

The Structured Literacy Starter Pack

Five practical tools for leaders and teachers moving K-5 reading instruction toward the science of reading.

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2	The 45-Minute Reading Data Chat	Grade-level teams
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Landing Literacy helps K-5 districts in New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania put structured literacy into practice, with coaching, data and curriculum support that lasts past the PD day. Learn more at landingliteracy.com.

The K-3 Literacy Walkthrough

What to look for during ten minutes of foundational skills instruction, and what to ask the teacher afterward.

How to use it

Visit during the foundational skills block. Mark what you see, not what you expect. One visit is a snapshot. Patterns across classrooms tell you where support will pay off most. Share it with teachers before you use it, so it reads as support and not as an evaluation.

Look-for	Seen	Partly	Not yet
Phonemic awareness			
Students blend, segment and change sounds out loud in short, brisk daily practice (K-1).	☐	☐	☐
The teacher says sounds cleanly, without an added "uh" (/m/, not "muh").	☐	☐	☐
Sound work connects to letters as soon as students are ready.	☐	☐	☐
Phonics and word reading			
Today's pattern is clear to an observer and fits a scope and sequence.	☐	☐	☐
New patterns are taught explicitly: the teacher models, students practice together, then on their own.	☐	☐	☐
Beginning readers practice the pattern in decodable words, sentences and text.	☐	☐	☐
When a student misreads, the prompt points to the letters ("Check the vowel. What sound does it make?").	☐	☐	☐
Irregular words are mapped: students sound out the regular parts and learn the tricky part by heart.	☐	☐	☐
Spelling and handwriting			
Students spell by segmenting sounds and writing them from dictation, not by copying.	☐	☐	☐
Spelling practice matches the pattern being taught in reading.	☐	☐	☐
Letter formation is taught and corrected, not left to chance.	☐	☐	☐
Fluency			
Students reread connected text with feedback (partner, choral, echo or timed reading).	☐	☐	☐

Look-for	Seen	Partly	Not yet
Fluency practice uses text students can decode accurately.	☐	☐	☐

Language, vocabulary and knowledge

Read-alouds use rich, grade-level or harder text, with talk and new words taught on purpose.	☐	☐	☐
Texts build knowledge on one topic across days instead of jumping between unrelated passages.	☐	☐	☐

Small groups and intervention

The teacher can name the skill each group is working on and the data that put students there.	☐	☐	☐
Group instruction targets that skill directly.	☐	☐	☐
Students working independently are practicing something they have been taught.	☐	☐	☐

Classroom environment

A sound wall or articulation chart is posted, and students refer to it.	☐	☐	☐
Beginning readers have decodable books, and libraries include knowledge-rich texts sorted by topic.	☐	☐	☐

Worth a conversation

- Students are told to "look at the picture" or "think what would make sense" to figure out a word.
- Leveled books are the only text for students who are still learning to decode.
- High-frequency words are memorized as whole shapes, with no attention to letters and sounds.
- Phonics happens only in a center or as a five-minute add-on.
- Every struggling reader gets the same intervention, whatever the data says.

After the visit: four questions

1. What skill were students practicing, and how will you know they got it?
2. Which students need more practice with it, and when will they get it?
3. What is working that other teachers should see?
4. What would help you most next week?

Notes

Look for evidence, not perfection. Celebrate one thing every visit.

The 45-Minute Reading Data Chat

A protocol for the meeting after each benchmark window, so screener data turns into groups and next steps the same week.

Before the meeting

- Pull screener results by class, with the composite and every subtest.
- Flag students who moved up or down a tier since the last window.
- Bring diagnostic results (a phonics survey, for example) for students below benchmark.
- Share one sheet per class so the team looks at the same thing.

Ground rules

- Talk about skills, not labels. "Blending is behind," not "she's low."
- Every concern ends with an action and a date.
- Growth counts. A student far below benchmark rarely closes the gap in one window.

The agenda

Time	Step	Guiding questions
5 min	Celebrate	Who moved up a tier? What were we doing for those students?
10 min	Find the pattern	Which subskill is lowest across the grade? If many students share it, it is a whole-class (Tier 1) issue. If a few do, it is a group issue.
15 min	Students at risk	For each student: which subskill is behind? Has it grown since the last window? Is growth steady, slowing or stalled? Who is on the cusp and could move with a small push?
10 min	Regroup	Match each group to one skill gap (see the table on page 2). Who teaches each group, when, and for how long?
5 min	Commit	Who does what, starting when? When do we check progress next? Which families need a call?

Read the subtests, not just the composite

Two students with the same composite can need very different help. A student who reads nonsense words sound by sound but rarely blends them into whole words needs blending practice, not more letter-sound review. On Acadience Nonsense Word Fluency, that shows up as a solid Correct Letter Sounds score with a low Whole Words Read score.

Match the need to the support

If the gap is	What it looks like	What usually helps	How to check it
Phonemic awareness	Trouble blending or segmenting spoken sounds.	Brief daily oral blending and segmenting, moving to letters quickly.	Phoneme segmentation every 2 to 3 weeks.
Decoding accuracy	Misreads words, guesses from the first letter, skips vowels.	Targeted phonics from your scope and sequence, word chains, decodable text.	Nonsense word reading and a phonics survey.
Fluency	Reads accurately but slowly or word by word.	Repeated and partner reading, phrase-cued text, modeled reading.	Oral reading fluency: words correct per minute and accuracy.
Comprehension	Reads fluently but cannot retell or answer questions.	Vocabulary and background knowledge, retell and summary routines, text-based talk.	A comprehension measure such as Maze or retell.

Is it enough progress?

- Is the student moving toward benchmark?
- Are skills developing in order, or are there big gaps?
- After 6 to 8 weeks of consistent, well-matched support with little growth, change something: time, group size, intensity or approach.
- If that change doesn't help either, bring the student to your intervention team (I&RS or MTSS) with the progress data.

A common rhythm

- **Benchmark:** beginning, middle and end of year for every student.
- **Tier 2:** progress monitoring every 2 to 3 weeks.
- **Tier 3:** progress monitoring every 1 to 2 weeks.
- **Team check-in:** every 4 to 6 weeks between windows.

Group planning sheet

Student	Tier now	Last tier	Lowest subskill	Group and skill	Next check

Same data, same day, same plan. That's the whole trick.

The Sounds of English

A phoneme-grapheme reference for sound walls, lessons and spelling feedback. Slashes mark a sound, like /b/. Plain letters are spellings.

English has about 44 speech sounds but only 26 letters, so most sounds have more than one spelling. Exact counts vary with dialect and with how r-controlled vowels and the schwa are counted. Teach the sound first, then the spellings, starting with the most common.

Consonant sounds

Sound	Key word	Common spellings
/p/	pig	p, pp (happy)
/b/	bat	b, bb (rabbit)
/t/	top	t, tt, -ed (jumped)
/d/	dog	d, dd, -ed (played)
/k/	cat	c, k, -ck, ch (school)
/g/	goat	g, gg, gu (guest), gh (ghost)
/f/	fish	f, -ff, ph (phone), gh (laugh)
/v/	van	v, -ve (have)
/th/	thumb	th (unvoiced)
/th/	this	th (voiced)
/s/	sun	s, -ss, c (city), -ce (face), sc (science)
/z/	zip	z, -zz, s (is), -se (rose)
/sh/	ship	sh, ti (nation), ci (special), ch (chef)

Sound	Key word	Common spellings
/zh/	measure	s (vision), -ge (garage)
/ch/	chin	ch, -tch (catch), t (picture)
/j/	jam	j, g (gem), -dge (badge), -ge (cage)
/m/	map	m, mm, -mb (lamb)
/n/	net	n, nn, kn (knee), gn (gnat)
/ng/	ring	ng, n before k (think)
/l/	leg	l, -ll, -le (table)
/r/	run	r, rr, wr (write)
/w/	web	w, u after q (queen)
/wh/	whale	wh (in dialects that say it)
/y/	yes	y
/h/	hat	h, wh (who)

Vowel sounds

Short vowels

Sound	Key word	Common spellings
/ă/	apple	a
/ĕ/	edge	e, ea (head)
/ĭ/	itch	i, y (gym)
/ŏ/	octopus	o, a after w (want)
/ŭ/	up	u, o (son), ou (touch)

Long vowels

Sound	Key word	Common spellings
/ā/	cake	a (paper), a_e, ai, ay, eigh, ey (they)
/ē/	tree	e (me), ee, ea, e_e, y (happy), ie (chief), ey (key)
/ī/	kite	i (hi), i_e, igh, y (my), ie (pie)
/ō/	boat	o (go), o_e, oa, ow, oe
/yoo/	cube	u (unit), u_e, ew (few), ue (cue)

The schwa

Sound	Key word	Common spellings
/ə/	about	Any vowel in an unstressed syllable: a (about), e (taken), o (lemon), u (circus)

Other vowel sounds

Sound	Key word	Common spellings
/oo/	moon	oo, u_e (rule), ew, ue, ou (soup), ui (fruit)
/oo/	book	oo, u (put), ou (could)
/aw/	saw	aw, au, a before l (ball), augh, ough (thought)
/oi/	coin	oi, oy
/ow/	cow	ow, ou

R-controlled vowels

Sound	Key word	Common spellings
/er/	her	er, ir, ur, ear (learn), or after w (work)
/ar/	car	ar
/or/	corn	or, ore, oar, our (four), oor (door)

Position matters

Many vowel spellings depend on where the sound falls. The first spelling in each pair usually comes in the middle of a word, the second at the end:

ai / ay rain, play
oi / oy coin, boy
au / aw haul, saw
ou / ow out, cow

Teaching tips

- Say sounds clipped and clean. /s/ is a hiss, not "suh." Extra vowel sounds make blending harder.
- Start with continuous sounds (/m/, /s/, /f/, /l/). Students can stretch them, so blending is easier.
- Group sounds on a sound wall by how they are made in the mouth, not by letter.
- When a spelling is wrong, ask "What sound do you hear?" first, then "Which spelling fits in this spot?"
- Teach the most common spelling first. Add others once the first is automatic.
- Point students back to the key word whenever a sound is shaky.

Six Syllable Types, and How to Split a Word

Syllable types tell a reader what the vowel will say. Division patterns tell them where to break a long word. Together they turn "I can't read that" into a plan.

Start here: every syllable has exactly one vowel sound. Count vowel sounds, not vowel letters. *Boat* has two vowel letters and one vowel sound, so it is one syllable.

Closed

One vowel, closed in by at least one consonant. The vowel is usually short.

cat, sit, nap·kin, rab·bit

Open

The syllable ends in one vowel. The vowel is usually long.

go, me, hi, ba·by, mu·sic

Vowel-consonant-e

A vowel, one consonant, then a final e. The first vowel is long and the e is silent.

cake, bike, home, cute, in·side

Vowel team

Two or more letters work together to spell one vowel sound.

rain, feet, boat, coin, cow, saw, rain·bow

R-controlled

A vowel followed by r. The r changes the vowel's sound.

car, her, bird, fork, turn, gar·den

Consonant-le

A consonant plus le at the end of a word. The e is silent. Count back three letters to find it.

ta·ble, puz·zle, lit·tle, can·dle

Some programs count seven types, splitting out diphthongs or other stable endings like -tion. Use whatever your program uses, consistently.

Where to split

Pattern	What to do	Examples
VC/CV	Two consonants between the vowels: split between them. Keep digraphs like sh, ch, th and ck together.	rab / bit , nap / kin , pic / nic
V/CV	One consonant between the vowels: try splitting before it first. The first syllable is open, so its vowel is long.	ro / bot , ti / ger , mu / sic
VC/V	If V/CV doesn't make a real word, split after the consonant. The first syllable is closed, so its vowel is short.	cab / in , lem / on , rob / in
VC/CCV VCC/CV	Three consonants between the vowels: keep the blend or digraph together and split on the other side.	mon / ster , hun / dred , pan / ther
V/V	Two vowels side by side that are not a team: split between them.	li / on , di / et , po / em
C+le	Count back three letters from the end and split there.	ta / ble , sim / ple , bub / ble

A routine students can run alone

- 1 Find the vowels and mark them.
- 2 Look at the letters between the vowels.
- 3 Choose the pattern and draw the split.
- 4 Label each syllable's type.
- 5 Read each syllable, then the whole word.
- 6 Ask: is it a real word? If not, flex the vowel sound and try again.

Words to practice

napkin	robot	cabin
tiger	lion	monster
puzzle	rainbow	garden
pumpkin	music	candle
reptile	sandwich	hundred

Why flexing matters

Patterns are reliable, not perfect. In unstressed syllables vowels often reduce to the schwa (the second syllable of *lemon*). Teaching students to try the other vowel sound keeps them reading instead of stuck.

Spelling Patterns Worth Teaching

English spelling is more predictable than its reputation. Most words follow patterns tied to sound, position and meaning. Teach these as patterns students can test, not rules to memorize.

Patterns that depend on position

FLOSS	At the end of a one-syllable word, right after a short vowel, double f, l and s, and often z. stuff, bell, pass, buzz. Exceptions: bus, gas, yes, if.
-ck or -k	At the end of a one-syllable word, /k/ right after a short vowel is spelled ck. After anything else, use k. back, duck, sick. But milk, desk, book, week.
c or k at the start	Use c before a, o and u. Use k before e, i and y. cat, cot, cut. But kept, kid, kite.
-tch or -ch	Right after a short vowel at the end of a one-syllable word, /ch/ is spelled tch. After a consonant or a vowel team, use ch. catch, fetch, pitch. But bench, coach. Exceptions: much, such, rich, which.
-dge or -ge	Right after a short vowel at the end of a word, /j/ is spelled dge. After anything else, use ge. badge, edge, bridge, judge. But cage, huge, large.
No final v or j	English words almost never end in v or j. Add an e after v. Use ge or dge for /j/. have, give, love, sleeve. cage, fudge.
Middle or end	Some vowel sounds have one spelling for the middle of a word and another for the end. ai / ay (rain, play). oi / oy (coin, boy). au / aw (haul, saw). ou / ow (out, cow).
Soft c and g	c and g usually say /s/ and /j/ before e, i or y. Before other letters they say /k/ and /g/. city, cent, cycle. gem, giant, gym. Exceptions for g: get, give, girl.

Patterns for adding suffixes

Doubling (1-1-1)	One syllable, one vowel, one final consonant: double that consonant before a suffix that starts with a vowel. Never double x or w. hop, hopping. run, runner. sad, saddest. But box, boxing. In longer words, double only when the last syllable is stressed: begin, beginning. But visit, visiting.
Drop the e	Drop a silent e before a suffix that starts with a vowel. Keep it before a suffix that starts with a consonant. make, making. hope, hoped. But hopeful, lately. Keep the e after soft c or g before a or o: noticeable, courageous.
Change y to i	When a word ends in a consonant plus y, change the y to i before most suffixes, but not before -ing. A vowel plus y keeps the y. cry, cried, crying. happy, happiness. play, played. joy, joyful.
-s or -es	Add -es when the base ends in s, x, z, ch or sh. You can hear the extra syllable. buses, boxes, buzzes, lunches, wishes.
Three sounds of -ed	-ed says /t/ after unvoiced sounds, /d/ after voiced sounds, and /ěd/ after t or d. It is always spelled -ed because it carries meaning: past tense. jumped /t/. played /d/. wanted, landed /ěd/.

When a word comes back misspelled, sort the error first

Type of error	Example	What to teach
A sound is missing	"stad" for stand	Segmenting. Have the student say each sound and tap it before writing.
Wrong spelling choice	"bak" for back	The position pattern. Here, -ck after a short vowel.
Suffix or base error	"jumpť" for jumped	Morphology. -ed is a meaning unit, spelled the same every time.

Patterns, not rules. Let students test them on real words and find the exceptions themselves.