

GLOSSARY OF TERMS RELATED TO LITERACY SKILLS



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LITERARY TERMS

The knowledge base of teachers must include clear understandings of the terms and concepts related to the phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntax of English. Although not a comprehensive list, the terms included in this glossary represent the more frequently used concepts related to literacy instruction.

Accuracy (related to reading): The number of words read correctly during oral and silent reading.

Affixes: An umbrella term for prefixes and suffixes that can be added to a root word. English has more than 700 affixes that can be added to a word to change or extend the meaning of base words.

Alliteration: Repetition of initial sounds in adjacent words (*Miss Molly's Moving Mess*).

Alphabet Principle: A standard that explains that the letters in an alphabet represent the spoken sounds in language.

Articulation: The physiological movements involved in modifying airflow in the articulators (tongue, lips, teeth, and other parts of the articulation system above the larynx) to produce speech sounds.

Blends (Consonant Clusters): Sound chunks represented by a group of letters; two or more letters that represent sounds that slide together during pronunciation but maintain the discrete sounds represented by each letter (e.g. “sl” in slip; “bl” in blue).

Book Handling Skills: the understanding that you open a book from the beginning and turn the pages sequentially from front to back.

Consonant: A voiced or unvoiced speech sound formed by a narrowing, intermittent, partial or

complete obstruction in some part of the articulatory system which produces audible friction. Changes in consonant sounds are created by the voice, place, and manner of articulation. Such changes produce voiced, unvoiced, oral, or nasal sounds. There are approximately 24 consonant sounds represented by 21 consonant letters. Depending on the part of the articulatory system used to pronounce the consonant sound they are labeled as *bilabial* (/p/), *labiodental* (/f/), *dental* (/th/), *alveolar* (/n/), *palato-alveolar* (/sh/), *palatal* (/j/), *velar* (/k/), or *glottal* (/h/). Other differences in the pronunciation of consonants (oral or nasal) are related to what happens to the airflow during articulation. Consonants are considered as *stop/plosive* (full oral obstruction of the airflow [b/]), *fricative* (partial obstruction, turbulence [f/]), *liquid* (construction without turbulence [l/]) *glide* (narrowing with rapid movement [j/]).

Decoding Skills: The ability to use a variety of contextual clues when reading to identify and recognize words. There are three major cueing systems: semantic (meaning), syntax, and visual. Semantic cueing uses the meaning of surrounding words to help decode an unfamiliar word. Syntax cueing uses knowledge of word and sentence structure to decode an unfamiliar word. Visual cueing uses the shape of the word and the sound-symbol correspondence to pronounce and recognize the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

Digraph: The prefix *di* means two; the root word *graph* refers to written symbols (graphemes). *Digraph* refers to two letters that represent a single sound (e.g. *ck* in truck; *sh* in ship).

Diphthong: A vowel sound created when two vowel qualities can be heard (e.g. In the pronunciation of the word “cake,” the vowel

“long a” sound glides into a “long e” sound.). A diphthong differs from *pure vowel* sounds like the “short a” sound in “cap” in which only one vowel sound is perceived.

Fluency: The ability to read smoothly with expression.

Graphemes: Letters or letter patterns (groups of letters) that represent the vowel, consonant, and diphthong sounds in English.

Homographs: Words that are spelled the same that *may or may not* be pronounced differently but that *do* have different meanings (e.g. bear [to carry]/bear[the animal]).

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Homonyms: Words that have a different origin and meaning but have the same pronunciation and/or the same spelling (e.g. *bark* [of a tree] or *bark* [of a dog]).

Homophones: Words that are pronounced the same and *may or may not* have different spellings but that *do* have different meanings (e.g. read/red)/

Inflectional suffixes: small units of meaning added to the end of a root word to indicate number (girl, girls), ownership (Mary, Mary's), tense and form of words (study, studied, studying), negativity (can-can't), case (he-him), comparison (high, higher, highest), and gender (alumna, alumnae).

Knowledge Construction: A theory that suggests that knowledge is not simply absorbed, rather it is constructed by the individual through mental processes of *assimilation* (storing new information in the brain without altering previous knowledge) and *accommodation* (altering information previously stored in the brain in light of new information).

Language: a system of verbal and nonverbal

signs and symbols used to transmit and receive meaning.

Language Structure: The rules of grammar that govern the construction of words and sentences.

Lexeme: A unit of language that has a specific pronunciation and meaning (words and idioms).

Lexicon: A dictionary of words and their meanings. A mental lexicon refers to all of the meanings of words and phrases that an individual has internalized and uses to comprehend and produce speech and print.

Morpheme: A meaningful word or word part that cannot be divided into smaller units of meaning. Morphemes include affixes, inflections, and root or base words. Morphemes can be added to root words to indicate number (singular/plural), gender, noun case, voice

(mood, number, person, tense), and part of speech (adverb, adjective, verbal, etc.)

Morphology: the study of word and sentence structure.

Onomatopoeia: Words that sound like their suggested meaning (beep, bang, boom..)

Onset: The consonant sounds preceding the initial vowel sound in a word. Also see Rime.

Oral Language: The process of communicating with others through speech. Factors related to oral speech include fluency, articulation, clarity, usage (pragmatics), and prosody (rhythm, pitch, volume).

Perceptual Skills: Skills that are accomplished through synchronous functioning of the brain and sense organs. **Auditory Perception** is the ability to accurately hear, track, and consistently recall information acquired from listening.

Visual Perception is the ability to accurately see, track, and consistently recall information acquired from visual stimuli.

Phoneme: The smallest unit of sound in speech that affects the meaning of words in a language (ex. /b/ in book /t/ in took).

Phonemic Awareness: The understanding that words are composed of individual, discrete sounds that can be isolated, identified, pronounced, classified and manipulated to form new words.

Phonics: A method of teaching reading that stresses sound-symbol relationships. The process involves mapping spoken sounds of a language with the letters that represent the sounds in print. Three important concepts for students to understand include: (1) The letters of the alphabet were invented to represent the sounds of a spoken language; (2) Some English letters and letter patterns represent more than

one sound (e.g. the letter “e” represents different sounds in the words “b**e**d” and “**e**mail,” and the letter pattern “ea” represents different sounds in “br**ea**d” and “b**ea**t”); (3) Some English sounds are represented by more than one letter or letter pattern (e.g. the long “a” vowel sound is spelled differently in “w**ai**t, pl**ay**, **a**pron, th**ey**, **ca**ke”).

Phonogram: letters that represent a sequence of sounds in a syllable frequently called a word family (a group of words containing similar phonic elements [*all: ball, tall*]).

Phonological Awareness: a broad umbrella term that includes the awareness of the sounds in a word separate from its meaning.

Phonological skills include an understanding of rhyme, the alphabet principle, phonemic awareness, phonics, and syllabication.

Phonology: The features and rules that govern the sound system of a language; the study of speech sounds and their functions in language.

Prefixes: Small units of meaning added to the beginning of a root word to adjust or qualify the meaning of the root word. There are approximately 400 English prefixes. Examples include *pre* (before), *non* (without or not). Some prefixes have more than one meaning (*in* can mean “into” (insert) or “not” (insensitive)).

Print Awareness: Knowledge of the form, function, and structure of print including directionality (reading English print from left to right, top to bottom), letter recognition, story structure, literature types or genre, print concepts.

Rime: A group of sounds in a word consisting of the initial vowel and the consonants and other letters that follow it in a syllable.

Rhyme: Words containing identical or similar ending sounds; a line of verse ending with similar or identical sounds in the words.

Root or base words: Stand alone, meaningful words to which other words (compound words), affixes, and inflectional endings can be added to change meaning.

Semantics (meaning); The study of meaning rather than the study of word and sentence structure; the explicit and figurative linguistic interpretation of individual words and groups of words (e.g. idioms).

Speed (related to reading): The ability to adjust reading speed depending on the type of text.

Reading Comprehension: The ability to construct meaning from print. Comprehension occurs at three levels: *Explicit* (recalling information directly stated in the text), *implicit*

(inferring information not explicitly written in the text), and *analytical/evaluative* (judgment of the relevancy, accuracy, and significance of information).

Suffixes: Meaningful units added to the end of a root word. Suffixes can change a noun to an adjective (Japan-Japanese), an adjective to a noun (free-freedom), a verb to a noun, (drive to driver), a concrete noun to an abstract noun (brother-brotherhood), and an adjective to a verb (just, justify). Also see **Inflectional Suffixes**.

Syllable: A sequence of sounds in a word containing at least one vowel sound or a combination of vowel and consonant sounds. Syllables are categorized as either open (ending in a vowel sound) or closed (ending in a consonant sound).

Syntax: The study of grammatical rules that govern the structure of sentences and words.

Unvoiced Sounds: A sound produced without vibration of the vocal cords.

Vocabulary: The words used and understood in speech (oral vocabulary), understood while listening (listening vocabulary), recognized instantly in print (sight or print vocabulary), and used and spelled correctly in writing (writing vocabulary).

Voiced Sounds: A sound produced by a vibration in the vocal cords.

Vowel Sounds: A voiced speech sound formed without obstruction in the articulatory system. The difference in the vowel sounds result from a change in the shape of the lips or mouth (rounded, spread, neutral) and the position and elevation of the tongue (front, center, back, high, medium, low). There are approximately 20 vowel sounds represented by various combinations of the five vowel letters in the

alphabet. Vowel sounds are categorized as *pure* vowel sounds (consisting of one perceived sound; includes the short vowel sounds) and *diphthongs* (consisting of two perceived sounds; includes most of the long vowel sounds). Also see **Diphthongs**.