

# **Wilson Reading System®**

**Adapted for Students who are  
Blind and Visually Impaired**

By Perkins School for the Blind



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# Table of Contents

<b>Section I:</b> Introduction .....	7
<b>A.</b> Overview of the Wilson Reading System®	
<b>B.</b> History of Perkins Project and Experience	
<b>C.</b> Wilson Language Training®	
<b>Section II:</b> How to Incorporate Braille Contractions ...	8
<b>A.</b> How Information is Presented in Braille	
<b>B.</b> When and Where to Teach Contractions	
<b>Section III:</b> Adaptations .....	10
<b>A.</b> Utilizing Braille Dots to Represent Color-Coding of Sound Cards	
<b>B.</b> Utilizing Student Notebooks	
<b>Section IV:</b> Expansion of the Program for Early Braille Learners .....	12
<b>A.</b> Utilizing Objects to Represent Keywords	
<b>B.</b> Multiple-Choice Comprehension Worksheets	
<b>C.</b> Supplemental Braille Skill Worksheets	
<b>D.</b> Wilson Reading System® Student Workbooks	
<b>Section V:</b> Miscellaneous Tips and Information .....	16
<b>A.</b> Organizing Materials and Work Spaces	
<b>B.</b> Timing/Scheduling Issues	
<b>C.</b> Collaborating with Other Professionals	
<b>Section VI:</b> Conclusion .....	19
<b>Appendix</b> .....	20



## **Section I: Introduction**

### **A. Overview of the Wilson Reading System®**

The Wilson Reading System (WRS), written by Barbara A. Wilson and first published in 1988 is a reading instruction program based on Orton-Gillingham philosophy and principles, as well as phonological coding research. Reading instruction is focused on the alphabetic principle of sound/symbol knowledge, phonemic awareness, segmentation skills, word structure/analysis knowledge (phonics), reading accuracy, fluency, comprehension, and spelling. This approach to reading instruction was supported by the National Reading Panel Report (2000), sponsored by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the U.S. Department of Education. The WRS is characterized by direct teaching of rules and concepts. It is a highly structured 12-step program with each substep introduced through a 10-part lesson plan. A cumulative and multi-sensory program, this system has been successfully implemented in public and private schools, clinics, and adult education classes across the country. Numerous publications, studies, and citations have reflected the success of this reading program.

### **B. History of Perkins Project and Experience**

The use of the WRS at the Perkins School for the Blind began as various teachers tried to find alternative teaching methods for students who were struggling to learn to read. Training from the Wilson Language Training Corporation took place on the Perkins campus. With a grant from the American Foundation for the Blind, print materials from the Wilson Reading System® were transcribed into

braille. Instruction was provided to various students who ranged in age from eight to 19 years. Teachers and parents were pleased to see the students begin to make progress and feel success in their reading abilities. The information provided in this pamphlet is the result of the experience gained as Perkins used this program with braille readers.

### **C. Wilson Language Training®**

Perkins School for the Blind wants to emphasize that formal training through the Wilson Language Training Corporation was critical to the success of this endeavor. Wilson's staff has continued to support Perkins and this contact has been extremely helpful. It is strongly recommended that all teachers interested in using this program participate in formal WRS Level I Certification. Please contact the Wilson Language Training Corporation at (800) 899-8454 or [www.WilsonLanguage.com](http://www.WilsonLanguage.com) to learn more about their training opportunities.

## **Section II: How to Incorporate Braille Contractions**

### **A. How Information is Presented in Braille**

The WRS provides practice in both reading and spelling with controlled text. This means that all words presented to students will only contain elements of specific sounds and word structure that have been previously taught. This essential component helps students experience success from the start of the program and continue to build success and confidence as they move forward. The amount of controlled text incorporated in this program was one of the biggest obstacles to utilizing this program



with braille readers because of the time and expense incurred while translating the texts into braille. As Perkins School for the Blind began this lengthy process through trial, practice, and revisions, the following techniques were incorporated into the braille version of the Wilson Reading System®.

When using word cards (part 3 of the WRS Lesson Plan), both contracted and uncontracted braille are presented. On the word cards, uncontracted braille is presented first then contracted braille is placed underneath. The braille is written this way because as the student progresses through the program, he/she needs the opportunity to see the spelling of words to determine syllable types and learn how to divide words into their syllabic parts in order to decode. This same practice is used when spelling dictation is given (part 8 of the WRS Lesson Plan). Students spell words in both uncontracted braille and in contracted braille. Cards with Nonsense Words are only formatted in uncontracted braille.

When using the magnetic tiles, you will note that there are two tiles for letter combinations that contain a contraction. One tile is in uncontracted braille and one tile is in contracted braille. Each tile has the upper right corner clipped to help the student orient the tile. For tiles that contain a braille contraction both the upper right and upper left corners have been clipped.

All Student Readers, workbooks, and supplemental worksheets are formatted in contracted braille. This is the format in which braille readers will access written information. The exceptions are nonsense words

and exercises in which spelling and pronunciation is pertinent. These exercises are written in uncontracted braille. When students write sentences for dictation in part 8 of the Wilson Reading System<sup>®</sup> Lesson Plan, they are asked to use contracted braille. In this way, they are consistently using contracted braille, which is necessary for everyday literacy.

## **B. When and Where to Teach Contractions**

The WRS uses a consistent 10-part lesson plan every time students receive instruction. Parts 1 through 5 emphasize decoding and parts 6 through 8 emphasize encoding or spelling. Part 9 addresses reading fluency and comprehension of controlled passages. Part 10 develops listening comprehension.

Perkins' teachers have found it easy to incorporate braille contraction instruction right from the beginning of the program. Introduce and teach specific contractions as they occur for each substep in the WRS Student Reader. Please refer to the appendix, which lists the contractions found in each substep of the Wilson Reading System<sup>®</sup> Student Readers. It is suggested that new contractions be taught during part 2 of the WRS Lesson Plan. Contractions along with sight words should be reviewed prior to reading sentences and stories.

## **Section III: Adaptations**

### **A. Utilizing Braille Dots to Represent Color-Coding of Sound Cards**

The WRS uses color-coded sound cards and magnetic

tiles to help students understand and recognize the structure or building blocks of the different syllable types. To make this information available to students with visual impairments who cannot access this color-coded system, Perkins has created the following system to provide the braille reader with the same information tactually:

- For the ivory colored consonant cards, braille dot 1 is left justified at the top of the card. The upper right corner is clipped to help the student orient the card or tile.
- For the salmon colored vowel cards, two braille dot 1s are left justified at the top of the card. The upper right corner is clipped to help the student orient the card or tile.
- For the light-green colored “welded” sound cards, three braille dot 1s are left justified at the top of the card. The upper right corner is clipped to help the student orient the card or tile.

## **B. Utilizing Student Notebooks**

The Wilson Reading System<sup>®</sup> uses a personal student notebook for students as they progress through the program. The notebook is a reference tool that the student can use at any time. The notebook contains five sections: sounds, syllables, spelling rules, sight words, and vocabulary.

For older students, electronic note-takers can be used to create a student notebook. This is more successful if the student is using an electronic note-taker with speech

capabilities. To make sure the information is recorded accurately, it may be necessary for the teacher to enter the information into the computer file for the student. For younger students or students with weak computer skills, the instructor can put together a notebook for the student in braille. Small objects that represent the keywords can be incorporated into this notebook system.

In addition to the sections of the student notebook that Wilson Reading System® recommends, Perkins suggests adding an additional section that contains braille contraction information. This can be included as either a separate section or within the sight vocabulary section.

## **Section IV:** Expansion of the Program for Early Braille Learners

### **A.** Utilizing Objects to Represent Keywords

The WRS uses keywords to help students identify and remember the correct pronunciation of sounds and the corresponding letter/s. The program directs students to create pictures of keywords and include them in their student notebooks to help recall words and sounds as needed. To provide the same information to students with visual impairments, teachers used small objects to represent this information tactually.

When selecting objects for keywords, the following criteria are suggested:

1. Select objects that have interesting textures that will stimulate the students' interest.
2. Select objects that can be discriminated tactually

from the other objects that represent keywords.

3. Select objects that are durable or easily replaced. The same objects need to be used throughout the length of the program.
4. Select objects that are small and similar in size for ease in storage and portability. These objects may be included as part of the student notebook.
5. Select objects that will help the student memorize the keyword. The object does not necessarily have to be a real or concrete representation of the keyword. Instead, it only needs to serve as a tool to help the student remember the keyword.

The following is a list of some of the examples of the objects teachers found successful in representing keywords:

For closed-syllable "o" sound  
keyword = octopus  
small, sticky toy octopus

For closed-syllable "i" sound  
keyword = itch  
small piece of rough/itchy fabric such as Velcro®

For digraph "ck" sound  
keyword = sock  
a baby's sock

For consonant "t" sound  
keyword = top  
a small plastic spinning top toy

## **B. Multiple-Choice Comprehension Worksheets**

Part 9 of the Wilson Reading System® Lesson Plan focuses on passage reading. Controlled-text passages are used to help develop reading fluency, comprehension using visualization, and oral expressive language skills. WRS recommends that the students read each passage twice, both silently and orally. WRS also addresses comprehension skills through visualization and oral retelling of the story. WRS recommends that, after a teacher guided discussion of the story title and vocabulary, the student read the story silently while practicing phrasing and visualization. The student then replays the visualization and rehearses retelling, referring back to the text as needed. Once rehearsed, the student retells the story in detail and proper sequence, and if necessary the teacher further models visualization and helps the student replay, rehearse, and retell the story again. Finally, the student reads the passage orally and practices phrasing and fluency.

Braille readers require multiple practices to become fluent. In order to develop fluency some braille readers need at least three repeated reading opportunities. While WRS addresses comprehension skills through visualization and oral retelling of the story, the concept of visualization may be difficult for some students who are blind and visually impaired. Additionally, some students do not have the expressive language skills to paraphrase a story or respond to open-ended questions. Therefore, multiple-choice “wh” questions were developed to improve comprehension. These questions are primarily concrete and factual in nature;

no inference skills are needed and students can find the answer directly in the text. These questions also provide the additional benefit of frequent practice with “wh” contractions, which are often difficult for braille readers. The worksheets reinforce scanning and decoding skills and independent practice.

### **C. Supplemental Braille Skill Worksheets**

There are some additional skills specific to braille readers that are not a part of the Wilson Reading System®. These mechanical skills are essential for fluent braille reading and include items such as finger position, smooth tracking, dropping from line to line, light finger touch, avoiding scrubbing, tactile perception/discrimination, and understanding format. To help develop these skills, teachers created Supplemental Braille Skill Worksheets. The published work of Myrna R. Olson, Ed.D. and Sally S. Mangold, Ph.D. supports this type of worksheet. The addition of the worksheets to the WRS supports a comprehensive braille reading instruction program. The worksheets provide extra practice in reading words, phrases, and sentences. They target WRS sight words and words with contractions that appear in the Wilson Reading System® Student Readers. The worksheets are presented to a student near the end of a lesson as an extra review to be completed as independently as possible. The worksheets can also be used for homework assignments. In part 5 of the WRS Lesson Plan students use a penciling technique in which sentences are marked or “scooped” into phrases to improve reading fluency. However, braille readers cannot complete this task. Teachers at Perkins found that braille phrase and sentence



worksheets target this important skill of fluency.

#### **D. Wilson Reading System® Student Workbooks**

Often, early braille readers have difficulty managing the Braille writer and reading materials. For this reason, Perkins adapted and modified the Wilson Reading System® Workbooks so they are easier for the braille reader to manage. Many worksheets were reformatted into a simpler layout so they are easier for the braille student to follow and understand. Worksheets focused on writing skills are presented as a separate task. Directions were revised to explain how the braille reader should complete the task.

For students who do not need the Modified Wilson Reading System® Workbooks, a CD containing a braille ready file of the standard translation of the workbook is included with each Modified Workbook. As a student's skills improve, the teacher may choose to use some of the prepared pages from the Modified Workbook and/or to emboss some pages from the Standard Workbook.

### **Section V: Miscellaneous Tips and Information**

#### **A. Organizing Materials and Work Spaces**

Several different materials need to be manipulated and managed throughout the WRS. These include three types of sounds cards, word cards, student readers, modified workbooks, supplemental worksheets, student notebooks, and a magnetic board with tiles. Often, a student with a visual impairment needs extra time and support to manage and organize all these materials. Below you will



find the tips and techniques that teachers at Perkins have found helpful for both students and teachers.

In general, Velcro® has been one of the most useful tools. Small pieces were placed on the back of each sound, syllable, and word card. Large pieces of tri-wall corrugated cardboard were used for two different purposes. One large board, covered in nylon loop fabric, allowed the latch side of Velcro® to stick to it. The teacher used this board to store sound cards in alphabetical order. This made it easier to find the cards. The other board was used by the student. The student's board was painted and then two strips of Velcro® attached. These strips of Velcro® were long enough to vertically hold up to ten different sound cards. Horizontally, the strips were placed one above another with enough space between for the sound cards to fit without overlapping. The board helped to define a workspace and organize the cards for the student. This simple tool was successful in reducing frustration, decreasing wasted time, and maintaining the focus on reading instruction.

Another tool that proved to be useful was a teacher-prepared lesson plan notebook. It allows the teacher to gather all needed materials and store them for easy accessibility during the lesson. The materials needed for this notebook include a large three-ring binder, the small objects used for vowel sounds, pocket folders, and Velcro®. Lesson sound cards are stored in the front pocket of the binder. The first page in the binder is made of durable paper. Objects that represent the vowel sounds can be mounted onto the paper with Velcro® or glue. In the binder is a pocket folder that stores word

cards. A second pocket folder can hold the sight and special (contraction) words that the student needs to review before beginning work with the Wilson Reading System® Student Reader. Wilson Reading System® worksheets or Supplemental Braille Skill Worksheets can also be stored in the binder.

## **B. Timing/Scheduling Issues**

The WRS recommends that the 10 part lesson plan be completed in a 90 minute time period. The recommended minimal amount of time a student should receive instruction is twice a week. Ideally, up to five sessions a week is recommended. Teachers at Perkins found that it takes longer for a braille reader to complete the 10 part lesson plan. It was often necessary to break up the lesson plan into two different teaching sessions. The WRS Lesson Plan can be divided into three blocks; Block 1 - Parts 1-5, Block 2 - Parts 6-8, and Block 3 - Parts 9-10. When returning to the lesson, always start with a quick sound drill with vowels. It is often hard to find enough time in the student or staff schedule to devote to reading instruction. However, if the priority for the student is learning to read, ample time must be allotted in the schedule to have success with this program. At Perkins it was helpful when more than one faculty member provided instruction to help cover the required time allotment. Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments, Reading Specialists, and Speech Language Pathologists could all be helpful in providing instruction.

## **C. Collaborating with Other Professionals**

There are additional benefits to collaborating with other

professionals when working with the program. Perkins strongly recommends that teachers consult specialists in their school to support their student's reading. There will be occasions when a student is struggling to learn a particular concept. Often a reading specialist, a speech language pathologist, or an occupational therapist can provide additional support to help the student be successful. For example, if the student is having a hard time remembering one sound or discriminating between two similar sounds, the speech language pathologist may be able to develop auditory discrimination activities to help the student become more successful with the particular sound. The speech language pathologist may also be needed to provide support with the practice of correct articulation of problem sounds. A reading specialist could develop additional practice of challenging concepts as needed. The reading specialist could also help fill in a student's gaps in basic and/or pre-reading concepts. An occupational therapist can help improve a student's spatial concepts which are crucial to recognizing letters and contractions.

## **Section VI:** Conclusion

The information presented in this pamphlet will assist teachers in using the adapted braille materials. This information is provided as a supplement to the Wilson Reading System® Instructor's Manual, which is part of the overall program. These adapted materials have proven successful at Perkins and many students have made significant gains in their reading skills.

## Appendix

<b>Substep</b>	<b><u>Level A</u> Contractions</b>	<b><u>Level A</u> Punctuation and Composition Signs</b>
<b>1.1</b>	the had in his not it	period, question mark, capital sign
<b>1.2</b>	to of from for this sh th ch wh ed er en but like and with will go which quick that was such	exclamation mark, comma, number sign
<b>1.3</b>	much him again st ( <u>lost</u> ) so	hyphen, opening/closing quotation marks
<b>1.4</b>	where you	
<b>1.5</b>		letter sign
<b>1.6</b>	ff ( <u>huffs</u> ) ar ( <u>are</u> )	
<b>2.1</b>	ong ing	
<b>2.2</b>	must just still less ( <u>bless</u> )	

<b>Substep</b>	<b><u>Level B</u> Contractions</b>	<b><u>Level B</u> Punctuation and Composition Signs</b>
<b>1.1</b>		
<b>1.2</b>		
<b>1.3</b>	would were just can about	
<b>1.4</b>	said could have	apostrophe s
<b>1.5</b>	do day	dash
<b>1.6</b>		
<b>2.1</b>		
<b>2.2</b>	gh	

<b>Substep</b>	<b><u>Level A</u> Contractions</b>	<b><u>Level A</u> Punctuation and Composition Signs</b>
<b>2.3</b>	blind child	
<b>2.4</b>		
<b>2.5</b>		
<b>3.1</b>	bb (rab <u>bb</u> it) cannot dd (sudd <u>en</u> ) cc (hicc <u>u</u> p) as	
<b>3.2</b>	children your first	
<b>3.3</b>		
<b>3.4</b>		
<b>3.5</b>		

<b>Substep</b>	<b><u>Level B</u> Contractions</b>	<b><u>Level B</u> Punctuation and Composition Signs</b>
<b>2.3</b>		
<b>2.4</b>	ea be out	
<b>2.5</b>		
<b>3.1</b>	ness ( <u>wit</u> ness) dis ( <u>dis</u> miss) con ( <u>con</u> vex) com ( <u>com</u> mon) ble ( <u>tab</u> let) gg ( <u>egg</u> nog) himself	
<b>3.2</b>	itself ow ( <u>how</u> )	
<b>3.3</b>		
<b>3.4</b>		
<b>3.5</b>	time	

# Notes



# Notes

# Notes



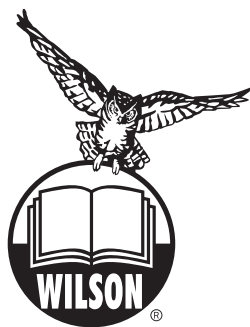


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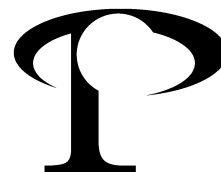
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