

ABOUT THE PRESENTATION:

This session explores the most up-to-date research on phonemic awareness and phonics—two essential components of literacy that are often misunderstood, undertaught, or taught based on outdated research. First, participants will review the distinction between phonemic awareness and phonics, and why both matter deeply, especially for students with dyslexia and other reading challenges. Then, the "How" portion of Structured Literacy will be presented. With reading difficulties affecting an estimated 1 in 5 students, it is critical to provide instruction that is explicit, systematic, cumulative, and data-driven. Next, participants will learn about the distinction between speech to print and print to speech and why speech to print is a superior approach.

Findings from "Teaching Phonemic Awareness in 2024: A Guide for Educators" by Ashby et al., which include the most current research on effective phonemic awareness instruction, will be discussed next. Some essential findings include: utilizing one routine for blending and segmenting, getting students to the phoneme level as soon as possible, and how to adapt scripted curricula to best meet the needs of students.

Finally, I will shift to phonics instruction, emphasizing evidence-based practices including effective word building, decodable text routines, and integration with spelling and writing. We will look at what structured literacy looks like in action and how these methods support students with dyslexia, ELL, and students with attention and/or executive functioning challenges.

Participants will leave with a set of tools, routines, and downloadable resources to strengthen their instruction.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Compare current teaching practices to most up-to-date research for both phonemic awareness and phonics.
- Explain the benefits of a speech-to-print instructional approach and describe how it supports more effective phoneme-grapheme mapping compared to traditional print-to-speech methods.
- Design and implement daily instructional routines for phonemic awareness and phonics that are explicit, systematic, and grounded in the latest research.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Sarah Cooley holds a Ph.D. and M.Ed. in Curriculum & Instruction with a specialization in Literacy from the University of Akron, and a B.S. in Early Childhood Education from Miami University. She is finishing requirements toward achieving a Structured Literacy Dyslexia Interventionist certification through CERI. She began her career as a first-grade teacher before pursuing a Ph.D. which has led to teaching future teachers. She is now assistant project director for the Center for Structured Literacy at the University of Akron and a senior lecturer teaching undergraduate and graduate literacy education courses in the LeBron James Family Foundation School of Education. She is passionate about helping teachers become effective literacy educators and sharing her love of reading.

Sarah Cooley holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum & Instruction with a specialization in Literacy from the University of Akron, and a B.S. in Early Childhood Education from Miami University. She is working toward a Structured Literacy Dyslexia Interventionist certification through CERI. She began her career as a first-grade teacher. She is now assistant director for the Center for Structured Literacy at the University of Akron and a senior lecturer teaching literacy education courses. She is also a literacy coach, partnering with teachers to examine their practices and modify instruction to align with structured literacy techniques.



Sarah Cooley, Ph.D.

Sound Foundations: The Latest Research of Teaching Phonemic Awareness and Phonics to Empower All Learners