



Ask Chris

This month Chris Turner answers a question about the Wilson Method.

I've been hearing about the Wilson Method. Can you tell me more about it?

~ Tutor

What is the Wilson Method?

The Wilson Method is a twelve step reading and writing program. Properly known as the Wilson Reading System, it was developed by Barbara Wilson when she was working with adults at Massachusetts General Hospital's Language Disorders Unit. The method is based on the well-known Orton-Gillingham approach.

The basic purpose of the program is to teach students to read (decode) and spell (encode) fluently and easily. It uses controlled text and multisensory techniques to present the English language systematically and cumulatively. And, it beats hands down, any other material I've seen for helping people master short vowels, an area where some of our students hit the wall.

Who benefits from using the Wilson system?

The Wilson method was designed for adults with learning difficulties, particularly in the areas of decoding and spelling. They need the step-by-step, multisensory approach which Wilson provides. We will be recommending the Wilson method for students who are not making progress using our regular materials.

How does the Wilson method work?

Wilson lessons have ten parts, which are highly interactive and multisensory. Students work on particular material until they have mastered it, that is until they can easily, fluently and consistently read and spell the material. Students are supported as they move from easier to more challenging tasks, working first on reading, then writing and finally on fluency. The method includes using tapping, penciling, manipulating cards, and mnemonic devices to help them develop automaticity.

Does the Wilson method use phonics?

The Wilson system takes a comprehensive approach to decoding and encoding words. It starts with the basic sound-symbol relationships (the alphabetic principle), moves through the segmentation and blending of sounds in words (phonemic awareness), to the patterns and system of written English (phonics). It places a special emphasis on working with syllables and analyzing words. Students are also taught to recognize common sight words as they develop their vocabulary. These are the areas that are the most challenging for many students with learning difficulties.

How does the Wilson method teach comprehension?

The inability to decode words automatically is the biggest barrier to comprehension. Therefore, the primary emphasis of the program is on decoding using controlled text. To prepare students for reading more authentic material, students are taught to visualize as they listen to stories or articles of interest to them.

How is it different from the Laubach Way to Reading?

The Wilson method is appropriate for students who do not make progress in the LWR material. It is particularly helpful for people with auditory processing problems. One of the biggest advantages of the Wilson method is its use of keywords for pure sounds. This makes a big difference to some students. Unlike LWR, the Wilson method also pays a lot of attention to encoding, which is an entirely different process than decoding.

How can I learn how to use the Wilson method?

The Wilson method requires a great deal of commitment on the part of both the student and the tutor. Students and tutors must meet consistently two or three times a week for about an hour at a time for the program to work. In addition, tutors need to receive special training. This month we are training the first group of tutors to use the method. If you would like to learn more, call the literacy council.