

Amira with Saxon Phonics and Spelling Publisher's Response

Introduction

HMH appreciates the thorough and insightful review the Texas Resource Review at Safal Partners, the Texas Education Agency, and participating educators conducted of *Saxon Phonics and Spelling K–2*. We feel their report is fair and points out strengths in Saxon about which we are proud. We would like to clarify a few additional points in our instruction that we feel are important for educators to understand.

Saxon aligns 100% to TEKS foundational skills standards across all 3 grades.

Saxon Phonics and Spelling includes a comprehensive Scope and Sequence for each grade outlining what skills are taught and reviewed and the order in which they are taught and reviewed. The TRR review concludes that *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* is 100% aligned to TEKS for all foundational skills standards in Grades K through 2. These correlations are documented separately from the Scope and Sequence and are available upon request.

The structure of Saxon's Scope and Sequence lends itself organically to easy navigation of the program.

Saxon is structured in a unique way. Each lesson is bound in its own booklet for teacher's ease of use, and the lessons appear in sequential order: the same order in which the Scope and Sequence enumerates them. Rather than navigating by page number in a large textbook, teachers can easily navigate to the point of instruction they are looking for by using the lesson booklet number. This makes it easy and straightforward to navigate Saxon lessons using the Scope and Sequence.

The Scope and Sequence also identifies which Decodable or Fluency Reader(s) teachers may need when teaching a particular lesson. Any worksheets or homework for a given lesson will be numbered with the same number as the lesson to which they correspond. All other student resources are used daily, so teachers know to keep them handy. Additionally, each lesson lists the materials needed for the lesson on the front page in case teachers need a reminder.

Students learn to decode all decodable high-frequency words in the course of Saxon instruction.

The inclusion of high-frequency words in Saxon is informed by the Dolch word list. Decodable high-frequency words are taught in the course of instruction as students learn the skills they need to decode each word. Non-decodable high-frequency words are taught by sight and are labeled "sight words." Students build automaticity reading

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these words through daily Review Deck practice (which are used as flashcards); reading the words in context via Fluency Readers, Fluency Passages, and Decodable Readers; and practicing reading and spelling the words as part of their daily in-class worksheets and take-home homework. The Scope and Sequence lists the lesson in which each sight word is introduced, and the full list of both decodable high-frequency words and non-decodable Sight Words can be found in the Front Matter of each Teacher's Manual Volume 1 on the Reading Word List. Students learn to read and spell 110 high-frequency words in Grade K, 315 high-frequency words in Grade 1, and 364 high-frequency words in Grade 2.

The pace at which letters are taught in Grade K can be adjusted to meet classroom and individual student needs.

Saxon offers guidance to teachers to adjust instructional pacing based on student need which can be found in the Instructional Overview present in the Front Matter of the Teacher's Manual Volume 1 for each grade. If the majority of the class struggles with certain letters, teachers can slow down the lessons and spend more time on the skills that need extra attention during whole group instruction. In Grade K, on p. 10 of the Instructional Overview, the material suggests that teachers "present new material only when you have a full week (five school days) in which to do so" and "during the short weeks (four or fewer school days) review previously taught information and play games to reinforce skills that are weak" when a slower pace is needed. It goes on to recommend where teachers can find additional activities to do with students to reinforce skills that need more practice.

Alternatively, for skills that the whole class masters more quickly than the baseline pace of the lessons, teachers can adjust the pace to move through less challenging skills more quickly. The material in the Grade K Instructional Overview on p. 10 continues to guide teachers with regards to accelerating the pace of instruction by suggesting they "teach two lessons at once since both will cover the same letter. Children may then complete both worksheets or only the front sides of each" depending on their need for practice and the constraints of time. In this way, teachers can apply instruction flexibly, increasing the practice offered for letters that students have more difficulty with, and moving more quickly through letters students master more easily. Offering teachers the flexibility to customize instruction to better reflect the specific needs of their classroom avoids the pitfall of the program simply assuming which letters will be more difficult for students to master.

Since the amount of exposure and number of repetitions needed for each student to master each letter may differ, teachers can also tailor their instruction to meet individual student needs by breaking the class out into small groups and doing the activities in the Options for Differentiation section at the end of each lesson, playing Kid

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Card games relevant to any skills that require additional practice, and/or doing other activities from the Resources for Differentiation booklet with students who need additional practice. Specific activities are recommended after each assessment to strengthen any skills where proficiency was not demonstrated, and all activities are available in the Resources for Differentiation booklet.

For students who are English Learners, EL Support tips included at the beginning of each lesson can help offset the difficulty of learning certain sounds or spellings by pointing out to teachers which languages may not have a corresponding sound to the one being taught, or which languages may associate a given sound with a different spelling. This feature helps teachers to be aware of where additional support may be necessary (and for which students) and allows teachers to prepare and adjust instruction to accommodate each student and offer additional support as needed.

A concern when teaching at the pace of one letter per week is that students will not be exposed to each letter, its sound, or its name until its assigned week. Saxon does not teach skills in this isolated way. Students become familiar with letter names very early on in the school year and practice saying the entire alphabet and identifying letters beyond simply the ones they have learned in depth beginning in Lesson 2. Additionally, Phonological Awareness activities feature sounds before the letters are taught. For example, in Lesson 10, students work on the Phonological Awareness skill of identifying matching initial sounds, or alliteration. By this point in instruction, students have learned letters *l*, *o*, and *g*, along with their sounds. The teacher begins the activity using sounds for which students have already learned the corresponding grapheme (the sounds /*g*/ and /*l*/), then continues the activity using new sounds for which students have not yet learned the grapheme (/h/ and /t/). Thus, students are familiar with far more sounds than the point they are up to in the phonics scope and sequence. By the time students are expected to connect the sound to its grapheme, they are used to working with the sounds in a meaningful way, and a foundation is in place for students to make that final connection between the sound and its grapheme.

In a standard classroom teaching just one letter a week, students may not have enough opportunities to practice the letters taught later in the year. However, repetition is the backbone of Saxon instruction. In a Saxon classroom, students are continually reviewing sounds and letters from previous lessons and are given abundant opportunities to practice all letters and sounds in this structure of constant review, including those taught later in the year. The cumulative review in Saxon is designed to make sure even students who struggle with particular skills are given enough opportunities to practice them. This ensures that each student gets the amount of exposure to each letter and the number of repetitions they need to become proficient in reading and spelling with all letters.

Teachers are given clear instruction to implement a gradual release model, relying on routines for daily activities.

Saxon lessons feature a clear and consistent routine of "I do, we do, you do" gradual release. Early lessons include guidance for teachers, building their confidence in the instructional model. For example, in Lesson 1 of Grade 1, teachers are given very clear instruction on how to model skywriting, how to introduce sound-spellings when reviewing the Spelling Cards, and how to conduct activities using the Letter Tiles (for example). In Lesson 2, similarly clear but less granular instruction is present to help guide teachers as they learn to implement these daily routines. By Lesson 6, teachers are familiar with the routines and can implement each step without it being spelled out; they can always refer to the first few lessons if they need refreshers.

The "New Increment" section of each lesson is the "I do" component, as the teacher introduces a new sound-spelling with Review Deck cards and whole class board demonstrations at the board. By following the teacher scripting in each lesson, the teacher is guided to clearly model each new skill. The lesson then uses the scripting and visual elements (reduxes or an image of the text teachers will write on the board) to guide the teacher in leading the class in "we do" practice. Teachers give students the opportunity to code and read words with the new skill on the board, walking students through the process or otherwise offering support as needed. Finally, the instruction has teachers release the students to independent practice ("you do") as they complete their worksheets. The teacher gives verbal instruction to students as they fill out their worksheets, and checks in with them to ensure students are on the right track to mastery during this independent practice. Finally, teachers go over the homework assignment students will take home to complete, which will be the final exercise in independent practice under Saxon's gradual release model.

Saxon uses clear and specific language when describing each skill, in both the Scope and Sequence and the Lessons.

The Scope and Sequence for each grade in Saxon is comprehensive and thoroughly covers each skill required by the Texas Education Agency's TEKS standards for foundational skills instruction. On occasion, the language Saxon uses internally differs slightly from the language in the TEKS standards. For example, in Grade K, the TEKS breakout K.2.B.ii asks that students "demonstrate and apply phonetic knowledge by: using letter-sound relationships to decode, including VC, CVC, CCVC, and CVCC words." Rather than identifying skills with digraphs as "CCVC" or "CVCC," Saxon instruction breaks the skills out individually, indicating in the Scope and Sequence where students learn to read and spell words with digraph *ck* or digraph *th* (for example). The skills are articulated specifically both as new concepts and as review concepts so that teachers are able to easily locate lessons to teach or support the specific skill they need instruction for. Lessons 109–120 and 129–130 in Saxon

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specifically focus on reading and spelling words with digraphs, referred to as “CCVC” and “CVCC” words in the TEKS standards.

Saxon simplifies language when referring to the skill “decoding,” describing it plainly as “reading,” and uses the word “spelling” to refer to the skill “encoding.” So, for example, instruction for decoding and encoding words with diphthongs can be found in the “New Concepts” column of the Grade 1 Scope and Sequence for Lesson 89 (among other places), listed as “reading and spelling diphthongs *oi* and *oy*.”

Further differences in language can be found when looking at the skill for “decoding words with r-controlled syllables.” Saxon uses more approachable language suitable for younger children than “r-controlled,” calling the *r* in these syllables “bossy *r*.” “Bossy *r*” first appears in the Scope and Sequence “New Concepts” column for Lesson 63 of Grade 1, which is where the first r-controlled vowel introduced in Grade 1 is taught (*er*). Each r-controlled vowel is referred to as its own combination: the r-controlled vowels in Saxon Grade 1 are Combination *er*, Combination *ar*, Combination *or*, Combination *ir*, and Combination *ur*. By using this specific language, students are empowered to accurately apply the program’s coding marks when reading words with r-controlled vowels and consequently, are more easily able to decode words with each combination. Teachers can identify specific skill deficits and resources to address them. For example, a teacher will support a first grade student struggling to read and write combination *ir* words by finding “reading and spelling combination *ir*” in Saxon’s Scope and Sequence in the row for Lesson 76, and then accessing Lesson 76 for the instruction, resources, and practice that meets the student’s needs.

Two other places where Saxon uses specific language in the Scope and Sequence, as well as in the instruction, appear when examining the breakouts for TEKS 1.2.A.iv, “demonstrate phonological awareness by: recognizing the change in spoken word when a specified phoneme is added, changed, or removed” and TEKS 1.2.A.vii, “demonstrate phonological awareness by: manipulating phonemes within base words.” For example, in the Phonemic/Phonological Awareness column of the Scope and Sequence for Lessons 56 and 57, “removing” a specified phoneme is referred to as “deleting [the] initial sound,” and falls under the larger umbrella skill of “manipulating phonemes.” In Lessons 66 and 67, the word “substitute” is used to describe the skill of “changing” a specified phoneme; students practice substituting individual sounds in words, including medial (in Lesson 66) and final sounds (in Lesson 67), again within the broader context of “manipulating phonemes.” In each lesson, students are recognizing the new word that is created when a phoneme is added, deleted, or substituted, as evidenced by the language in the Scope and Sequence, for example: “substitute individual sounds in words to make new words” (from the Phonemic/Phonological Awareness column in Lesson 68).

Phonological/ Phonemic Awareness in Grade 2 follows a logical research-based continuum. Skills can be taught or strengthened according to student need.

Saxon Phonics and Spelling Grade 2 includes a Phonological and Phonemic Awareness resource with activities that follow a clear research-based continuum, teaching skills in order from basic to complex. Since most students will have attained phonological awareness skills by the middle of first grade, the Grade 2 Phonological Awareness preassessment given at the beginning of the year can identify specific deficits. The Phonological and Phonemic Awareness booklet provides targeted, intentional, and explicit instruction and practice to address gaps in skill proficiency.

***Saxon Phonics and Spelling* integrates morphological instruction within the phonics lessons.**

A strength of Saxon's lies in its consistent instructional routines. By following these routines, teachers know they are teaching skills in a consistent way that minimizes confusion. Further, by following these routines, students are set up for success because they know what to expect when learning each new skill.

Saxon Phonics and Spelling Grade 2 offers ample opportunity for students to read base words with affixes, such as in the Fluency and Decodable Readers (notably, Decodable Readers 24, 25, 20, and 23). During in-class activities, such as Boardwork and Worksheets, students are given the opportunity to recognize, code, and read words with affixes. Students also practice encoding words with phonics skills they've learned every day on their Spelling and High Frequency Word Practice, including words with affixes. They practice spelling words on their own as well as words in sentences (for example, in Grade 2 Spelling and High Frequency Word Practice 73 and Worksheets 103, 121, and 133). In any lesson where students are learning about affixes, students are given the opportunity to both read and spell words with base words and affixes.

The focus of *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* is to help students become effective readers and spellers. When learning about affixes, instruction centers around the skills of decoding and encoding words with affixes. Morphological awareness in Saxon is integrated for the purpose of providing students with a better means to decode and encode multisyllabic words while understanding its meaning. Students learn the meaning of each affix and how it changes the meaning of a base word in the course of Saxon instruction. The Affix Cards in the Review Decks, which are reviewed on a regular basis, provide both the spelling and the meaning of each affix students have learned for them to review. By learning to effectively read and spell words with affixes, students develop a solid foundation upon which future morphological awareness instruction can be built.

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HMH is committed to excellence. We will continue to enhance the learning experience and maximize student gains.

Saxon Phonics and Spelling K–2 was created to give educators the solutions they need to establish early learners' foundational literacy skills and meet the needs of all types of learners within the classroom. *Saxon Phonics and Spelling K–2* combines explicit instruction with a cumulative, multisensory approach to support beginning readers as they build confidence through repeated success. It is a research-based and time-tested program that has helped students across thousands of classrooms become effective readers and spellers. At HMH, we continue to ensure that Saxon remains aligned with the latest research and that we address important feedback from reviewers and from our customers to help Saxon offer the best learning experience and student outcomes possible. One way Saxon will integrate this feedback is regarding our approach to teaching high-frequency words: words previously labeled "sight words" that contain decodable elements will be taught as "partially decodable." This means that the elements that students can decode in each word will be taught, and only the irregular parts of the word will have to be memorized. We also foresee the addition of more specific immediate and corrective feedback to help teachers better support students in the program. And finally, we intend to clarify the gradual release model within Saxon instruction, clearly highlighting the "I do," "we do," and "you do" parts of each lesson.

Thank you to TRR and our loyal customers.

We would like to thank the Texas Resource Review at Safal Partners and the Texas Education Agency for including *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* in this review. Saxon's 100% TEKS alignment and the overwhelmingly positive feedback present in Safal Partners' report on behalf of Texas Resource Review reflect our commitment to teaching young students of all backgrounds and abilities to become successful readers and spellers. We strongly believe in the strength of the *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* program and look forward to continuing to grow with our customers and meet students' and educators' needs in order to enhance the learning experience and maximize student gains.

If you would like to learn more about how *Saxon Phonics and Spelling* can help your students become more effective readers and spellers, please visit us online at: www.hmhco.com/programs/saxon-phonics-and-spelling.