

Why Multisensory Phonics?

Multisensory learning was first promoted in educational settings by Maria Montessori for preschoolers and young children, who learn by seeing, hearing, touching/feeling, tasting, and smelling. It is the way children naturally learn.



In the 1930's, Dr. Samuel Orton and Anna Gillingham devised a system of teaching structured, systematic, rule-based phonics using multisensory reinforcement to cement new learning into long-term memory. In the Orton-Gillingham Approach, learners trace letters to reinforce shapes, names and sounds. When spelling words, students are encouraged to break each word into its phonemic elements or sounds to make the phonemes recognizable and to assure correct sequencing of sounds. Learners assign one sound to each finger and then spell the sequence of sounds to create a word. This is called finger counting, finger spelling, finger tapping, Touch Spelling and various other descriptive titles. Research by the National Institutes of Health suggests that successful reading programs incorporate a spelling component and involve multisensory reinforcement. Students with weak phonological awareness ability often experience difficulty sequencing sounds accurately. Touch Spelling provides a way to simplify the process and enable learners to spell.

Research indicates that the following are key components in successful reading programs. These components are included in the Sonday System®.



Phonological awareness

The ability to play with language by rhyming, isolating the beginning or ending sound of a word, deletion and substitution of parts of a word into syllables. Print is not involved.

Phonemic awareness

Understanding that words and syllables are made up of speech sounds which are represented by alphabetic symbols or letters.

Systematic, explicit phonics

Direct instruction in the sound-symbol correspondences, with practice reading and spelling sounds in isolation, in the context of words, and in sentences.

Spelling

Teaching consonant sounds and clusters, vowel spellings, syllables, affixes and the rule base needed for correct use. Spelling strengthens concepts and skills needed for reading.

Multisensory reinforcement

Practice using three pathways of learning through eyes, ears and sense of touch. Students simultaneously see the letter(s), hear the sound, feel how it is formed with their lips, tongue, and throat, and feel the form as the sound is traced or written.

Controlled reading with decodable text

New sounds and spellings must be practiced in the context of words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs which emphasize those new sounds. Books written with controlled text are often less than inspiring but provide necessary practice of new material taught. Beginning readers should read a variety of text at appropriate levels.

Vocabulary

Adding new words, word definitions and practicing using those words appropriately should be built into

reading programs. Understanding new words comes faster to those with a well developed vocabulary. Nothing increases vocabulary faster and more efficiently than reading.

Comprehension

The most valuable activity for increasing comprehension is reading itself. Practice. The very first step in developing reading comprehension is the ability to read words.

Progress testing

Regular testing, monthly or quarterly, using informal measures will determine progress in reading and spelling. Teachers, students and parents should know if there is growth or if intervention is indicated.