Orton-Gillingham

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The Orton-Gillingham Approach to reading instruction was developed in the early-20th century.

It is language-based, multisensory, structured, sequential, cumulative, cognitive, and flexible.[1]

The Orton-Gillingham Approach has been in use since the 1930s. An intensive, sequential phonics-based system teaches the basics of word formation before whole meanings. The method accommodates and utilizes the three learning modalities, or pathways, through which people learn—visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Unlike some scripted and rigid reading programs, the Orton-Gillingham Approach is a system that allows for flexibility.

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Orton and Gillingham

Samuel Torrey Orton (1879–1948), a neuropsychiatrist and pathologist at Columbia University, brought together neuroscientific information and principles of remediation. As early as the 1920s, he had extensively studied children with the kind of language processing difficulties now commonly associated with dyslexia and had formulated a set of teaching principles and practices for such children.

Anna Gillingham (1878–1963) was an educator and psychologist at Teachers College, Columbia University. Working with Dr. Orton, she trained teachers and compiled and published instructional materials. Gillingham combined Orton’s teaching methods with her analysis of the structure of the English/American language and with Bessie Stillman, she wrote what has become the Orton–Gillingham manual: Remedial Training for Children with Specific Disability in Reading, Spelling and Penmanship. First published in 1935/6, this work is updated and republished regularly.
Features of the Approach

**Language-based:** The Orton-Gillingham approach is based on a technique of studying and teaching language, understanding the nature of human language, the mechanisms involved in learning, and the language-learning processes in individuals.

**Multisensory:** Orton-Gillingham teaching sessions are action-oriented and involve constant interaction between the teacher and the student and the simultaneous use of multiple sensory input channels reinforcing each other for optimal learning. Using auditory, visual, and kinesthetic elements, all language skills taught are reinforced by having the student listen, speak, read and write. For example, a dyslexic learner is taught to see the letter A, say its name and sound and write it in the air – all at the same time. The approach requires intense instruction with ample practice. The use of multiple input channels is thought to enhance memory storage and retrieval by providing multiple "triggers" for memory.[2]

**Structured, Sequential, and Cumulative:** The Orton-Gillingham teacher introduces the elements of the language systematically. Sound-symbol associations along with linguistic rules and generalizations are introduced in a linguistically logical, understandable order. Students begin by reading and writing sounds in isolation. Then they blend the sounds into syllables and words. Students learn the elements of language—consonants, vowels, [digraphs](#), blends, and [diphthongs](#)—in an orderly fashion. They then proceed to advanced structural elements such as syllable types, roots, and affixes. As students learn new material, they continue to review old material to the level of automaticity. The teacher addresses vocabulary, sentence structure, composition, and reading comprehension in a similar structured, sequential, and cumulative manner.

**Cognitive:** Students learn about the history of the English language and study the many generalizations and rules that govern its structure. They also learn how best they can learn and apply the language knowledge necessary for achieving reading and writing competencies.

**Flexible:** Orton-Gillingham teaching is diagnostic and prescriptive in nature. Teachers try to ensure the learner is not simply recognising a pattern and applying it without understanding. When confusion of a previously taught rule is discovered, it is re-taught from the beginning.

Research support

The system has been supported by multiple studies,[3] though some research has shown contradictory results.

The Florida Center for Reading Research reported in 2006 that it was unable to identify any empirical studies examining the efficacy of the approach specifically as described in Orton-Gillingham training materials. Thus there was no direct research evidence to determine its
effectiveness, although there are a variety of studies of derivative methods that incorporate aspects of Orton-Gillingham in combination with other techniques. [4]

An overview of all reported studies of Orton-Gillingham derivative methods, such as Alphabetic Phonics or Project Read, revealed only a dozen studies with inconsistent results and a variety of methodological flaws. Despite these conclusions, the article does provide a detailed overview of the available research, which viewed most favorably would show some evidence of benefit from classroom use of OG methods with first graders, and use in special education or resource room settings with older children with learning disabilities. [5]

In July 2010, a US Department of Education agency reported that it could not find any studies meeting its evidence standards to support the efficacy of Orton-Gillingham based strategies. [6] One study found it was effective for students who were English Language Learners. [7]

A longitudinal study found it more effective than the Wilson reading system, because unlike Wilson the Orton-Gillingham does not focus on a small subset of students, [8] allows for flexibility of approach, and is understood better by students.

Another study noted gains in California Achievement Test scores when students used the system, as opposed to the Wilson Reading System. [9][10]

Research has indicated the system is effective in remediating instruction for students with dyslexia. [11] Although further research mentions that its efficacy is yet to be determined. [12]

**AOGPE Accredited Schools**

From the Spring 2007 Academy News, the publication of the *Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators*, the following is a list of AOGPE accredited schools:

- Assets School, Honolulu, Hawaii [1]
- Camperdown Academy, Greenville, South Carolina [2]
- The Carroll School, Lincoln, Massachusetts [3]
- The Kildonan School, Amenia, New York [5]
- Marburn Academy, Columbus, Ohio [6]
- Pine Ridge School, Willison, Vermont [7]
- Riverside School, Richmond, Virginia [8]
- Sandhills School, Columbia, South Carolina [9]
- Schenck School, Atlanta, Georgia [10]
- Trident Academy, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina [11]
- The Hamilton School, Providence, Rhode Island [12]
References

2. The Orton-Gillingham approach. J. L. Orton… - 1966 - Orton Dyslexia Society