

“My Orton-Gillingham background caused me to move way too slowly with Sounds-Write”

Speech-Language Pathologist, US, October 2023



Katie, a speech-language pathologist from Massachusetts, completed the Sounds-Write training to help her son Michael, after he was diagnosed with dyslexia in 2022.

During the 2020-2021 Covid school year I home-schooled my son, who was in 1st Grade. I noticed he was behind in reading at the start of the year, but initially thought it was due to Covid closures and remote instruction the year before. I used an Orton-Gillingham-based classroom phonics program, [Program A], and [Program B] for phonemic awareness. He would get through a unit and score within the expected 80% range but was not holding onto those skills once we went to the next unit. It felt like we were spending so much time spiraling back to review previous skills.

My son returned to school for the 2021-2022 school year (2nd grade), where they also use [Program A] with a basal-type English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum. I expressed concern at the beginning of the year and was told all the kids were behind, so I should not worry. He continued to struggle, but not enough for school to initiate services. He has very good comprehension, expressive language and vocabulary skills, which help to cover some of the reading weaknesses.

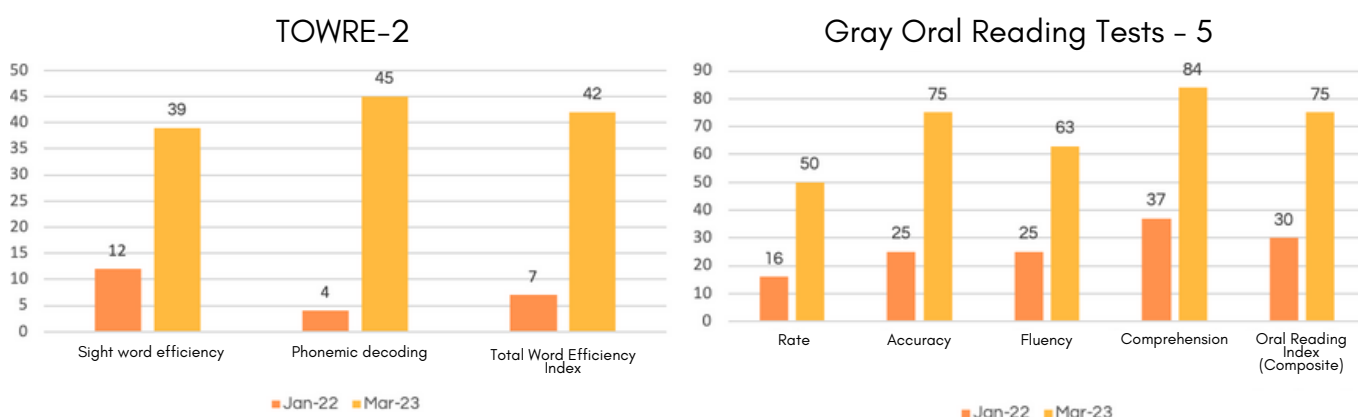
We completed private neuropsychological evaluation in January 2022 and he was diagnosed with dyslexia, orthographic subtype. We initiated private Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) services twice a week, using [Program C] plus twice a week with me for carry-over. He was picked up for school services in February 2022 and started working in a special education pull-out group with five kids using an OG-based program. He was making gains, but they were slow and by the end of 2nd grade he was still stuck at what would be the Initial Code in Sounds-Write. Seeing his frustration, I started researching to figure out a better way and that led me to Sounds-Write.

I completed my Sounds-Write training in June-July of 2022. I am a speech-language pathologist myself and had done a concentration in literacy with training in OG-based reading instruction; however, I have worked with adults in a medical setting for most of my career and my area of specialty is cognitive rehab. There were so many moments during the training that I thought to myself “that makes so much more sense!”, based on my understanding of cognitive theories.

I started working with my son using Sounds-Write in mid-July 2022, but had already started incorporating some of what I was learning along the way during the training. We worked together 3-4 days per week through the end of August. When he went back to school, he continued with special education small group services provided by a special education teacher, four 30-minute sessions a week using an OG program, and also had whole-class phonics instruction using [Program A] and [Program D] for English Language Arts. His special education group was stuck on blends for the first three months of school even though my son did not have difficulty with them. Once school started, I worked with my son 1-2 days per week using Sounds-Write until about December. Then we had to slow down when his OG program got to VCe words. It felt like the two approaches were confusing him at that point and we stopped completely in February so I could get a better sense of how things were going without all the extra support I was providing.



I started Sounds-Write with him at the last unit of the Initial Code and we have worked through Unit 15 of the Extended Code. I have included all of the “More Spellings” as we have progressed through those units, since he had already had some exposure to them during classroom [Program A]. We asked school to repeat testing because it was clear that he had made a lot of progress and we wanted to adjust his IEP goals. Below are the charts with the results of the testing he did in January 2022 and then in March 2023. I truly believe that it was the work we did using Sounds-Write that allowed him to make the big gains that he made in decoding and reading fluency.



Michael was 7y 9m in January 2022 (Grade 2) and 8y 11m in March 2023 (Grade 3)

I had planned to work with him again during the summer to complete the rest of the program, but we didn't finish all the units and focused instead on reading fluency. Training him using Sounds-Write has led him to be able to pick up those skills we haven't covered on his own (which he was not holding onto before Sounds-Write). In the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests, he was able to score in the proficient range in both English Language Arts and Math last spring, which was great to see - less than 60% of kids scored proficient; less than 20% for those with a special education diagnosis. His reading benchmarks this fall were in the 50th percentile, which shows he was able to maintain skills over the summer without the intensity of intervention provided the previous summer.

“The speech-language pathologist who was doing the interventions with my son has been amazed by his progress, and just signed up for the Sounds-Write Symposium to learn more.”

My OG background caused me to move way too slowly with Sounds-Write. The OG work helped, but all the rules slowed him down and did not allow him to progress to the more advanced code knowledge. I know OG works for a lot of kids, but it takes years and years of intervention and high levels of intensity to see those gaps close. I want people to know there are alternatives that seem to be able to do the same at a faster pace. Our goal needs to be to get kids to read the fastest way possible, without getting stuck on the idea that there is a “gold standard” just because we are unfamiliar with the alternatives.