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# Section 1

## Philosophy of Learning to Read

### Objectives

When you have completed this section, you should be able to

- Briefly explain what Learning to Read is about.
- List the three steps of reading.
- Describe the phonics method of teaching reading.
- State the long-term advantage of teaching reading with the phonics method.
- Define *comprehension*.
- Define *analysis*.
- State how regional pronunciations should be handled.
- Give examples that show how concepts are introduced one at a time.
- Give examples that show how concepts progress from simple to complex.

### Vocabulary

**Analysis**—The reader’s mental response to what he has read.

**Comprehension**—Understanding the meaning of words and sentences.

**Consonant digraph**—Two consonants together that make only one sound.

**Infer**—To form a conclusion using facts.

**Mechanics**—Recognizing and pronouncing letters arranged as words.

**Phonics method**—A method of teaching beginners to read and pronounce words by learning the sounds of letters, letter groups, and syllables.

**Sight words**—Words that are not phonetic and must be learned by sight.

**Visual discrimination**—The ability to see likenesses and differences.

Learning to Read is a course developed by Christian Light Education to teach children to read. There are 108 lessons in Learning to Read. They introduce the beginner to the basics in several areas of language arts. These areas

include phonics, listening, handwriting, spelling, and reading. Thus, in a given lesson, the children learn several things such as the sound of a letter, how to write the letter, and how to blend the sound of the letter with other sounds.

### What is Reading?

“Reading is the process by which one person’s thoughts entombed in print are released to live again in the mind of another.”

“Reading is a skill.”

“No, reading just requires skill.”

“Reading is gathering ideas from the printed page.”

“No, reading is simply recognizing and pronouncing words.”

Probably all of these and many other definitions carry a measure of truth, each expressing what its writer understands reading to be.

Christian Light Education’s reading program sees reading as the three steps by which the mind processes the written word—**mechanics**, **comprehension**, and **analysis**.

#### Mechanics

Reading always has to do, first of all, with the written word. Therefore, the mechanics of reading is recognizing and pronouncing letters arranged in sequences we call words.

#### Comprehension

Comprehension means understanding the meaning of words and sentences. It includes understanding the general information that a group of sentences in a passage intends to convey. It also includes the ability to read “between the lines” to grasp an implied meaning.

#### Analysis

Analysis is the mental response of the reader to what he understands from the written passage. It can be acceptance or rejection, interest or indifference, or a wide range of emotions—anger, depression, fear, relief, appreciation, astonishment.

The average six-year-old enters first grade with a speaking and comprehension vocabulary of six to ten thousand words. His reading vocabulary may be zero, but he already comprehends the meaning of many of the words he will encounter during his first year of reading. Many of those words evoke a mental response in the child because of personal associations with them. This is an elementary form of analysis, which continues automatically as the child combines words into phrases and sentences.

#### Summary

Naturally there can be no analysis without comprehension. And there can be no comprehension or analysis unless the child has mastered the mechanics of reading. Mechanics, comprehension, analysis—each calls for a different mental process; but all are interdependent. None has value alone. Learning to Read starts by teaching reading mechanics and brings in comprehension when the child’s reading skill reaches a level to make it practical.



#### Do these exercises.

1. List the three parts of the reading process.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. The mechanics of reading is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ letters.

3. Comprehension includes understanding the meaning of \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Analysis is the reader's \_\_\_\_\_ to what he has read.
5. How many words does the average six-year-old have in his speaking and comprehending vocabulary? \_\_\_\_\_

## Methods of Teaching Reading

How can a Christian educator make an intelligent decision when faced with various methods for teaching reading? By which method do beginners best learn to read?

In this section we will look at the theories behind several methods. This will give an overview of current methods and explain why Learning to Read uses the phonics method to teach reading.

### Whole-language

The whole-language method states that the best way to learn to read is to read meaningful materials. Children learn new words in the context of their reading material, where the meanings and uses of the words can best be understood. Students are allowed to choose reading materials that reflect their personal interests. Reading skills are not formally taught or drilled. Practice simply comes from reading more.

### Language-experience

The language-experience method is based on the belief that what a child can say, he can write, and what he can write, he can read.

Beginning readers create their own reading text by dictating stories to the teacher. The teacher writes the story ideas on the board or a large paper. Then the students read it, review materials they have already learned, or learn to read any new words the story may contain.

### Look-and-say

Look-and-say instruction developed from the assumption that children probably first learn to identify words by their appearance or by the context in which they are used. This method operates on the belief that new words can be taught as sight words, without any analysis of the sounds they contain. Look-and-say learning is no longer emphasized, but developing a sight word vocabulary remains a part of reading instruction in many classrooms.

### Phonics instruction

Phonics instruction teaches children to relate letters to sounds. By definition, *phonics* has to do with sounds and auditory discrimination. The **phonics method** teaches the child all the sounds of all the letters of the alphabet and shows him how to blend those sounds in the same sequence as the letters occur in words.



### Do these exercises.

6. In which method of instruction are students allowed to choose their own reading material?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. In the language-experience method, how do beginning readers create their own text?

\_\_\_\_\_

## Lesson 1

8. What part of look-and-say instruction is still used in many classrooms?

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9. The phonics method teaches the \_\_\_\_\_ of all the letters and shows the child how to \_\_\_\_\_ those sounds together.

### Defense of the Phonics Method

One favorite criticism of the phonics method is that it turns children into word-callers who miss the meaning of what they are reading.

It is true, children who read by phonics are word-callers. So is every reader. However, if a child becomes only a word-caller, the fault does not lie with the phonics method. The fault lies with a teacher who neglects to teach comprehension.

A second objection to the phonics method is that our English language is not phonetically reliable, that phonics has too many rules and the exceptions to those rules are impossible to remember.

Although English does have a significant number of exceptions to its rules, several independent studies have revealed that 87% of English words follow fixed rules of phonics.\*

This does not, however, solve the problems created by the other 13%. There are 26 letters in our alphabet, yet three of them really are not necessary. *C*—the soft sound is the same as *s*. The hard sound is the same as *k*. *Q* is the same sound as *kw*, and *x* could just as easily be spelled *ks*.

This leaves 23 letters to be used to indicate the 44 or 45 sounds in our language. Obviously, some of those 23 letters, such as the vowels, have more than one sound. Not one of the

phonics rules holds true in every situation—all have exceptions.

No one denies that English has its difficulties. Nevertheless our children speak and hear it so they must learn to read and write it. The phonics method is a systematic approach that provides the fundamental mechanics to read a majority of English words.

Another accusation is that phonics learners will always be slow, plodding readers because they must sound out every word.

This belief reveals a lack of understanding of the total program. The reading program cannot be phonics only.

Teachers first train the beginning reader how to sound out words. As his reading skill increases, the need to consciously consider individual letters decreases. The child's knowledge of phonics begins to be applied subconsciously and he recognizes words without sounding them. His sight vocabulary grows. He begins to read by phrases, then sentences.

Naturally this transition takes time, but the task of every first grade teacher is to lead the children from sounding out words to whole-word recognition as soon as possible.

This makes it important that the mechanics of reading are learned thoroughly. The phonics method has proven to be an excellent way to teach reading.



#### Do these exercises.

10. How can a teacher prevent her students from being mere word-callers? \_\_\_\_\_

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\* Rudolf Flesch, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, Harper and Row, 1955

11. What percent of English words follow fixed rules of phonics? \_\_\_\_\_
12. The phonics method is a \_\_\_\_\_ approach that provides the mechanics to read a \_\_\_\_\_ of English words.
13. In order to avoid plodding reading, a child must learn to \_\_\_\_\_ words without \_\_\_\_\_ them.
14. Briefly describe how the transition to whole-word recognition takes place.  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

# Learning to Read and Phonics

## Lesson 2

Although the theory underlying the phonics method of teaching reading mechanics is simple, the teaching of phonics requires time and effort. If the teaching is done in a structured and systematic way students will learn how to read. In a phonics program first graders can apply what they learn effectively. The teacher can watch their skill develop. Children usually learn to read better and faster using phonics.

### Reading Mechanics

Learning to Read uses the phonics method to teach reading mechanics because every word in the English language is made up of letters that have their own sounds. A beginner who can hear and speak can learn these sounds in the first grade if he is taught them in a systematic manner and given ample practice in their use.

To children, as nonreaders, the written word is a message written in code. The message may

be very simple, but he has no way of knowing what it is. Letters of the alphabet are the symbols used in writing the message, but the child does not know how to interpret those symbols. The sounds of the letters are the key to decoding the message locked in the word. It is only logical to teach what those sounds are.

Learning to Read teaches the beginner the sound of each letter and the basic phonics rules. Using the reading mechanics taught in Learning to Read, he will be able to independently sound out most of the words in his speaking vocabulary by the end of first grade. However, the CLE phonics program is not complete without Language Arts 100 and 200.

During the span of his lifetime, every child will be obliged to read tens of thousands of words he never met in grade school. The phonics method is the method of teaching reading which will best equip the child to decode the words he will encounter.



**Do these exercises.**

1. Teaching reading by the phonics method is most effectively done in a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ environment.