



Literacy handout 1: foundations of literacy instruction for secondary English learners

Teaching literacy to secondary ELs presents unique challenges. Many existing literacy interventions are designed for younger learners and native English speakers, leaving a gap in age-appropriate resources for secondary ELs. These handouts will give you the knowledge and strategies needed to effectively address literacy gaps and support the reading development of your secondary ELs.

Your role as a teacher

Your role is especially important to your students' literacy learning. Our lessons are made to get students involved, using visuals, icons, and sound recordings to make the content clear and engaging, which means less talking from you and more doing from them. Your task is to model sounds, demonstrate concepts, and tailor your instruction to what each student needs.

Two key concepts in literacy instruction

1: Phonemes and graphemes

- Phonemes are the smallest units of **sound** in a language (e.g., /s/, /t/, /r/)
- Graphemes are the **written representations** of phonemes (letters or letter combinations)
- English has 44 phonemes and various graphemes represent these sounds



2: Sound-symbol correspondence

- Linking phonemes to graphemes is the foundation of reading development
- Explicit instruction in sound-symbol correspondence helps ELs decode words
- Consistent practice with sound-symbol relationships builds automaticity in word recognition

Understanding phonemes (the smallest units of sound), and graphemes (the letters that represent these sounds) is a major building block in literacy. With a full set of 44 phonemes in American English and many grapheme possibilities, our lessons support you in teaching these fundamentals methodically. Starting with Unit 1, we introduce phonemes, using anchor words to connect speech and writing. Each phoneme is connected to a single anchor word that is used consistently to reference the sound (e.g., “eagle” for ē), so that students can quickly associate the word with the sound.

Explicit, systematic phonics instruction:

- Phonics teaches the relationship between sounds and their written representations
- Explicit instruction means directly teaching and modeling sound-spelling patterns
- Systematic instruction follows a planned sequence of skills, from simple to complex
- Research shows that explicit, systematic phonics accelerates reading growth for ELs

Explicit, systematic phonics instruction is a research-backed approach that has been shown to accelerate reading growth for ELLs. By directly teaching and modeling sound-spelling patterns in a logical sequence, you can help your students develop a strong foundation in decoding and word recognition.



Introducing the Off2Class foundational literacy lessons:

- Designed specifically for secondary ELs to address common literacy gaps
- Aligns with best practices in literacy instruction, including explicit phonics
- Consists of 12 units, each with 4 lessons, covering key early literacy skills
- Integrates phonics, high-frequency words, and reading practice

The Off2Class foundational literacy lessons provide you with a comprehensive, ready-to-use resource for addressing literacy gaps in secondary ELs. By aligning with best practices and offering a structured, progressive curriculum, these lessons support teachers in delivering effective literacy instruction.

Overview of unit 1: teaching phonological awareness and phonics:

- Unit 1 focuses on building phonological awareness and introducing phonics concepts
- Lessons cover identifying and producing sounds, blending and segmenting phonemes
- Teachers model articulation of sounds and guide students in practice activities
- Students begin to connect phonemes to graphemes in preparation for later units

Unit 1 sets the stage by getting students familiar with the sounds of English. For students who already have some spoken English, this unit is a great refresher. It focuses on how sounds are made and introduces anchor words, which we use to teach grapheme pronunciations throughout the later units.



Lesson	Objective and outcome	Phonemes taught
1: Simple vowels	Introduce simple vowels (monophthongs). At the end of the lesson, students can distinguish simple vowels and produce an anchor word for each.	/ē/, /ī/, /ě/, /ǎ/, /ō/, /aw/, /ū/, /oo/, /ū/, /ə/
2: Complex vowels	Introduce complex vowels (diphthongs, r-controlled). At the end of the lesson, students can distinguish complex vowels and produce an anchor word for each.	/ā/, /ī/, /ō/, /yū/, /oi/, /ow/, /ar/, /er/, /or/
3: Consonants 1	Introduce consonants 1 (bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar). At the end of the lesson, students can distinguish consonants 1 and produce an anchor word for each.	/p/, /b/, /m/, /f/, /v/, /th/, /<u>th</u>/, /t/, /d/, /n/, /s/, /z/, /l/
4: Consonants 2	Introduce consonants 2 (postalveolar, retroflex, palatal, velar, glottal). At the end of the lesson, students can distinguish consonants 2 and produce an anchor word for each.	/sh/, /zh/, /ch/, /j/, /y/, /r/, /k/, /g/, /ŋ/, /wh/, /w/, /h/

Next step: [Open the "Simple Vowels" lesson](#) in Off2Class.

Familiarize yourself with the first phonemes introduced and consider how you will model these sounds for your students and provide feedback to support their mastery.