

The Spalding Method®

No studies of *The Spalding Method*® that fall within the scope of the Beginning Reading 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 Spalding Method*® on beginning readers. Additional research is needed to determine the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of this intervention.

Program Description¹

The Spalding Method® is a language arts program for grades K–6 that uses explicit, integrated instruction and multisensory techniques to teach spelling, writing, and reading. The program and its textbook, *The Writing Road to Reading*, provide 32 weeks of lesson plans. Students work on program materials in spelling, writing, and reading for 90–120 minutes every day.

During spelling instruction, students are taught how to use a basic marking system to connect speech sounds to print. They first separate words into syllables and mark them in notebooks, eventually forming a personal glossary of marked words. Spelling instruction focuses on teaching students how to read and write 70 common phonograms (sounds-symbols) and how to blend these phonograms into high-frequency words.

During writing instruction, students practice using these high-frequency words. The goal is to have students work their way up, from composing sentences and paragraphs, to writing stories, plays, poems, and research reports. To support this progression, writing lessons focus on types of writing and the attributes and structure of quality writing.

Finally, during reading instruction, lessons emphasize text structure, listening, and reading comprehension strategies. Students are encouraged to use what they have learned about other words to read new words. Reading selections are taken from classical literature, biography, poetry, and science.

This review of *The Spalding Method*® for Beginning Reading focuses on students in grades K–3.

Research²

The WWC identified 17 studies of *The Spalding Method*® for beginning readers that were published or released between 1983 and 2011.

Two studies are within the scope of the Beginning Reading review protocol but do not meet WWC evidence standards. Both studies use a quasi-experimental design but do not establish that the comparison group was comparable to the intervention group prior to the start of the intervention.

Twelve studies are out of the scope of the Beginning Reading review protocol because they have an ineligible study design.

- Three studies do not use a comparison group design, a regression discontinuity design, or a single-case design.
- Nine studies are literature reviews or meta-analyses.

Three studies are out of the scope of the Beginning Reading review protocol for reasons other than study design.

- One study does not include students in grades K–3, as specified in the protocol.
- One study includes fewer than 50% general education students.
- One study examined the intervention combined with other components, so it is not possible to isolate the effect of the intervention.

References

Studies that do not meet WWC evidence standards

Bitter, G., & White, M. A. (2010). *Final report: Evaluation study of the Writing Road to Reading*. Scottsdale: Arizona State University. 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.

Additional sources:

Bitter, G., Miron, D., & White, M. A. (2007). *Year one report: Evaluation study of the Writing Road to Reading*. Scottsdale: Arizona State University.

Bitter, G., Miron, D., & White, M. A. (2007). *Year one report summary: Evaluation study of the Writing Road to Reading*. Scottsdale: Arizona State University.

Bitter, G., & White, M. A. (2008). *Year two report: Evaluation study of the Writing Road to Reading*. Scottsdale: Arizona State University.

Bitter, G., & White, M. A. (2008). *Year two report summary: Evaluation study of the Writing Road to Reading*. Scottsdale: Arizona State University.

Bitter, G., & White, M. A. (2009). *Year three report: Evaluation study of the Writing Road to Reading*. Scottsdale: Arizona State University.

Bitter, G., & White, M. A. (2009). *Year three report summary: Evaluation study of the Writing Road to Reading*. Scottsdale: Arizona State University.

Bitter, G., & White, M. A. (2010). *Final summary report: Evaluation study of the Writing Road to Reading*. Scottsdale: Arizona State University.

Spalding Education International. (2004). *2004 special report: Spalding student achievement*. Phoenix, AZ: Author. 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.

Additional sources:

Spalding Education International. (n.d.) *Reading and language test scores*. Retrieved from <http://www.spalding.org/index.php?tname=research&p=testscores>.

Spalding Education International. (2001). *2001 special report: Spalding student achievement*. Phoenix, AZ: Author.

Spalding Education International. (2002). *2002 special report: Spalding student achievement*. Phoenix, AZ: Author.

Spalding Education International. (2003). *2003 special report: Spalding student achievement*. Phoenix, AZ: Author.

Studies that are ineligible for review using the Beginning Reading Evidence Review Protocol

Aaron, P. G., Joshi, R. M., Gooden, R., & Bentum, K. E. (2008). Diagnosis and treatment of reading disabilities based on the component model of reading: An alternative to the discrepancy model of LD. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 41*(1), 67–84. The study is ineligible for review because it does not disaggregate findings for the age or grade range specified in the protocol.

Aukerman, R. (1984). *Approaches to beginning reading* (pp. 535–546). New York: John Wiley and Sons. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.

Farnham-Diggory, S. (1992). *Cognitive processes in education* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.

Hammond, L. (1998). *An examination of four reading programs: Letterland, the Spalding Method (incorporating the Sound Way Program), Direct Instruction Reading, THRASS (Teaching Handwriting, Reading And Spell-*

- ing Skills) to teach beginning literacy in the Kimberley education district.* Broome, W. A., Australia: Kimberley District Education Office. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine an intervention implemented in a way that falls within the scope of the review—the intervention is bundled with other components.
- Hoerl, M. F., & Koons, D. (1995). Effect of Spalding multisensory phonics instruction on the literacy skills of high school special education students. In C. W. McIntyre & J. S. Pickering (Eds.), *Clinical studies of multi-sensory structured language education for students with dyslexia and related disorders* (pp. 225–230). Salem, OR: International Multisensory Language Education Council. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.
- McEwan, E. (1998). *The principal's guide to raising reading achievement*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press, Inc. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Norsworthy, S. (1999). The Spalding Writing Road to Reading. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 4(3), 21–26. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.
- North, M. (1992). The Writing Road to Reading: From theory to practice. *Annals of Dyslexia: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the Orton Dyslexia Society*, 42(1), 110–123. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- North, M. (1995). *The Writing Road to Reading*. Jolimont, Australia: Institute of Public Affairs, Education Policy Unit. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol—the sample includes less than 50% general education students.
- Ritchey, K. D., & Goeke, J. L. (2006). Orton-Gillingham and Orton-Gillingham-based reading instruction: A review of the literature. *The Journal of Special Education*, 40(3), 171–183. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Slavin, R. E., Cheung, A., Groff, C., & Lake, C. (2008). Effective reading programs for middle and high schools: A best-evidence synthesis. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 43(3), 290–322. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Slavin, R. E., Lake, C., Chambers, B., Cheung, A., & Davis, S. (2009). Effective reading programs for the elementary grades: A best-evidence synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(4), 1391–1466. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Slavin, R. E., Lake, C., Davis, S., & Madden, N. A. (2009). *Effective programs for struggling readers: A best evidence synthesis*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Spalding Education International. (n.d.). *Spalding school accreditation*. Retrieved from <http://www.spalding.org/index.php?tname=home&p=accreditation>. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.
- Wilson, J., & Colmar, S. (2008). Re-evaluating the significance of phonemic awareness and phonics in literacy teaching: The shared role of school counselors and teachers. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counseling*, 18(2), 89–105. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.

Endnotes

¹ The descriptive information for this program was obtained from a publicly available source: the program's website (<http://www.spalding.org>, downloaded January 2012). The WWC requests developers to review the program description sections for accuracy from their perspective. The program description was provided to the developer in May 2012, and we incorporated feedback from the developer. 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 December 2011.

² The studies in this report were reviewed using WWC Evidence Standards, version 2.1, as described in the Beginning Reading review protocol, version 2.0. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.

Recommended Citation

U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse. (2012, October). *Beginning Reading intervention report: The Spalding Method*[®]. Retrieved from <http://whatworks.ed.gov>.

Glossary of Terms

Attrition	Attrition occurs when an outcome variable is not available for all participants initially assigned to the intervention and comparison groups. The WWC considers the total attrition rate and the difference in attrition rates across groups within a study.
Clustering adjustment	If intervention assignment is made at a cluster level and the analysis is conducted at the student level, the WWC will adjust the statistical significance to account for this mismatch, if necessary.
Confounding factor	A confounding factor is a component of a study that is completely aligned with one of the study conditions, making it impossible to separate how much of the observed effect was due to the intervention and how much was due to the factor.
Design	The design of a study is the method by which intervention and comparison groups were assigned.
Domain	A domain is a group of closely related outcomes.
Effect size	The effect size is a measure of the magnitude of an effect. The WWC uses a standardized measure to facilitate comparisons across studies and outcomes.
Eligibility	A study is eligible for review and inclusion in this report if it falls within the scope of the review protocol and uses either an experimental or matched comparison group design.
Equivalence	A demonstration that the analysis sample groups are similar on observed characteristics defined in the review area protocol.
Extent of evidence	An indication of how much evidence supports the findings. The criteria for the extent of evidence levels are given in the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 2.1).
Improvement index	Along a percentile distribution of students, the improvement index represents the gain or loss of the average student due to the intervention. As the average student starts at the 50th percentile, the measure ranges from -50 to +50.
Multiple comparison adjustment	When a study includes multiple outcomes or comparison groups, the WWC will adjust the statistical significance to account for the multiple comparisons, if necessary.
Quasi-experimental design (QED)	A quasi-experimental design (QED) is a research design in which subjects are assigned to intervention and comparison groups through a process that is not random.
Randomized controlled trial (RCT)	A randomized controlled trial (RCT) is an experiment in which investigators randomly assign eligible participants into intervention and comparison groups.
Rating of effectiveness	The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in each domain based on the quality of the research design and the magnitude, statistical significance, and consistency in findings. The criteria for the ratings of effectiveness are given in the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 2.1).
Single-case design	A research approach in which an outcome variable is measured repeatedly within and across different conditions that are defined by the presence or absence of an intervention.
Standard deviation	The standard deviation of a measure shows how much variation exists across observations in the sample. A low standard deviation indicates that the observations in the sample tend to be very close to the mean; a high standard deviation indicates that the observations in the sample tend to be spread out over a large range of values.
Statistical significance	Statistical significance is the probability that the difference between groups is a result of chance rather than a real difference between the groups. The WWC labels a finding statistically significant if the likelihood that the difference is due to chance is less than 5% ($p < 0.05$).
Substantively important	A substantively important finding is one that has an effect size of 0.25 or greater, regardless of statistical significance.

Please see the [WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook \(version 2.1\)](#) for additional details.