

Decoding Strategy Toolkit

Teacher-facing supports for students struggling with reading accuracy

Purpose

- Help teachers respond when students make word-reading errors during connected text, small group, or intervention.
- Shift prompts from “guess and move on” to “look closely, decode, blend, and check.”
- Match the support to the type of error: sounds, blending, vowel pattern, syllables, word parts, or meaning check.

Use these tools when students...

- guess from the picture or first letter
- skip or substitute words
- read slowly word-by-word
- misread vowel patterns
- struggle with longer words

Teacher goal

- prompt briefly
- return attention to the print
- model only as much as needed
- have the student reread for accuracy and meaning

What is included

Tool	Document	How teachers use it
1	Accuracy Error Decision Guide	Choose a prompt based on what the student did.
2	Teacher Prompt Card	Use consistent language during reading conferences or small groups.
3	Core Decoding Routine	A repeatable routine for unfamiliar words.
4	Strategy Sheets	Short, practical pages for sound-by-sound blending, word chaining, vowels, syllables, and morphemes.
5	Small-Group Lesson Template	A 15-20 minute routine for accuracy-focused instruction.
6	Progress Monitoring Tools	Track accuracy patterns and next steps.
7	Student Bookmark	A student-friendly reminder to use while reading.

1. Accuracy Error Decision Guide

Use this guide during oral reading. Listen for the error pattern, then choose the smallest prompt that helps the student return to the print and decode accurately.

What you notice	Possible evidence	Teacher prompt	Best support
Student guesses using the first letter only	Says “pony” for “puppy” or “house” for “horse”	“Look all the way through the word. What sound comes next?”	Cover-reveal or sound-by-sound blending
Student skips the word	Pauses, skips, or says “I don’t know”	“Let’s try the word part by part.”	Tap and blend; mark the vowel
Student misreads the vowel	Says “bit” for “bite” or “hop” for “hope”	“Check the vowel pattern. Is that vowel short or long?”	Vowel pattern check
Student reads a longer word as one chunk	Stumbles over “unbelievable” or “construction”	“Find the parts you know. Where can we break it?”	Syllable scoop or morpheme mapping
Student blends correctly but says a nonsense word	Reads “slented” for “silent”	“Does that sound like a real word? Check again.”	Blend, say, and meaning check
Student reads accurately but very slowly	Correct but choppy word-by-word reading	“Now reread that sentence smoothly.”	Reread for automaticity

Teacher note

- Avoid prompts that encourage guessing: “Look at the picture,” “What would make sense?” or “Try something.”
- Meaning matters, but students need to first attend to the letters and patterns in the word.

2. Teacher Prompt Card: Decoding Accuracy Language

Keep prompts short. The goal is to cue the process, not explain the whole strategy every time.

Purpose	Prompt options
Attend to the print	"Point to the word." "Look at each part." "Start at the beginning."
Check sounds	"What sound does that letter or pattern spell?" "Say the sounds."
Blend	"Blend it without stopping." "Slide the sounds together."
Check the vowel	"Find the vowel." "What is the vowel pattern?" "Is it short, long, r-controlled, or a vowel team?"
Break the word	"Find a chunk you know." "Scoop the syllables." "Cover the ending."
Check meaning	"Does that sound like a real word?" "Does it make sense in the sentence?"
Reread	"Go back and reread the sentence accurately." "Read it again smoothly."

Least-support prompt

- "Try that word again. Look closely."
- Use when the student can self-correct with a light cue.

More-support prompt

- "I'll cover the ending. Read this first part, then add the ending."
- Use when the student needs a scaffold to decode accurately.

3. Core Decoding Routine: Look, Break, Blend, Check

Use this routine with any unfamiliar word. It works best when the teacher models it repeatedly and students practice with decodable or pattern-aligned words before applying it in connected text.

Step	Student action	Teacher model language
1. Look	Look all the way through the word.	"I see letters and patterns from left to right."
2. Break	Break the word into sounds, patterns, syllables, or word parts.	"I can cover the ending and read the base word first."
3. Blend	Blend the parts together without adding or dropping sounds.	"I will slide the sounds together: sssaaat, sat."
4. Check	Check that the word is real and makes sense in the sentence.	"That word is plant. I'll reread the sentence."

When the student makes an error

- Stop briefly at the point of error.
- Ask the student to look at the word again before giving the word.
- Prompt the exact part that caused the error.
- Have the student reread the full sentence to connect accuracy and comprehension.

4. Strategy Sheet: Continuous Blending

Best for students who know many letter-sound correspondences but struggle to blend sounds into a word.

Teacher move

- Use words with continuous sounds first, such as m, s, f, l, r.
- Stretch the first sound and add each next sound without pausing.
- Move from teacher model to student practice quickly.

Example

- m - a - t becomes mmmmaaaat, mat
- s - l - i - p becomes sssllliiip, slip
- f - r - o - g becomes fffrrroog, frog

Release	What it sounds like
I Do	Teacher points and blends: “mmmmmaaaap, map.”
We Do	Teacher and students blend together while sliding a finger under the letters.
You Do	Student reads a short list, then rereads the words in a sentence.

5. Strategy Sheet: Sound Boxes for Accuracy

Best for students who drop, add, or change sounds in simple words.

Step	Teacher/student action
Say the word	Teacher says the target word clearly: “ship.”
Stretch the sounds	Student stretches the sounds: /sh/ /i/ /p/.
Map the sounds	Student taps or writes one sound per box. Digraphs stay in one box because they spell one sound.
Read the word	Student blends and reads the whole word, then uses it in connected text.

Blank sound boxes: [] [] [] []

6. Strategy Sheet: Word Chaining

Best for building accuracy with closely related words and helping students notice every sound and spelling change.

How to use word chaining

- Give students one word to read and build.
- Change one sound or spelling at a time.
- Ask students to read the new word after each change.
- End with a short sentence using several words from the chain.

Pattern focus	Sample chain
Short a CVC	sat → sap → map → mat → mad
Digraphs	ship → shop → chop → chip → chin
Silent e	cap → cape → tape → tap → tape
Vowel teams	rain → train → brain → braid → paid

7. Strategy Sheet: Vowel Pattern Check

Best for students who misread words because they do not check the vowel pattern.

Pattern	Student-friendly reminder	Examples
Closed syllable	One vowel closed in by consonant; vowel is usually short.	cat, ship, basket
Silent e	Final e often makes the vowel long.	make, these, hope
Vowel team	Two or more letters work together for a vowel sound.	rain, boat, seed
R-controlled	Vowel followed by r changes the sound.	car, her, bird

Prompt

- “Find the vowel pattern before you read the word.”
- “What is the vowel doing in this word?”
- “Try it with the vowel sound you know for that pattern.”

8. Strategy Sheet: Syllable Scoop for Longer Words

Best for students who can read one-syllable words but lose accuracy with multisyllabic words.

Step	Action
1. Find vowels	Underline or mark the vowels/vowel teams.
2. Look between vowels	Notice the consonants between the vowel sounds.
3. Scoop parts	Break the word into readable syllables or chunks.
4. Blend and adjust	Read each syllable, then blend and adjust to a real word.
5. Reread in context	Read the sentence again for accuracy and meaning.

Words to practice

- picnic
- magnet
- tablet
- contest
- fantastic
- remember
- important

Teacher language

- “Find the vowels first.”
- “Read the first part.”
- “Now add the next part.”
- “Put the whole word together.”

9. Strategy Sheet: Morpheme Mapping

Best for older or more advanced readers who struggle with longer academic words that include prefixes, roots, and suffixes.

Word part	What students look for	Examples
Prefix	Meaning part at the beginning	re-, un-, pre-, dis-
Base or root	Main meaning part	act, form, port, struct
Suffix	Ending that can change meaning or part of speech	-ed, -ing, -ful, -tion, -able

Routine

- Circle the prefix if there is one.
- Box the base or root.
- Underline the suffix.
- Read each part, then read the whole word.
- Use the parts to support meaning: “rebuild” means build again.

10. 15-20 Minute Small-Group Routine for Reading Accuracy

Use this routine when several students are showing similar decoding needs.

Time	Routine part	Teacher action
1-2 min	Warm-up	Review 3-5 known sound-spellings or word parts.
3-4 min	Model the pattern	Teacher models the strategy with 2-3 words and thinks aloud.
5-6 min	Guided word reading	Students read a short word list or word chain aligned to the pattern.
5-6 min	Connected text practice	Students read sentences or a short passage with the target pattern.
1-2 min	Reread and goal	Students reread for accuracy and name the strategy they used.

Planning template

Planning item	Teacher notes
Group decoding need	
Target pattern or word part	
Words for practice	
Sentence or connected text	
Teacher prompt I will use	
What I will listen for	
Next step	

11. Reading Accuracy Progress Monitoring Tool

Use this quick tracker during oral reading. It helps teachers notice patterns instead of only counting errors.

Date	Text/level	Words read	Accuracy %	Error pattern noticed	Strategy prompted	Next step
_____	_____	_____	_____	initial/final sounds, vowel, syllable, morpheme, guessing	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	initial/final sounds, vowel, syllable, morpheme, guessing	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	initial/final sounds, vowel, syllable, morpheme, guessing	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	initial/final sounds, vowel, syllable, morpheme, guessing	_____	_____

Accuracy quick formula

Accuracy percentage = words read correctly ÷ total words read × 100

How to respond to the data

- If errors are mostly sound-based, return to phoneme-grapheme mapping and blending.
- If errors are mostly vowel-based, review vowel patterns in isolation and connected text.
- If errors increase with longer words, teach syllable division and morpheme mapping.
- If accuracy improves but fluency is choppy, add repeated reading after decoding practice.

12. Student Bookmark: When I Get Stuck on a Word

Print, cut, and place in reading folders or intervention notebooks.

When I Get Stuck on a Word	When I Get Stuck on a Word	When I Get Stuck on a Word
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Look at all the letters.2. Find the vowel or word part.3. Break the word into parts.4. Blend the parts together.5. Ask: Does it sound right?6. Reread the sentence.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Look at all the letters.2. Find the vowel or word part.3. Break the word into parts.4. Blend the parts together.5. Ask: Does it sound right?6. Reread the sentence.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Look at all the letters.2. Find the vowel or word part.3. Break the word into parts.4. Blend the parts together.5. Ask: Does it sound right?6. Reread the sentence.
<p>My goal:</p> <hr/>	<p>My goal:</p> <hr/>	<p>My goal:</p> <hr/>

Teacher reminder

- Teach the bookmark before expecting students to use it independently.
- During conferences, ask: “Which step helped you read that word accurately?”