

OG approach to reading instruction can benefit all children

Orton Gillingham is an *approach* that was developed in the 1930s by Samuel Orton, a neuropsychiatrist, and Anna Gillingham, an educator and psychologist, for people with dyslexia. Orton Gillingham (OG) is not a curriculum or a program, although there are curricula and programs based on the Orton Gillingham approach. There are even some companies that use "Orton Gillingham" in their name. These companies may offer a scope and sequence and other tools to support the OG approach, but they are not and do not claim to be curriculum companies. Instead, they aim to provide professional development about the rules and structures that govern the English language and about how to most effectively teach those rules and structures to all children.

The Orton Gillingham approach is an explicit, systematic, structured, sequential way of teaching reading, writing, and spelling. When a knowledgeable teacher applies the OG approach when teaching phonological awareness, phonics, morphology, vocabulary, and fluency, the result is reading fluency and comprehension, and accurate spelling. This approach to teaching benefits all children, but especially children with dyslexia.

There are several characteristics of the Orton Gillingham approach:

OG is language-based. Contrary to popular belief, most English words follow consistent spelling and pronunciation rules. According to Reading Rockets, approximately 50% of the English can be decoded and spelled accurately by letter-sound correspondences (phonics). Another 36% can be spelled phonetically except for one speech sound. The OG approach directly teaches students the letter-sound correspondences to automaticity (allowing reading and writing to become automatic). OG trained teachers receive extensive training in the structure and rules that govern the English

language. This training empowers them to interpret assessment data and understand the specific reading and spelling gaps with which a student presents.

The Orton Gillingham approach is diagnostic and prescriptive. An OG trained teacher regularly assesses students' progress and uses that assessment data to guide whole group and small group instruction. Error correction is clear, concise and constructive.

Orton Gillingham instruction is direct and explicit. Research has shown that guessing words based on pictures and context is what poor readers do because they have not mastered phonics. It does not matter how strong your vocabulary or background knowledge is if you cannot read the words on the page. Research has shown that students learn best through direct, explicit instruction coupled with ample opportunity for initial and ongoing practice of specific skills.

Some students will master language patterns more quickly than other students - just like some students will master math concepts more quickly than others. A small percentage of students, perhaps 15%, will intuit these language patterns with very little instruction. However, research shows that most children need explicit instruction in the rules that govern decoding (reading) and encoding (spelling).

OG is systematic, sequential, and cumulative, but also flexible. Our language's patterns and rules are directly taught to the student in order of most common to least common and easiest to hardest. Lessons move from basic skills (letter/sound correspondences) to advanced skills (syllable types, prefixes, and suffixes). There is a continual review and spiraling of skills, which leads to reading fluency. New lessons build off of previous lessons.

The OG approach is flexible and keeps the needs of a student in mind. Students are met where they are. An OG trained teacher will work as quickly as a student can but as slowly as the student needs to.

The Orton Gillingham approach is multi-sensory. Orton Gillingham uses visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile learning simultaneously whenever possible. For example, if the student is learning that 'dge' says /j/ after a short vowel, they will write 'dge' while saying it with repetition. They see it (visual), hear it (auditory), write (kinesthetic) and say it (verbal). They may also use blocks or actual letters to represent the letters that make up that sound (tactile). Students will read

'dge' words and spell 'dge' words. Students practice this new sound-letter combo in fun ways until they have mastered it.

OG is emotionally sound. Students who struggle with reading often develop confidence problems, anxiety, and depression. School is a daily reminder of their failure to read and write like their peers. Orton Gillingham lessons are planned so that students achieve a high degree of success. New skills are added in isolation and practiced until the student is fluent in that skill and can apply it accurately and independently.

Orton Gillingham is cognitive. Samuel Orton and Anna Gillingham's principles of instruction have been affirmed by the neuroscience of reading skill acquisition.

If your child is having difficulty learning to read, has great listening comprehension but low reading comprehension, has messy handwriting, poor spelling, or has qualified for an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) with a Specific Learning Disability in Reading, start asking questions. Your child will likely benefit from instruction that reflects the Orton Gillingham approach. Please contact WY Lit with any questions.

Special thanks to Diane Mayer, FIT/OGA, Nancy Redding, F/OGA, and Karen Leopold ATF/OGA.

August 27, 2020 | Reprinted with permission, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Heather Fleming is co-founder of the nonprofit WY Lit. She is a certified structured literacy teacher and will complete her master's degree in Reading Science at Mount St. Joseph University in Cincinnati, Ohio in 2020. Heather provides a variety of training for educators and parents of struggling readers. Email: heather@wylit.org.

Kari Roden is co-founder WY Lit. She is currently an intensive reading interventionist in Laramie County School District 1. Her expertise is in dyslexia and individualized, data-driven instruction for struggling readers. Email: kari@wylit.org.