



English Foundations Series

The Research Base

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Introduction

The English Foundations series (including two full-year courses: English Foundations I and English Foundations II) has been carefully designed to help adolescent learners with below-proficient and below-basic achievement to become stronger, more competent, and more flexible readers and writers. English Foundations I has been designed for adolescent students whose achievement is below basic. These students are reading at the third- to fifth-grade level and need additional instructional support to read for meaning and to write grade-level texts. English Foundations II has been designed for students whose achievement is below proficient. These students are reading at the sixth- to eighth-grade level and are ready to learn reading and writing strategies that will help them transition to high school–level academic work.

The Importance of Strategy Instruction

Research (e.g., Duffy, 2002; Page-Voth & Graham, 1999; Pearson, Dole, Duffy, & Roehler, 1992; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995) shows that proficient students use a variety of reading strategies to construct meaning from text, to figure out new words, to learn from the books and materials they read, and to write texts with organization and purpose. While many students learn these strategies automatically or with little effort, students with below-basic and below-proficient achievement have often not acquired the reading and writing skills and strategies they need and do not know when and how to apply the ones they have. These strategies can be learned when taught through modeling, explicit explanation, and practice (Duffy, 2002; Pressley, Almasi, Schuder, Bergman, Hite, El-Dinary, et al., 1994).

Learning in Multiple Modes

The English Foundations series presents all of the key reading and writing strategies in multiple modes. Strategies are taught through a combination of written texts, audio, video clips, graphic images, printed graphic organizers, interactive media, manipulatives, and other modes. Technological multimodality is especially important for the millennial adolescent, whose life is inundated with digital media (Alvermann, 2002). Repeating key ideas through multiple modes of communication reinforces each major strategy. Students do not all learn at the same pace and exposure to new information, so repeating ideas through print, audio, video, images, and writing supports student learning. In addition, key reading and writing strategies are repeated multiple times throughout the series. The strategies presented in earlier lessons are reinforced through reminders, self-checks, and other multimedia features. This repetition means that strategies and skills are not taught in isolation but are intertwined in meaningful contexts throughout the series.

Empowering Students through Autonomy

English Foundations I and English Foundations II are highly motivating, dynamic learning environments that allow students to build competence in individual ways. Students have autonomy to vary the rate at which they engage in the lessons and activities in each course. Because the instructional text has accompanying audio, students can choose to read and hear the text as they determine which way provides the most support. Audio options include stopping the recording and listening to sections multiple times, allowing students to proceed at their own pace. Students can read and reread each print component as many times as they need. Students can also view Flash animations at their own pace—either by viewing an animation repeatedly until they understand its significance or by stopping an animation in order to take notes or complete the graphic organizer. A print-out option is provided for graphic organizers that serve as guided note-taking devices. Additionally, students can use interactive self-checks to gauge understanding before taking a graded assessment and can return to earlier lessons to clear up misunderstandings. This autonomy allows students to work at the pace that best supports their own learning.

Supporting with Immediate Feedback

Along with this autonomy comes useful feedback. Frequent checks for understanding, mini-quizzes, and writing prompts supplement the formal assessments and allow students to accurately gauge whether they understand the skills and strategies being taught. Along with frequent opportunities to check their learning comes a great deal of meaningful praise. As they work through the lessons, assessments, and self-checks, students complete relevant tasks and are given praise when they achieve success. Autonomy and frequent, targeted feedback help to build what Deci and Ryan (1985) call self-determination—the willingness to engage with academic tasks on one’s own. Self-determination and perseverance are especially important for students who have traditionally struggled with reading and writing and who may have given up on academic tasks—that is, students who are functioning at below-basic and below-proficient achievement.

Learning a Vocabulary for Academic Success

Most adolescents have a good handle on the language of everyday life by the time they enter school. What many below-basic and below-proficient readers have not acquired is the language of school—academic language (e.g., Charlot & O’Malley, 1994; Cummins, 1980; 2000). Some of these formal words—like *cause and effect*, *compare and contrast*, or *examine*—are commonly used across academic subjects. Other terms—such as *constitution*, *legislative resolution*, and *electoral votes*—are encountered in specific subjects studied in school. Because these words and phrases are not informally learned and used outside school, they must be acquired through planned academic opportunities for reading, discussions, and activities. Adolescents in particular are continually expected to understand, use, and apply academic language in their reading and writing and in their tests (Bailey &

Butler, 2003). In addition, it may be that adolescents have a working understanding of a concept but are stymied when they are presented with the formalized words and phrases associated with it. This content vocabulary becomes a roadblock to comprehending what they read or hear in school. To foster learning in all subject areas, adolescents with below-proficient achievement need extended, focused instruction with engaging text that introduces academic language and offers strategies to help students independently determine the meaning of the language.

Scaffolding Vocabulary Acquisition

The English Foundations series fosters the acquisition of academic language in a couple of ways. First, the series highlights key academic terms and provides their definitions. When students roll their mouses over a key term, that word's definition appears. Students can read and reread that definition to help them understand the text and learn the meaning of the word. More importantly, the English Foundations series focuses on scaffolding students' acquisition of academic language as they read and write nonfiction, informational text—the kind of text students most often encounter across the secondary curriculum. Because it is focused on content knowledge rather than storytelling, informational text generally contains a higher percentage of academic language (Deshler, Biancarosa, Palincsar, & Nair, 2007). As students write different genres of academic texts, such as compare-contrast, description, and explanation, they learn the academic language and text characteristics associated with each type of text. A focus on nonfiction, informational text helps students acquire both content knowledge and academic vocabulary and helps prepare them for success in future academic coursework.

Emphasis on Constructed Response

Each unit includes assessment items that call for students to write a constructed response. These written assessments allow students to apply their learning in a meaningful way (Brooks, Nolan, & Gallagher, 2003). Items in the reading units engage students in metacognition, requiring them to think about how, when, and why to apply the strategies they are learning. The written tasks ask students to practice and apply the strategies for effective writing. These constructed-response items require a higher depth of knowledge (Webb, 1997) and so foster students' engagement in higher-order thinking. Rubrics are provided that allow teachers to score the constructed-response assessment based on students' ability to apply the strategy they are learning.

Strong Value for English Language Learners

The English Foundations series is also an effective intervention for English language learners. The same features that support below-basic and below-proficient students in general also support English language learners. English language learners need comprehensible input: they need to hear, see, and interact with language that they can understand (Krashen, 1982; Carlo, 2007; Klingner & Vaughn, 2004; García & Godina, 2004). Because the texts in the English Foundations series are written with controlled vocabularies and repeat new words in meaningful contexts, the Foundations series provides comprehensible input. The texts are made even more comprehensible because all of the key concepts, skills, strategies, and processes are presented in multiple modes. This multimodality allows for verbal and visual repetition and reinforcement of ideas. Because students have the autonomy to work through each lesson and activity at their own pace, to review components multiple times, and to select which pieces they visit and revisit, English language learners are uniquely supported in their comprehension. The emphasis on academic language also helps English language learners develop what Chamot and O'Malley (1994) call cognitive academic language proficiency. Many times, English language learners have had little opportunity to acquire academic language in their first languages and in their home lives. These students are more successful in the second-language English classroom, and then in English immersion classrooms, if they learn the language of school—those words that are used almost exclusively in classrooms and school-based texts and are rarely spoken at home. As English language learners acquire cognitive academic language proficiency, their achievement at school improves.

Summary

In sum, the English Foundations series is an effective instructional choice for students who are working at below-basic and below-proficient levels. Its content and instructional design are research-based and address the needs of struggling adolescent readers, as highlighted by the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2007) and the findings of the National Reading Panel Report. The series focuses on content knowledge and strategies in reading and writing that have wide applicability across the curriculum (Deshler, Palincsar, Biancarosa, & Nair, 2007; Nokes & Dole, 2004). Finally, its self-paced multimedia features are motivating for adolescents who find reading and writing difficult and rarely have these engaging options in formal schooling.

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