



IXL Reading Foundations Scope and Sequence

Grades K–5

Grounded in Research

Scope and Sequence

IXL's Learn to Read skill plan includes word recognition and language comprehension skills with a scope and sequence that reflects the understanding that skilled reading develops through the coordinated growth of word recognition and language comprehension, as described in Scarborough's Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001). The scope and sequence of the Learn to Read skill plan aligns with the science of reading and is based on findings from decades of reading research (e.g., IES practice guide, 2016). The skills in this plan span a full range of foundational reading development, from phonological awareness to phonemic awareness that is integrated with simple single-word decoding, and ultimately to more complex decoding and spelling. Skills are introduced through explicit, systematic instruction delivered via short instructional videos and are sequenced to build cumulatively on previously taught concepts.

Throughout each year, concepts are introduced strategically and revisited through spaced repetition to support mastery. The skill progression reflects research showing that early, explicit instruction in sound awareness and decoding is essential for developing accurate and automatic word reading (Ehri, 2014; National Reading Panel, 2000). Skills are sequenced and scaffolded within and across grade levels so that students develop increasingly complex reading skills over time.

Word recognition

Word recognition skills are developed through systematic, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, and morphology. Early phonics instruction begins with letter-sound correspondences closely tied to phonemic awareness (Erbeli, F. et. al 2024). Explicit instruction is used to introduce each new concept, with instructional videos modeling accurate application of skills. Students then practice and apply the new learning within the IXL skill.

Word recognition skills are taught in isolation first at the word level, then sentence level, and finally in longer decodable text skills. Decodable text reading allows students to immediately apply taught phonics patterns, reinforcing orthographic mapping and building fluency.

Sight word instruction focuses on high-utility words from researched lists (e.g., Fry 1970, Brown, Culligan and Phillips 2013) and begins after students have a solid understanding of letter-sound relationships and can decode simple words. This timing reflects research indicating that phonics knowledge supports efficient learning of high-frequency words. Instruction explicitly highlights the phonics patterns within each word while explicitly addressing any irregular letter-sound associations. Students practice these words to automaticity throughout the year, focusing on a small set at a time. This approach aligns with research on orthographic mapping, which emphasizes repeated, accurate exposure to words to support automatic word recognition (Ehri, 2014).

Language comprehension

Vocabulary and comprehension skills support the development of language comprehension by building background knowledge, word knowledge, understanding of language structures, and overall literacy knowledge (Snow, 2002). These skills are embedded throughout the Learn to Read plan within and across grade levels, beginning with simple word meanings and structured opportunities to demonstrate understanding of text, and progressing to more complex vocabulary development, inferencing, and understanding of increasingly sophisticated language and text structures.

Kindergarten

Word recognition

Scope

Phonological awareness

- Syllable blending
- Syllable segmentation
- Syllable manipulation
- Rhyming

Phonemic awareness

- Phoneme isolation
 - Initial sound, medial sound, final sound
- Blending
 - Onset-rime, phonemes
- Segmenting
 - Phonemes
- Phoneme manipulation in three-sound words
 - Initial sound, medial sound, final sound

Phonics

- Letter-sound associations
- Short vowels
- Consonant digraphs
 - ch, sh, th
- Consonant blends
 - Two-letter blends (e.g., st-, fl-, -mp, -nt)

Sight words

- High-utility words with patterns that may be unknown or irregular

Sequence

The kindergarten reading foundation skills in the [Learn to Read skill plan](#) are carefully scaffolded both within and across skills. Early in the year, students focus on phonological awareness, starting with syllable segmentation. They then progress to phonemic awareness, working on initial sound isolation and onset-rime blending. By the end of kindergarten, students are blending and segmenting CVC words and manipulating sounds within them.

In phonics, students begin by learning letter-sound correspondences and move toward decoding short vowel words. By year's end, they are introduced to digraphs and blends. Throughout the year, they apply new phonics skills in both words and sentences, culminating in reading longer decodable texts.

High-frequency, "irregular" words are introduced after students have a solid understanding of letter-sound awareness and can decode simple CVC words. The high-frequency words taught in kindergarten are high-utility and may follow regular phonics patterns (e.g., "on") or contain irregularities (e.g., "was"). Students receive explicit instruction on decoding words with regular patterns, as well as on the letter-sound associations and irregularities of words that don't follow expected patterns for their grade. They practice these words to automaticity throughout the year, focusing on a small set at a time.

Language comprehension

Vocabulary and comprehension skills are taught throughout the year. Vocabulary instruction introduces students to new words through basic word relationships and categorizing. Students are introduced to word structure through prefixes and inflectional suffixes. Comprehension instruction focuses on foundational understanding, including simple inferences, identifying basic story parts, and concrete comprehension in literary and informational texts.

Student expectations

By the end of the year, kindergarten students are expected to understand sound segmentation and how sounds are linked to letters. Students should demonstrate basic decoding skills. They should be able to read simple short texts that include mostly regular short-vowel words and some irregular, high-frequency words. Students should be able to answer literal comprehension questions in texts they read independently and demonstrate a deeper level of literal understanding in more complex texts that are read aloud.

First grade

Word recognition

Scope

Phonological awareness

- Syllable segmentation
- Rhyming

Phonemic awareness

- Phoneme isolation
 - Initial sound, medial sound, final sound
- Phoneme blending and segmenting
 - Three-sound words, four-sound words
- Phoneme manipulation in four-sound words
 - Initial sound, medial sound, final sound

Phonics

- Letter-sound associations
- Short vowels
- Consonant digraphs
 - ch, sh, th
- Consonant blends
 - Two-letter blends (e.g., st-, fl-, -mp, -nt)
- Silent e
- Long vowels
 - Long a patterns: ai
 - Long e patterns: ee, ea
 - Long i patterns: ie
 - Long o patterns: oa
 - Long u patterns: ue

Phonics (cont.)

- R-controlled vowels
 - ar, or, ir, er, or
- Diphthongs
 - oi/oy, ow/ou
- Two-syllable words
 - closed/closed

Word analysis

- Inflectional suffixes
 - ed, -es, -ing, -s

Sight words

- High-utility words with patterns that may be unknown or irregular

Sequence

The first-grade reading foundation skills in the [Learn to Read skill plan](#) are carefully scaffolded within and across skills. Early in the year, students focus on phonological awareness skills, starting with syllable segmentation and rhyming. They also work on phonemic awareness by blending and segmenting three-sound words, progressing to four-sound words. By the end of first grade, students are blending and segmenting both long and short vowel words with consonant blends and digraphs, and manipulating sounds within these words.

In phonics, students begin by strengthening their letter knowledge, focusing on vowels, consonants, and letter-sound correspondences. They move on to decoding and encoding closed-syllable words with three or four sounds, including consonant blends and digraphs. By midyear, students decode and encode silent "e" words and words with the long vowel teams, ai, ee, ea, ie, oa, and ue. By the end of the year, they are introduced to r-controlled vowels and vowel diphthongs. Throughout the year, they apply these skills in reading words, sentences, and longer decodable texts.

High-frequency, "irregular" words are introduced once students have a solid understanding of letter-sound awareness and can decode simple CVC words. First-grade high-frequency words are high-utility and may follow regular phonics patterns (e.g., "gave") or contain irregularities (e.g., "once"). Students receive explicit instruction on decoding both regular and irregular words, focusing on letter-sound associations and any irregularities. They practice these words to automaticity, concentrating on a small set at a time throughout the year.

Language comprehension

Vocabulary and comprehension skills are taught throughout the year. Vocabulary instruction continues to focus on word relationships and expanding awareness of simple morphemes. Comprehension instruction focuses on more explicit understanding of story structure, including characters, setting, and plot. Students engage in both literal and inferential comprehension in literary and informational texts.

Student expectations

By the end of the year, first-grade students are expected to show increased decoding accuracy. Students should be able to read longer texts that include mostly one-syllable words with common short and long vowel patterns. They should demonstrate text comprehension of basic ideas and simple inferences in texts they read independently and demonstrate a deeper level of literal and inferential understanding in more complex texts that are read aloud.

Second grade

Word recognition

Scope

Phonological awareness

- Syllable segmentation
- Rhyming

Phonemic awareness

- Phoneme manipulation
 - Phoneme substitution
 - Phoneme deletion

Phonics

- Letter-sound associations
- Short vowels
- Consonant digraphs
 - ch, sh, th, ph, wh
- Consonant blends
 - Two-letter blends (e.g., st-, fl-, -mp, -nt)
 - Three-letter blends (e.g., str-)
- Silent letters
 - mb, kn, wr

Phonics (cont.)

- Hard and soft c and g
- Silent e
- Long vowels
 - Long a patterns: ai, ay
 - Long e patterns: ee, ea
 - Long i patterns: ie, y, ild, ind
 - Long o patterns: oa, ow, old, olt, ost
 - Long u patterns: ue, oo, ew
- R-controlled vowels
 - ar, or, ir, er, ur
- Diphthongs
 - oi/oy, ow/ou
- Two-syllable words with the six syllable types
 - Closed
 - Open
 - Silent e
 - Consonant-l-e
 - Vowel team
 - R-controlled

Word analysis

- Prefixes
 - dis-, mis-, pre-, re-, un-
- Suffixes
 - Inflectional suffixes (-ed, -er, -es, -est, -ing)
 - Derivational suffixes (-er, -ful, -less, -ly, -y)
- Spelling changes:
 - Final e deletion
 - Consonant doubling
 - Change y to i

Sight words

High-utility words with patterns that may be unknown or irregular

Sequence

The second-grade reading foundation skills in the [Learn to Read skill plan](#) are carefully scaffolded within and across skills. Early in the year, students focus on enhancing their phonemic awareness through phoneme manipulation.

In phonics, students begin by reinforcing their knowledge of consonant digraphs and blends, while also reviewing previously learned skills, including short vowel words, silent "e," long vowel patterns (ai, ea, ee, ie, oa, ue), r-controlled vowels, and diphthongs. By midyear, they progress to decoding and encoding additional long vowel patterns (e.g., "ay"), variant vowels (e.g., "ea"), and the soft sounds of "c" and "g." They also focus on multisyllabic words and decoding and encoding words with all syllable types. Throughout the year, students apply these phonics skills in reading words, sentences, and longer decodable texts.

High-utility regular and "irregular" words are taught throughout the year, starting with word recognition and progressing to using the words in sentences. By the end of the year, students practice spelling these high-utility words.

Language comprehension

Vocabulary and comprehension skills are taught throughout the year. Vocabulary instruction deepens word relationship study and emphasizes using context to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words. Comprehension instruction shifts toward analysis of texts, as students examine story elements and text features to explain key ideas and meanings in literary and informational texts.

Student expectations

By the end of the year, second-grade students are expected to show increased decoding accuracy. Students should be able to read longer texts that include mostly one-syllable words with common short and long vowel patterns. They should demonstrate text comprehension of basic ideas and simple inferences in texts they read independently and demonstrate a deeper level of literal and inferential understanding in more complex texts that are read aloud.

Third grade

Word recognition

Scope

Phonics

- Consonant digraphs
 - ch, sh, th, ph, wh
- Consonant trigraphs
 - dge, tch
- Consonant blends
 - Two-letter blends (e.g., st-, fl-, -mp, -nt)
 - Three-letter blends (e.g., str-)
- Silent letters
 - mb, kn, wr
- Long vowels
 - Long a patterns: silent e, ai, ay, ea, ey
 - Long e patterns: silent e, ee, ea, ie
 - Long i patterns: silent e, ie, y, ild, ind, igh
 - Long o patterns: silent e, oa, ow, old, olt, ost
 - Long u patterns: silent e, ue, oo, ew, ui

Phonics (cont.)

- R vowel patterns
 - ar, or, er, ir, ur, air, ear
- Variant vowel patterns
 - oo, ou, ow, ea
- Diphthongs
 - oi/oy, ow/ou
- Advanced patterns
 - augh, ough, eigh, oul, igh
- Two- and three-syllable words with the six syllable types
 - Closed
 - Open
 - Silent e
 - Consonant-l-e
 - Vowel team
 - R-controlled

Word analysis

- Prefixes
 - de-, dis-, in-, mis-, non-, pre-, re-, un-
- Suffixes
 - able, -er, -est, -ful, -ish, -less, -ly, -ment, -ness, -y
- Greek and Latin Roots
 - auto-, bi-, graph, -logy, meter, phon, port, quar-, rupt, scope, scribe, spec, tele-, tract, uni-
- Spelling changes:
 - Final e deletion
 - Consonant doubling
 - Change y to i

Sight words

High-utility words with patterns that may be unknown or irregular

Sequence

The third-grade reading foundation skills in the [Learn to Read skill plan](#) are carefully scaffolded within and across skills.

Phonics in third grade places a strong emphasis on encoding. Students strengthen their phonics skills by reviewing short and long vowel patterns, along with blends, digraphs, and trigraphs previously taught. As the year progresses, they move on to encoding and decoding more complex patterns, such as "eigh," and learn to identify syllable types to help with decoding and encoding multisyllabic words.

High-utility regular and "irregular" words are also taught throughout the year. Students learn to identify vowel patterns in these words and practice spelling them.

Language comprehension

Vocabulary and comprehension skills are taught throughout the year. Vocabulary instruction focuses on learning new words, determining meaning, and analyzing word structure, with an emphasis on applying word-analysis strategies across academic texts to support decoding and encoding. Comprehension instruction extends text analysis, as students examine story elements and text features to explain key ideas, construct meaning, and extend understanding beyond the text across literary and informational genres.

Student expectations

By the end of the year, third-grade students are expected to show increased decoding accuracy. Students should be able to read longer texts that include mostly one-syllable words with common short and long vowel patterns. They should demonstrate text comprehension of basic ideas and simple inferences in texts they read independently and demonstrate a deeper level of literal and inferential understanding in more complex texts that are read aloud.

Fourth grade

Word recognition

Scope

Phonics

Multisyllabic words with the six syllable types

- Closed
- Open
- Silent e
- Consonant-l-e
- Vowel team
- R-controlled

Word analysis

Prefixes

- de-, dis-, in-, mis-, non-, pre-, re-, un-

Suffixes

- -able, -er, -est, -ful, -ish, -less, -ly, -ment, -ness, -y

Greek and Latin roots

- auto-, bi-, graph, -logy, meter, phon, port, quar-, rupt, scope, scribe, spec, tele-, tract, uni-

Sight words

High-utility words with patterns that may be unknown or irregular

Sequence

The fourth-grade reading foundation skills in the [Learn to Read skill plan](#) are carefully scaffolded within and across skills.

Students continue to refine their phonics skills with an emphasis on segmenting, reading, and spelling multisyllabic words both in isolation and in context. They learn to divide words into syllables, identify and understand prefixes and suffixes, and decode and spell words with affixes. As the year progresses, students encode words by applying knowledge of syllable types, base words, roots, affixes, and spelling patterns to accurately spell multisyllabic and high-utility words.

Students read, recognize, and accurately spell high-utility words, including those with irregular or unknown patterns, and use them appropriately in sentences and texts.

Language comprehension

Vocabulary and comprehension development refines students' understanding of word relationships and morpheme meanings. Comprehension instruction emphasizes strategies for reading and interpreting increasingly complex texts. Students read to construct meaning, draw inferences, and analyze text structure, moving from identifying information to interpreting ideas, comparing texts, and explaining how details support understanding.

Student expectations

Fourth-grade students are expected to demonstrate fluent reading of long texts that include multisyllabic words with a wide range of orthographic patterns. Students should demonstrate ability to decode novel words using syllable and word analysis skills. Students should be able to read for meaning and demonstrate understanding of more advanced inferential concepts in texts they read independently.

Fifth grade

Word recognition

Scope

Phonics

Multisyllabic words with the six syllable types

- Closed
- Open
- Silent e
- Consonant-l-e
- Vowel team
- R-controlled

Word analysis

Prefixes

- con-, dis-, in-, mis-, non-, over-, pre-, -pro, re-, sub-, un-

Suffixes

- -able, -ible, -ful, -hood, -ion, -less, -or, -ure

Greek and Latin roots

- auto-, bi-, graph, -logy, meter, phon, port, quar-, rupt, scope, scribe, spec, tele-, tract, uni-

Sight words

High-utility words with patterns that may be unknown or irregular

Sequence

The fifth-grade reading foundation skills in the [Learn to Read skill plan](#) are carefully scaffolded within and across skills.

Students apply advanced decoding and word analysis strategies to read and spell multisyllabic words with multiple affixes and roots. Spelling instruction focuses on applying knowledge of syllable patterns, roots, prefixes, suffixes, and word structure to spell high-utility, multisyllabic, and grade-level words.

Students read, recognize, and accurately spell high-utility words, including those with irregular or unknown patterns, and use them appropriately in sentences and texts.

Language comprehension

Vocabulary and comprehension instruction deepens their understanding of Greek and Latin roots, prefixes, and suffixes to build morphological awareness. Comprehension instruction guides students to analyze text structures, infer meaning, and integrate information across complex passages, supporting higher-level critical reading and reasoning skills.

Student expectations

Vocabulary and comprehension instruction further deepens morphological awareness through focused study of Greek and Latin roots, prefixes, and suffixes. Comprehension instruction guides students to analyze text structures, infer meaning, and integrate information across multiple complex passages, supporting higher-level critical reading, synthesis, and reasoning skills.

References

- Browne, C., Culligan, B., & Phillips, J. (2013). The New General Service List. Retrieved from <https://www.newgeneralservicelist.com/>
- Ehri, L. C. (2014). Orthographic mapping in the acquisition of sight word reading, spelling memory, and vocabulary learning. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 18*(1), 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888438.2013.819356>
- Erbeli, F., Rice, M., Xu, Y., Bishop, M. E., & Goodrich, J. M. (2024). *A meta-analysis on the optimal cumulative dosage of early phonemic awareness instruction. Scientific Studies of Reading, 28*(4), 345–370.
- Foorman, B., Beyler, N., Borradaile, K., Coyne, M., Denton, C. A., Dimino, J., Furgeson, J., Hayes, L., Henke, J., Justice, L., Keating, B., Lewis, W., Sattar, S., Streke, A., Wagner, R., & Wissel, S. (2016). *Foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through 3rd grade* (NCEE 2016-4008). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc_foundationalreading_040717.pdf (Institute of Education Sciences)
- National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel*. Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.
- Scarborough, H. S. (2001). *Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice*. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of research in early literacy* (pp. 97–110). New York, NY: Guilford Press. (CT.gov)
- Snow, C. E., & RAND Reading Study Group. (2002). *Reading for understanding: Toward an R&D program in reading comprehension*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. ([National Library of Australia Catalogue](http://www.nla.gov.au))