

About This Review

This blog provides an evaluation of the RAVE-O reading program, analyzed through two lenses: its available experimental research and the alignment of its core principles with established scientific literature on literacy (as detailed in my previous books and articles on this site).

Full Disclosure: I have no personal or financial connection to RAVE-O and have received no compensation for this review. A member of the RAVE-O team reached out to request a review; subsequently, I conducted a one-hour interview with them and received follow-up written documentation. This evaluation is based strictly on the program's theoretical framework and experimental data; I have not personally implemented the product in a classroom setting. It is also worth noting that I sell multiple products, which directly compete with RAVE-O.

What is RAVE-O?

RAVE-O is a supplemental reading program beginning in Grade 1, designed specifically as a Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention. It is not intended for whole-class core instruction but is advertised as an intensive solution for struggling readers in Grades 1–5.

The creators emphasize a multi-component approach (POSSUM), integrating:

- Phonology
- Orthography
- Syntax
- Semantics (understanding)
- Understanding the Alphabetic principle
- Morphology

RAVE-O utilizes a multi-sensory delivery model. Notably, it offers a flexible implementation path: teachers can choose a scripted approach for high consistency or a non-scripted approach based on their professional expertise and comfort level with the curriculum.

The Theoretical Evaluation

At Pedagogy Non Grata, we evaluate reading programs qualitatively based on their inclusion of the following evidence-based instructional pillars:

- Individualized & Explicit Instruction



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- Phonemic Awareness & Phonics
- Morphology & Irregular Word Identification
- Fluency & Comprehension
- Spelling & Writing

Based on my interviews, literature review, and the technical answers provided by the RAVE-O team, the program incorporates nearly every component of our criteria: explicit instruction, individualization, phonemic awareness, phonics, irregular word identification, morphology, fluency, comprehension, and spelling.

Moving Beyond Checklists

While identifying these components is a start, the *efficacy* of a program lies in its delivery. In this review, I look for specific high-leverage practices supported by meta-analytic research (Colenbrander, 2024; Rhefeld et al., 2022; NRP, 2000), such as:

1. **Phonics:** Is there a systematic scope and sequence?
2. **Phonemic Awareness:** Does it prioritize blending and segmenting *with letters* rather than purely oral manipulation?
3. **Morphology:** Does it focus on how affixes impact word spelling (encoding)?
4. **Fluency:** Does it include proven methods like repeated reading or readers' theater?

Phonics

RAVE-O employs a systematic phonics approach, though its methodology is unique. It utilizes a hybrid of synthetic phonics (focusing on individual graphemes) and analytic phonics (focusing on larger units and word families). This is an unconventional choice in the current market; most modern programs adhere strictly to synthetic phonics following the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) findings that identified it as more effective. While few companies (such as 95% Group) still incorporate analytic elements, it is worth noting that there is a lack of modern, large-scale research directly comparing a hybrid "synthetic + analytic" approach against a "synthetic-only" model.

Phonemic Awareness

In terms of phonemic awareness, the program uses blending and segmenting with letters, which aligns with best practices. It does not include oral deletion or manipulation drills. This means that it aligns with multiple meta-analyses (NRP, 2000; Rhefeld et al., 2022; Erbeli et al., 2024) which indicate that phonemic awareness is most effective when the focus remains on segmenting and blending with letters, rather than purely oral manipulation or complex



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deletion tasks. This means that RAVE-O is one of the structured literacy programs, which best aligns with evidence on phonemic awareness instruction.

Morphology

RAVE-O's morphology instruction focuses on affixes (prefixes and suffixes) and how they alter word meaning and spelling. Focusing on affixes rather than obscure roots is a practical choice for this age group. Meta-analytic research consistently shows that the strongest impact of morphological instruction is on spelling rather than comprehension (Colenbrander et al., 2024; Reed, 2008).

Fluency

RAVE-O defines fluency as more than just "speed and accuracy." Their framework emphasizes how semantic, syntactic, and morphological knowledge supports the transition from decoding to automaticity. Their fluency toolkit includes, but is not limited to:

- One-minute stories
- Repeated readings
- Dedicated RAVE-O chapter books
- Meta-cognitive fluency strategies
- RAN charts

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is central to the RAVE-O experience, and text difficulty is scaled specifically around lexical challenge. The founders describe their goal as "deepening and broadening semantic networks." Lessons begin by eliciting a student's prior knowledge of core words to explore polysemy (multiple meanings) and the interconnectedness of language, rather than teaching words in isolation.

Comprehension

Compared to typical structured literacy interventions, RAVE-O places a significantly heavier emphasis on comprehension. They utilize a "Big Three" strategy: Prediction, Summarization, and Perspective-taking. This is supplemented by instruction in background knowledge, inference-making, critical thinking, and empathy building.

Individualization

While the program follows a set progression and script, the creators advocate for fidelity to intent rather than rigid adherence to the manual. They explicitly encourage teachers to



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deviate from the script to meet a student's specific needs or to apply professional judgment. Teachers can also use assessments on the RAVE-O website to further individualize the delivery of the program (I love this).

Irregular Words

The program approaches irregular words by identifying specific graphemes that represent "uncommon" sounds within a word's pattern. This method—focusing on the regular parts of the word while highlighting the "heart" or irregular part—is a highly effective strategy that aligns with how I personally approach instruction.

Spelling

Spelling is taught explicitly in every class, with a sounds first, letters second focus. RAVE-O doesn't leave spelling patterns to incidental discovery. Visual-orthographic patterns are named, analyzed, and reinforced deliberately across lessons and across Core Words. Morphology lessons extend this, to build on how affixes change spelling.

Research Review

The groundwork for this review began in 2023 as part of a collaborative project with Elizabeth Reenstra. At that time, we identified three experimental or quasi-experimental studies. However, I deliberately delayed the public release of this review until I could secure direct comments from the RAVE-O team. This consultative approach has become standard practice for my recent reviews, as it significantly reduces misunderstandings and ensures the highest possible accuracy.

Our initial search utilized the Education Source database and the RAVE-O company website. While that search occurred three years ago and was not a "systematic" review, I recently asked the RAVE-O team to provide their own comprehensive list of studies. Their internal list matched our findings, confirming we had captured the most relevant data available.

Methodology

To ensure reliability, all three studies were dual-coded by Elizabeth Reenstra and myself. In instances of initial disagreement, we engaged in iterative discussions and re-read the studies until a 100% consensus was reached. We applied the same rigorous, standardized process for calculating all effect sizes.

The Evidence Base

1. Morris, et al. (2012)

- Design: Randomized Experimental (High Rigor)



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- Sample: 137 students (Grades 2–3)
- Dosage: 70 hours of instruction vs. alternative treatment
- Results: The treatment group showed substantial gains across all domains:
 - Word Attack: 0.89
 - Reading: 0.71
 - Spelling: 0.70
 - Word ID: 0.68
 - Comprehension: 0.59
 - Fluency: 0.52
- Overall Mean Effect Size: 0.68 According to the effect size guidelines I recently peer-reviewed in Hansford, et al. (2026), an effect size of 0.68 is considered very large, particularly given the randomized design and use of standardized measurements.

2. Katzir, et al. (2013)

- Design: Quasi-Experimental
- Sample: 45 students (Grades 1–3)
- Dosage: 8 months of instruction vs. alternative treatment
- Results: The treatment group outperformed the control group on reading fluency with an effect size of 0.31. While categorized as a small but meaningful effect size per the Hansford et al. (2026) guidelines, it remains a positive indicator of the program's impact on fluency over time.

3. Lovett, et al. (2017)

- Design: Quasi-Experimental
- Sample: 219 students (Grades 1–3)
- Dosage: 9 months of instruction vs. "Business as Usual"
- Results: This study yielded extraordinary gains:
 - Decoding / Phonemic Awareness: 1.39
 - Word Attack: 1.08
 - Passage Comprehension: 0.72
 - Spelling: 0.72
 - Vocabulary: 0.61
 - Word ID: 0.59
 - Sight Words: 0.57
- Overall Mean Effect Size: 1.25 Per the Hansford et al. (2026) guidelines, this result is extraordinarily large, representing a significant acceleration of student growth.

Summary of Findings

Across these three studies, RAVE-O maintains a raw, unweighted mean effect size of 0.74. Under the Pedagogy Non Grata Review Guidelines, an "A" grade requires 2–3 studies with

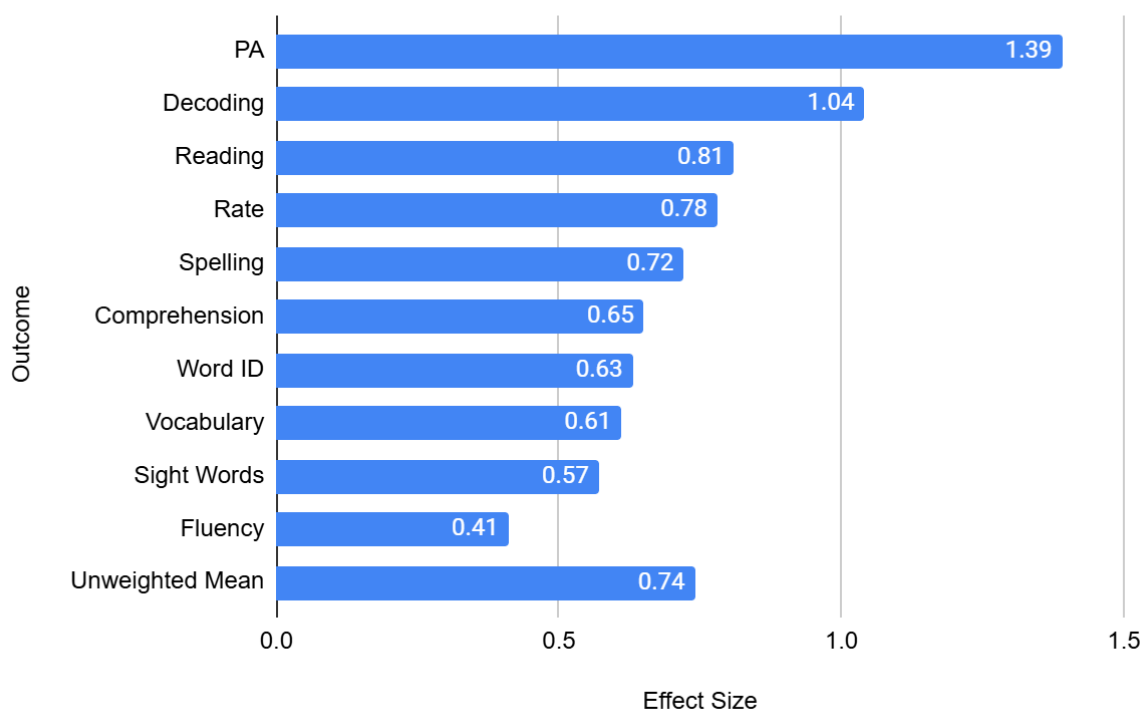


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control groups showing a mean effect size of 0.40 or higher on standardized tests. RAVE-O comfortably exceeds this threshold and nearly qualifies for an A+ grade—a distinction I have never previously awarded to any program.

The Impact of RAVE-O

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What I Like:

RAVE-O is an exceptionally comprehensive and well-conceptualized program. Its experimental results are far above average, but what I find most compelling is the creators' stance on implementation: they encourage fidelity to the intent rather than rigid fidelity to the manual.

While it may surprise some in the Science of Reading community, the NRP (2000) meta-analysis actually found significantly higher effect sizes in studies that did not strictly track program fidelity compared to those that did. I have always interpreted this to mean that when teachers are forced into a "scripted box," they are often prevented from making the logical, real-time instructional decisions necessary for the students sitting in front of them. RAVE-O's flexibility respects professional judgment. Furthermore, I find the program's specific approaches to phonemic awareness and fluency to be standout features of the curriculum.



What I Would Do Differently

While RAVE-O is a powerhouse of a program, there are a few areas where I believe it could be further optimized:

- **Morphology Focus:** Current instruction leans heavily toward meaning. Given that meta-analyses (Colenbrander et al., 2024) show that morphology has weak benefits for comprehension and strong benefits on spelling, I would shift the focus to emphasize how morphemes dictate word structure and encoding and spend less time on morpheme meaning.
- **Phonics Methodology:** The inclusion of analytic phonics is an interesting, if questionable, choice. While not necessarily a "deal-breaker," it deviates from the synthetic-heavy evidence base favored by most modern research.
- **Comprehension Breadth:** I worry the program may be spread too thin across too many comprehension strategies. Research by Filderman et al. (2022) and Hansford et al. (2026) suggests that the majority of student gains come from mastering a few high-leverage strategies, such as main idea identification and summarization. However, it should be noted that an RCT by Morris, et al. (2012) and a quasi-experimental study by Morris, et al. (2012) found large effect sizes for the impact of RAVE-O on comprehension, suggesting that the program does show significant benefits for student reading comprehension outcomes.

Despite these minor critiques, the results achieved by RAVE-O far exceed the industry average. It is a testament to the program's quality that it is one of only four programs to ever receive an A grade on this website.

Final Grade: A:

"2-3 studies with control groups that showed a mean effect size of .40 or higher, on standardized tests"

Qualitative Grade: 10/10

The program includes the following evidence-based types of instruction: phonics, morphology, spelling, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, spelling, irregular words, comprehension, individualized, and direct instruction.

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Contributed to by Elizabeth Reenstra

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Conflict of Interest Statement:

Pedagogy Non Grata has not received any direct or indirect compensation for publishing this review, nor would they accept compensation for conducting a review on this website.



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Pedagogy Non Grata sells a competing product with RAVE-O and the author of this writer also sells an online learning platform, which would be a competing product with RAVE-O.

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