



Curriculum Navigation Report

Saxon Reading Foundations (2025)



2026 Publication|
Reviewed with Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines (3rd Edition, 2026)

Introduction

CURRICULUM EVALUATION GUIDELINES DESCRIPTION

“Decisions regarding curriculum, instructional approaches, programs, and resources are critical and must be informed by more than experience, observations, or even belief systems. If we are to succeed in implementing effective practices, then we will need to embrace learning as a part of our work as much as teaching itself.”

Hennessy, 2020, pg. 8.

Due to the popularity of the science of reading movement, the term “science of reading” has been used as a marketing tool, often promising a quick fix for decision makers seeking a program aligned with the scientific evidence base. However, as articulated in The Reading League’s [*Science of Reading: Defining Guide \(2022\)*](#),

The science of reading is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. Over the last five decades, this research has provided a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some students have difficulty; and how educators can most effectively assess and teach, and, therefore, improve student outcomes through the prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties. (p.6)

The Reading League’s [*Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines \(CEGs\)*](#) are a resource developed to assist consumers in making informed decisions when selecting curricula and instructional materials that best support evidence-aligned instruction grounded in the science of reading.

The CEGs are anchored by frameworks validated by the science of reading. Findings from the science of reading provide additional understandings that substantiate both aligned and non-aligned practices (AKA “red flags”) within the CEGs. These serve as a foundation for what to expect from published curricula that claim to be aligned with the scientific evidence of how students learn to read. The CEGs highlight best practices that align with the science of reading. Red flags specify any non-aligned practices in the following areas:



- Word Recognition
- Language Comprehension
- Reading Comprehension
- Writing
- Assessment



The CEGs have been used by educators, building and district leaders, local education agencies, and state education agencies as a primary tool to find evidence of red flags, or practices that may interfere with the development of skilled reading. While the CEGs have been useful for schools and districts for informing curricular and instructional decision-making, The Reading League recognized the challenge of school-based teams that might not have the capacity for an in-depth review process. In the spirit of its mission to advance the awareness, understanding, and use of evidence-aligned reading instruction, expert review teams engaged in a large-scale review of the most widely used curricula currently in the United States to develop informative reports of each.

This report was generated after a review of the curriculum using the revised *Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines* (3rd Edition), published in 2026. The *Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines* have been refined based on feedback and a lengthy pilot review, and have undergone an inter-rater reliability study with positive results. As you read through the findings of this report, remember that red flags will be present for all curricula, as there is no perfect curriculum. The intent of this report is not to provide a recommendation, but rather to provide information to local education agencies to support their journey of selecting, using, and refining instruction and instructional materials to ensure they align with the science of reading.

Disclaimer: The Reading League's curriculum review is deemed an informational educational resource and should not be construed as sales pitches or product promotion. The purpose of the review is to further our mission to advance the understanding, awareness, and use of evidence-aligned reading instruction.

Curriculum Description

The evaluation on the following pages features the review of Saxon Reading Foundations, which is created for students in Grades K-2.

For this report, reviewers closely examined the following:

- Teacher Manual
- Student Handbooks
- Alphabet Cards
- Decodable Readers
- Fluency Readers
- Review Decks
- Wall Cards
- Teacher Assessment Workbook

Reviewers were selected based on their deep knowledge of the science of reading and associated terminology, as well as high-quality instructional materials. Once selected, they were assigned to teams of at least three reviewers. The team met regularly to establish reliability in their individual scores based on the Red Flag rubric that follows and to report their findings. For a more comprehensive review process description, visit [The Reading League Compass's Curriculum Decision Makers page](#).



1 Red Flag statement is False.



2 Red Flag statement is minimally True. Evidence is minimal or briefly mentioned.



3 Red Flag statement is mostly True. If applicable, evidence is in multiple places throughout the curriculum.



4 Red Flag statement is always true, pervasive, and/or integral to the curriculum.



A black box indicates that this component is not addressed in this curriculum and must be addressed with other materials.

Reviewers used the notes section of each component to capture helpful evidence and notes, such as keywords that described a practice listed within the CEGs, specific examples, and precise locations of evidence. Notes were included in the review of any optional aligned components as well.

Overall Design and Delivery

Identification of the following red flag practices was prioritized in the review of this section.

OVERALL DESIGN AND DELIVERY	SCORE
No evidence of deliberate and purposeful practice: “These two terms refer to practice that goes beyond rote repetition and involves practicing for a purpose (e.g., accuracy, fluent retrieval, generalization) with the deliberate goal of long-term improvement of skill performance” (Hughes & Riccomini, 2019, p. 406).	1
No evidence of retrieval practice: Retrieval practice “consists of tasks requiring retrieval of targeted skills and knowledge from memory without prompts or cues” (Hughes & Riccomini, 2019, p. 407). “Retrieval practice is a strategy in which calling information to mind subsequently enhances and boosts learning” (Agarwal, Roediger, McDaniel, & McDermott, 2020, p. 2).	1
No evidence of spaced or distributed practice: Spaced or distributed practice “involves taking a given amount of time devoted to learning and arranging that time into multiple sessions that are spread over time” (Carpenter & Agarwal, 2019, p. 3).	1
No evidence of cumulative practice: Cumulative practice is “the systematic addition of a just-learned skill to previously learned and related skills, allowing them to be practiced together” (Hughes & Lee, 2019, p. 414; Archer & Hughes, 2011). “It requires that new (and usually related) skills are added to a practice activity as they are acquired, thus providing distributed practice for multiple skills within one session” (Hughes & Riccomini, 2019, p. 407).	1
No evidence of interleaved practice: Interleaved practice “is similar to cumulative practice but involves mixing the order of skills and problems to be practiced by distributing them in a random fashion, causing the learner to have to discriminate” (Kirschner, P. & Hendrick, C., 2020).	1
Student Interest: The materials are generally not intrinsically interesting and engaging for most students in that grade.	1
Cohesion: The program components are disjointed and not seamlessly related to one another. Instruction based on the science of reading must be integrated, acknowledging the impact of various component skills upon each other.	2
Usability: The materials are confusing and/or difficult to manage and use in a classroom setting.	1

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

The team found evidence of deliberate and purposeful practice embedded within the Saxon Reading Foundations scope and sequence of instruction. This document clearly depicts targeted new and review concepts in each lesson. For example, in Grade 2, Lesson 106, students learn to read and spell words with the digraph “ey.” However, they also review these previously taught concepts:

- read and spell words with digraphs “aw,” “ea,” “ck,” “th,” and “oo”
- read v~c, vc’|v, and vc|cv words
- read and spell words with suffix “-ing”
- read and spell words with diphthong “ou”
- read and spell words with final, stable syllable “-sion”
- read and spell words with combinations “ar,” “or,” and “er”
- read and spell words with scribal “o”

The Application and Continual Review portion of the lesson plan provides opportunities for student retrieval practice as it integrates newly targeted skills with previously mastered ones. Additionally, students practice independently through student workbook activities. The program reflects spaced practice as students revisit previously taught concepts over time, rather than practicing them all at once in a single lesson. For example, in kindergarten, students practice identifying vowels, producing letter sounds, reviewing short vowel patterns, and blending sounds throughout the instructional routine. They then apply these skills in both word and sentence reading. Because these concepts have been previously taught and are revisited across lessons, students must retrieve prior learning rather than rely on immediate practice. This repeated, cumulative review strengthens retention over time and reflects spaced practice embedded within the daily routine.

Reviewers also noted that the Saxon Reading Foundations decodable readers cover a range of topics and include varied characters and illustrations that would likely enhance engagement for students in that grade. Additionally, the team found the program’s materials and lessons to be user-friendly and easy to implement. The program’s lesson plans feature a consistent, daily instructional routine that is likely to support efficiency and make implementation more manageable over time.

Finally, as Saxon Reading Foundations is a foundational skills program, it primarily addresses the development of word recognition skills. While this aspect of the program is generally cohesive, it stops short of fully integrating the complete range of processes and skills involved in skilled reading. For that reason, adopters must ensure that additional high-quality materials are in place to provide students with opportunities to build the language comprehension skills necessary for skilled reading. Without a complementary program, students will not receive the full range of instruction necessary to develop into proficient readers.

Findings:

COMPONENTS SUPPORTING WORD RECOGNITION

1A: Word Recognition Non-Negotiables

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

WORD RECOGNITION NON-NEGOTIABLES	SCORE
1.1: Three cueing-systems are taught as strategies for decoding in early grades (i.e., directing students to use picture cues, context cues, or attend to the first letter of a word as a cue).	1
1.2: Guidance to memorize any whole words, including high frequency words, by sight without attending to the sound/symbol correspondences.	1
1.3: Supporting materials do not provide a systematic scope and sequence nor opportunities for practice and review of elements taught (e.g., phonics, decoding, encoding).	1

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Saxon Reading Foundations does not use the three-cueing system as a decoding strategy in the early grades. Instead, students are taught to code and identify words based upon vowel patterns and letter clusters, which help them identify corresponding sounds, and, in turn, read the words. Many of the program’s worksheets and assessments include word lists for students to code and read. As students review and gain mastery of phonetic concepts, coding every word may no longer be necessary. Instead, coding should be used as a temporary support until phonetic patterns become automatic. The ultimate goal is reading proficiency, with coding serving as a tool to help students reach that goal (Grade 2 Teacher Manual, Volume 1, p. xxvii).

Students are explicitly taught directionality (left-to-right tracking), how to follow text across a line, and how to use visual features such as bold print, picture clues, and rebuses to support meaning-making. By modeling finger tracking and discussing how images connect to text, the lesson builds students’ understanding of how print is organized and how readers navigate and interpret text. For example, in Grade K, Lesson 17, students are introduced to foundational concepts of print prior to reading. The teacher explicitly models directionality by demonstrating how to track text from left to right and across a line while reading aloud. Using a page from a fluency reader, the teacher then models how illustrations support comprehension by prompting students to compare the text to the image and use the picture to clarify meaning. This level of instruction happens consistently in Grades K-2.

Saxon Reading Foundations does not emphasize memorization, and educators are prompted to “point out the sound-spelling patterns that children can decode, then teach them the irregular spellings in each word” (Grade 1 Teacher Manual: Volume 1, Lesson 12; p. 114) For example, in Grade 1, Lesson 13, students are introduced to the sight word “the” as an irregular word that does not fully follow previously taught phonics rules. The teacher guides students in identifying familiar letters and sounds within the word, highlighting the /th/ digraph, while explaining that the letter “e” represents an irregular schwa sound. Students practice recognizing and using the word in oral sentences and are reminded that it will appear frequently in their reading, reinforcing the need for automatic recognition. The program also uses the terminology of temporary sight words to highlight that “sometimes we will read and spell words before we have talked about all of their sounds” (Grade 1 Teacher Manual: Volume 1, Lesson 13, pp. 90–91).

Finally, Saxon Reading Foundations provides a systematic scope and sequence across all grade levels. For Grades K–2, the scope and sequence is located in the introductory pages at the beginning of each Teacher Manual.

1B: Phonological and Phoneme Awareness

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR PHONOLOGICAL AND PHONEME AWARENESS	SCORE
1.7: Instruction only attends to larger units of phonological awareness (syllables, rhyme, onset-rime) as a focus of instruction without moving to the phoneme level.	1
1.8: Blends such as /b/ /l/ are kept intact rather than having students notice their individual sounds.	2
1.9: Students do not practice the phonemes as soon as they learn the graphemes.	1
1.10: Instruction is focused on letters only without explicit instruction and practice with the phonemes that letters represent.	1
1.11: Phoneme awareness is not taught as a foundational reading skill.	1
1.12: Phoneme awareness is not assessed and monitored (e.g., a student's ability to identify the initial, final, and medial phonemes in a word).	2

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Saxon Reading Foundations demonstrates an instructional sequence that moves appropriately from larger units of sound to more advanced phoneme manipulation. Instruction begins at the word and syllable level before progressing to increasingly complex phonemic awareness tasks.

For example, in kindergarten, the sequence develops as follows:

- **Lesson 1:** Identifying same/different words
- **Lesson 9:** Identifying same/different phonemes
- **Lesson 19:** Syllable identification (compound words)
- **Lesson 29:** Blending syllables (e.g., ta/ble)
- **Lesson 39:** Add a final syllable
- **Lesson 49:** Segmenting onsets and rimes
- **Lesson 69:** Blending two phonemes (e.g., /s/ /ee/)
- **Lesson 89:** Isolating the initial phoneme

Overall, this progression reflects a shift from broader phonological sensitivity (e.g., words and syllables) to more refined phonemic awareness skills.

Beginning in kindergarten, letters and sounds are taught in an integrated manner, with uppercase and lowercase forms introduced simultaneously. Students also engage in a daily sound-spelling review that includes opportunities to practice encoding. This is similar to Grade 1, Lesson 1, in which students first review the target grapheme and its corresponding phoneme before reading words that contain the phoneme and writing words that include the grapheme. In addition, the program's spelling cards support both sound production and articulation. Articulation is explicitly addressed when new sounds are introduced and revisited as more advanced spellings for those sounds are taught. This pattern is evident in Grade 2, Lesson 37, which reviews the vowel diphthong /oo/ (e.g., "moon" or "food") before introducing its second sound (e.g., "book" or "look").

In kindergarten, blends are taught explicitly, and students are prompted to identify their individual sounds. For example, in Grade K, Lesson 20, students are taught that "sometimes letters go together in special groups, called blends. A blend is two or more consonants that slide together smoothly, but you can hear each sound" (p. 142). Students then practice with the blends "st," "sp," and "sn." However, as they progress through the grades, less attention is given to blends as individual sounds. For example, in Grade 2, Lesson 7, students are taught that "a blend is two consonants that slide together so smoothly that you can hardly hear each sound" (Grade 2 Teacher Guide, pp. 49-56). The program then has students read words with the "sp" blend, specifying that they will learn many blends, but "won't code them because we don't need to know any special sounds to read them" (Grade 2 Teacher Guide, pp. 49-56).

Phoneme awareness is taught daily as a foundational reading skill during a designated portion of the lesson plan in kindergarten and Grade 1. While there isn't a distinct phonological or phonemic awareness section in the Grade 2 curriculum, phonemic awareness activities are interleaved throughout the lessons. For example, in Grade 2, Lesson 21, the teacher provides students with three words and then asks them to identify the sound heard in the medial position of each (p. 181). Later, in Lesson 28, the teacher again provides students with three different words and asks them to identify the sound in the initial position of each.

Saxon Reading Foundations offers a Phonological/Phonemic Awareness Preassessment available on Heinemann's digital platform, Flight, to help determine students' existing levels of phonological and phonemic awareness at the start of the year. However, no ongoing progress-monitoring tools specific to phonological awareness were observed. Guidance is given on the what, when, and why of assessment for letter names, letter sounds, CVC words, coding long and short vowels, and other phonics elements; however, the same guidance is not provided for phonological and phonemic awareness assessments.

1C: Phonics and Phonic Decoding

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR PHONICS AND PHONIC DECODING	SCORE	
1.17: Letter-sound correspondences are taught opportunistically or implicitly during text reading.	1	
1.18: Instruction is typically “one and done”; phonics skills are introduced but with very little or short-term review.	1	
1.19: The first letters of key words for letter-sound correspondences are not aligned with the pure phoneme being taught (e.g., earth for /ě/, ant for /ă/, orange for /õ/).	1	
1.20: Phonics instruction takes place in short (or optional) “mini-lessons” or “word work” sessions.	1	
1.21: The initial instructional sequence introduces many (or all) consonants before a vowel is introduced, short vowels are all taught in rapid succession, and/or all sounds for one letter are taught all at once.	2	
1.22: Blending is not explicitly taught nor practiced.	2	
1.23: Instruction encourages students to memorize whole words, read using the first letter only as a clue, guess at words in context using a “What would make sense?” strategy, or use picture clues rather than phonic decoding.	1	
1.24: Words with known letter-sound correspondences, including high-frequency words, are taught as whole-word units, often as standalone “sight words” to be memorized.	1	
1.25: There are few opportunities provided for word-level decoding practice of new phonics patterns and interleaving practice for prior phonics patterns.	2	
1.26: Early texts are predominantly predictable and/or leveled texts, which include phonic elements that have not been taught; decodable texts are not used or emphasized.	1	
1.27: Advanced word study (Grades 2–5): Instruction in phonics ends once single-syllable phonics patterns (e.g., CVC, CVCe) are taught.	1	
1.28: Advanced word study (Grades 2–5): There is no evident instruction in multisyllabic word decoding strategies and/or using morphology to support word recognition.	1	

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

In Saxon Reading Foundations, letter-sound correspondences are taught explicitly and systematically across Grades K-2. Phonics instruction is not “one and done”; instead, skills are intentionally revisited through distributed practice and cumulative review. For example, in kindergarten, the suffix “-s” is introduced and then reinforced through ongoing, cumulative review. Lesson 30 explicitly teaches the suffix, and Lesson 31 provides immediate follow-up practice as students continue reading words ending in “-s” while also incorporating apostrophes. Subsequent lessons revisit the suffix in increasingly complex contexts. For example, Lesson 34 includes additional word-level practice, while Lessons 44-45 extend application to sentence reading. Continued review is embedded throughout later instruction, including Lessons 81, 92, 97, 98, 100, 101, 105, 112, and 113, reflecting distributed practice and sustained reinforcement over time. In Grade 1, spelling patterns for the letters “c” and “k” are introduced and reinforced through cumulative review. Lesson 23 explicitly teaches the spelling pattern of “c” and “k.” Lesson 28 revisits this concept while introducing the digraph “ck” spelling, and Lesson 29 continues review of the “ck” digraph. In addition to these targeted lessons, spelling patterns are revisited daily during the warm-up routine, providing ongoing practice and reinforcement.

Across Grades K-2, Saxon Reading Foundations’ key words represent the pure sounds of the target phoneme. Phonics instruction is delivered through dedicated instructional blocks rather than brief or optional mini-lessons. In kindergarten, the new instruction portion of the phonics lesson appears to take approximately 5-10 minutes, while in Grade 1, explicit phonics instruction extends to roughly 15-20 minutes daily. However, reviewers were unable to locate recommended instructional timeframes within either the kindergarten or Grade 1 Teacher Manuals. In Grade 2, the scope and sequence document indicates that each lesson includes a daily letter-sound review, a new “increment” (focused on phonics or print awareness), and a cumulative review section (pp. liii-cxxi). The instructional sequence does not frontload consonants before vowels. For example, in kindergarten, the vowel “o” is introduced as early as Lesson 2, allowing students early access to vowel sounds for blending and decoding. However, long and short vowel sounds are introduced in close succession, occurring within approximately three lessons. In Grade 1, the program includes a review of letters and sounds previously taught in kindergarten. Additionally, digraphs are introduced one at a time, although new spellings are added daily. Grade 2’s scope and sequence similarly begins with review, revisiting both short and long vowel sounds before moving into consonant instruction.

Kindergarten students engage in daily blending practice. However, in Grade 1, reviewers observed limited opportunities for daily blending of individual sounds in words. In Grade 2, blends are explicitly defined, and each lesson includes a letter-sound review; however, no consistent blending review routine was identified. As stated previously, memorization is not emphasized, and students are instead taught to code words “by marking common vowel patterns and letter clusters, which helps them identify the sound of each letter/letter cluster and thus read the words” (Grade 2 Teacher Guide, p. xxvii). Students apply coding to program worksheets and assessments until their word recognition skills become automatic. The coding approach is also applied to sight words as students are taught to first identify familiar letters and sounds before analyzing irregular word parts. However, some of the language used in the Teacher Manual may lead to confusion. For example, in Grade K, Lesson 13, p. 90-91 of the Teacher Manual, it states, “This year we will learn words that don’t follow the rules we are learning. We call these sight words because we must learn them by sight. This word is the. It does not follow our rules, so we must memorize it.” In the teacher’s note, they are instructed to identify each letter with children and ask them about the letters and the sounds they represent. While the instructional approach does not require whole-word memorization, the wording around the approach might be misinterpreted.

Regarding word-level decoding practice, kindergarten students participate in daily word reading. However, this decreases in Grade 1, where students practice word-level decoding with three to five words a day. In Grade 2, students practice syllabication and reading multisyllabic words during the boardwork section of the lesson.

Early texts are not leveled, and Saxon Reading Foundations states that “a controlled vocabulary is used throughout this program. Children read only those words containing letters/letter clusters, sounds, and syllable division patterns that have been taught” (Grade 2 Teacher Guide, p. xxvi). In kindergarten, students use controlled texts to develop and practice foundational decoding skills. Reviewers noted that some early texts, such as the Fluency Reader (Circle 1) “An Ant,” are repetitive in structure but not predictable. As students progress through the grades, decodable texts increase in both length and complexity. For example, the Grade 1 selection “Pop It, Toss It” features fully decodable text appropriate to students’ developing skills at that point in the program. In Grade 2, phonics instruction expands to include multisyllabic word reading and syllable type identification. The Grade 2 scope and sequence also indicates explicit instruction in prefixes and suffixes. Additionally, Saxon Reading Foundations references a History of English Guide, which may include morphological content; however, this resource was not available for review.

1D: Fluency

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR FLUENCY	SCORE
1.42: Fluency instruction focuses primarily on student silent reading.	1
1.43: Rate is emphasized over accuracy; priority is given to the student's ability to read words quickly.	1
1.44: Word-level fluency practice to automaticity is not provided, or fluency is viewed only as text-reading fluency.	1
1.45: Fluency is practiced only in narrative text or with repeated readings of patterned text.	1
1.46: Fluency assessment allows acceptance of incorrectly decoded words if they are close in meaning to the target word (e.g., accepting the word "house" instead of the printed word "home").	1

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Fluency instruction does not primarily emphasize student silent reading. Starting in Grade K, Lesson 4, oral reading at the word level is used daily. Word lists are available in Heinemann Flight and correspond to each target lesson. During Kindergarten, Lesson 9, students are asked to read aloud at the sentence level, and then the first decodable reader is introduced in Lesson 13. Students are asked to repeat the sentences after the teacher and then reread the passage. In another example, a Grade 1 decodable reader lesson incorporates guided oral reading, teacher modeling, and questioning, with independent reading at the end, rather than relying primarily on silent reading. Fluency practice in Grade 2 includes opportunities for independent or group reading; however, teachers are also prompted to listen to students read aloud and document performance using informal fluency assessments, indicating that fluency instruction is not limited to silent reading.

Rate is not emphasized over accuracy. In kindergarten and Grade 1, the Teacher's Assessment Workbook includes Informal Fluency Assessment Recording Forms that outline key fluency goals. These measures focus on students' attempts to read smoothly by grouping words into meaningful phrases, reading with expression, using end punctuation as phrasing cues, maintaining an even pace, and demonstrating an understanding that text conveys meaning. In Grade 2, fluency assessment remains aligned to this approach, with students evaluated across multiple dimensions, including rate, prosody, pacing, and comprehension. Daily word-level fluency practice is included for kindergarten students. Students in Grade 1 practice reading both in phrases and in sentences, while Grade 2 educators have access to additional fluency activities and word lists for extra practice. Additionally, Saxon Reading Foundations decodable texts and fluency readers include both narrative and expository texts.

Finally, beginning in kindergarten, accuracy is assessed through word-level decoding tasks. The Teacher's Assessment Workbook includes a Phonics Assessment Recording Form in which students read words in isolation, grouped by phonics patterns. This approach allows teachers to evaluate foundational decoding accuracy before students engage in connected text reading. As students progress to Grade 1, fluency assessments continue to emphasize word-level decoding along with work on phrases and sentences. By Grade 2, the Assessment Guide's scoring criteria for accuracy specify that students should "read accurately or self-correct while reading," reflecting an emphasis on precise word recognition during fluent reading.

Findings:

COMPONENTS SUPPORTING LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION, READING COMPREHENSION, AND WRITING

SECTIONS 2–4: Non-Negotiables for Language Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, and Writing

This section begins with a review of non-negotiable elements for language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing before moving on to the language comprehension strands highlighted in Scarborough’s reading rope. Therefore, identification of the following red flag practices was prioritized in the review of this section.

NON-NEGOTIABLES FOR LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION, READING COMPREHENSION, AND WRITING	SCORE
2-4.1: (LC, RC, W) In early grades, the instructional framework is primarily a workshop approach, emphasizing student choice and implicit, incidental, or embedded learning.	1
2-4.2: (LC, RC, W) Students are not exposed to rich vocabulary and complex syntax in reading and writing materials.	n/a
2-4.3: (RC) Comprehension activities focus mainly on assessing whether students understand content (the product of comprehension) instead of supporting the process of comprehending texts.	n/a
2-4.4: (RC, W) Writing is not taught or is taught separately from reading at all times.	n/a
2-4.5: (LC, RC) Questioning during read-alouds focuses mainly on lower-level questioning skills.	n/a

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Saxon Reading Foundations’ Non-Negotiables for Language Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, and Writing are largely not applicable. Reviewers noted that the curriculum does not follow a workshop model but instead adheres to a prescribed lesson format. Each lesson plan includes a language or alphabet activity, daily letter-sound review, spelling instruction, introduction of a new increment, and opportunities for application and cumulative review. Practice is reinforced through boardwork, worksheet activities, and homework assignments. Furthermore, while the curriculum includes comprehension questions with its decodable texts and provides some instruction in vocabulary and affixes, it does not present a comprehensive approach to develop language comprehension, reading comprehension, or writing composition within daily lessons. These components appear supplemental rather than central to the program’s instructional design.

For that reason, adopters must ensure that additional high-quality materials are in place to provide systematic instruction in vocabulary, background knowledge, syntax, inference, literacy knowledge, and writing. Without a complementary program, students will not receive the full range of instruction necessary to develop into skilled, proficient readers.

2B: Background Knowledge

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE	SCORE
2.1: Read-aloud opportunities emphasize simple stories or narrative texts. Read-aloud text is not sufficiently complex and/or does not include knowledge-building expository texts (i.e., topics related to science, social studies, current events).	n/a
2.2: Opportunities to bridge existing knowledge to new knowledge is not apparent in instruction.	n/a
2.3: Advanced (Grades 2–5): For students who are automatic with the code, texts for reading are primarily leveled texts that do not feature a variety of diverse, complex, knowledge-building text sets to develop background knowledge in a variety of subject areas.	n/a

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Saxon Reading Foundations’ practices for Background Knowledge are not applicable. Since this program focuses on foundational skills, read-aloud texts are not included. Teachers are encouraged to expose their students to authentic literature to introduce them to rich vocabulary and syntax. Additionally, the program’s decodable readers include a note reinforcing that teachers should be reading to their students daily to help expand their vocabularies (Grade 2 Teacher Manual, p. 19). Reviewers noted that the stories featured in Grade 2 include a range of content areas and cultural perspectives. For example, Story #13, “Meet the Artist,” explores elements of pottery making, while Story #17, “Father Mouse’s Quest: A Chinese Folktale,” introduces students to stories from another culture. Additional nonfiction selections include Story #19, “Women and Space,” which highlights women’s contributions to space exploration; Story #21, which focuses on the hobby of gardening; and Story #25, which examines schooling in early America. However, the team observed that the stories rely on simple, decodable text rather than complex language. For that reason, adopters must ensure that additional high-quality materials are in place to provide students with opportunities to build and integrate background knowledge. Without a complementary program, students will not receive the full range of instruction necessary to develop into skilled, proficient readers.

2C: Vocabulary

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR VOCABULARY	SCORE
2.7: Vocabulary worksheets and activities are used with little opportunity for deep understanding of vocabulary words.	n/a
2.8: Instruction includes memorization of isolated words and definitions out of context.	n/a
2.9: Tier 2 words are not taught explicitly and practiced; students are not given opportunities to use them in their speech, see them in print, and use them in writing.	n/a
2.10: Students are not exposed to and taught Tier 3 words.	n/a
2.11: Explicit instruction in morphology is not present and/or not taught according to a scope and sequence (i.e., simple to complex) consistently throughout K-5 instruction.	1

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Saxon Reading Foundations' practices related to Vocabulary are largely not applicable. The program primarily emphasizes the word-recognition components of skilled reading, including phonological awareness, decoding, sight word recognition, and fluency. As a result, vocabulary instruction is typically embedded within discussion prompts rather than systematically and explicitly taught. For example, some decodable readers highlight select words from the text and include notes encouraging teachers to discuss their meanings, but explicit vocabulary instruction and practice are limited. Reviewers did note that the program incorporates instruction on both analogies and affixes. In Grade 2, Saxon Reading Foundations includes nineteen Morphology Extensions designed to build on foundational affix knowledge introduced in earlier grades. Through these extensions, students are taught prefixes such as "bi-," "mis-," "mono-," "pent-," "quad-," "re-," and "tri-." However, this represents the primary extent of vocabulary instruction within the program. As such, adopters should ensure that complementary, high-quality materials are in place to provide students with opportunities to deepen their vocabulary knowledge. Without an accompanying program or instructional support, students may not receive the full range of vocabulary and language instruction necessary to support the development of skilled, proficient reading.

2D: Language Structures

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR LANGUAGE STRUCTURES	SCORE
2.18: Conventions of print, grammar, and syntax are taught implicitly or opportunistically with no evidence of consistent, explicit, simple to complex instruction across all grade levels.	n/a
2.19: Instruction does not include teacher modeling nor sufficient opportunities for discussion.	n/a
2.20: Students are asked to memorize parts of speech as a list without learning in context and through application.	n/a

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Saxon Reading Foundations' practices related to Language Structures are not applicable. The Teacher Manual for Grade 2, Lesson 42, explicitly states, "Although teaching grammar is not by any means a component of Saxon Reading Foundations 2, at times some mention of it becomes necessary to help children gain experience using and writing various punctuation, such as commas, quotation marks, and apostrophes" (p. 374). As such, instruction in grammar and syntax is primarily limited to brief discussion. For example, in Grade 2, Lesson 107, the curriculum touches on subject-verb agreement in the context of introducing plural "-s" and "-es." There is some inclusion of grammar and the concepts of print in kindergarten and Grade 1. For example, the kindergarten scope and sequence begins with concepts of print with book design (Lesson 13, pp. 91-92) and then includes commas (Lesson 21, pp. 147-149), apostrophes and possessive "-s" (Lesson 30, p. 206), quotation marks (Lesson 44, pp. 297-298), and question marks (Lesson 77, p. 122). The scope and sequence in Grade 1 includes capital and lowercase letters (Lesson 1), followed by commas (Lesson 11), ending punctuation (Lesson 12), quotation marks (Lesson 14), apostrophes (Lesson 15), and continued reinforcement of end punctuation (Lesson 17).

Adopters must ensure that additional high-quality materials are in place to provide students with opportunities to work with the conventions of print, syntax, and grammar. Without a complementary program, students will not receive the full range of instruction necessary to develop into skilled, proficient readers.

2E: Verbal Reasoning

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR VERBAL REASONING	SCORE
2.27: Inferencing strategies are not taught explicitly and may be based only on picture clues (i.e., picture walking), and not connecting them to background knowledge and instructional texts.	n/a
2.28: Students do not practice inferencing as a discrete skill.	n/a

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Saxon Reading Foundations’ practices related to Verbal Reasoning are not applicable. While students are asked to make predictions and answer inferential questions in the Understanding the Decodables section of the lesson plan, direct instruction on inference strategies and metacognition was not apparent. For that reason, adopters must ensure that additional high-quality materials are in place to teach students inferencing strategies and provide opportunities to practice inferring as a discrete skill. Without a complementary program, students will not receive the full range of instruction necessary to develop into skilled, proficient readers.

2F: Literacy Knowledge

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR LITERACY KNOWLEDGE	SCORE	
2.33: Genre types and features are not explicitly taught.	n/a	
2.34: Genre types and text structures (e.g., cause and effect, problem and solution, sequence, compare and contrast) are not used to understand the purpose of what is being read.	n/a	
2.35: Specific text structures and corresponding signal words are not explicitly taught and practiced.	n/a	

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Saxon Reading Foundations' practices for Literacy Knowledge are not applicable. Saxon Reading Foundations focuses on the word recognition components of skilled reading, including phonological awareness, decoding, sight recognition, and fluency. As such, instruction in genre types and text features is not the focus of this program. While the program's decodable texts include both narrative and expository/informational text, explicit instruction in genre types, text structures, and associated signal words is limited. For that reason, adopters must ensure that additional high-quality materials are in place to explicitly teach students about the various genre types and text structures, along with their corresponding signal words. Without a complementary program, students will not receive the full range of instruction necessary to develop into skilled, proficient readers.

SECTION 3: Reading Comprehension

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR READING COMPREHENSION	SCORE
3.1: Comprehension strategies such as identifying the main idea, summarizing, noting text structure, inferencing, and fix-ups are not taught and practiced throughout the year using a gradual release of responsibility (i.e., I do, we do, you do) using appropriate instructional text that students can accurately decode.	n/a
3.2: Students are asked to independently apply reading comprehension strategies primarily in short, disconnected readings at the expense of engaging in knowledge-building text sets.	n/a
3.3: Emphasis is on independent reading and book choice without engaging with complex texts.	n/a
3.4: Materials for comprehension instruction are predominantly predictable and/or leveled texts.	n/a
3.5: Students are not taught methods to monitor their comprehension while reading.	n/a

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Saxon Reading Foundations’ practices for Reading Comprehension are not applicable. Saxon Reading Foundations focuses on the word recognition components of skilled reading, including phonological awareness, decoding, sight recognition, and fluency. As such, students are not taught and do not practice comprehension-monitoring strategies such as identifying the main idea, summarizing, noting text structure, inferencing, and fix-ups throughout the year using a gradual release of responsibility (i.e., I do, we do, you do). Students are provided access to decodable texts that are approximately six to eight pages in length. The passages address a range of topics, many of which are fictional, but they lack complex text. Students are expected to read these decodables independently; however, reviewers found no evidence of student choice in reading materials. After reading, teachers pose comprehension questions, but students are not explicitly taught strategies to monitor their comprehension during reading. For that reason, adopters must ensure that additional high-quality materials are in place to explicitly teach students ways to monitor their reading comprehension. Without a complementary program, students will not receive the full range of instruction necessary to develop into skilled, proficient readers.

4A: Writing – Handwriting

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR HANDWRITING	SCORE	
4.1: No direct instruction in handwriting.	2	
4.2: Handwriting instruction is an isolated add-on.	2	

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Saxon Reading Foundations includes explicit instruction in handwriting and letter formation in kindergarten and Grade 1. For example, in Grade K, Lesson 1, the teacher introduces the lowercase letter “l” by modeling how to form it on handwriting lines. Students practice skywriting the letter in the air while the teacher demonstrates correct finger positioning and guides them with a verbal formation cue: “Pull straight down, stop” (p. 5). Students then repeat the motion and language to reinforce proper letter formation. Handwriting instruction in these grades is also paired with phoneme instruction. The program’s Handwriting Instruction Guide is designed to provide explicit, differentiated instruction in letter formation pathways that support and directly align with reading and spelling instruction. However, reviewers did not have access to this guide for their review. The team observed that in kindergarten, students receive more explicit handwriting instruction, while those in Grade 1 engage primarily in letter tracing tasks. In Grade 2, however, explicit handwriting instruction was not integrated into the program’s lessons, and handwriting activities were listed as optional. For example, in Grade 2, Lesson 84, students are asked to write sight words as an optional handwriting activity. Also in Grade 2, the teacher determines the choice of handwriting style. Although there may be disagreement about the appropriate style of handwriting to teach in second grade, this program accommodates most ideologies.

4B: Writing – Spelling

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR SPELLING	SCORE
4.5: There is no evidence of explicit spelling instruction, no spelling scope and sequence, or the spelling scope and sequence is not aligned with the phonics/decoding scope and sequence.	1
4.6: There is no evidence of phoneme segmentation or phoneme-grapheme mapping to support spelling instruction.	2
4.7: Patterns in decoding are not featured in encoding/spelling; spelling lists are based on content or frequency of word use and not connected to decoding/phonics lessons.	1
4.8: Students practice spelling by memorization only (e.g., rainbow writing, repeated writing, pyramid writing).	1
4.9: Spelling patterns for each phoneme are taught all at once (e.g., all spellings of long /ā/) instead of a systematic progression to develop automaticity with individual graphemes/phonemes.	1

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

In Saxon Reading Foundations, spelling instruction and assessment follow a systematic scope and sequence across Grades K-2. Evidence of phoneme-grapheme mapping was most strongly observed in kindergarten, where students engage in explicit phoneme-grapheme mapping through guided spelling and blending. For example, in Grade K, Lesson 14, the teacher leads students to isolate each phoneme in the word “nap” (/n/ /ă/ /p/), identify the corresponding letters, and write each grapheme to represent the sounds (Grade K Teacher Manual: Volume 1, p. 101). Students then blend the phonemes together to read the complete word. In Grade 1, explicit phoneme-grapheme mapping is used when students require support, but it is not systematically required for all learners. For example, in Grade 1, Lesson 32, teachers are prompted as follows: “If children need help, unblend the sounds and have them name and write the letter that makes each sound” (Grade 1 Teacher Manual: Volume 1, p. 323). As students progress to Grade 2, learners practice spelling and self-correction; however, lessons do not include explicit phoneme-grapheme mapping or sound segmentation to support spelling.

Patterns taught during the decoding portion of the lesson are featured in the encoding segment of the lesson plan. It should be noted that there are both decodable readers and fluency readers provided for student practice texts. The review team cautioned that the decoding and encoding scope and sequence aligns with the decodable readers and not the fluency readers, which is an important distinction for those implementing the curriculum.

Students do not practice spelling through rote memorization; rather, Saxon Reading Foundations emphasizes its coding approach that supports students in identifying and labeling various spelling patterns. This process encourages students to analyze words by marking orthographic features, promoting pattern recognition, and reinforcing letter-sound relationships. Finally, spelling patterns are taught in a systematic progression to develop automaticity with individual graphemes/phonemes. For example, in kindergarten, common long and short vowel spellings are taught together by grouping similar spelling patterns. However, the instructional sequence introduces long and short vowels in close succession. This pacing may be challenging for students who enter kindergarten with limited prior exposure to letters or sounds. Although the program includes scaffolds, such as daily review and visual coding, to support this progression, these scaffolds may require additional adjustment for students who join mid-year or enter the program in later grades.

4C: Writing – Composition

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR COMPOSITION	SCORE
4.15: Writing tasks and prompts are provided with minimal instruction for the skills needed to complete them and little time for planning prior to writing.	n/a
4.16: Writing assignments are primarily unstructured with few models or graphic organizers.	n/a
4.17: Conventions, grammar, and sentence structure are not explicitly taught, and opportunities for practice to develop automaticity are not provided; instead, they are addressed opportunistically.	n/a
4.18: Writing instruction and assignments are focused primarily on narrative writing or unstructured student choice.	n/a
4.19: Students are not taught the writing process (i.e., planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing).	n/a
4.20: Writing is taught as a standalone skill and is not used to further reading comprehension.	n/a

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Saxon Reading Foundations' practices for Writing Composition are not applicable. Saxon Reading Foundations focuses on the word recognition components of skilled reading, including phonological awareness, decoding, sight recognition, and fluency. As such, writing composition is not the focus of this program, and student writing only occurs during dictation and writing tasks. Any writing practice included occurs primarily at the sentence level, as students are asked to provide single-sentence responses to comprehension questions or compose sentences using previously discussed vocabulary. For that reason, adopters must ensure that additional high-quality materials are in place to explicitly teach students writing composition skills. Without a complementary program, students will not receive the full range of instruction necessary to develop into skilled, proficient readers and writers.

Findings:

COMPONENTS SUPPORTING ASSESSMENT

SECTION 5: Assessment

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

NON-NEGOTIABLES FOR ASSESSMENT	SCORE
5.1: Assessments measure comprehension only without additional assessment measures to determine what is leading to comprehension weaknesses (e.g., phonics, phoneme awareness, nonsense word fluency, decoding, encoding, fluency, vocabulary, listening comprehension).	1
5.2: Assessments include miscue analysis in which misread words are marked correct if the mistake does not substantially alter the meaning of the text.	1

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Saxon Reading Foundations includes the following measures of word recognition: the Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Preassessment, a phonics measure that students take at the beginning, middle, and end-of-the-year; phonics and spelling assessments, which occur every 5th lesson and include oral and written components; spelling tests; sight word evaluations; a listening, speaking, and discussion skills assessment; and fluency assessment measures. This is the cadence of assessments in Grades 1 and 2. Kindergarten has phonics and spelling assessments every 12 lessons.

Additionally, assessment measures do not allow for misreadings. The program states that “if children need help, unblend the sounds and have them name and write the letter that makes each sound” (Phonics Assessment Recording Form, p. vi). This is consistent throughout the grades.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR ASSESSMENT	SCORE	
5.6: Assessments result in benchmarks according to a leveled text gradient.	1	
5.7: Foundational skills assessments are primarily running records or similar assessments that are based on whole language or cueing strategies (e.g., read the word by looking at the first letter, use picture support for decoding).	1	
5.8: Phonics skills are not assessed.	1	
5.9: Phoneme awareness is not assessed.	1	
5.10: Decoding skills are assessed using real words only.	4	
5.11: Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) assessments are not used.	1	
5.12: The suite of assessments does not address aspects of language comprehension (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, listening comprehension).	n/a	
5.13: Multilingual Learners are not assessed in their home language.	4	

Evidence from the curriculum materials indicates the following:

Assessment results do not result in benchmarks according to a leveled-text gradient. The program recommends that teachers utilize its “Where Should They Be?” chart for support, reinforcement, and extension. Students receive support if they score below the grade-level and time-of-year benchmarks. The program states the following:

It is essential to begin exposing them to the skill(s) in various ways, ensuring they have the number of exposures needed to be successful readers. Have children practice where they see some success and slowly add more challenging items. (Teacher Assessment Workbook, p. viii)

Students who test at or above the target score for their grade level and time of year are directed to the reinforcement activities, while those who score higher than the grade-level target for the time of year should use the extension activities. Educators are also referred to the Resources for Differentiation Guide found on Heinemann’s Flight platform for specific directions and more information.

Foundational skills assessments do not take the form of running records, and, as stated previously, include the following measures: the Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Preassessment, a phonics measure that students take at the beginning, middle, and end-of-the-year, phonics and spelling assessments, which occur every 5th lesson and include oral and written components, spelling tests, sight word evaluations, a listening, speaking, and discussion skills assessment, and fluency assessment measures. However, reviewers noted that decoding skills are assessed using real words only, limiting insight into students' ability to apply their decoding skills to unfamiliar words. As a foundational skills program, Saxon Reading Foundations does not include measures to assess language comprehension; therefore, adopters would need to identify supplemental assessments to ensure comprehensive evaluation of students' language and reading comprehension skills. Finally, Saxon Reading Foundations does not include resources to assess multilingual learners in their home language. As such, educators would also need to look to outside assessment tools to ensure that multilingual learners are assessed in their home language. However, the team noted that this would most likely be the case with most core curricula programs.

Final Report Summary

Overall, the components reviewed for the Saxon Reading Foundations curriculum demonstrate strengths as well as areas that would benefit from further refinement. Continued attention to these elements can help ensure high-quality instruction across Grades K-5. While an evidence-aligned core curriculum is a critical part of any literacy program, it is no substitute for building a solid foundation of educator and leader knowledge in the science of reading, as well as a coaching system to support fidelity of implementation.

STRENGTHS

1. Saxon Reading Foundations' daily routines are clearly written and easy to follow. Reviewers noted that its scripting is a strength, especially for new educators, as it helps them follow and deliver its routines with ease. The team also noted that the program's ease of delivery helps learners succeed.
2. Saxon Reading Foundations places its scope and sequence at the front of each grade-level teacher manual. Reviewers noted that this intentional placement offers easy access, supporting efficient planning and streamlining daily lesson preparation.
3. Saxon Reading Foundations' materials are high-quality and thoughtfully designed. Reviewers highlighted the program's review card decks, including its letter cards and affix deck, as especially effective instructional resources. The program's student workbook pages were also named as a specific strength, as they were easy to remove, even by younger students.
4. Saxon Reading Foundations incorporates an effective spiraling design, ensuring that previously taught skills are systematically revisited and reinforced over time. Reviewers noted that the program intentionally builds in ample opportunities for distributed practice and cumulative review, allowing students to strengthen accuracy, build fluency, and apply new learning. This consistent revisiting of skills supports retention and promotes mastery rather than one-time exposure.
5. Reviewers felt that Saxon Reading Foundations was reasonable in terms of instructional timing within the school day. The daily lesson structure appears manageable and can be implemented within a typical literacy block without requiring excessive additional time. The pacing allows for explicit instruction, guided practice, and review while remaining realistic for classroom schedules that must also accommodate other subject areas and routines.

1. The coding component of Saxon Reading Foundations may be cumbersome in some classrooms and for certain students. While the explicit instruction is a clear strength, students are not only expected to demonstrate knowledge through accurate encoding and decoding but also to apply specific coding marks (e.g., breve, macron). While this is a strength of the program, reviewers noted that this additional layer of marking can present challenges, particularly when new students enter midyear and must learn both the content and the coding system simultaneously. There was also concern that teachers may become overly focused on the application of coding marks rather than prioritizing students' overall reading and spelling development.
2. While Saxon Reading Foundations integrates handwriting instruction alongside reading and introduces it explicitly in kindergarten, the instruction becomes less direct and systematic as students progress through the grades. Additionally, as each letter is introduced, students are taught to write both its uppercase and lowercase forms simultaneously. For some learners, this approach may increase cognitive load, particularly as they are still solidifying letter formation and sound-symbol connections.
3. Overall, reviewers responded positively to Saxon Reading Foundations' assessment system, noting that the available measures are clearly aligned to instruction and provide useful information about students' skill development. The team recommends incorporating clearer tools for ongoing progress monitoring of segmenting and blending phonemes, beginning earlier in kindergarten, to help teachers track growth over time, identify students in need of additional support, and provide explicit guidance on how to adjust instruction more responsively.
4. Because Saxon Reading Foundations does not present itself as a comprehensive literacy curriculum, some areas of instruction are limited or missing. Comprehension is addressed mainly through decodable texts, and vocabulary development is confined to words found in these readers. Students have limited opportunities for complex read-alouds or explicit comprehension strategy instruction. Basic grammar concepts (e.g., concepts of print and punctuation) are included, but instruction in broader language structures, such as parts of speech, was not evident. However, the team noted that, when taught in conjunction with a knowledge program and with teachers aware of the gaps, Saxon Reading Foundations has the potential to be effective for teaching students to read and write at a kindergarten skill level.
5. Saxon Reading Foundations' instructional sequence introduces long and short vowels in close succession. This pacing may be challenging for students who enter kindergarten with limited prior exposure to letters or sounds. Although the program includes scaffolds, such as daily review and visual coding, these supports may require additional adjustment for students who join mid-year or enter the program in later grades.

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PUBLISHER'S RESPONSE



Saxon Reading Foundations (2025)



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*.

