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Learning Success Starts Here

What Is *Funnix?*

Funnix is a web-based reading program designed to teach your child to read as efficiently as possible. Based on the internationally renowned [Direct Instruction](#) programs created by [Siegfried (Zig) Engelmann](#), *Funnix* provides individualized instruction that will have your child reading fluently in just a few months.

Funnix Beginning Reading (120 lessons) starts with a placement test, then teaches all the foundational and pre-reading skills and systematically builds on these. By the end of *Funnix* Beginning Reading, children are reading at a solid first-grade level. *Funnix 2* (100 lessons) introduces more sophisticated decoding strategies, expands children's comprehension skills, and teaches children how to decode text containing questions, apostrophes, and ellipses. Children who complete *Funnix 2* will be reading at a beginning third-grade level.

How Does *Funnix* Work?

Funnix is a web-based app: All *Funnix* materials are available in the *Funnix* web app, including placement materials and tests, 220 lessons, a Teacher's Guide, downloadable worksheets, and instructions for implementing the program.

To use the program, parents/instructors log in to our site/app, open a lesson, and start teaching! The parent/ instructor prints the worksheet, sits with the child in front of the computer monitor, and controls the mouse. The *Funnix* narrator presents tasks in a fast-paced sequence—the same way a good teacher would —and the child responds. The parent/instructor gives feedback, confirms correct responses, and provides the correct answer if the child makes a mistake. Toward the end of each lesson, the child will complete narrator-guided writing tasks on the worksheet.

Each *Funnix* lesson takes 25 to 30 minutes to complete, and best results are achieved with 4 to 5 sessions per week.

History of **Direct Instruction** and *Funnix*

The roots of the *Funnix* program go back to the 1960s when Zig Engelmann—then based at the University of Illinois—created an explicit, carefully sequenced teaching model known as Direct Instruction. (The American Institutes for Research has ranked Direct Instruction as one of only two school-wide teaching approaches that have substantial evidence of effectiveness.) Over the next decades, Engelmann authored more than 100 instructional programs, all field-tested and revised to make sure that they worked, and worked well, before they were published. This body of work includes the highly successful Reading Mastery series, which has been used around the globe for over 50 years.

In 1998, Owen Engelmann (Zig's son) decided to develop a computer-based homeschool reading program. Owen and Zig adapted work from previously published programs into a digital visual presentation for the computer, and *Funnix* was born. Owen and Zig decided the *Funnix* program would carry on the Engelmann tradition of field-testing and revising everything that's taught.
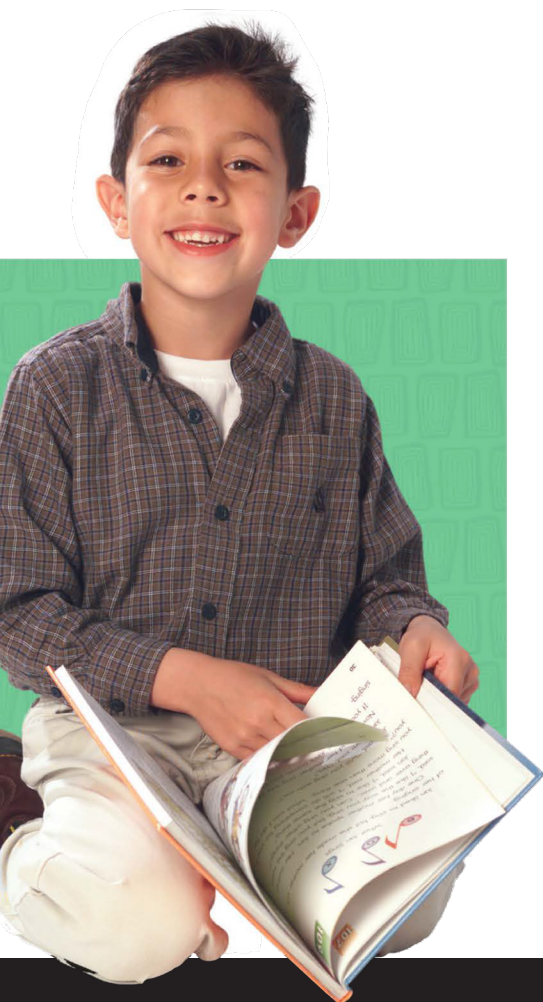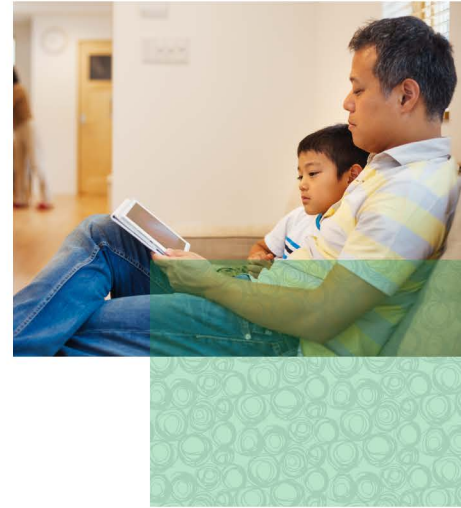
Design

Funnix lessons are designed so that about 10% of each lesson presents new material—the rest is review and practice of material taught earlier. In each lesson, the child first works on letter sounds, then reads words that are in lists, and then reads a new story that is composed entirely of words that have been practiced in word lists in earlier exercises and lessons. The story is presented twice. On the first reading of stories in *Funnix* Beginning Reading, only the text is shown on the screen. On the first reading of stories in *Funnix 2*, children read the text in their reader. The second reading (in both *Funnix* Beginning Reading and *Funnix 2*) presents an illustrated version, sometimes with captions and with characters' speech in "balloons." The narrator asks questions about the events and points out things to the child. Children look forward to the entertaining pictures and to the small, unpredictable variations between the first reading and the second reading of the story. Some second-readings present animation.

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Research

The *Funnix* program has been effective for tens of thousands of teachers, homeschooling parents, and children. *Funnix* employs all the tools deemed most effective in beginning-reading programs:

Phonics:

Research shows that the most effective programs teach explicit phonics. The *Funnix* program is designed so children initially learn only one sound for each letter. Exceptions and letter combinations are systematically and gradually introduced. *Funnix* presents prompts that show children how to read some letter combinations. These prompts replace "phonics rules," which children in other programs recite but often fail to understand or apply.

ai   oa   ea   ar

For instance, in *Funnix,* the letter combinations **ai**, **oa**, **ea**, and **ar** are initially underlined and one letter is blue. The blue letter in these combinations is the silent letter. Children are taught that the blue letter doesn't make a sound, but the black letter says its name. In *sail* the **i** in **ai** is blue. The **a** is black and says its name. The sound for the combination **ai** is the letter name **a**. The sound for the combination **oa** is the letter name **o**. The sound for the combination **ea** is the letter name **e**. The blue letter in the combination **ar** is **a**, so the sound for the combination **ar** is the letter name **r**.

The same blue-letter prompt applies to final-**e** words and other words in which the combination is "split up," such as in words like *mile* and *cake*. The **e** at the end of the word is blue, so it doesn't make a sound. But another letter in the word (a, e, i, o, or u) says its name. The word is *mile*, not *mill*. After children have read a word with prompts quite a few times, the prompts are gradually and systematically dropped.

Phonological Skills:

Research also shows that children who learn "phonological" pre-reading skills learn to read more easily. Phonological skills involve spoken words and sounds, not written words. For example, the teacher says a word a sound at a time: mmm-aaa-t. The child says it fast: "Mat." *Funnix* Beginning Reading presents the full range of phonological tasks—verbal blending, saying words a part at a time (which is a useful spelling skill), and rhyming. The early lessons present phonological tasks in connection with all the early words children will read in later lessons, so the students have all the foundation skills necessary to "sound out" a word and then "say it fast."

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Decodable Text:

Research says that the stories children read should have "decodable texts," which means that the instructional sequence should first teach the words that will appear in a story before the story is presented. All the stories in *Funnix* are composed entirely of words that have been taught earlier in the program. This design feature ensures that when children read a story, they will be able to concentrate more on comprehending the story rather than trying to decode unfamiliar words and attend to story events at the same time.

Cumulative Reviews:

Research shows that material should have "cumulative reviews" of what has been taught. All programs that Engelmann developed have pioneered this concept since the late 1960s. The *Funnix* program is no different from other DI programs. All material that is taught in the *Funnix* reading program is reviewed or integrated into other task-sequences to ensure children master the material and retain what they've learned.

Automaticity:

Research shows that skills like reading should present enough repetition and practice that children achieve a high level of "automaticity," which means that they receive enough practice to automatically recognize words without sounding them out. *Funnix* Beginning Reading systematically teaches fluency strategies, and *Funnix 2* provides ample practice applying the strategies and integrating them with strategies for reading with expression.

Is *Funnix* for You?

The *Funnix* reading program has tools that enable average adults to teach like effective reading instructors, and the program enables experienced teachers to teach reading skills to all children better than ever before. Because of the nature of explicit phonics instruction, this program, like Reading Mastery, also meets the needs of English language learners—but *Funnix* (unlike other reading programs) has built-in, inexhaustible, always positive, native-speaking narrators!

Funnix.com provides more details on the program, the authors, and the research that validates the program. Visitors may view a sample lesson and an alphabet-game placement test. This game can also teach the letter names that are used early in the *Funnix* sequence. For answers to instructional or technical questions, contact our developers or a *Funnix* team member at (866) 732-3963 or email: fun@funnix.com.

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