



# Foundational Literacy Instructional Routines

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**ROUTINES FOR EVIDENCE-BASED  
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**SPED**  
SPECIAL EDUCATION

# INTRODUCTION

High-quality foundational literacy instruction is essential to ensure all students become successful readers and writers. Instruction should provide many language and literacy experiences throughout a student’s PK-12 education in engaging, print-rich classrooms. The Nebraska State Board of Education supports and encourages systemic efforts to improve foundational literacy, including providing educators with tools and resources that enhance instruction.

This guide has been developed to provide consistent, systematic, and explicit routines to ensure the delivery of evidence-based practices for all learners. The routines are organized into two categories—**Foundational Skills** and **Comprehension Strategies**—and can be used across all tiers of instruction within a locally determined curriculum aligned to [Nebraska’s College- and Career-ready Standards for English Language Arts](#).

**For additional information, please visit:**

- [NebraskaREADS](#)
- [Nebraska Instructional Materials Collaborative](#)
- [2023 NeMTSS Framework](#)





# FOUNDATIONS OF READING

A sequence of explicit, systematic phonics instruction provides the foundation for literacy. Nebraska's 2021 College and Career Ready *Foundations of Reading* standards align with the body of research known as the science of reading. A systematic approach to the foundational skills—*Concepts of Print, Phonological Awareness, Phonics and Word Analysis, and Fluency*—supports emergent readers as they develop proficiency during the early years.

## CONCEPTS OF PRINT

Print concepts refers to the awareness of how print works. Examples include that print reads from left to right, that words are separated by spaces, and basic knowledge of the parts of a book.

## PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Phonological or phonemic awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate the sounds in spoken language. Young children begin developing phonological awareness by enjoying and reciting rhyming words and alliterative phrases from familiar stories, songs, or nursery rhymes.

## PHONICS AND WORD ANALYSIS

The ability to match the sounds of spoken language with individual letters or groups of letters is known as phonics. Instruction focuses on common letter-sound correspondences, strategies for sounding out letters, and blending sounds into words. Word analysis instruction focuses on recognizing base words, prefixes, and suffixes in increasingly complex words.

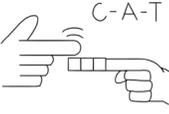
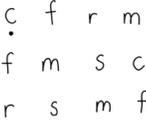
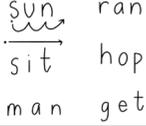
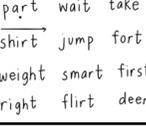
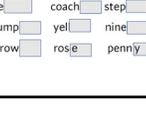
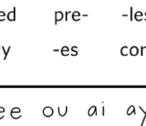
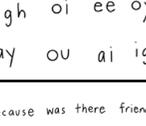
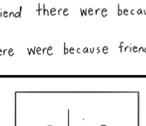
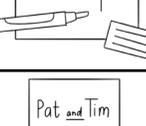
## FLUENCY

Fluency is the ability to read accurately at an appropriate rate with expression. As the ability to decode, or master letter-sound relationships, improves, so does a student's ability to read smoothly and clearly. Fluency is considered the “bridge” to reading comprehension; a student is considered a proficient reader when both fluency and reading comprehension are at grade level.

# LITERACY ROUTINES

The segments from the linked Literacy Routines Map video, are designed to briefly model most of the instructional routines in the foundational skills portion of a K-2 reading lesson. These routines are also commonly found in any intervention lesson for striving readers in the third through fifth grades. The intention of the Literacy Routine Map is to provide an example of how teachers can take any instructional routine from their core reading program and make the delivery more explicit. The routines are delivered using elements of explicit instruction. Tightening up a routine, providing more opportunities for the student to respond, lessening teacher talk, and the offering of more repetition oftentimes can result in improved instruction for striving readers.

<b>Phoneme Blending</b>	This routine develops the student's ability to listen to each discrete sound and blend it together to make a word. This skill is particularly important when students begin to work with phoneme-grapheme mapping when blending new words.
<b>Phoneme Segmentation</b>	This routine develops the student's ability to hear a word and identify each of the phonemes within the word. This skill is particularly important when writing. The Phonological Processor holds the sound in the proper sequence of the word. When writing, the brain separates the word into discrete sounds and then holds the sounds while each sound is represented in spelling.
<b>Letter Names &amp; Sounds</b>	This routine is used once students have been introduced to a sound-spelling card which uses the picture, sound and spelling (letter/letter pattern). The review of letter names and sounds is designed to secure the names and sounds in a student's long-term memory, thus facilitating automatic retrieval.
<b>Sound-Spelling Cards</b>	This routine is used to introduce students to the visual cue, the sound and spelling pattern all at once. The picture provides a visual reminder of the sound associated with the spelling pattern. The sound-spelling cards represent the most frequent of the 250 graphemes related to the 44 phonemes in the English Language.
<b>Continuous Blending</b>	This routine develops the student's ability to associate sounds within letter strings and blend those sounds together to make words. This is a kindergarten skill and students who are learning to read need modeling and support when first beginning to read. This routine is designed to be used with Consonant Vowel Consonant patterns. More complex patterns are served better with the more advanced blending routines.
<b>Sound-By-Sound Blending</b>	This routine develops the student's ability to utilize familiar letter patterns without consciously treating each sound separately. This is particularly important as the spelling patterns become more complex. This routine often begins in the middle of kindergarten and is used through the middle of first grade. Use of this routine can be helpful for struggling readers who read complex spelling patterns letter by letter.
<b>Vowel-First Blending</b>	This routine develops the student's ability to identify the complex vowel within a single syllable word and then go back and read the entire word. Complex vowel patterns often give students trouble, and this routine is designed for students to identify the vowel combination before they begin to tackle the word. This routine begins the middle of first grade and can be highly effective for struggling students as well. Once students begin multisyllabic reading, this routine becomes even more important as students use this routine with each syllable in larger words.
<b>Multisyllabic Word Blending</b>	These routines develop the student's ability to identify the complex vowels and familiar parts of words within a multisyllable word. In one routine, students identify the vowel sound, blend through the syllable and move to the next syllable, repeating that pattern until they blend all of the syllables together and read the word. Just as in single syllable vowel-first blending, complex vowel patterns often give students trouble, and this routine is designed for students to identify the vowel combinations before they begin to tackle a longer word. In another routine, students are looking for familiar prefixes/suffixes and then use the vowel-first blending routine to decode what remains, the root/base word. These routines typically begin as soon as multisyllable words are introduced to students, usually in the first half of first grade. These routines can also be used in grades 3-5 as an approach to introducing vocabulary words and unknown multisyllable words in text.
<b>Affix Introduction</b>	This routine is used to effectively and efficiently teach students to recognize word parts, affixes, or prefixes and suffixes, at the beginning and end of words to help them decode a longer word. Beyond just recognizing familiar word parts, this routine also teaches the meaning of the prefixes and suffixes to help students identify the meaning of unknown multisyllable words. This supports development of morphological awareness and vocabulary and is essential for reading comprehension.
<b>Sound-Spelling Review</b>	This routine develops a student's ability to quickly recognize letter combinations and assign a sound to the combinations. This routine is particularly helpful with complex patterns such as digraphs, trigraphs, and vowel combinations. As with the letter names and letter sound review routine, this routine should be used once the sound-spelling card is introduced with the complex spelling patterns.
<b>High Frequency Words</b>	This routine develops a student's ability to remember words that are irregular and of high frequency in text. Students say, spell and say the word. This routine is used many times over the course of a week or two with a specific set of words to provide ample opportunities to store the words in long term memory. If students struggle to remember irregular high frequency words, the intensification routine draws in the phonological processor to assist with the storing of the word patterns.
<b>Dictation</b>	This routine is used to provide opportunities for encoding (spelling words). It is important to consider that this is not a spelling test, rather an opportunity to apply the sounds/letter patterns of a word in writing. The spelling patterns that are used should be patterns that have been taught, practiced and read throughout the lesson. Dictation is often the last routine in a Foundational Skills portion of the reading lesson. It is a successful way to apply the sound/letter pattern skills before closing the lesson.

Routine Name/Timing	Instructional Focus	Image	What/Why	Cues
1. <a href="#">Phoneme Blending AND Phoneme Segmentation</a> <a href="#">Correct phoneme production video</a> (1 min.)	Word Work Phonemic Awareness		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds phonological awareness</li> <li>Develops awareness of sounds in speech</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tap each cube</li> <li>Say sounds</li> <li>Slide finger</li> <li>Student says "Word"</li> </ol> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Say whole "Word"</li> <li>Student says each "Sound"</li> </ol>
2. <a href="#">Letter Names and Letter Sounds</a> (1 min.)	Word Work Phonics: Introduce Build Fluency: Sound/Spell-ing		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds decoding &amp; phonics skills</li> <li>Develops ability to recognize letter names and sounds with automaticity</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finger to bottom left of letter</li> <li>"Name" or "Sound"</li> <li>Tap under stopped sounds; Hold under continuous sounds</li> </ol>
3. <a href="#">Sound-Spelling Card</a> (1 min.)	Word Work Phonics: Introduce: 1. Model 2. Guide Practice		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds phonics skills</li> <li>Develops ability to map sounds onto symbols and create visual cues for sounds and letters</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"The card is..."</li> <li>"The sound is..."</li> <li>"The spelling is/are..."</li> </ol>
4. <a href="#">Continuous Blending</a> (2-3 mins.)	Word Work Phonics: Introduce: 1. Blend words with...		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds phonics skills</li> <li>Develops ability to move through each sounds and then put them together into a word</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finger to the left of the word</li> <li>"Blend"</li> <li>Swoop finger under each sound of the word</li> <li>Finger to the left of the word</li> <li>Slide finger under the word</li> </ol>
5. <a href="#">Sound by Sound Blending</a> (2-3 mins.)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds phonics skills</li> <li>Develops skills to unitize and to see sound chunks rather than letter by letter blending</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write first sound...tap..."Sound?"</li> <li>Write second sound...tap..."Sound?"</li> <li>Blend</li> <li>Write next sound...tap..."Sound?"</li> <li>Blend</li> <li>"Word?"</li> </ol>
6. <a href="#">Vowel First Blending</a> (2 mins.)	Word Work Use with: Phonics: Build words with...		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds phonics skills</li> <li>Develops ability to notice the vowel pattern first before sounds out the word</li> <li>Struggling students usually have difficulty with vowel patterns.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fingers under the vowel pattern</li> <li>"Sound?"</li> <li>Tap</li> <li>Finger under first letter</li> <li>"Word?"</li> <li>Slide</li> </ol>
7. <a href="#">Vowel-First Blending with Multisyllable Words</a> (2-5 mins.)	Word Work Use with: Advanced Decoding: Build words with...		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds advanced decoding skills</li> <li>Develops ability to notice the vowel pattern first before blending through a syllable</li> <li>Struggling students usually have difficulty with vowel patterns</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fingers under the vowel pattern</li> <li>"Sound?" (tap)</li> <li>Blend Syllable (swoop)</li> <li>Repeat steps 1-4 for the remaining syllables</li> <li>Blend whole word (swoop)</li> <li>"Word?" (slide)</li> </ol>
8. <a href="#">Multisyllable Routine- Identify Familiar Word Parts</a> (2-5 mins.)	Word Work Use with: Advanced Decoding: Build words with...		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds advanced decoding skills</li> <li>Develops morphological awareness and vocabulary</li> <li>Struggling students benefit from identifying word parts before approaching a long unknown word</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Do you see any familiar word parts?" (slide under/circle prefixes and/or suffixes)</li> <li>"Let's blend the syllable(s)." (swoop)</li> <li>Blend whole word (swoop)</li> <li>"Word?" (slide)</li> </ol>
9. <a href="#">Affix Introduction/Review</a> (2 mins.)	Word Work/Morphology Use with: Advanced Decoding: Build words with...		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds advanced decoding skills</li> <li>Develops morphological awareness</li> </ul>	<p>Introduction</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"The prefix/suffix is..." (slide)</li> <li>"The meaning is" (slide)</li> </ol> <p>Review</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finger to the left of affix</li> <li>"Affix?" (slide)</li> <li>"Meaning?" (slide)</li> </ol>
10. <a href="#">Sound-Spelling Review</a> (1-2 mins.)	Word Work Phonics: Introduce: 1. Quick Review		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds phonics skills</li> <li>Develops ability to recognize and review complex spelling patterns with automaticity</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finger to the left of sound spelling</li> <li>"Sound?"</li> <li>Tap under spelling</li> </ol>
11. <a href="#">High Frequency Words</a> (2 mins.)	Word Work High Frequency Words		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds phonics skills</li> <li>Develops ability to read irregular words with automaticity</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Now you are going to read some new words"</li> <li>"The word is"</li> <li>"Word?"</li> <li>"Spell" Student spells word</li> <li>"Word?"</li> <li>Review by putting finger to left</li> <li>"Word?" Slide finger</li> </ol>
12. <a href="#">Dictation</a> (3 mins.)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds phonics skills</li> <li>Develops ability to encode (representing sounds in writing)</li> <li>Note: Teacher writes on the white board at the same time in case struggling students needs a model</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"The word is"</li> <li>"Word?"</li> <li>Say the sounds in</li> <li>"Write"</li> <li>"Check to see if your word looks like mine. If not, fix it up."</li> </ol>
13. <a href="#">Decodable Books</a> (7-10 mins)	Decodable readers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds phonics &amp; fluency skills</li> <li>Develops ability to read connected text</li> <li>Supports students to sound and feel like a fluent reader every day.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First read: Student reads each word for accuracy</li> <li>Second read: Student rereads the page for fluency</li> <li>Teacher listens and provides immediate feedback for errors</li> </ol>



# COMPREHENSION ROUTINES

Comprehension is a highly complex cognitive process involving the intentional interaction between the reader and the text to create meaning (National Reading Panel, 2000). To help students develop and use strategies to comprehend text, research suggests that classrooms must provide explicit instruction in how to use text to think (McNamara, 2007).

This Comprehension Routines map can be used within a whole-group setting in core instruction, or as an intervention with a small group to support a focus strategy. When delivering instruction in reading comprehension, the teacher must choose reading strategies that are taken from their core reading program and make the delivery more explicit. The teacher “thinks aloud” about the given strategy and discusses why it is important and how the strategy helps students learn. These Comprehension Routines support some of the strategies often taught in comprehensive core curricula. The provided graphic organizers lend themselves to a deeper, wider understanding of grade-level text. However, please feel free to use your own graphic organizers if your students are already familiar with a specific format.

A teacher must frequently model the comprehension routines included in this document. As the strategy is repeated in instruction, depending on student success, the teacher guides repeated practice opportunities to help students understand how the skill is applied in grade-level text. As students read, the teacher provides feedback and engages them in discussion. The teacher can also give students opportunities to interact with the text through answering essential questions or composing a written response to the text. After several successful uses of the graphic organizers, they may be shared with students so they can practice the skill throughout their school career.

## **Using Comprehension Instructional Routines supports:**

- Delivery of focused instruction on a specific comprehension strategy
- An increased number of student responses
- Opportunities to adjust instructional supports during small group time based on observations during whole group instruction and the response of students
- Alignment between core instruction and intervention for students needing more time and practice with the skills and strategies addressed in whole group instruction

<b>Ask and Answer Questions</b>	<a href="#">Comprehension Routine for Asking and Answering Questions by Using Details in Narrative Text</a>
	<a href="#">Graphic Organizers for Ask and Answer Questions</a>
<b>Author's Purpose</b>	<a href="#">Comprehension Routine for Identifying Author's Purpose</a>
	<a href="#">Graphic Organizers for Author's Purpose</a>
<b>Cause and Effect</b>	<a href="#">Comprehension Routine for Identifying Cause and Effect Relationships in Text</a>
	<a href="#">Graphic Organizers for Identifying Cause and Effect Relationships in Text</a>
<b>Compare and Contrast</b>	<a href="#">Comprehension Routine for Compare and Contrast in One Text</a>
	<a href="#">Graphic Organizers for Compare and Contrast</a>
<b>Literary Text Elements</b>	<a href="#">Comprehension Routine for Identifying Literary Text Elements</a>
	<a href="#">Graphic Organizers for Literary Text Elements</a>
<b>Make Connections</b>	<a href="#">Comprehension Routine for Making Connections</a>
	<a href="#">Graphic Organizers for Making Connections</a>
<b>Make an Inference</b>	<a href="#">Comprehension Routine for Making an Inference</a>
	<a href="#">Graphic Organizers for Making an Inference</a>
<b>Sequence Literary Text</b>	<a href="#">Comprehension Routine for Sequencing Literary Text</a>
	<a href="#">Graphic Organizers for Sequencing Literary Text</a>
<b>Summarize Literary Text</b>	<a href="#">Comprehension Routine for Summarizing Literary Text</a>
	<a href="#">Graphic Organizers for Summarizing Literary Text</a>
<b>Vocabulary Instructional Routines</b>	<a href="#">Vocabulary Instructional Routine: New Vocabulary</a>
	<a href="#">Vocabulary Routine Cards</a>