

What Works Clearinghouse



Wilson Reading System®

Effectiveness¹ No studies of the *Wilson Reading System*® that fall within the scope of the Students with Learning Disabilities review protocol meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The lack of studies meeting WWC evidence standards means that, at this time, the WWC is unable to draw any conclusions based on research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the *Wilson Reading System*® on students with learning disabilities.

Program Description² The *Wilson Reading System*® is a reading and writing program developed by Barbara Wilson and distributed by Wilson Language Training.³ It provides a curriculum for teaching reading and spelling to individuals of any age who have difficulty with written language. The *Wilson Reading System*® directly teaches the structure of words in the English language, aiming to help students learn the coding system for reading and spelling. The

program provides interactive lesson plans and uses a sequential system with extensive controlled text. The *Wilson Reading System*® is structured to progress from phoneme segmentation to more challenging tasks, and seeks to improve sight word knowledge, fluency, vocabulary, oral expressive language development, and reading comprehension.

1. The studies in this report were reviewed using WWC Evidence Standards, Version 2.0 (see the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Chapter III), as described in protocol Version 2.0.
2. The descriptive information for this program was obtained from a publicly available source: the program's website (<http://www.wilsonlanguage.com>, downloaded November 2009). The WWC requests developers to review the program description sections for accuracy from their perspective. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this program is beyond the scope of this review. The literature search reflects documents publicly available by November 2009.
3. The *Wilson Reading System*® is one of many curricula that are based, in part, on the principles of the sequential, multisensory Orton-Gillingham approach to teaching reading. Other WWC intervention reports related to the multisensory Orton-Gillingham approach include *Barton Reading & Spelling System*®, *Foundations*®, *Herman Method*™, *Orton-Gillingham-based Strategies (Unbranded)*, *Alphabetic Phonics*, *Project Read*®, and *Dyslexia Training Program*.

Program Description

(continued)

The WWC identified 28 studies of the *Wilson Reading System*® for students with learning disabilities that were published or released between 1989 and 2009.

Four studies are within the scope of the Students with Learning Disabilities review protocol but do not meet WWC evidence standards.

- One of these studies uses a quasi-experimental design in which the analytic intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent.
- For three studies, the measures of effectiveness cannot be attributed solely to the intervention, since there was only one unit assigned to one or both conditions.

Twenty-four studies are out of the scope of the Students with Learning Disabilities review protocol and are ineligible for review.

- Eight studies are not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention.
- Nine studies do not use a comparison group.
- Seven studies have samples that are not aligned with the protocol—for five studies, the sample does not include at least 50% students with learning disabilities, and two studies use samples outside of the age or grade range specified in the protocol.

References

Studies that fall outside the Students with Learning Disabilities review protocol or do not meet evidence standards

- Arndt, E. J. (2007). *Wilson Fluency/Basic*. Tallahassee, FL: Florida Center for Reading Research. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Brunner, N. (2005). The light bulb goes on. *NEA Today*, 23(8), 26–26. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol—the sample includes less than 50% students with learning disabilities.
- Brupbacher, J. M. (1999). A study of the literacy development of two adults with dyslexia. (Master's thesis, University of Houston–Clear Lake, 1999). *Masters Abstracts International*, 38(02), 107–322. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- Dellinger, K. A. (2003). *The effect of the Wilson Reading Program on spelling skills in an inclusive sixth grade setting*. Unpub-

lished master's thesis, Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol—the sample includes less than 50% students with learning disabilities.

- Dickson, S., & Bursack, W. D. (1999). Implementing a model for preventing reading failure: A report from the field. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 14, 191–202. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol—the sample includes less than 50% students with learning disabilities.
- Edgerton, M. A. (2000). The effectiveness of a staff development program: Training teachers to use a code-based, explicit, and systematic reading instruction program. (Doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 61(11A), 225–4337. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- Education Commission of the States. (1999). *Wilson Reading System*. Denver, CO: Author. The study is ineligible for review

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- because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Gorman, A. J. (1997). The 15% solution: Literacy and learning disabilities. *American Libraries*, 28(5), 52. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- Gustavson, K., & Watson, N. (1995). *Wilson Reading and Reading to Read*. Augusta, ME: Division of Adult & Community Education. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol—the sample is not within the specified age or grade range.
- Guyer, B. P., Banks, S. R., & Guyer, K. E. (1993). Spelling improvement for college students who are dyslexic. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 43, 186–193. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol—the sample is not within the specified age or grade range.
- Irvin, J. L. (2006). *A resource guide for adolescent literacy: Prepared for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation*. Tallahassee, FL: National Literacy Project. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Johnson, T. (2004). *Wilson Reading System*. Tallahassee, FL: Florida Center for Reading Research. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Lord, R. (2005). Why Johnny can read. *Pittsburgh Magazine*, 36(2), 76. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Lordi, D. L. (2004). The impact of a multi-sensory approach toward the improvement of reading and language processing skills in fourth- and fifth-grade students with specific reading difficulties and language processing disorders. (Doctoral dissertation, Union Institute and University, 2004). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 66(02A), 140–497. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- McKenna, B. J. (1999). *The satisfaction measure of parents with Wilson Reading Strategies as a reading instruction tool with their children*. Unpublished master's thesis, Centenary College, Hackettstown, NY. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- Moats, L. (1998). Reading, spelling, and writing disabilities in the middle grades. In B. Wong (Ed.), *Learning about learning disabilities*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Moccia, J. P. (2005). The influence of multi-sensory, multi-component reading intervention strategies with middle school poor readers. (Doctoral dissertation, Seton Hall University, 2005). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 67(08A), 77–2837. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because it uses a quasi-experimental design in which the analytic intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent.
- O'Connor, J., & Wilson, B. (1995). Effectiveness of the *Wilson Reading System* used in public school training. In C. McIntyre & J. Pickering (Eds.), *Clinical studies of multisensory structured language education*. Salem, OR: International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- Pang, R. V. (2007). *The effects of the Wilson Reading System and Foundations on the decoding skills of elementary students with reading disabilities*. Unpublished master's thesis, California State University–San Marcos. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- Potter, M. N. (1998). *Can students make decoding gains and build reading confidence by participating in a specialized reading program, utilizing the Wilson Reading System, and a “whole language” component?* Unpublished master's thesis, Gratz College, Melrose Park, PA. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.

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- Reuter, H. B. (2006). Phonological awareness instruction for middle school students with disabilities: A scripted multisensory intervention. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon, 2006). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 68(02A), 117–457. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because the measures of effectiveness cannot be attributed solely to the intervention—there was only one unit assigned to one or both conditions.
- Richer, D. E. (2004). *The effectiveness of the Wilson Reading System on word recognition of second and third grade special education resource students*. Unpublished master's thesis, Benedictine University, Lisle, IL. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because the measures of effectiveness cannot be attributed solely to the intervention—there was only one unit assigned to one or both conditions.
- Rosica, H. E. (2005). *The effectiveness of the Wilson Reading Program in improving spelling and decoding skills of a selected sample of special needs children*. Unpublished master's thesis, Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because the measures of effectiveness cannot be attributed solely to the intervention—there was only one unit assigned to one or both conditions.
- Torgesen, J., Schirm, A., Castner, L., Vartivarian, S., Mansfield, W., Myers, D., et al. (2007). *National assessment of Title I. Final report. Volume II: Closing the reading gap—findings from a randomized trial of four reading interventions for striving readers*. (NCEE 2008-4013). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol—the sample includes less than 50% students with learning disabilities.
- Additional source:**
- Torgesen, J., Myers, D., Schirm, A., Stuart, E., Vartivarian, S., Mansfield, W., et al. (2006). *National assessment of Title I: Interim report. Volume II: Closing the reading gap: First year findings from a randomized trial of four reading interventions for striving readers*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.
- Uhry, J. K., & Clark, D. B. (2004). *Dyslexia: Theory & practice of instruction (3rd ed.)*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Wilson, B. A. (1996). Teaching reading and spelling with the *Wilson Reading System* multisensory structured language techniques. In S. C. Russell (Ed.), “*Stars shine bright deep in the heart of LDA*”: *Poster session abstracts of the International Conference of the Learning Disabilities Association of America* (Vol. 5, pp. 21–22). Pittsburgh, PA: Learning Disabilities Association of America. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- Wilson, B. A. (1998). Matching student needs to instruction: Teaching reading and spelling using the *Wilson Reading System*. In S. A. Vogel & S. M. Reder (Eds.), *Learning disabilities, literacy, and adult education* (pp. 213–235). Baltimore, MD: P. H. Brookes Pub. Co. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Wood, F. (2002). *Wilson literacy solutions: Evidence of effectiveness. Wake Forest University 2002 data analysis*. Unpublished manuscript. The study is ineligible for review because the WWC could not confirm that at least 50% of the sample was classified as students with learning disabilities.