



**DROPPIN'
KNOWLEDGE
ON**

Sight Words and Word Mapping

**High-Frequency Word Exercises
Aligned to the Science of Reading**

Heidi and Adam Martin

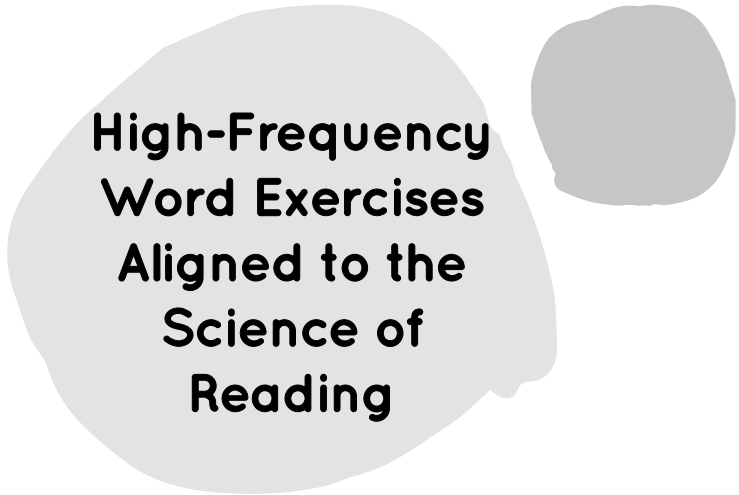
JOSSEY-BASS™
A Wiley Brand

**DROPPIN'
KNOWLEDGE ON
SIGHT WORDS
AND
WORD MAPPING**

Heidi Martin

Adam Martin

DROPPIN' KNOWLEDGE ON SIGHT WORDS AND WORD MAPPING



**High-Frequency
Word Exercises
Aligned to the
Science of
Reading**

JOSSEY-BASS™

A Wiley Brand

Copyright © 2025 John Wiley & Sons Inc. All rights, including for text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies, are reserved.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

ISBNs: 9781394258680 (Paperback), 9781394258697 (ePub), 9781394258703 (ePDF)

Except as expressly noted below, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 750-4470, or on the web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permission>.

Certain pages from this book are “activity pages” designed for educational/training purposes and may be reproduced. This free permission is not extended to “narrative” pages that provide background information and directions regarding the reproducibles, and permission is restricted to limited customization of these materials for your organization and the paper reproduction of the materials for educational/training events. It does not allow for systematic or large-scale reproduction, distribution (more than 100 copies per page, per year), transmission, electronic reproduction or inclusion in any publications offered for sale or used for commercial purposes—none of which may be done without prior written permission of the Publisher.

Trademarks: Wiley and the Wiley logo and the Jossey-Bass logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Further, readers should be aware that websites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read. Neither the publisher nor authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993. For product technical support, you can find answers to frequently asked questions or reach us via live chat at <https://support.wiley.com/s/>.

If you believe you’ve found a mistake in this book, please bring it to our attention by emailing our reader support team at wileysupport@wiley.com with the subject line “Possible Book Errata Submission.”

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic formats. For more information about Wiley products, visit our website at www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025001254 (print)

Cover Design and Images: Wiley

Contents

About the Authors, vii

Hey, Parents and Teachers!, 1

What Is Balanced Literacy?, 2

What Is the Science of Reading?, 3

What Is a Sight Word?, 6

What Is a High-Frequency Word?, 7

What Are Heart Words?, 9

How Do We Do That?, 9

What in the World Is Orthographic Mapping?, 10

Wrapping Up, 183

Ready, Set, Read On! Your Next Steps and Staying in Touch, 183

About the Authors

Heidi Martin is trained in LETRS for Early Childhood, IMSE Orton-Gillingham, and Top 10 Tools. She is a National Facilitator for LETRS EC. She has presented at national conferences as well as provided training at the district level. Heidi is the author of *P is for Paint*, which is the one and only alphabet book with embedded mnemonics. She has authored and self-published the *Decodable Adventure Series* books. She taught first grade for over 10 years and most recently taught Kindergarten and 4K.

Adam Martin is a National LETRS Facilitator certified for Units 1–8 and presents to teachers and districts on a weekly basis. He has his Masters in Educational Literacy and his Reading Specialist License. He is the co-author and editor for the *Decodable Adventure Series* books. He taught first grade for seven years and has tutored children of all ages.

How to Contact the Authors

We appreciate your input and questions about this book! Email us at hello@droppinknowledge.com or visit our website at www.droppinknowledge.com.

Other Books in the *Droppin' Knowledge Series*

Droppin' Knowledge on Phonics: Spelling and Phonics Activities Aligned to the Science of Reading

Droppin' Knowledge on Foundational Skills: Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Activities Aligned to the Science of Reading

Hey, Parents and Teachers!

We are so excited to help you teach reading! We are Heidi and Adam Martin—both former first-grade teachers (and parents) who now spend our time sharing the Science of Reading with as many people as we can! But before this, we **had no idea there was a science to how we learn to read**. We taught first grade for a combined 15+ years using what most people call “balanced literacy” methods until we found that there is actual science to how we learn to read.

We also learned that according to the 2022 Nation's Report Card, less than 40% of kids are reading proficiently.¹ To us, this was a big wake-up call. If over 60% of our kids are not reading proficiently, we must be doing something wrong!

Once we learned there was decades of evidence and research on how we learn to read, we set out on a mission to unlearn and learn it all. We want to let you know that this has been a journey, not a sprint. There was a lot for us to unlearn (and still is). Throughout this journey of unlearning, we definitely had to work through some ups and downs, as well as emotions of frustration, anger, and regret. The fact that we were not taught this earlier, especially since this science has been around for over 20 years, can really weigh on you. We often think back to the kids we could have helped if we only knew what we know now. However, you don't know better until you do, so we just have to move forward and make sure this doesn't happen again. If some of this is new to you as well, please remember to give yourself grace!

Let's talk about some of the terms we have been using and clarify where we came from and where we are now.

What Is Balanced Literacy?

Balanced literacy sounds good, doesn't it? I mean who doesn't love being balanced? Heidi was sold on this, especially being a type B teacher. She was not a fan of words like "systematic" and "structured." Then, she found out that balanced literacy is not truly balanced after all. Adam was starting his teaching career being taught about the Science of Reading through his licensure program. However, in our school district, we were using balanced literacy curriculums. Going through hours of professional development on this curriculum, this became the norm. Since this was all the buzz, it had to be the most beneficial thing for our

¹<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/nation/achievement/?grade=4>.

students, right? Adam said, “I had my skepticisms on balanced literacy, especially since I was seeing minimal progress from my students. I think this is the case for a lot of teachers.”

To be clear, when we say balanced literacy, we are talking about programs and strategies that were most often used in schools and called “balanced” within those schools and programs. In reality, these programs skip many of the foundational reading skills kids need in order to become successful readers.

Balanced literacy was supposed to be the answer to the reading wars—a compromise. However, in our experience, there is much more of the whole language approach in balanced literacy programs. We feel that these “balanced literacy” programs are not truly balanced after all. Some examples of the remnants of whole language are

- Skipping a word if you don’t know it
- Using meaning or context to solve or read a word
- Believing that reading is natural (aka reading more will help kids become good readers)
- Memorizing “sight words” or spelling words

If our kids cannot decode and read the words on a page (or if they are skipping words), how will they “naturally” become skilled readers? We have learned from the research on how we learn to read that the continuum, or progression of learning to read, is NEVER truly balanced. We spend more time on specific skills when students are developing foundational reading skills than we do later on once those skills and abilities to decode are mastered. The time spent on specific skills will vary based on where our kids are in their reading development. So, although it sounds good, there is never really a “balance” to literacy.

What Is the Science of Reading?

You have probably heard the term “Science of Reading” more times than you can count, but the definition can get a little muddy. So let’s talk about what the Science of Reading is **not**.

The Science of Reading is not a curriculum.

The Science of Reading is not just phonics.

The Science of Reading is not a strategy or activity.

Here is how The Reading League defines the Science of Reading²:

The Science of Reading is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. This research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world.

It is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages. The Science of Reading has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop, why some have difficulty, and how we can most effectively assess and teach and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties.

The Science of Reading is derived from researchers from multiple fields:

Cognitive psychology

Communication sciences

Developmental psychology

Education

Implementation science

Linguistics

Neuroscience

School psychology

To break that down, we like to say that **the Science of Reading is the research and the evidence on how our brains learn to read**. This means that not just one study is referenced when discussing the skills kids need to read. Again, this is research that has been conducted for almost 50 years and includes research of the research (meta-analysis)!

²<https://www.thereadingleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Science-of-Reading-eBook-2022.pdf>.

We hope that helps explain some of the terms you may have been hearing about and why we decided to write these books. We are so excited for you to use these activities with your students and/or your own children. We have done the research and can assure you that the methods used in this book are more effective than memorization.

We created these activities to help you teach words in a brain-friendly way! You will find activities for tricky high-frequency words, cheat sheets for teaching over 230 high-frequency words, word mapping pages for spelling words, and mapping mats that make word mapping fun!

Both of us were first-grade teachers and most of our teaching revolved around getting kids to learn a set of 100 words. (While we only worked on 100 words throughout the year, we have heard that some schools require much more!) This was something that we spent the majority of the year teaching. We would introduce several words, play games, spell the words, put them on the word wall, and review them daily.

Some of our favorite games to play were silly sticks, BANG!, musical sight word chairs, and bingo. Silly sticks were simply popsicle sticks that we wrote a fun movement on. We would have a student randomly choose a stick and we would do the action to spell our new word. We love anything that gets kids up and moving so this was a favorite!

BANG! was a game that kids played in a center. They would choose a card, read a word, and if they knew it, they would keep it. If they got BANG!, they would have to put all their cards back.

Musical sight word chairs is just like musical chairs, but once the music stops and the kid finds a chair, there would be a book with specific sight words the students had to read and find in that book.

Bingo is self-explanatory, but it was definitely another favorite!

All of these games were fun and engaging for kids, **but kids would still leave us at the end of the year not knowing all 100 sight words!** How could this be after we had spent so much time on them and had so much fun with them? Even the students that did show progress in learning most of the words went to the next grade and would not remember them. This frustrated us, frustrated the kids, frustrated the teachers in the next grade, and I am sure it was frustrating for their parents as well.

As we started to learn more about the evidence we have on how we learn to read and how our brains work when we read, we learned that **memorizing words can take hundreds of repetitions**. Depending on the child, memorizing a word can take around 5–500 repetitions. Thinking back, while it felt like we must have reviewed each word 500 times, did we really? It is likely that the kids who left us still not knowing all 100 words are the kids who needed more repetitions. Not to mention the fact that we were not giving them the skills they need to decode new, unknown words!

If any of this sounds familiar, you are in the right place! This book was written to give you some background into how we learn words and the tools to teach them.

Let's talk about the term SIGHT WORD. *For many years, we told parents and students that a sight word is a word that just has to be memorized.* You have to know it by sight because it is not spelled how we might expect it to be. That is why we believed it was called a sight word. We found out later that we were wrong.

Let us share the definitions we have learned along our Science of Reading journey.

What Is a Sight Word?

The definition that researchers use is that **a sight word is ANY word you can read effortlessly and automatically without sounding it out or guessing**. This is because your brain has already made the neuron connections of the sound–symbol relationship of that word, called orthographic mapping, and has stored that word in your brain. Adults actually know 30,000–70,000 sight words. All the words you are reading in this book right now are sight words for you, because you know them effortlessly and automatically. As soon as you see the word, you know it. You are not trying to use a picture to help you solve a word. You are not sounding out every single word. These are words that are stored in what's called your orthographic lexicon.

So while the words in the activity pages may not actually be sight words for your kids yet, our goal is to turn them into sight words! We want our kids to know these words effortlessly and automatically so that they can read them with ease. This ease and fluency then frees up space in our kids' brains to begin to

understand what they are reading, instead of spending all their brain energy on trying to figure out what the words are. The activities in this book will help you do just that!

What Is a High-Frequency Word?

Okay so we admit it, we definitely used to use the terms *sight word* and *high-frequency word* interchangeably, but they are not necessarily the same. High-frequency words are the words that we see most often in text. These are the words we were trying to get our students to memorize. These are the words that are on our word walls. These are the words that kids need to know in order to read most texts. These are the words in the activities included in this book!

Again, when we teach high-frequency words, the goal is to turn these words into sight words. In our experience, unlearning this, especially if you are a teacher like us who did this for so many years, can be very overwhelming. Just remember that change takes time. Our hope is that the activities in this book will help you take steps toward that change.

Let's do a little activity to illustrate the difference between sight words and high-frequency words. The following list of words are likely words that you'll be able to read right away. Try to read this set of words and pay attention to whether or not you were able to read these words effortlessly and automatically.

plant	house	video
grateful	grass	refrigerator
dog	animate	curtain
television	heater	

If you could read this list of words effortlessly and automatically without sounding them out or guessing, these are sight words for you. However, **these are not high-frequency words**. These are not words a kindergartener or a first grader will have on their word wall or "sight word" list.

That is the difference between high-frequency words and sight words.

This can sometimes be a tricky concept so let's try it this way. Set a timer for one minute and on the next few lines, write down as many words as you can think of that are sight words for you but not high-frequency words.

This may or may not have been difficult for you, but it is definitely something we overlook and do not think of as competent readers, educators, or parents. Now let's try another set of words. I want you to try to read these words and see if you can read them just as fast as you were able to read the previous list.

dehydroascorbic
tocopherol
cobalamin
acetylsalicylic
hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia

Okay so that last one is just for fun because it means "fear of long words"!

Unless you are in the field of nutrition or medicine, these words were likely trickier for you and took you a bit longer. You could likely sound them out because you have decoding skills; however, you could not read them effortlessly and automatically without sounding them out or guessing. That means these words are not sight words for you.

Now I will show you one more list you have likely seen before. These are the lists that many of us had our kids memorize. This list of words³ we typically call "sight words" is actually a list of high-frequency words. (That means none of these words should be on your list you created above!)

Pre-primer: (40 words) a, and, away, big, blue, can, come, down, find, for, funny, go, help, here, I, in, is, it, jump, little, look, make, me, my, not, one, play, red, run, said, see, the, three, to, two, up, we, where, yellow, you

Primer: (52 words) all, am, are, at, ate, be, black, brown, but, came, did, do, eat, four, get, good, have, he, into, like, must, new, no, now, on, our, out, please,

³These are taken from the Dolch sight words list, developed by educator Dr. Edward Dolch beginning in 1936 and eventually published in his book *Problems in Reading* (1948, Garrard Press).

pretty, ran, ride, saw, say, she, so, soon, that, there, they, this, too, under, want, was, well, went, what, white, who, will, with, yes

1st Grade: (41 words) after, again, an, any, as, ask, by, could, every, fly, from, give, going, had, has, her, him, his, how, just, know, let, live, may, of, old, once, open, over, put, round, some, stop, take, thank, them, then, think, walk, were, when

2nd Grade: (46 words) always, around, because, been, before, best, both, buy, call, cold, does, don't, fast, first, five, found, gave, goes, green, its, made, many, off, or, pull, read, right, sing, sit, sleep, tell, their, these, those, upon, us, use, very, wash, which, why, wish, work, would, write, your

3rd Grade: (41 words) about, better, bring, carry, clean, cut, done, draw, drink, eight, fall, far, full, got, grow, hold, hot, hurt, if, keep, kind, laugh, light, long, much, myself, never, only, own, pick, seven, shall, show, six, small, start, ten, today, together, try, warm

We want to turn these high-frequency words into sight words, **but they are not considered sight words until we can read them effortlessly and automatically without sounding them out or guessing.**

Many of us in the teacher world like to say, "Every word wants to be a sight word when it grows up!"

What Are Heart Words?

Heart word is a newer term that has become popular over the past few years. A heart word refers to a word with an irregular sound-spelling pattern. For example, the word "said" is referred to as a heart word because the -AI is not a normal spelling for the short E /ɛ/ sound.

It is very important to note that only 4% of words are truly irregular. Most words are actually not heart words at all. They become heart words when we try to teach them before we teach the phonics pattern. We want to avoid this whenever possible by teaching skills before words.

How Do We Do That?

The easiest way to start is to organize your high-frequency words by phonics skill. I have done this and let me tell you, I was shocked to see how many words from my word wall could fit perfectly into a phonics scope and sequence. Why was I teaching the word GET as a tricky word kids had to memorize instead of just teaching it when I taught short E words?