



State of Israel
Ministry of Education
The Pedagogical Secretariat
Languages Department
Inspectorate for English Language Education



BUILDING BLOCKS 2 OF 3

A FRIENDLY GUIDE FOR ELEMENTARY EFL TEACHERS



Teaching Orthographic Patterns & Sight Words

How to teach spelling patterns to young learners of English - step by step.

2 OF 3

Sounds to letters · patterns · words that reach automatic recognition

WHERE THIS FITS

The Building Blocks journey to reading

These guides build on each other, step by step. You are on Building Blocks 2.



BUILDING BLOCKS 1

Phonological awareness

Hearing and playing with sounds by ear - rhythm, rhyme, first and last sounds. No letters yet.

✓ Done



BUILDING BLOCKS 2

Orthographic patterns & sight words

Connecting those sounds to the letters on the page - spelling patterns and words that reach automatic recognition.

★ This guide · YOU ARE HERE



BUILDING BLOCKS 3

Reading fluency

Practising until reading is smooth, fast, and full of meaning - the bridge to comprehension.

→ Next

What is inside



What fluent reading means

Fluent readers vs beginning readers



The building blocks of reading

Sounds, letters, word parts & sight words



Word recognition + comprehension

Decode words and know what they mean



Spelling patterns & word families

Five patterns and rimes for longer words



Sight words & orthographic mapping

How a word locks into memory



Games and activities to try

Vowel actions and word games



Teaching cycle & differentiation

A 4-step cycle; reaching every learner (MTSS)



Assess to plan + FAQ

Assess across five skills; questions teachers ask

Where Building Blocks 2 fits: the reading rope

Skilled reading weaves two strands together (Scarborough, 2001). Our building blocks build the **word recognition** strand.

Word recognition

Our building blocks

 Phonological awareness - play with and manipulate sounds **BB 1**

 Decoding - sound-spelling patterns, with spelling **BB 2**

 Sight recognition - matching decodable text **BB 2**

Language comprehension

Keep feeding this strand too

 Background knowledge

 Vocabulary

 Language structures

 Verbal reasoning

 Literacy knowledge

Both strands together → skilled, fluent reading. [Read more - the Science of Reading & Scarborough rope \(Amplify\)](#)

Reading = decoding × language comprehension

This guide builds word recognition (the lower strand). But EFL learners often decode words they have never heard - so decoding must run in parallel with oral language.



Word recognition

Sounds, patterns, sight words → **says** the word. (this guide)



Language comprehension

Listening, vocabulary, oral language → **knows** the word.



Reading with meaning

A word a child can sound out but has never heard is not yet truly read.

 The Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986): both sides must be strong - if either is zero, there is no comprehension. So grow oral language and pre-teach word meanings right alongside decoding.

Glossary of terms

A shared vocabulary for the whole three-Building-Blocks series.

literacy	the ability to read, write, and understand material
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decoding	pronouncing a word from its letters
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automaticity	reading automatically, without mental effort
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orthography	the spelling system of a language
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sight word	a common word read instantly, through automatic recognition
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lexical item	a word or chunk of language
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extraction	pulling the meaning out of a text
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phoneme	a single sound in a spoken word
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orthographic pattern	a regular sound-to-spelling rule (e.g. magic e)
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fluency	reading quickly, accurately, and with expression
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Three kinds of knowledge – keep them separate

They build on each other. Teachers who can name them clearly can teach them clearly.



Phonological awareness

Hearing and playing with sounds – out loud, no letters. Rhyming, clapping syllables, blending sounds.

Building Blocks 1 • ears only



Phonics / decoding

Mapping sounds to letters – turning c-a-t into a spoken word.

sound → letter



Orthographic knowledge

Recognising spelling patterns and word parts – and building richer word pictures over time.

patterns + meaning

💡 Orthographic learning is more than memorising patterns. Every good read makes a word spelling more detailed and easier to recognise next time.

English spelling is hard – and it counts



English is deep

The same letters can spell many sounds. (Frost, 2005)



Far from Hebrew

The distance between Hebrew and English makes EFL spelling hard to acquire. (Gholamain & Geva, 1999; Kahn-Horwitz et al., 2011)



Spelling powers it all

Accurate spelling supports reading and writing, and frees the mind to compose. (Fender, 2008; Puranik & Al Otaiba, 2012)



Teacher knowledge counts

Teachers who know the writing system teach reading and spelling more successfully. (Piasta et al., 2009)

🔗 The Peter Effect: you cannot teach what you do not know - so English orthography must be taught explicitly in teacher education. (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012; Moats, 2009)

By the end of Building Blocks 2, you will be able to...

- ✓ Tell apart phonological awareness, decoding, and orthographic knowledge.
- ✓ Teach the main English spelling patterns and word families (rimes) explicitly.
- ✓ Explain how sight words become automatic (orthographic mapping).
- ✓ Adjust the teaching cycle for beginning, developing, and struggling readers.
- ✓ Teach useful word parts - prefixes, suffixes, and endings.
- ✓ Anticipate the difficulties of Hebrew- and Arabic-speaking learners.
- ✓ Link reading and writing through encoding activities.
- ✓ Use assessment results to plan the next lesson.

THE GOAL

What does fluent mean?



The fluent reader

- ✓ Knows many words quickly
- ✓ Reads groups of words together
- ✓ Sounds smooth and natural

Focus: understanding the meaning



The beginning reader

- Sounds out each word slowly
- Reads one word at a time
- Sounds choppy and flat

Focus: sounding out the letters

💡 Big idea: when sounding out becomes fast and easy, the brain is free to understand the story.

How reading is built

5

Fluency & meaning

Read smoothly and understand

4

Reading sentences

Put words together in context

3

Fast word reading

Read words quickly; break long words

2

Sounds to letters

Match sounds to written letters · [this guide](#)

1

Hearing sounds

Notice the sound parts in words · ✓ built in Building Blocks 1

One sound, more than one spelling

C



Hard C

as in **cat** - sounds like /k/



Soft C

as in **city** - sounds like /s/

These are not exceptions. The letter next to C tells us the sound. Teaching this clearly helps children feel sure when they read.

The tricky part: short vowels

Vowel type	How hard?	Why
Long vowels	 Easy	The sound is just the letter name. Easy to hear and tell apart.
Short vowels	 Hard	Mouth shapes look almost the same. The letters a, e, i, o, u also look alike on the page.



Closed syllables (at, met, mop, in, up) make up almost half of all written syllables - and their spelling predicts the vowel sound in 95% of words. (Stanback, 1992)

Sounds that are hard for Hebrew & Arabic speakers

These sounds do not exist - or behave differently - in the first language. Teach and contrast them on purpose. Every word here is from Pre-Band 1 or Band 1.



Long /i:/ vs short /ɪ/ - **feel** · **fill**

the vowel length changes the word



/æ/ vs /e/ - **bad** · **bed**

a very common EFL mix-up



Consonant clusters - **street** · **desks** · **asked**

many consonants, no vowel between



Silent letters - **know** · **write** · **half**

letters written but not said

🗣️ Say the pair, show the mouth, then let children sort words into two groups. Contrast makes the difference easy to hear.

 TRY THIS ACTIVITY

Activity: vowel actions

Give each short vowel a word, a sound, and a move.

Vowel	Word	Stretch the sound	Action
a	apple 🍏	aaaa-ple	pretend to bite an apple
e	edge 🖐️	eeee-dge	slide hand off a table edge
i	itch 🤤	iiii-tch	scratch your arm
o	octopus 🐙	oooo-ctopus	wave arms like an octopus
u	up 👆	u-p	point up high

 Why it works: movement helps the sound stick in the memory.

Activity: mix the words

Step 1 • Set up

mat

met

mit

mot

mut

Point to the words in a mixed-up order.

Step 2 • Swap

bat

bet

bit

bot

but

Change the first letter.

Step 3 • Scramble

bit

bat

but

bet

bot

Change the order of the vowels.

 Core idea: make the brain read every single time. If children only remember the shape of a word, they are not really reading.

Two kinds of tricky words



Sight words (read them fast)

A sight word is any word a child reads instantly from memory - no sounding out. We start with the most common words; a few have one irregular part, but they are still mapped through their sounds, not stored as pictures.

the

to

is

they



Long words (chunk them)

Long words make children guess or skip. Break them into small parts.

bas·ket·ball

eve·ning

What is a sight word?

A **sight word** is any word a child recognises **instantly** - read straight from memory, no sounding out. The real goal is **automatic recognition**, which is what we want for **every** word a child reads.

✔ What it is

A word read **automatically**, in an instant.

Often a **very common** word - the first ~200 (*the, a, is, to, and...*) are especially helpful for our fourth- and fifth-graders.

Learned by **decoding it well, again and again**, until the spelling, sound and meaning bond together.

⊘ What it is not

Not a word **memorised as a picture** or a shape.

Not only irregular words - **any** word can become a sight word.

Not learned by flashcard drilling alone.

💡 Automaticity is built right here in the orthographic stage - practising letter combos (*at, an, am, im* → *cat, mat, fan, man, him, Tim*) until they are instant. Work on fluency as you teach reading, so each child feels their own growing skill and confidence.

START HERE

Beginning sight words

The most common words in English - the ones we want children to read automatically.



They appear again and again

These few words fill most sentences. Knowing them saves time on every page.



A few have tricky parts

Words like *the* and *said* have one irregular part. Point to the tricky letters, then read the rest by its sounds.



They free the brain

Reading these words fast leaves more thinking room for new words and meaning.

★ First words to make automatic

the

a

is

to

and

you

they

was

said

of

have

are



Teach just a few at a time, and review them often.

How words become sight words

Children get there by sounding words out well - not by memorising their shape (Ehri).

abc

1 • Decode

The child sounds the word out, letter by letter - sh-i-p → ship.



2 • Bond

The brain files the spelling *ship* with its sound and its meaning together.



3 • Recognise

After a few good reads, *ship* is known on sight - no sounding out needed.

⊘ This is why just memorise the shape does not work. Children reach automatic reading by decoding words well, again and again.

How orthographic mapping works

Sight words are not memorised as pictures. The brain binds spelling to sound and meaning - this four-step process is **orthographic mapping**.

1

Say the word

Hear it as a whole - cat.

2

Segment the sounds

/c/ /a/ /t/ - the Building Blocks
1 skill.

3

Match the letters

c→/c/, a→/a/, t→/t/ - grapheme
to phoneme.

4

Write & read it

Spell it, read it back - the spelling
locks to the sounds.

🔒 Repeat a few times and the word is mapped - recognised instantly, no sounding out. This is why decoding, not flashcard drilling, builds real sight vocabulary. (Ehri)

SPELLING PATTERNS

Five spelling patterns to teach

Teach these five patterns to help children read longer words.

Vowel teams

meet
year
weekend
see

Magic E

rides
makes
evening
likes

Y = E or I

family
city
very
busy

Soft / hard C

science
city
bicycle

R-controlled

girl
morning
parents
dinner

Word families

Words that share the same ending pattern and sound. Read one, and you can read the whole family by swapping the first letter.

-at

cat
hat
bat
flat

-ake

cake
make
lake
snake

-ing

king
ring
sing
wing

-ight

light
night
right
bright

-op

hop
top
stop
shop

-ug

bug
hug
rug
mug

★ The 37 most common families (Wylie & Durrell, 1970) appear in a huge number of words - the biggest reading pay-off. Teach one family a week: read the rime, build words by swapping the first letter, then hunt for it in a rhyme or story.

Teach meaningful word parts

A morpheme is the smallest part of a word that carries meaning. From about Grade 3, these parts help children read and spell longer words.

Prefixes & suffixes

Parts added to the front or end of a base word - they change its meaning or its job.

care → **careful** → **carefully** · **unhappy**

Inflectional endings -s -ed -ing

Endings that show when or how many - the base word keeps its meaning.

play → **plays** · **played** · **playing**

Word families

A base word and its relatives, sharing a spelling and a meaning.

teach → **teacher** · **read** → **reader** · **reading**

Syllable types

Beats in a word - splitting a longer word into syllables makes it readable.

rab-bit · **ba-na-na** · **af-ter-noon**

 Word parts spell more reliably than single sounds and carry meaning - drawn straight from the Pre-Band 1 & Band 1 words your pupils already meet.

Model lesson plans

► Watch: Teaching the building blocks of reading and writing in EFL - Prof. Janina Kahn-Horwitz, Oranim College of Education.



The Little Purple Table - Part 1

Modelling a short-vowel decodable text. ·  Lesson plan · ► Watch



The Little Purple Table - Part 2

Continuing the decodable-text lesson. ·  Lesson plan · ► Watch



Ch is for Chocolate

Teaching the *ch* digraph. ·  Lesson plan · ► Watch



Long Vowels

Modelling magic-e and vowel-team patterns. ·  Lesson plan · ► Watch

HOW TO TEACH IT

The teaching cycle

🕒 A1 pacing: aim for 5-10 minutes each lesson for focused reading and spelling-pattern work - and keep ~5 min of oral sound play going too.

1

Before reading

Remove problems first: hard words, rules, and sight words.

2

Quiet practice

Let children read silently before they read aloud.

3

Read out loud

Practise reading aloud in many different ways.

4

After reading

Check progress and practise again at home.

📖 Then start again with the next story.

Get ready before reading

Anna is a ten-year-old girl. She has two brothers. Anna family lives in a small city. On weekdays, Anna goes to school in the morning. She studies English, math, and science.

Sight words

Vowel teams

Soft C

R-controlled

Teach the highlighted words before reading aloud, so children meet the story with the hard parts already solved.

STEP 2 • QUIET PRACTICE

Quiet practice first

🕒 Give **1-2 minutes** of silent reading before reading aloud.

🔍 Finishing the whole text is **not** the goal.

🔗 The goal: quietly connect the letters to the sounds.



Confidence ↑

Children practise on their own first - so they feel ready before reading in front of others.

Read out loud

Aim for at least 3 different reading chances in one lesson.



Find & translate

Find words or sentences and say them in the first language.



Match L1 → L2

Teacher says it in the first language; students find the English.



Partner reading

Read out loud together with a friend.



Line by line

Give lines by the first letter of each child name.



Choral reading

Whole class reads together. Change voices (quiet, squeaky) to keep attention.



More reading chances = more practice = more confidence.

Check and practise at home



The 1-minute retest

Time the reading again. Show the child that they read more words in the same time. This proves their reading is getting faster.

▶ **start before**

▣ **further after**



Home practice

🗣️ Send voice recordings of the reading to the teacher.

👨🏻‍👩🏻‍👧 Use family-signed practice sheets so reading happens at home too.

Link reading and writing

Reading (decoding) and spelling (encoding) draw on the same sound-letter knowledge - building a word from its sounds strengthens the very links used to read it.



Dictation

Say a word; children write it using the pattern they just learned.



Word building

Change one sound to make a new word: cat → cap → map.



Sentence writing

Use the new pattern words in a short sentence of their own.



Spelling → reading

Spelling a word by its sounds makes reading it easier next time.



Decoding and encoding are reciprocal - every word a child spells by its sounds is another rehearsal for reading it.

The same cycle, adjusted to the reader

Keep the four steps. Change the text, the amount, and the support.



Beginning readers

More decoding practice

Shorter texts

Controlled vocabulary



Developing readers

Longer connected texts

Repeated reading

Vocabulary expansion



Struggling readers

Targeted intervention

Based on diagnostic results

Use the ABLE Kit



Let assessment results decide who needs which - then plan the next lesson to match.

Reaching every learner

Same four-step cycle, different support. A multi-tier system of support (MTSS) helps you plan for struggling, gifted and multilingual pupils.

● TIER 1 • EVERYONE

Explicit whole-class pattern teaching, with decodable reading practice.

↓ Struggling: one pattern at a time, more decodable repetition and review.

◆ TIER 2 • SOME

Small-group re-teaching of one pattern (short vowels, magic-e) with more examples.

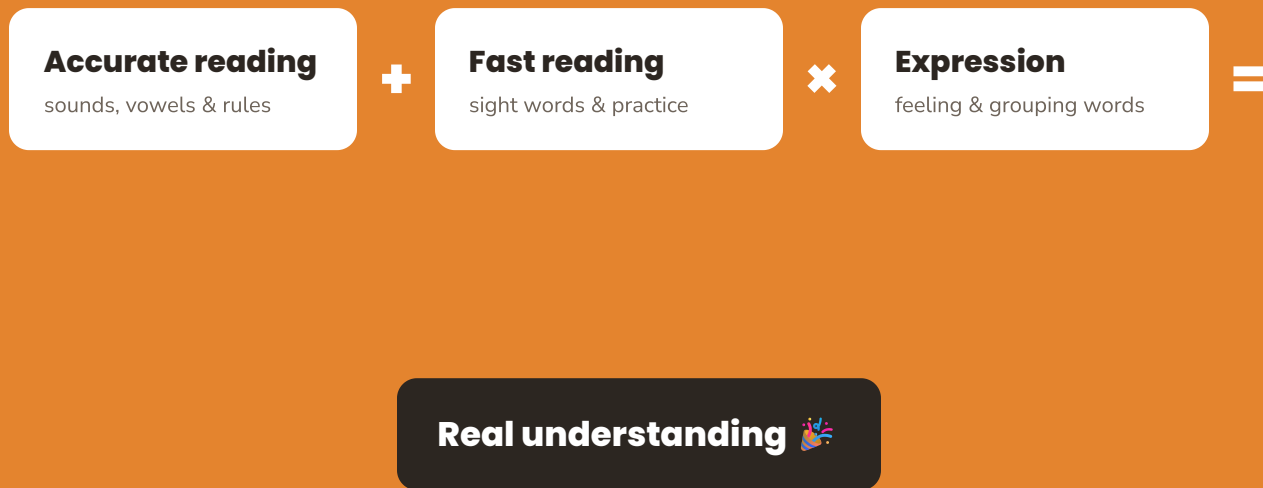
↑ Gifted: longer words, morphology, spelling investigations, peer tutoring.

● TIER 3 • A FEW

Intensive one-to-one: one pattern at a time, multisensory say-tap-write.

🌐 Many home languages: name the clash (p/b, vowels) and give extra practice.

Why we teach all the small parts



We teach the small parts - sounds and rules - not to make reading robots, but to free the child mind to enjoy the story.

ASSESS TO PLAN, NOT JUST TO SCORE

Measure more than speed

Skill	How to check it	If weak, teach...
Phoneme-grapheme	Quick decoding task	Re-teach the sound-letter links
Orthographic patterns	Read & spell pattern words	Revisit that spelling pattern
Sight-word recognition	Read common words in context	More repeated, meaningful reading
Fluency	Accuracy + rate + expression	Repeated reading and phrasing
Comprehension	Ask meaning questions	Vocabulary and discussion

🔔 Faster reading is not the same as better reading. Check all five, then use the weakest area to plan the next lesson.

Science of Reading: a teacher checklist

- ✓ Frequent sound and word play in a language-rich room.
- ✓ Student-friendly definitions and many exposures to words.
- ✓ Explicit decoding and encoding before connected text.
- ✓ Students interact through receptive and productive tasks.
- ✓ Grammar and syntax for receptive and productive purposes.
- ✓ Content activated with questions, visuals and Readers Theater.
- ✓ Vocabulary is preselected and tied to topic and text.
- ✓ The letter patterns needed to read the text are taught.
- ✓ Topics are rich and relevant for the learners.
- ✓ Students are guided to understand the text.
- ✓ The content of the text is the focus of instruction.
- ✓ Attention to text structure, sequence and critical thinking.

💡 Not every lesson needs all the skills - but every lesson should cover at least one or two.

Questions teachers ask

? My students already read in their first language. Do I still teach sounds?

Yes. English has new sounds and spellings. Teach them clearly and slowly.

? Should children memorise the shape of a word?

No. Words become automatic through decoding, not photos. Mix the words so children read them, not recall a picture.

? How long should quiet practice be?

About 1 to 2 minutes of silent reading before reading out loud.

? What if a word has an irregular part?

Read the regular letters by their sounds and flag the tricky part - like the *ai* in *said*. It still becomes automatic through reading.

? How do I show that a child is making progress?

Use the 1-minute retest and simple home practice sheets. Small, clear proof works best.

Reflect & self-assess

Ask yourself

Which of the three kinds of knowledge do I now separate with confidence?

Did I link decoding and encoding, or teach reading and writing apart?

How do I decide which sight words to make automatic - and how do I know they have stuck?

What does my assessment tell me to teach next - not just who reads faster?

Now I can...

- ✓ explain the difference between phonics and orthographic knowledge.
- ✓ teach the five core spelling patterns with clear examples.
- ✓ explain how a word becomes a sight word (orthographic mapping).
- ✓ break a longer word into morphemes and syllables.
- ✓ run the four-step teaching cycle in a real lesson.
- ✓ assess across all five skills, not speed alone.

From patterns to fluency

Children can now decode the patterns. Next, they practise until reading is smooth, fast, and full of feeling.

 Fluency is the bridge between recognising words and understanding the story. - based on Shanahan & the National Reading Panel

10 Building Blocks 3: ten steps to practise reading fluency

1 Model fluent reading

2 Pre-teach vocabulary

3 Word investigation

4 Sentence investigation

5 Repeated reading

6 Multi-modal reading

7 Provide feedback

8 Spelling

9 Theatrical reading

10 Distancing

SOURCES

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BUILDING BLOCKS 2 OF 3 · COMPLETE

You have got this!

Small steps every day build confident readers.

1 · Teach patterns clearly

2 · Practise with games

3 · Read many times, many ways