



Publisher's Response to The Reading League Review

Heinemann thanks The Reading League for their comprehensive and research-informed review of *Saxon Reading Foundations* and welcomes the opportunity to reflect on and clarify how the program supports students' development of foundational literacy skills. We value The Reading League's leadership in advancing evidence-aligned literacy practices and supporting educators and decision-makers in understanding high-quality instructional materials.

Saxon Reading Foundations is a foundational skills program, grounded in the science of reading and designed to develop accurate and automatic word recognition through explicit, systematic instruction. In the spirit of continuous improvement and shared understanding, we offer the following clarifications and additional context to support accurate interpretation of the program's design, instructional approach, and intended use.

Program Design and Intent

Saxon Reading Foundations is designed to develop foundational literacy skills for Grades K–2 through a coherent system of instruction built on explicit teaching, cumulative review, and consistent instructional routines. The program's design and materials work together to support instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, encoding, spelling, handwriting, fluency, and application in controlled and decodable text. The program may also be used to support students beyond Grade 2 who require additional support with foundational skills.

Saxon Reading Foundations is not designed or presented as a comprehensive literacy program and, as such, does not provide direct instruction in vocabulary, language structures, comprehension, broader literacy knowledge, or writing. This design is intentional and reflects the research underlying the *Simple View of Reading* and *Scarborough's Reading Rope*, which demonstrate that word recognition and language comprehension are distinct but interdependent strands of skilled reading. Accordingly, *Saxon Reading Foundations* focuses explicitly on developing word recognition, with the understanding that this instruction is most effective when paired with high-quality language comprehension instruction provided through complementary components or programs.

Program Strengths

The Reading League's review identified several important strengths that reflect the program's intentional design and its alignment to evidence-based foundational skills instruction, including:

- Clear, consistent, and easy-to-follow daily routines
- Explicit instruction in foundational word-recognition skills, including decoding and encoding



- A well-defined scope and sequence that supports efficient planning and lesson preparation
- High-quality instructional materials, including review decks, student workbooks, teacher's assessment workbooks that provide a record of individual student progress, decodable readers, and fluency readers
- A spiraling design that provides distributed, cumulative review over time
- A manageable daily lesson structure that can fit within a typical literacy block
- Strong alignment between decoding, encoding, and fluency practice

Program Clarifications

In the *Saxon Reading Foundations* program, students do memorize irregular high-frequency words (“sight words”), and research confirms that this is both appropriate and necessary for fluent reading. However, these words are not memorized as whole, unanalyzed units. Instead, they are stored in memory through orthographic mapping, in which students connect the letters in a word to their sounds and meaning. This means that memorization occurs as a result of analyzing the word: students attend to regular letter–sound patterns and identify any irregular elements, rather than relying on visual memorization of the entire word. By anchoring words in students’ phonics knowledge and drawing attention to both predictable and unpredictable parts, this approach ensures that memorization is meaningful, supports long-term retention, and aligns with how the brain stores words for efficient reading

The program does provide consistent and structured opportunities for word-level decoding practice through aligned student materials in Grades K–2. In Kindergarten, word-level reading is embedded directly within daily worksheets, where students practice decoding aligned to newly taught phonics skills. In Grades 1 and 2, this practice is extended through the Decodable Practice pages, a dedicated resource that includes targeted word lists and short, fully decodable passages aligned to each lesson’s focus skill (this resource was not included in the reviewed sample set). These pages ensure that students engage in explicit word-level decoding of newly introduced phonics patterns while also applying previously learned patterns in controlled text. Together, these materials provide systematic, lesson-by-lesson opportunities for students to build accuracy and automaticity in decoding.

The coding system in *Saxon Reading Foundations* is intentionally designed as a temporary and supportive scaffold, not an ongoing requirement that could impede access for students. It explicitly supports students in analyzing phoneme–grapheme correspondences, vowel patterns, syllable types, and other orthographic features of words in a clear and systematic way, with the goal of building accurate, automatic reading and spelling. As students develop proficiency, teachers are directed to gradually remove the coding supports, ensuring a smooth transition to fluent, unmarked reading and writing. Importantly, the program’s cumulative and recursive design directly mitigates potential challenges for students entering midyear. Skills, routines, and coding conventions are not introduced once and left behind; rather, they are consistently revisited and practiced across lessons, allowing all students multiple entry points to learn, reinforce, and master both the coding system and the underlying phonics concepts.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

We value The Reading League's review as an important opportunity for reflection and refinement. Beginning in 2026, Saxon Reading Foundations will offer Pacing Guides, Unit Guides, and Vocabulary and Comprehension Practice Routines for K–2.

Pacing Guides are designed to provide actionable guidance on instructional timeframes and effective implementation. These guides outline daily and yearly pacing and offer practical strategies for lesson pacing and maximizing instructional time, including prioritization of key activities, efficient use of transitions, and flexible implementation of lesson components across the day. Together, these elements ensure that teachers have straightforward guidance to manage instructional time effectively while maintaining the program's systematic and cumulative approach to skill development.

Unit Guides are designed to strengthen coherence, clarity, and instructional decision-making across each unit. These guides highlight the unit's big ideas, essential questions, and expected student outcomes, providing a precise instructional focus. In addition, each Unit Guide consolidates lesson-level objectives and aligned quick checks, while offering enhanced guidance for both formative and summative assessment. Together, these tools are intended to improve the visibility of instructional priorities, support more consistent progress monitoring, and help teachers more effectively connect daily instruction to unit-level goals and student outcomes.

Vocabulary and Comprehension Practice Routines are designed to further strengthen alignment to the full scope of reading development through language comprehension alongside foundational skills instruction. These practice routines provide explicit, scaffolded opportunities for students to build vocabulary, engage in meaningful discussion, and respond to text through oral and written discourse, ensuring that decoding and meaning-making occur simultaneously. Through consistent use of think-pair-write-share structures, targeted vocabulary instruction, and writing about text, students deepen comprehension while applying phonics knowledge in authentic contexts. The practice routines are intentionally designed to support multilingual learners, incorporating sentence stems, guided questioning, opportunities for collaborative discussion, and connections to students' home languages to promote access, participation, and language development. By integrating repeated, meaningful interactions with language across reading, speaking, and writing, this resource strengthens overall literacy development and ensures a more comprehensive and inclusive instructional approach.

Ongoing areas of focus include improving visibility of instructional resources, expanding guidance for phonological awareness monitoring, and strengthening pathways that connect assessment to instruction and support more responsive instructional adjustments.

Final Thoughts

Saxon Reading Foundations provides high-quality, easy-to-implement instructional materials that deliver explicit, systematic, and cumulative foundational skills instruction for students in Grades K–2. Its consistent routines, spiraled review, decodable text application, spelling instruction, handwriting support, and fluency practice help students build the accuracy and automaticity needed for successful reading and writing.

When implemented as part of a comprehensive literacy system that also includes rich knowledge building, vocabulary, language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing composition, *Saxon Reading Foundations* plays a critical role in developing confident, capable readers and writers.

Please visit <https://www.heinemann.com/saxon-reading-foundations> to learn more about *Saxon Reading Foundations*.

