



DEDICATED TO TEACHERS

November 2019

**Fountas & Pinnell *Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study System***  
**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

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*“The central goal of phonics instruction is to teach children to become “word solvers”: readers who can take words apart while reading for meaning, and writers who can construct words while writing to communicate.”*

—Irene Fountas & Gay Su Pinnell

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**INTRODUCTION**

The *Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study System (PWS)* was developed as the tier 1 phonics instruction of *Fountas & Pinnell Classroom™* (a cohesive, comprehensive literacy system) and as a stand-alone explicit, systematic phonics system within an already established literacy model. *PWS* reflects the following values and goals:

- Lesson principles are derived from *The Comprehensive Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study Guide* (a complete description of the nine categories of word learning) and *The Literacy Continuum* (the articulation of how literacy develops in children over time).
- Lessons are designed to help teachers think about where students are in the development of their understanding of the alphabetic system and to help them make sound instructional decisions based on evidence gained from systematic and ongoing observation/assessment.
- Lessons are explicit, structured, and sequenced. They involve students in inquiry, helping them to become “noticers” of the features of words, such as letters in sequence (which they connect to sounds), word beginnings and endings, phonogram patterns, and, ultimately the affixes, base words, and roots in multisyllable words.
- Resources are designed to elevate teacher expertise, strengthen instructional decision making, and empower teachers with current literacy understandings.

Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell believe that it is essential for all readers to have a wide range of word-solving strategies to use rapidly, flexibly, and in a largely unconscious way as they read and write. This flexible range of strategic actions enables them to give attention to the meaning as they process the print (decode the words).

## **SYSTEM OVERVIEW**

*PWS* provides explicit, whole-group instruction focusing specifically on phonics principles. That means children work with single words and groups of words (outside the text) to notice features, categorize, and connect them. They learn to use sounds and letters in sequence across words and use patterns such as phonograms. Each lesson also provides built-in small-group, individual, multilevel application that engages students in exploring, attending to, learning about, and using their knowledge of sounds, letters, and words.

Each K-2 system includes a collection of 100 lessons (and extensions) that address the nine areas of learning for letters, sounds, and words:

1. Early Literacy Concepts
2. Phonological Awareness
3. Letter Knowledge
4. Letter-Sound Relationships
5. Spelling Patterns
6. High-Frequency Words
7. Word Meaning/Vocabulary
8. Word Structure
9. Word-Solving Actions

## **IN TEXT AND OUT OF TEXT PHONICS INSTRUCTION**

While it is essential for children to have daily explicit, systematic phonics instruction, it is equally important to use in-text opportunities to teach, prompt for, and reinforce the reader's ability to take apart words effectively and efficiently (part by part, letter by letter).

*PWS* provides explicit phonics instruction out of text; and each lesson provides many suggestions for extending and applying the learning in text through explicit instruction across instructional contexts (Figure 1).

Each lesson contains:

- direct links to *FPC* books with clear, multilevel application opportunities in interactive read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, or independent reading and in modeled, shared, interactive, and independent writing;
- guidance in maximizing reading and writing opportunities outside of *FPC* to demonstrate and apply principles.

The goal of each lesson is to enable the reader/writer to apply principles to continuous text. As teachers support students in taking on new word-solving principles, guidance is provided for demonstrating, prompting and reinforcing meaningful in-text applications across instructional contexts. In interactive read-aloud the teacher builds language and vocabulary knowledge, linking lesson principles as appropriate. Shared reading provides a rich opportunity for students to notice and use word parts as they process and revisit text. Students locate specific words in texts in small group instruction and develop flexibility with hands-on word work after the lesson. In reading/writing conferences the teacher takes the opportunity to reinforce principles. Shared and interactive writing provide further opportunity for the teacher to support students as they apply principles while constructing words.

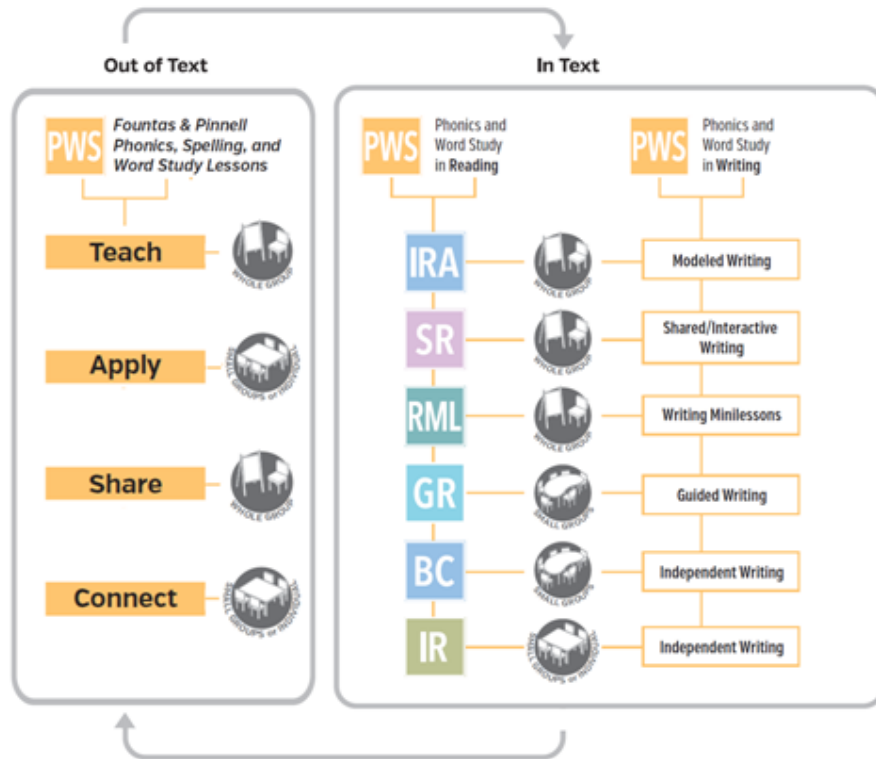


Figure 1: Systematic Phonics/Word Study Teaching.  
 © 2020 by Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell from *Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study Lessons*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

## FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH

The development of *PWS* rests on over 25 years of the authors' classroom experience and research on how proficient readers and writers build understandings of how words work over time. It incorporates current knowledge related to essential aspects of effective literacy instruction.

- It is grounded in a wide base of academic research and reflects recommendations for instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- Lessons reflect classroom-based research on how children learn and include practices that have been confirmed by teachers as they field-tested the *PWS* lessons in their classrooms.
- Fountas and Pinnell's curriculum systems were developed from extensive research and are intricately connected to and complement one another for instructional coherence.

To read about the research base, visit: <https://www.fountasandpinnell.com/research/pws>

As an essential instructional context of *FPC*, the *PWS* System aligns with the [FPC research base](#). In each *PWS* lesson, books from *FPC* have been intentionally chosen to support and extend the phonics/word study principle within the reading and writing of continuous text.

## **RESPONSIVE TEACHING**

Moment-to-moment instructional decisions that teachers make, based on observations and analysis of students' learning behaviors, are honored and supported in *PWS*. In *PWS*, the focus is on building on readers' strengths and using information about students to make instructional decisions. The suggested sequence of instruction should be tailored to the competencies of the children.

Teachers using the *PWS System* learn ways to more effectively:

- use formative, systematic observation and assessment to understand each child's strengths and areas for growth;
- select lessons for working at the cutting edge of students' learning;
- choose facilitative, concise language that leads literacy learning forward;
- support independence and student agency.

A suggested sequence is provided to help teachers plan the year, but teachers may choose to use the lessons in an order that reflects their observation/assessment of children's learning. Lessons are generative and thus provide a recurring structure that teachers can use over and over with similar items within a knowledge set to teach a variety of letters, sounds, phonogram patterns, word parts, etc. As students acquire knowledge, they build systems for similar learning to make accelerated progress.

Every lesson includes specific guidance for meeting the needs of English Language Learners, ranging from using suggested sentence frames to identifying phrases or vocabulary that may need clarification to noting linguistic differences.

## **ONGOING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

*PWS* supports teachers in developing their capacity for observing students as word solvers so that they can make instructional decisions to meet students where they are and lead them forward. The extensive professional learning tools woven into the system help educators develop their craft and deliver high-impact literacy instruction.

### ***PWS* develops teacher expertise by:**

- providing a comprehensive description of the essential phonics understandings that children need to control at each grade level;
- linking each lesson to *The Literacy Continuum* and *The Comprehensive Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study Guide*, the key to the phonics lessons;
- connecting each phonics principle to children's work in other instructional contexts so that teachers can bring principles to their attention during in-text teaching.

The single most important factor in students' literacy success is skillful, informed teaching. With both embedded and extended opportunities for sustained, scalable professional growth of district administrators, literacy coaches, and teachers, professional learning informs the *PWS System*.

## **FREE – No Purchase Necessary**

- [Podcast](#) with the authors discussing Phonics as a critical part of a cohesive literacy system
- [9-minute video](#) overview of the *PWS System*
- [Digital sampler](#)
- Hour-long [recorded webinar](#) with authors on how to implement the *PWS System*

### **Embedded with Purchase**

- Getting Started video in Online Resources
- Lesson videos in the Online Resources (with/without author commentary)
- *The Comprehensive Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study Guide*
- Tools for planning and organizing lessons:
  - Nine Areas of Learning Across the Year
  - Master Lesson Guide: Suggested Sequence for Phonics/Word Study Lessons
- Complimentary Implementation Online Support Course: Video and interactive sessions that focus on the seven instructional contexts of *FPC*, including *PWS*. During this course, teachers will be guided in:
  - Building familiarity with implementation resources
  - Getting started with each instructional context
  - Fitting it all together - connecting contexts across the day, week and year.

### **Fee-Based Professional Learning (post purchase)**

ON-SITE: Delivered by authorized Fountas and Pinnell Consultants

*FPC: Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study System* for up to 30 participants (6 hours)

<https://www.heinemann.com/pd/seminars/products/smfpcphon.aspx>

ONLINE: *FPC* Webinar Series on *PWS*

For details visit: <https://www.heinemann.com/pd/livewebinars/products/wbpws.aspx>

Heinemann is committed to supporting teachers, schools, and districts with sustainable and scalable professional learning from implementation to transformative teaching and learning. We strive to amplify the voice of those who share our respect for the professionalism and compassion of educators' efforts to help children become literate, empathetic, knowledgeable citizens.