

Pre-Session Activity

Directions: Read the following excerpts from *Making Sense of Decoding and Spelling: An Adult Reading Course of Study, Teachers' and Administrators' Guide*. Then, complete the exercises that follow.

MacArthur, C.A., Alamprese, J.A., & Knight, D. (2010), *Making Sense of Decoding and Spelling: An Adult Reading Course of Study, Teachers' and Administrators' Guide*. Washington, DC: The National Institute for Literacy. This document may be downloaded at <http://lincs.ed.gov>.

Foundational Knowledge Needed by Instructors

Metalinguistic Knowledge about English Orthography, Phonology, and Morphology

Metalinguistic means “about language.” Orthography refers to the ways that words are spelled and pronounced based on those spellings. Phonology refers to the sounds of words; phonemes are the basic speech sounds. Morphology refers to the meaning units in words, or morphemes. For example, “decomposition” has three morphemes: “de” means opposite, “compose” means to put together, and “tion” changes the verb to a noun.

Instructors need to know why words are spelled the way they are. English spelling is complex but not random. It is complex because English words originate in many languages. It also has to be complex because there are more phonemes (about 44) than letters, so patterns must be used to spell some sounds. It is further complex because words include spelling patterns that represent meaning, not just sound. For example, the vowel sounds in “compose” change when it becomes part of “composition,” but the spelling of the base word keeps the two letter “o”s to preserve the meaning. An even simpler example is that English uses the single morpheme “ed” to mean past tense, even though the pronunciation changes depending on the phonemes in the base word (e.g., *jumped*, *yelled*, *rented*). Keeping the spelling based on meaning might make decoding and spelling harder for beginning readers, but it probably makes fluent reading easier in the long run. Thus, both phonemes and morphemes must be considered in understanding and teaching decoding and spelling in English. Good readers have an implicit understanding of these patterns, as shown by the fact that they can spell complex pseudowords correctly. For learners who have trouble with decoding and spelling, explicit instruction in these patterns is needed. (p. 6)

Basic Phonics Concepts and Terminology

Instructors need to understand basic phonics concepts because those concepts have major instructional implications. For example, they should know the difference between a consonant blend and a consonant digraph. Blends (e.g., “fl”) are often difficult to learn because they require blending together two phonemes; in contrast, consonant digraphs (e.g., “ch”) just require learning that two letters together make a single sound. Instructors also need to know the various types of vowel sounds and spellings, such as short vowels, long vowels, *r*-controlled vowels, and diphthongs. Each of these vowel types has a different relationship between spelling and sound that must be taught.