

Not all reading tutors are the same. Many still use outdated methods like guessing strategies, picture clues, or memorizing whole words. A Science of Reading-aligned tutor uses evidence-based, structured literacy practices that teach your child how the reading brain works — through explicit, systematic phonics instruction. Here's what to look for.

Questions to Ask a Potential Tutor

- ? "What reading programs or methods do you use?"
Look for: UFLI Foundations, Orton-Gillingham, Wilson Reading, Barton, Heggerty, or other structured literacy programs.
- ? "How do you teach phonics?"
They should describe explicit, systematic instruction — teaching sounds and letter patterns in a clear, sequential order.
- ? "Do you assess before starting?"
A qualified tutor will use diagnostic assessments (PAST, DIBELS, or phonics surveys) to pinpoint exactly where your child needs help.
- ? "How do you track progress?"
Expect regular data collection and progress monitoring, not just "they seem to be improving."
- ? "What is your training background?"
Look for certifications or coursework in structured literacy, Orton-Gillingham, or Science of Reading methodology.

What a Session Should Include

- Phonemic awareness — blending, segmenting, and manipulating individual sounds in words
- Phonics / Word study — explicit teaching of letter-sound relationships and decoding patterns
- Connected text practice — reading decodable texts that match the patterns being taught
- Encoding (spelling) — writing words using the same sound-spelling patterns being learned
- Fluency building — repeated reading practice for accuracy and automaticity

Green Flags — Signs of a Strong Tutor

- ✓ Uses a structured, sequential phonics scope and sequence
- ✓ Teaches phonemic awareness explicitly (not just "listen to the sounds")
- ✓ Uses decodable texts matched to skills being taught
- ✓ Shows you data and progress reports regularly
- ✓ Can explain why they use each strategy
- ✓ Holds certifications in structured literacy or SoR methods
- ✓ Adjusts instruction based on your child's assessment data

Red Flags — Warning Signs to Watch For

- ✗ Relies on leveled readers instead of decodable texts
- ✗ Teaches children to guess words from pictures or context
- ✗ Uses "three-cueing" (MSV) strategies
- ✗ Cannot name or describe a phonics scope and sequence
- ✗ No formal assessment before starting instruction
- ✗ Says "every child learns differently" to avoid systematic methods
- ✗ Focuses only on sight word memorization without phonics

Remember

Your child's reading difficulty is not a reflection of intelligence. With the right instruction, nearly every child can learn to read. A qualified, Science of Reading-aligned tutor will meet your child exactly where they are and build skills systematically. Trust your instincts — if something doesn't feel right about the instruction your child is receiving, ask questions and seek a second opinion.

Your Child Deserves Evidence-Based Reading Instruction

For expert literacy support, tutoring, or to learn more about the Science of Reading:
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