

# Guide To Phonics Pathways And Reading Pathways

*Dolores G. Hiskes*



Although many customers have said, “*Phonics Pathways almost seems to teach itself,*” from time to time parents and teachers have requested more detailed information on exactly how to most effectively use these materials.

This is especially true now that its companion book of reading exercises, *Reading Pathways*, is here. How do these books fit together? Do you have to finish one before beginning the other?

This manual is intended to be a guide to show you how to navigate, incorporate, and blend these two books together for maximum reading fluency.

We do hope you will enjoy these special field-tested tips, tools, and techniques and find them useful.

We also hope that you will continue sending us your creative comments and suggestions. Your feedback is most valuable and welcome—*as always!*

~Dolores



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P.O. Box 2588~Livermore CA 94551

[www.dorbooks.com](http://www.dorbooks.com)~[dor@dorbooks.com](mailto:dor@dorbooks.com)

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ISBN 1-884580-77-7

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## INTRODUCTION

**P***honics Pathways* teaches the *mechanics* of reading using *unpredictable* reading practice to ensure knowledge and retention of all the basics. It uses explicit phonics to teach reading to beginning and remedial readers of all ages with an easy-to-use, foolproof method.

It is organized by sounds and spelling patterns which are introduced one at a time and slowly built into syllables, words, phrases, and sentences.

Each lesson is filled with extensive examples, word lists, and practice readings that are 100 percent decodable.

*Phonics Pathways* contains comprehensive spelling rules gathered from English-speaking countries worldwide, including New Zealand, Australia, The United Kingdom, and Canada, which are embedded in the instructional method throughout the book.

**R***eading Pathways* teaches *reading fluency* using *predictable* scaffolded reading practice of slowly increasing length and complexity. It parallels the same lesson format as that in *Phonics Pathways*, and is designed to enhance and reinforce those lessons. *Reading Pathways* employs a unique pyramid format to nurture and develop accurate and fluent reading skills in an especially effective and enjoyable manner.

While either book can be used alone very successfully, these books complement and enhance each other and are especially effective when used as a pair. They each follow the same sequence of instruction.

Used just a short time every day, they are an ideal supplement to enhance any current classroom reading method and make it more effective, and by homeschoolers as a complete reading and spelling program. They achieve maximum results in the minimum time with the least amount of effort.

## **Phonics Pathways Overview:**

### **Short-Vowel Sounds**

The initial lessons in *Phonics Pathways* are devoted to teaching the short-vowel sounds. They are the basic foundation of our language, and are needed to build good reading and spelling skills. Short-vowel sounds can be difficult to learn, and are best taught in isolation, one at a time.

Every letter introduced is illustrated with pictures that *begin* with that sound, since at first many children experience difficulty trying to hear a sound *within* a word. Multiple pictures demonstrate the subtle range of sounds that each short vowel sound makes, similar in effect to that of a 3-D hologram.

### **Two-Letter Blends (CV)**

Consonants are introduced next, blending with short-vowel sounds as they are learned. Blending skills are an important but frequently-overlooked factor in learning how to read! Special blending exercises establish smooth, strong left-to-right eye tracking skills, and help prevent or correct reversals. They are similar in effect to exercises frequently prescribed by professionals to treat dyslexia.

### **Three-Letter Words (CVC)**

Three-letter words are built as soon as possible. Thus, students will be able to unlock many phonetic words very early in the game, solidly establishing the mechanics of reading and giving them a real feeling of success. *There is no guessing or choosing*—accuracy in reading and spelling is taught from the very first lesson.

### **Spelling Rules**

Reading and spelling enhance one another and are best taught as an integrated unit. Learning how to read and spell by logical patterns develops critical, logical thinking and reasoning skills, which enhance math and other disciplines.

Spelling rules are incorporated with reading lessons throughout the book, and are introduced together with the sounds being taught, one by one, in order of complexity.

## **Reading Pathways Overview:**

This book offers an easy-to-use, highly effective approach to teaching reading accuracy and fluency to students of all ages using a unique pyramid format.

Reading pyramids begin with one word and slowly build into phrases and sentences of gradually increasing complexity. As the student moves from the pinnacle to the base of each pyramid, the phrase or sentence becomes more interesting and expansive, and the student's confidence grows with each line completed. Progressively building up the amount of text per line increases eye span, strengthens eye tracking, and develops reading fluency.

### **Part One: Simple Pyramids**

These pyramids are comprised of single-syllable words. Sounds blend into words, and are slowly built into phrases and sentences of gradually increasing complexity. Each line has a few added words and is centered under the previous one, giving it the shape of a pyramid.

### **Part Two: Multisyllable Word Mini-Pyramids**

These mini-pyramids are comprised of single multisyllable words, one word per pyramid, built from syllables. Two multisyllable words at a time are then incorporated into practice sentences.

### **Part Three: Multisyllable Word Pyramids (“Brain Busters”)**

These pyramids contain a wide variety of multisyllable words in every pyramid, and are for learners who are ready for more complex material. These “Brain Busters” are sure to be a challenge!

### **Part Four: Multisyllable Word Games & Summary**

All words having three or more syllables are summarized and indexed at the end of the book for easy reference. Multisyllable word games help develop vocabulary.

Learning to read long words accurately by syllables prevents guessing, removes the fear and mystique of multisyllable words, and helps students build the strong vocabulary so critical for success in reading and writing.

# Using *Phonics Pathways*

## Preparation:

1–Read “Getting Started” section of *Phonics Pathways* (page xvii) for a quick overview of how to teach these lessons, including a sample session.

2–Make a folder for each student, and staple the “Student Achievement Chart” and the “Student Progress Notes” (pages 244 and 245) to the inside. This will provide an at-a-glance record of your student’s progress at any time, as well as of any comments you noted about the lesson itself. (This folder will come in especially handy at parent/teacher conferences!)

3–Make enough copies of *The Short-Vowel Stick* on page 3 of for each student. At first all students should keep one on their desk during lessons for quick referral and continuous reinforcement. These sounds can be difficult to learn, and students need all the help they can get!

4–Make four or more copies of *The Short-Vowel Shuffle* on page 4. This game reinforces the short-vowel sounds in a truly enjoyable fashion. Begin playing it with the A card, add other cards as more sounds are learned. (Learning these sounds can be tedious—this makes it fun!)

5–Make copies of *The Short Sheet of Vowels* (page 8 of this booklet).

6–For added reinforcement, make up *Blendit!* on page 14. Make one set for every two students – the game is played in pairs. It is great reinforcement, and increases recognition/response time. It’s fun to play, and the slowest students have just as much chance of winning as the quickest!

7–It’s very important to plan ahead and have all of your materials ready *before* the lesson begins . . . . . so . . . . . *be prepared!*



**Hot Tips:** *At first work for only about ten minutes a day with these lessons. You will find that you automatically spend more time with them as your student progresses, but lessons should be kept very short in the beginning. Only ten minutes every day will result in real progress!*

*Measure these lessons by **time spent**, not **age** or **page**! Your students might spend several days on one page, or they might complete several pages in one day. However long or short it takes, students must know these sounds as well as they know their own names.*

# The Short Sheet of Vowels

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Aa****Ee****Ii****Oo****Uu**

## Short-Vowel Sounds:

1—Begin with the short A sound on page 9, following the directions on page 8.

(If each student does not have his or her own book, either duplicate one copy of page 9 for every student, or project the page on an overhead to use with the whole class.)

2—Play *The Short-Vowel Shuffle*. (Older students can use this game as flash cards, and just ignore the “Eyes” card.)

3—Keep *The Short Vowel Stick* right on the table by the lesson page for students as a quick-reference and reinforcement until these sounds are automatic in recall, and it is no longer needed. It is a very handy reference!

4—Add one vowel at a time, making sure that each one is thoroughly learned first. Add more vowel cards to *The Short Vowel Shuffle* as they are learned. Shuffle the cards before playing. It’s an excellent way to determine whether or not your students really know these sounds!

5—After all the vowels are learned, give one *Short Sheet of Vowels* to every student. Have them write their names on top. Dictate a vowel sound, and have the students listen carefully, and write the correct letter under the correct heading. Check for errors, repeat as needed.

6—Play *Blendit!* (also page 255) It will reinforce learning and increase recognition/response time. (If you like *Bingo*, you’ll love *Blendit!*)



**Hot Tips:** *These sounds can be difficult to differentiate—/e/ and /i/ in particular. If your students are having trouble hearing the difference between “e” and “i,” for example, try saying some of the “i” words with an “e” sound: “etch,” “egloo,” etc. Or tell him “we say inch, not ench.” Hearing a word pronounced incorrectly really can be quite helpful.*

*Practice dictation with every lesson, unless writing is too difficult. Dictate about 3–6 sounds or words per lesson. Reading and writing reinforce and enhance one another.*

## Blending Sounds Into Syllables:

1—Begin with the S consonant on page 17, following the directions on page 16. Make one page for every student, or use as overhead with class.

2—If your students do not know the sound of the letter S, name the pictures on page 17 and say the beginning sound of each one, including S:

"Star /s/, snowman /s/, swan /s/, S /s/."

3—If blending letters together is difficult for your students, play *The Train Game* on page 18 (and 253-254). Hands-on manipulatives like this can really make a big difference in developing blending skills.

4—Remember to take a deep breath and slowly blend the sounds together in an exaggerated manner: "*Sssssssaaaaa*." It helps!

5—Some students can not see the sense of making two-letter blends—For variety have them make real words when they say the blend, such as:

"'Sa' as in 'sat'," or "'si' as in 'sick'."

(Or try making a game out of it by asking them how many words *they* can think of that begin with this blend!)

6—Remember—keep those *Short-Vowel Sticks* handy at the draw! At first it's more difficult to recall these sounds when paired with consonants, and the *Short-Vowel Stick* will help smooth this transition.

7—Hand out a *Short Sheet of Vowels* from this booklet to each student, and dictate a few blends. They must write the blend under the correct heading. Check papers, and redo errors.



**Hot Tips:** To cement blending skills, make up and play the *Starsearch* game on page 36 (also 256) following the directions on page 35. Students can play the game in small groups—make one set for each group of students.

*It helps make learning blends a lot more fun, and certainly provides great practice as well. (Let's face it: learning blends can be tedious!)*

*Make sure your students blend each letter together smoothly. It isn't enough to have them merely pronounce each letter correctly. They must blend them smoothly! It's so important to master blending.*

## Building Syllables Into Words:

At this point students should know all of the short-vowel sounds and be able to blend consonants and vowels together smoothly.

1–Read through directions and teaching tips on page 37.

2–Put page 38 on an overhead, or distribute copies to everyone.

3–Have students take turns reading each word, working from the single letter to the three-letter word, following the directions on top of the page. Everyone should pay attention to what is being read.

4–Have the whole class read the first sentence together: “**Sis sat.**” Ask them what happened. If necessary, ask what each word means: “What does ‘Sis’ mean?” and “What does ‘sat’ mean?”

Then ask, “What did Sis do?” and “Who sat?” Comprehension and vocabulary-building should be a part of every reading lesson!

5–Hand out a **Short Sheet of Vowels** to each student, and dictate a few of the words on that page. Check papers, and redo errors.

6– Continue through pages 44 and 45, having students take turns reading each group of words. First have them read down each group (easier) and then have them read across the page (harder!).

7–Keep those **Short-Vowel Sticks** handy!



**Hot Tips:** To reinforce and develop reading skills make up the ever-popular **Bag The Bugs** game on page 47 (and 257). It will greatly increase recognition/response time when reading these words.

Divide the class into smaller groups and make up two copies of **Bag The Bugs** for each group. Play as directed on page 46, using the third suggestion for playing the game. (It’s easiest for classroom use.)



**Warning:** This extremely popular game is a perennial favorite, but can result in mass hysteria. Have a bucket of water handy to pour on any overly-excited students!

## Building Words Into Sentences:

At last your students are ready for *real reading*. Let the fun begin!

1–Turn to pages 48 and 49, and proceed as directed with previous lessons.

2–Here are the first two sight words in *Phonics Pathways*: “I” and “a.” It’s important to keep sight words at a minimum when first learning how to read!

3–Note that in the sentences on page 49 have the two main words first positioned to the left of the sentence. This will be true for most of the practice sentences in this book. A gradual transition between reading words and reading sentences is easier for everyone.

4–Now turn to page 50. The scaffolded reading practice in pyramid reading exercises jump-starts reading fluency by utilizing a sentence expansion method, adding only one or two words per line. It eases connected reading and makes it a more manageable task.

5–Read the directions on top of the page. Have students read the pyramid together, or take turns reading the lines. (There is another pyramid to practice with on pages 248 and 249.)

6–There are also a variety of games to play on page 250 that will reinforce learning while providing variety in a fun and enjoyable fashion. Take a peek!



**Hot Tips:** *Students should stop reading when their eyes get tired—they should only read as far as they can without feeling any eye strain.*

*The next day they probably will be able to read farther farther down the page, and before they know it they will be reading the whole pyramid!*

*“Connected reading” is a complex step and may take time to learn. The readiness for learning this skill varies greatly, and has nothing to do with intelligence any more than wearing glasses does.*

# Using Reading Pathways

*Reading Pathways* is a whole book of pyramids similar to the two that are in *Phonics Pathways*. Now it is time to incorporate both books into daily lessons!

**Remember:** Be sure students know short-vowel sounds and are able to read three-letter CVC words before beginning this book!

- 1–First, complete a lesson in *Phonics Pathways*.
- 2–Choose a corresponding pyramid from *Reading Pathways*.
- 3–Read as far down the pyramid as possible. Stop when tired and come back to it the next day—you’ll be able to read a little farther.
- 4–Very soon you will be reading the whole pyramid!

The following chart correlates the skill levels in *Reading Pathways* with those in *Phonics Pathways*, and will help you combine and blend the two books. Choose a pyramid to practice with from the same group of skills you are working with:

	<i>Phonics Pathways</i>	<i>Reading Pathways</i>
Three-Letter Words	48–52	1–23
Two-Consonant Endings	53–86	24–31
Long-Vowel Sounds: Long A	88	33
Long I	90	35
Long O	92	36
Long U	94	37
Long E	96–99	34
Long-Vowel Review	100–105	38–53
Two-Consonant Beginnings	119–144	54–61
R-Modified Vowels	145–154	62–67



**Hot Tips:** To facilitate learning have students also *begin* every lesson with a previously-read pyramid—choose one that was especially easy for them to read.

It will help “prime the pump” and act as a warm-up to facilitate smooth reading with *Phonics Pathways* lessons.

If reversals persist, practice with *The Train Game* as well as the *Vision/Motor Coordination Exercises* in *Phonics Pathways* (pages 246-247).

## Simple Pyramids

1–Begin with the first pyramid on page 3 of *Reading Pathways*, after a lesson on page 51 or 52 of *Phonics Pathways*.

2–Read the blending exercise on top of the page first.

3–Now attack the pyramid itself, beginning with the single word on top. Read as far as possible, and come back to it the next day if necessary. (It may take several days to complete reading the whole pyramid!)

## Multisyllable Word Pyramids

The multisyllable word pyramids in *Reading Pathways* are for students who are already reading but who need assistance reading multisyllable words fluently and accurately. This section is divided into two parts:

1–**Multisyllable Word Mini-Pyramids** each contain one multisyllable word, built by syllables into a mini-pyramid. Two of these words are then used in a sentence. Read the words first, then the sentence.

2–**Multisyllable Word Pyramids** are comprised of full-sized pyramids containing a wide variety of multisyllable words in every practice sentence, with both syllabic and phonetic pronunciation to facilitate reading.

## Multisyllable Word Games

On page 129 there are four multisyllable-word games that will reinforce pronunciation and develop vocabulary as well: *WordScramble*, *Word-Sleuth*, *WordMaster*, and *WordSwitch*. The whole class can play!

A summary of all multisyllable words used is indexed in back of the book, showing the pages the words appear in. It is very handy for quick reference and review, and vocabulary building.



**Hot Tips:** *These exercises can be very stimulating – most students want to keep on reading until they have finished the whole pyramid.*

*It is important, however, that they do stop reading before their eyes get too tired. Then they will look forward to the next day’s lesson, when they can read it again—Each day they will be able to read a little farther. It’s like a game!*

## ELL, Remedial

1–Do a pre-test to determine where your students need to begin. Remember: just because learners are older you cannot assume they know the short-vowel sounds or are able to read without guessing!

2–Begin with the first review page in *Phonics Pathways* (page 14). If students stumble over short-vowel sounds, that is where to begin. The multiple illustrations for every letter are especially helpful to ELL who can speak English but not yet read it (i.e. *apple*, /a/, *ant*, /a/, etc.).

3–Sometimes ELL cannot pronounce a sound because it is not in their native language. If they have said a word incorrectly (but to the best of their ability) just repeat back, “*That’s right, the word says \_\_\_\_\_.*” Then their ears are trained to hear the correct pronunciation even though their tongues are not ready yet. Tell them as long as they know what the word means and you can understand them, it doesn’t matter whether they can say the sound exactly right yet or not. They will improve with practice.

4–If they can read these sounds, keep testing with the review pages until they begin to slow down or struggle. That is where to begin.

5–Are reversals a problem? Begin each lesson with a simple reading pyramid as a “reading warm-up.” *The Train Game* is excellent practice for reversals, as are the vision/motor exercises on pages 246-247.

6–Do students understand the meaning of the words they are reading? It’s especially important with ELL to define any word they don’t understand. Picture dictionaries can be *very* useful for vocabulary development!

7–Do they misread multisyllable words? The multisyllable word section of *Reading Pathways* was especially developed to remediate this issue.



**Hot Tips:** *Be sure to check students’ knowledge of short-vowel sounds by having them write the sound from dictation under the right heading in **The Short Sheet of Vowels**.*

*If writing is difficult, just have them point to the correct vowel heading. Or, write the vowels on separate index cards, lay the cards face up on the table, and have them pick up the correct card after you dictate a vowel sound.*

## Comprehension

Comprehension questions should be part of every reading lesson from the very beginning, but the problem is that students today are not always trained to read accurately in the first place.

Most schools today do teach phonics, and early grades improve. But subsequent comprehension issues are rampant, and by 4th grade reading scores plummet. It is appropriately called “The Fourth Grade Slump.”

In fact most phonic programs today are Implicit Phonics. Students are taught the whole word, given the beginning and ending letters, and asked to fill in the middle. They are instructed to use sentence context clues to help determine the meaning of the word, and that it’s acceptable to substitute a similar word if it seems to have the meaning needed.

But if students are trained to guess or substitute words they are *putting meaning into* rather than *extracting meaning from* the story. And even changing only one or two words can alter the whole meaning of the story.

First, students must learn how to read accurately. Then they begin reading stories. Simple questions should be asked to check for comprehension. It’s surprising how many students do not connect reading with meaning until the connection is pointed out to them!

The first sentence in *Phonics Pathways* is “Sis sat.” Ask students “What happened?” “Who sat?” or “What did sis do?” After students are able to paraphrase a sentence, have them do the same thing with a whole pyramid in *Reading Pathways*. Continue doing this as students read more complex material. Possible questions to consider asking:

“Who were the characters?”

“Tell me what happened first.”

“Then what happened?”

“Summarize this story in your own words.”



**Hot Tips:** See also “The Comprehension Dilemma: A Simple Solution,” a graphic PowerPoint presentation. ([www.dorbooks.com](http://www.dorbooks.com): “Free Downloads”)

Also check out Phonics-Talk newsletters Volumes 8 and 13. These two issues discuss this problem extensively. ([www.dorbooks.com](http://www.dorbooks.com): “Dorbooks Newsletters.”)

## Spelling

Learning how to read and spell by logical patterns develops clear, analytical thinking, a skill which enhances math and other disciplines. Math scores frequently rise without any math tutoring at all!

Spelling rules are incorporated with reading lessons throughout *Phonics Pathways* and are introduced in patterns when the sound or spelling is first presented. They are taught one at a time, from simple to complex. (Do we not remember names much better when we meet people one at a time, rather than all at once in a group?)

At first spelling should just be an “exposure” for the students just to show them the logic of the language. After reading is more established, toward the end of the book, it is time to go back to the first spelling rule presented and begin teaching spelling in earnest.

Each student will need a notebook with three dividers in it: one section for copywork, one for dictation, and one for “trouble words.” Just follow the detailed directions in “Spelling Strategies” on page 238 of *Phonics Pathways*, which lays out a step-by-step sample lesson to use as a guide when teaching spelling.

Spelling today is frequently taught randomly, taken from stories being read. What if we learned math times tables randomly: 10x7, 12x3, etc? When spelling is taught by patterns spelling improves *dramatically!*

For example: Why are some words spelled -able and others -ible, as in appeasable, visible, dependable, edible? There is one rule that covers over 90% of these words. It is *SO* much easier learning one rule for many words than it is learning each word individually!



**Hot Tips:** See page 239 for an index to all of the spelling rules and patterns in *Phonics Pathways*.

There are supplemental spelling charts on pages 111, 115, 242 and 243, and a handy “Spelling and Pronunciation Chart” on pages 240 and 241.

(Also check out *Phonics-Talk*, a free online newsletter published 3-4 times a year. It has a wealth of information and contains many tips and ideas. Subscriptions and archived issues are available at [www.dorbooks.com](http://www.dorbooks.com).)

## Surprise!

There is a free set of charming, beautifully-colored certificates that can be downloaded and presented to students as they master various skill levels in *Phonics Pathways*, at [www.dorbooks.com](http://www.dorbooks.com). (Click on “Free Downloads”):

First Level of Reading Competence: **BEGINNING EXPLORER**  
Awarded when students have learned all of the short-vowel sounds and can read *Phonics Pathways* through page 14.

Second Level of Reading Competence: **EAGER BEAVER**  
Awarded when students can blend letters into syllables and words, and are able to build words into simple short-vowel phrases and sentences, through page 67.

Third Level of Reading Competence: **SMART COOKIE**  
Students can read more interesting stories with consonant digraph endings, suffixes, and long-vowel words, through page 112.

Fourth Level of Reading Competence: **COOL READER**  
Students now read books containing complex multisyllable words, R-modified vowels, long-vowel digraphs, and vowel diphthongs, through page 176.

Fifth Level of Reading Competence: **READING WIZARD**  
End of book. **Graduation!** Students are now expert readers who are able to read anything in *Phonics Pathways* or any other book with ease, fluency, and great enjoyment!

These little certificates are *great motivators!* Students get excited to have tangible, graphic evidence of their progress in reading through *Phonics Pathways*.



**Hot Tips:** *While students technically will be able to read anything at this point, they will only comprehend words that are in their current lexicon, and so will tend to choose books reflecting this knowledge.*

*For example, you and I would be able to read a book on brain surgery, but most likely we would not comprehend it. Therefore, along with teaching the mechanics of reading it is important to continue developing vocabulary.*

# A Foolproof Recipe For Reading

Listen to all of the ingredients  
(phonemic awareness)

Add short-vowel sounds one at a  
time, spiced with pictures

Drop in consonants to make syllables,  
blend until smooth

Combine syllables into words, mix until clear

Add more words gradually, one at a time, until  
well-absorbed

Fold in dry ingredients (*spelling!*) until completely smooth

Simmer mixture with decodable text until thoroughly digested



*If we are able to effortlessly read and understand  
a wide variety of words,  
it will help us build a strong vocabulary  
and critical thinking skills.*

*It will develop our ability to make independent judgments  
based on complex, nuanced thinking  
that are so necessary for success  
in today's challenging, complex society.*

*Our horizons will keep on expanding along with our vocabulary.*

*The limits of our words  
determine  
the limits of our world!*

*~Dolores*