

Orton-Gillingham Reading Instruction

What to Expect in Your Child's Lessons

WHAT IS ORTON-GILLINGHAM?

Orton-Gillingham (OG) is a research-backed approach to reading and spelling instruction. It is not a single program; it is a highly flexible method designed around how the brain learns language.

OG is especially effective for students who struggle with reading, including those with dyslexia. Rather than working around a student's challenges, it teaches the structure of language directly and systematically — building real, lasting skills.

“Orton-Gillingham is teaching the language the way it is, to the students the way they are.” — Margaret Byrd Rawson, former president of the Orton Dyslexia Society

Because OG is an approach rather than a fixed program, lessons may look different depending on your child's age, reading level, and current goals. The 10-part structure remains consistent even while we adapt the content within each step.

THE 6 CORE PRINCIPLES

Sequential

OG follows a carefully ordered scope and sequence — simpler concepts always come before more complex ones. No skill is introduced before its foundation is in place.

Cumulative

Nothing is taught and then left behind. Each new lesson revisits previously learned material, so skills stay sharp and are woven into everything that follows.

Multisensory

Students engage sight, hearing, voice, and movement together in every lesson. When the brain encodes information through multiple pathways at once, retention improves significantly.

Individualized

There is no single script. The instructor meets your child where they are, adjusting pace, content, and approach to fit their specific learning profile.

Diagnostic & Prescriptive

The instructor observes and responds — every session informs the next. If something is not landing, the approach shifts. If a student is ready to move forward, they do.

Emotionally Sound

Struggling with reading can take a real toll on a student's confidence. OG lessons are structured to feel achievable, supportive, and affirming at every step.

WHAT A LESSON LOOKS LIKE

Every OG-inspired lesson follows the same 10-part structure. This consistency is intentional — it helps students build confidence through predictability while still progressing steadily. The content within each step adjusts to your child's age, level, and current goals.

1 Warm Up

A brief routine to settle in and activate language skills — often includes alphabet review, vowel practice, or sound chants.

2 Phonological Awareness

Oral and listening exercises that strengthen the student's ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds in words.

3 Visual Drill

The instructor holds up cards; the student identifies letters and their sounds. Repeated practice builds the automatic recognition needed for fluent reading.

4 Auditory Drill

The inverse of the visual drill — the instructor says a sound and the student writes the corresponding letter(s). Directly supports spelling.

5 Rapid Exchange

Fast-paced practice blending sounds and syllable patterns the student already knows, building speed and retrieval confidence.

6 High Frequency Words

Focused practice on words that appear constantly in text. Many do not follow standard phonics rules, so they require dedicated attention.

7 Coding / Extensions

Students physically mark up words — underlining, circling, or labeling phonetic elements. This kinesthetic step deepens pattern recognition.

8 New Concept

A single new skill is introduced, carefully chosen based on where the student is in the OG sequence and how they performed in recent sessions.

9 Spelling / Dictation

The instructor reads words and sentences aloud; the student writes them. This integrates everything taught and shows what has truly been internalized.

10 Reading Practice

The student reads connected text that uses the sounds and patterns they have been building. This is where all the pieces come together.

WHY THIS APPROACH WORKS

Reading is not natural

The brain must connect three systems at once: recognizing printed symbols, linking them to sounds, and attaching meaning. OG builds all three pathways simultaneously.

Multisensory learning sticks

When a student sees a letter, says its sound, and writes it at the same time, multiple parts of the brain activate together — making the connection stronger and more durable.

Struggling readers learn differently

Dyslexia affects 15–20% of the population. It is not a sign of low intelligence, laziness, or an eye problem. It is a difference in how the brain processes language — and OG is specifically designed for it.

Progress is always the goal

Sessions are designed to be just challenging enough — not frustrating. Your child will always leave having practiced something they know and learned something new.

Questions about your child's lessons? Reach out anytime. We're always happy to talk through what we're working on and why.