



OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

The *Essential Sight Words Reading Program (ESWRP)* is a revised and updated version of the *Essential Sight Words Program* (Sundbye, Dyck & Wyatt, 1979). Although the name has been changed, the revision retains the methods and procedures and much of the content of the original program.

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

The *Essential Sight Words Reading Program* is designed for use with struggling readers in general first- through eighth-grade classrooms, in inclusion settings, and in special classes. The program may also be used with English language learners in either school or home settings. The program's materials focus on the interests of students who are 6 to 13 years old.

The *ESWRP* is based on the teaching of 200 of the most frequently occurring words in the English language. Studies of word frequency (Kucera and Francis, 1967; Francis and Kucera 1982; and Harris and Jacobson, 1975) indicate that a very small number of words occur very frequently and make up the core of the English vocabulary. For example, of the 1,014,232 running words studied by Kucera and Francis, a set of 10 words—*the, of, and, to, a, in, that, is, was, and he*—account for 24% of their total sample of words. The 200 words on the *ESWRP* list account for 52% of the Kucera and Francis sample (see Appendix A, pages 31–33).

Because of their utility, it is essential that readers learn the 200 words on the *ESWRP* list as early as they can in their reading programs. Those words must be learned as sight words, in that the reader must be able to read them accurately and quickly.

However, the words on the *ESWRP* list constitute a list of words that may be difficult to learn. Many of them are structural rather than lexical; that is, they are devoid of sensory meaning and evoke no specific mental images when they are considered in isolation. A sense of the difference between the two types of words may be gained by closing one's eyes and recalling images associated with lexical words such as *airplane* and *dance* and then trying to do the same with structural words such as *of* or *what*. Structural words have sometimes been called “empty” words because they do not represent concrete experiences.



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Words that are low in sensory meaning or imagery value are more difficult for readers to learn as sight words than are high-imagery words. Such low-imagery words need greater repetition or exposure than high-imagery words in order to make them part of the set of words that a reader can identify automatically. The 200 sets of activity sheets included in the *ESWRP* program provide that repetition. Each word is repeated from 30 to 50 times as the reader completes the set of activity sheets designed to teach it. Many other reading programs provide only 8 to 12 repetitions of a word.

Learning to read 200 high-frequency words at sight is only the first step in the *Essential Sight Words Reading Program*. The *ESWRP* also provides 30 books that students can read successfully as they learn those words. Each book is a picture book with art that carries the story line. In Level 1, pictured nouns appear in the lines of print in Books 1–7. Then Books 8–20 progress so that the pictured nouns are underlined in the text and shown below the lines of print. The teacher identifies a book’s pictured nouns before the reader begins to read the book. A few proper names and other words are read by the teacher.

Level 1 of the *ESWRP* presents the first 100 words in 20 books. After learning the first 20 words, the student can enjoy reading four books. From then on, the reader can successfully read a new book after learning 4 to 7 additional sight words. *Level 2* presents the second 100 words in 10 books. After learning 9 to 12 new words, a student can read another book.

The *ESWRP* is designed to teach students to read 200 high-frequency words at sight and to have them enjoy successfully reading a variety of books ranging from 16 to 50 pages in length.

APPLICATION AND USE

The *Essential Sight Words Reading Program* helps users achieve the following objectives.

Prevent Reading Failure

Students who have been identified as “at risk” for school failure during their preschool years may benefit from a start in successful reading with *ESWRP* before they are introduced to faster-paced and more complex reading systems. This early reading success can be highly motivating for struggling learners and may prevent reading failure in the early school years.



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Supplement Classroom Reading Programs

Some students have difficulty learning high-frequency sight words in some reading programs. Many of these programs give limited attention to the acquisition of a basic sight vocabulary. *ESWRP* is designed so that it can be used to provide supplementary work on high-frequency words in any such reading program.

Correct Certain Reading Problems

Teachers who work with struggling readers in an inclusive classroom or other setting may use *ESWRP* to correct a variety of reading problems.

- It may be used with students who have developed some reading skills but who need instruction on a number of high-frequency words in order to become more fluent readers.
- It may be helpful for students who have not responded well to a phonics approach and who use the sound-and-blend strategy on every word, no matter how many times it appears. The *ESWRP* may help them read more rapidly and easily.
- It may be a resource to use with readers who have failed with every approach and who need a program that provides a great deal of reading practice with each set of words before new words are added.
- The program's format and its structured approach also make it effective for students with attention deficit disorders, mental retardation, autism, and multiple disabilities.
- It may be used to reinforce a spelling program if a student is having difficulty retaining the correct spelling of words that occur on the *ESWRP* list.

Teach English Language Learners

The number of students for whom English is a new language has grown rapidly in many parts of the United States (Nation, 2001) and around the world in recent years. These students need instruction to not only speak but to read and write the new language. The meaning emphasis of *ESWRP* is especially beneficial to English language learners who can develop word meanings at the same time they are exposed to reading the sight words in a meaningful context. The interesting content of *ESWRP* activity sheets and books provides a rich format for discussion and explanation of many concepts that may be new to English language learners.



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Nation (2001) has identified 2,000 words that should be the focus of direct instruction for English language learners. The words in *ESWRP* are a critical part of the word list created by Nation and are essential to teach to English language learners.

COMPONENTS

All components in Level 1 of *ESWRP* are listed and briefly described below.

20 Books (softbound, ranging in length from 16 to 44 pages)

1 Book with:

- **4 Quick-Start Guides** (Pre-/Posttest, Mastery Tests, Activity Sheets, and Books)
- **Teacher Instructions and Research Documentation**
- **324 Reproducible Activity Pages** (58 sets of two-page activity sheets and 52 sets of four-page activity sheets)

6 Pre-/Posttest Strips (five strips with a list of 20 words printed on each side and one strip with the number words *one* through *ten* printed on each side)

50 Mastery Test Strips (with a list of 20 words printed on each side)

1 Tachistoscope (word-strip holder, for use in presenting the pre-/posttest and the mastery tests)

1 Pad of 50 Individual Test Record forms (for recording each student's performance on the pre-/posttest)

