

An illustration of seven lightbulbs hanging from above against a black background. The central lightbulb is glowing yellow with radiating lines, while the other six are unlit and drawn in white. The lightbulbs are arranged in a slightly irregular pattern, with the glowing one in the center.

**Why kids struggle with sight words  
and how SLPs can help**

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## Disclosures

No financial relationships relevant to the presentation.

No nonfinancial relationships relevant to the presentation

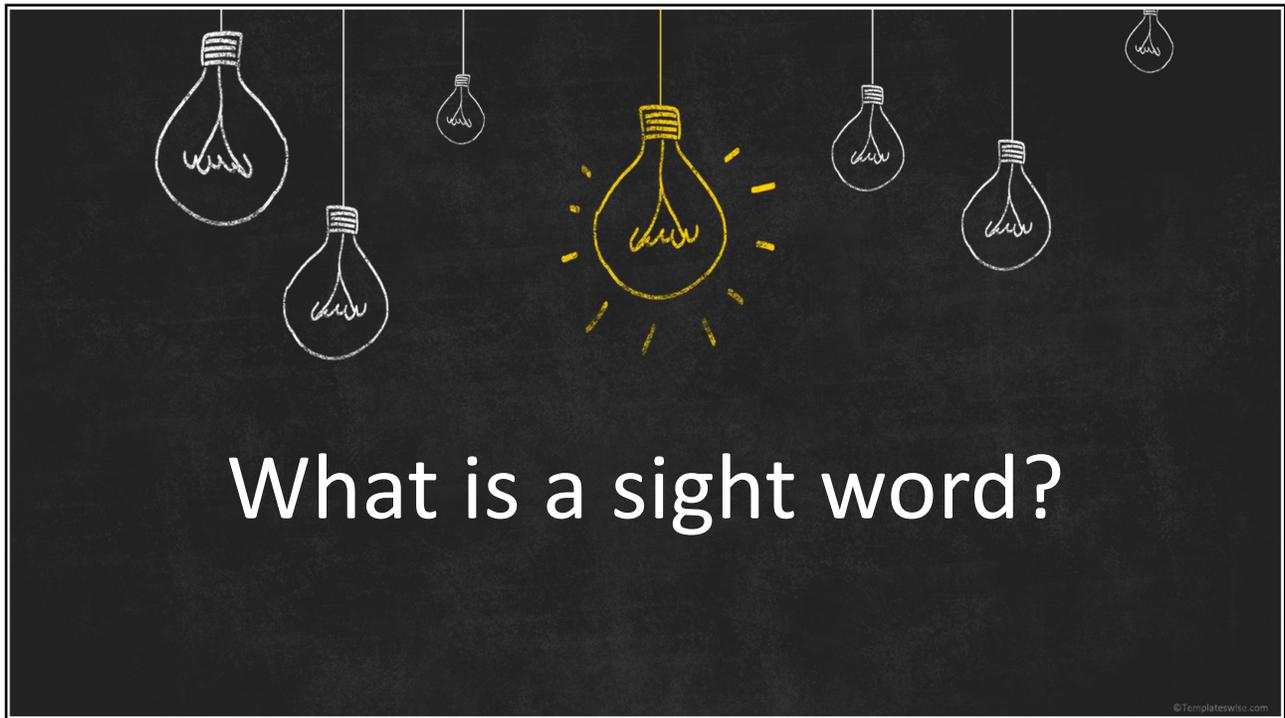
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## Learner Outcomes

- Participants will be able to explain how a written word is stored in long term memory.
- Participants will be able to discuss the differences between the print to speech instructional approach and the speech to print approach.
- Participants will be able to outline a sight word instructional technique based on the principle of orthographic mapping.

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**How teachers view sight words**

- 1) Word commonly encountered in grade-level print (e.g. Dolce and Fry lists)
- 2) Phonetically irregular word (permanently or temporarily)

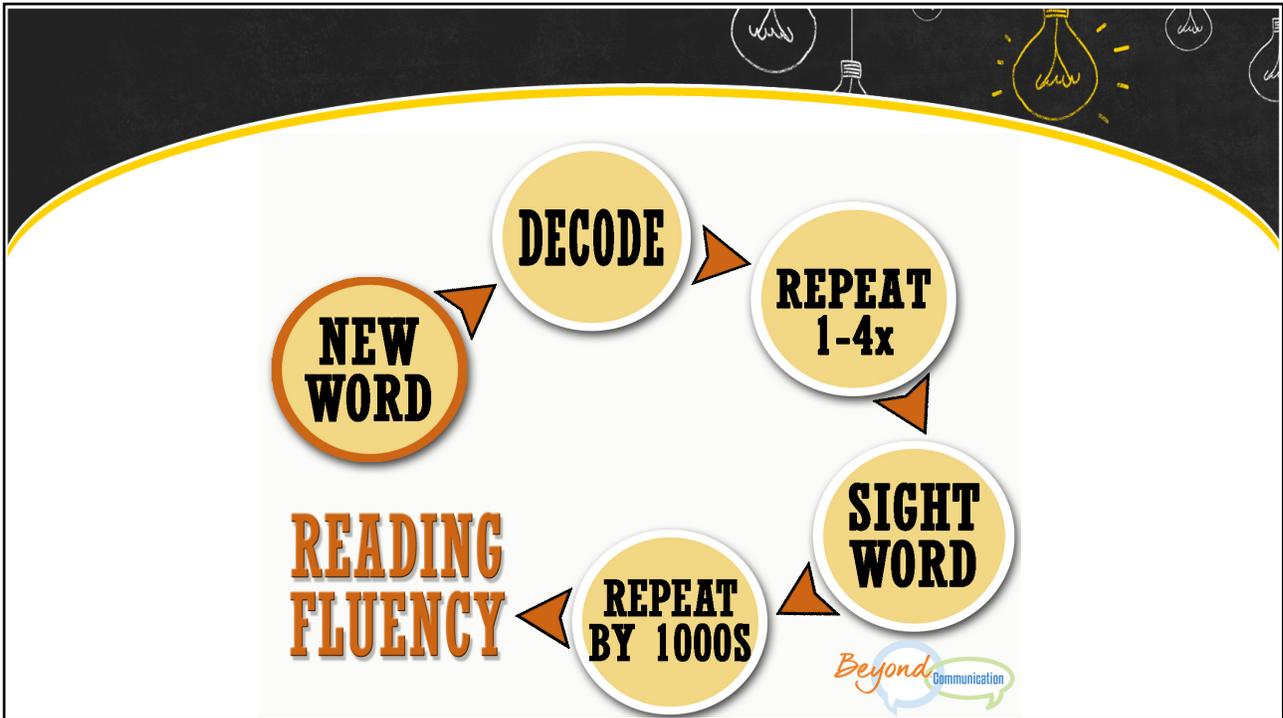
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## How Reading Science views sight words

Any word that is instantly, automatically recognized in print

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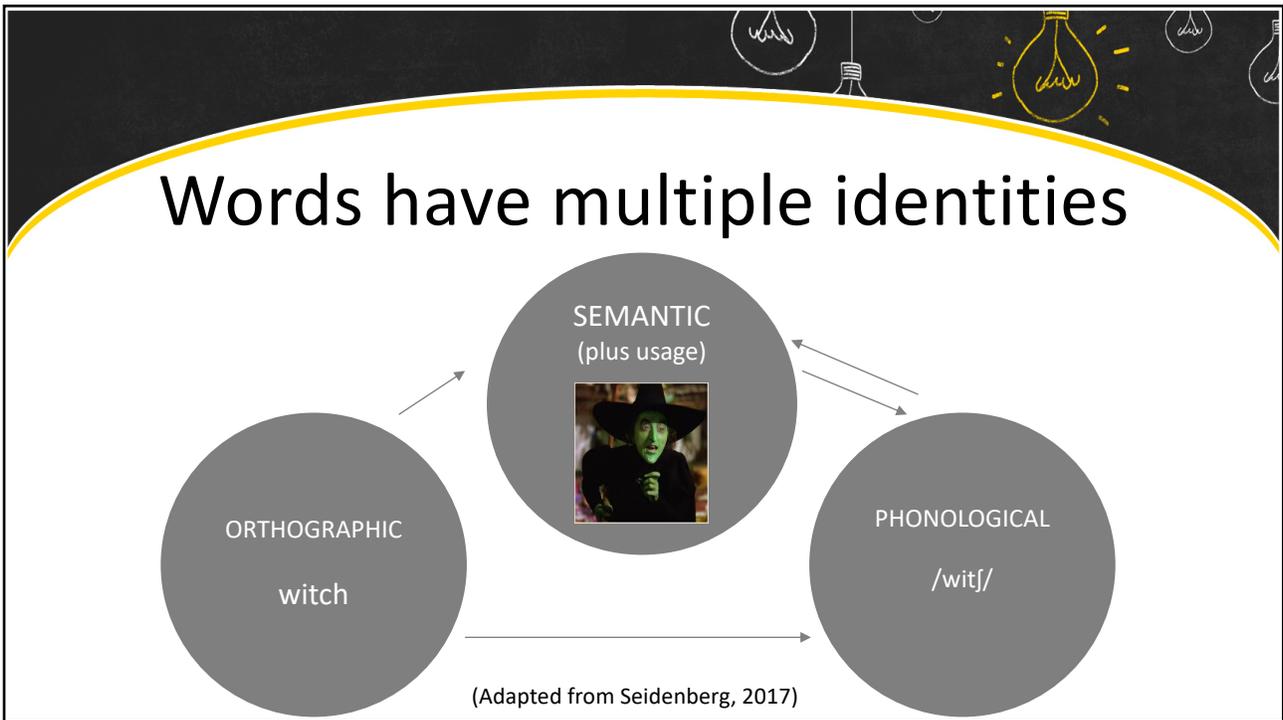
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How a new word in print becomes a sight word

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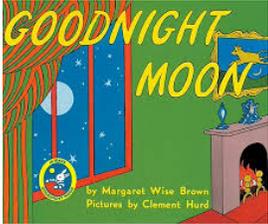
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# Ehri's Phase Theory of Sight Word Reading

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**Pre-Alphabetic Phase**

Children read words by remembering associated visual or contextual cues.



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## Partial Alphabetic Phase

Children use the sound values of some letters to form connections between spellings and pronunciations to remember how to read words.

min sistr got mex a puppy  
 my dad had to dsid if vex  
 got a puppy and hey sed  
 yes and hey got a puppy  
 but my sistr pitot the put  
 and it wux a icrow  
 mix mom cam with mix  
 sistr it wux lat mix emily  
 got home and yay cam in  
 the hose and put the  
 crow got in the box for  
 a spis and i opbind  
 up and i soll a crow  
 and i pit up it wux  
 pran and. BIACI if wux chut

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## Full Alphabetic Phase

Children use decoding skill and graphophonemic knowledge to read and spell all the way through a word. They bond spellings fully to their pronunciations in memory.

1 yet	15 conquest	29 moister
2 blined	16 staple	30 normal
3 shock	17 revive	31 budding
4 stress	18 rut	32 brape
5 sprint	19 tempt	33 suspended
6 plastic	20 stigma	34 transcribe
7 sag	21 drench	35 revolv
8 globe	22 republic	36 impech
9 slang	23 robe	37 squart
10 clamps	24 requier	38 textil

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## Consolidated Alphabetic Phase

The predominant types of connections for storing and recognizing words are morphographic.  
The child is using unitization.

collect ✓ collection	intercept ✓ interception	adapt ✓ adaptation	possess ✓ possession
electric ✓ electrician	correct ✓ correction	perfect ✓ perfection	invent ✓ invention
discuss ✓ discussion	tempt ✓ temptation	magic ✓ magician	predict ✓ prediction

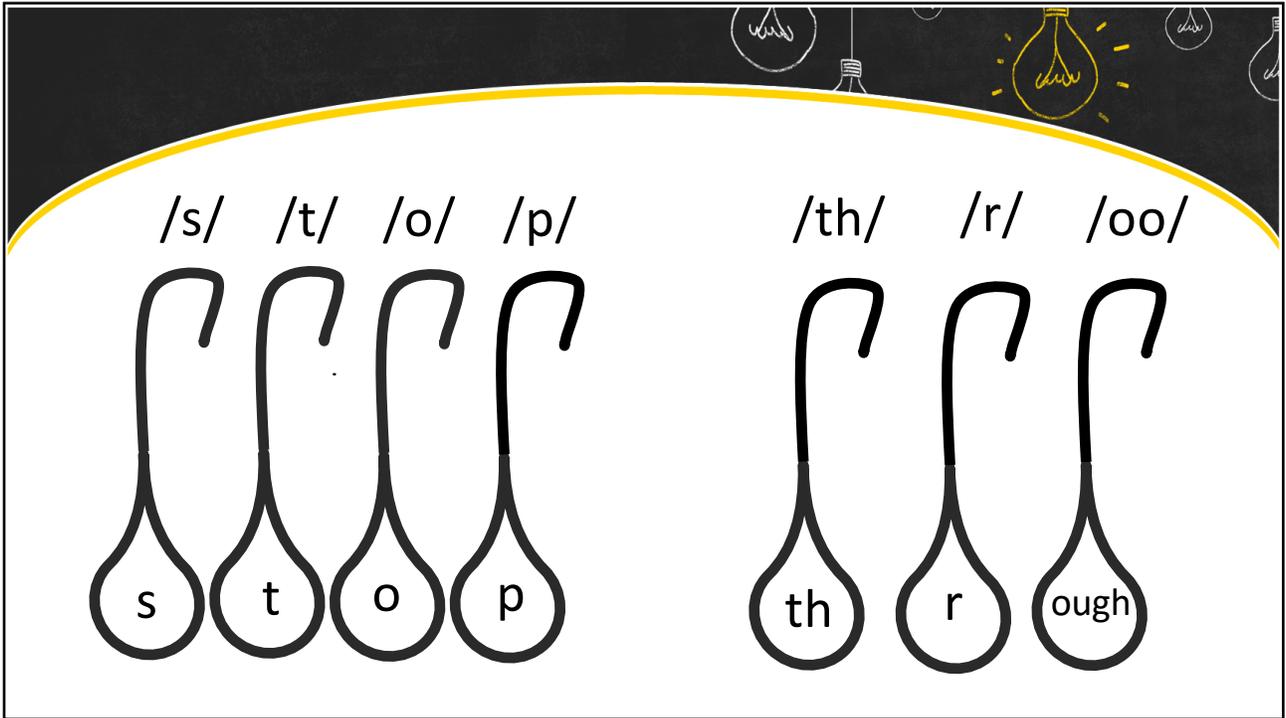
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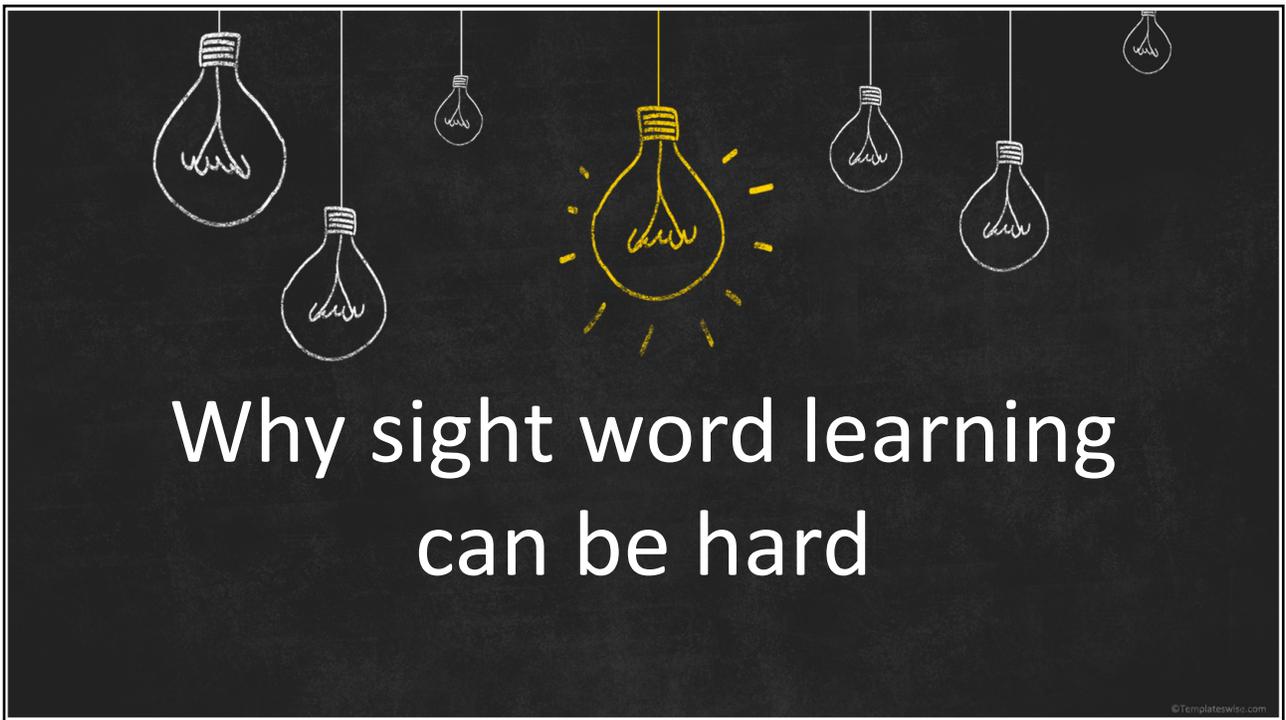
## Orthographic Mapping

- The phonemes of the spoken word act like mental anchors onto which the letters of the printed word are attached.
- This is relatively easy when the word has transparent orthography.
- Relatively more challenging when the word has opaque orthography.

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## What the problem likely isn't.

- Visual memory
- Basic lack of attention
- Lack of practice
- Absence of “multisensory” strategies such as sandwriting, forming letters out of beans
- Hasn't “clicked” yet

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## The phonemic component

- Phonological representations of target words are weak
- Stuck at the partial alphabetic phase

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## The linguistic component

- It is easier to orthographically map to semantically concrete words than to function words. (Miles & Ehri, 2017)
- Mapping letters to other word identities (phonological, semantic, syntactic) is at risk when those identities are weak. (Dawson & Ricketts, 2017)

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## Targeted sight words are often particularly perilous for children with DLD.

### Often function words (rather than content words)

conjunctions, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, irregular verb inflections

### From the Fry list:

the, of, and, a, to, in, is, you, that, it, he, was, for, are, as

### From the Dolch 1 list:

again, any, by, could, has, how, may, some, where, when

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## Not unitizing

- Many children get stuck at the full alphabetic phase and never move to the consolidated phase.
- Unitization simplifies and speeds storage and recognition.

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## One Solution: Speech to Print Instruction

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## Common Sight Word Instructional Practices

- Show the written word- say it- have students repeat and practice
- Sky writing and sand writing
- Rainbow writing / color in word outlines
- Write three times
- Waterfall writing
- Match the shape of the word
- Unscramble
- Put it on a word wall

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## The Speech to Print Way

- Core Principle: Start with the spoken word, then map on the letters.
- Harness the phonological framework and make the connection from speech to print explicit
- Make connections between orthographic, phonological, and semantic word identities
- Build cognitive habits that promote orthographic mapping of all words (not just the ones we directly teach)

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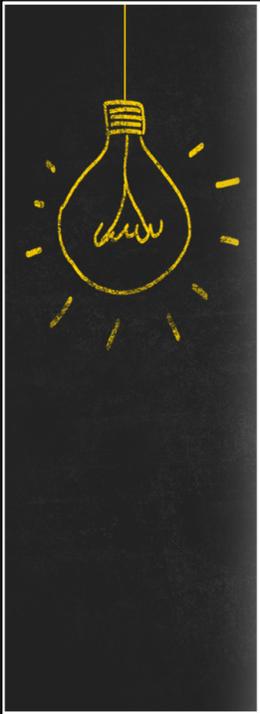
## Your Turn!

- Find a partner & assign SLP/student roles
  - SLP introduce the word *these*
    - Switch places
  - SLP introduce the word *right*

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## When You're the Primary Interventionist

- Fits easily into existing structured phonics programs
- Phonics-based teaching of phonetically regular words already promotes mapping, but remember the value of unitization
- When choosing words to teach this way- consider their linguistic identity and whether they're temporarily or permanently irregular
- Add these concepts and techniques to parent training

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## When You're a Support Interventionist

### Classroom Teacher

- Letter-sound correspondence
- Phonics rules
- Traditional sight word practice
- Reading fluency practice
- Reading comprehension (story elements, text connections, strategies)

### SLP

- Speech sound remediation
- Phonemic awareness intervention
- Grammatical intervention
- Semantic intervention

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## When You're a Support Interventionist

- Select words from your goal areas and spend some therapeutic time connecting orthography to the phonological and semantic/syntactic identities you're already creating.
- Share these words and your work on them with the classroom teacher.
- Collaboration with classroom teacher may help you identify overlap words (words already being targeted in class that overlap with your goals)

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## Sharing Knowledge

- Teachers responsible for literacy instruction with kids on our caseloads may not have accessed this knowledge base yet.
- Major takeaways they need for our kids:
- Draw attention to the sounds in the words even when they're irregular
- Make sure the child has lots of practice using the word so its identity is strong in their LTM
- Increase spelling practice

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## Big Takeaways

Learning sight words is not a visual process.

Written words are all learned and stored through the same phonologically and linguistically anchored processes.

Students with vulnerabilities in phonology and language content & structure skills need literacy instruction that targets these foundations.

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