Don Potter's Alphabet Writing and Identification Fluency Materials

The Precursor to
Accurate and Fluent
Reading and Spelling

Teaching "Total Recall of the Alphabet"

Manuscript Only Edition

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www.donpotter.net

TAP THE ALPHABET

MANUSCRIPT UPPERCASE

A B C D

E F G

H I J K

L M N O P

Q R S

T U V

W X Y Z

Alphabet Tapping Exercise

a	b	c	d	
e	f	g		
h	i	j	k	
l	m	n	o	p
q	r	s		
t	u	v		
w	x	y	z	

Instructions

1. Have the students use their index finger to physically tap each letter in in ABC order while saying the names of the letters. They can use the alphabet song to help them, but make sure they are tapping the correct letter that goes with the name.
2. Once they can tap each letter in sync with the alphabet song, have them tap the letters from left to right starting with different rows.
3. Next, have them name the letters tapping from top to bottom, bottom to top, and right to left.
4. Finally, have them identify the letters by randomly pointing at the letters.

Note: The **purpose** of this exercise is to make sure that students are **completely focused** on learning each letter and not mindlessly singing the alphabet song. Mere master of the song is not a sure sign of mastery of the alphabet, nor is it much of an aid in learning since it can be memorizes long before the student can identify any of the letters. This is an amazingly powerful technique for forming a strong association (bond, connection) the letterform to the letter name.

Don Potter's Alphabet Flashcards for *Developing Instant Total Recall of the Alphabet*

These Flashcards are designed to help teachers and parents teach the youth of today the high-level reading skills of an effective phonics-first method.

Visit www.blendphonics.org and www.donptter.net for superior phonics programs to use with these flashcards.

The **first step in learning to learning to reading** is to know the letters of the alphabet well. I teach the letters in a game format using the Tapping Exercise, the flashcards, and handwriting. The uppercase letters should be taught first, for reasons that are explained in the notes at the end of this document.

A B C D	a b c d
E F G	e f g
H I J K	h i j k
L M N O P	l m n o p
Q R S	q r s
T U V	t u v
W X Y Z	w x y z

A a

Card 1: ā
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B b

Card 2: *bē*
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C c

Card 3: *cē*

D d

Card 4: *dē*

E e

Card 5: *ē*
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F f

Card 6: *ĕf*
Don Potter's Alphabet Flashcards © 2010 by Donald L. Potter www.donpotter.net

G g

Card 7: *ġē* (Note the single-dot ġ represents the /j/ sound)
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H h

Card 8: *aych*
Don Potter's Alphabet Flashcards © 2010 by Donald L. Potter www.donpotter.net

I i

Card 9: *ī*

J j

Card 10: *jā*

K k

Card 11: *kā*
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L l

Card 12: *ĕl*
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M m

Card 13: *ĕm*

N n

Card 14: *ĕn*

O o

Card 15: *ō*
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P p

Card 16: *pē*
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Q q

Card 17: *cū*
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R r

Card 18: *ăr*
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S s

Card 19: *ĕs*
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T t

Card 20: *tē*
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U u

Card 21: ū = /yo͞o/
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V v

Card 22: *vē*
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W w

Card 23: *double-ū*
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X x

Card 24: *ĕks*
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Y y

Card 25: *wī*
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Z z

Card 26: *zē*

Alphabet Letter Recognition Test

Name: _____ Date: _____ Age _____ Grade _____

School _____ Uppercase LPM ____ Lowercase LPM _____

Upper Case Manuscript

I E A Z W S O K G C X

T P L H D U Q M Y V R

N J F B

Lower Case Manuscript

u p m y v r n j f

b x t p l h d l e

a z w s o k g c

INSTRUCTIONS FOR GIVING THE ALPHABET FLUENCY TEST

There are two parts to the Alphabet Fluency Test:

1. **Alphabet Recognition Fluency**. Ask the student to say the names of the letters as quickly as he or she can. To find the speed in letters per minute, (LPM) divide 1560 by the number of second it took them to identify the letters. (The factor 1560 comes from multiplying 26 by 60.).

2. **Alphabet Writing Fluency.** Ask the student to write the alphabet from *a* to *z* as fast as they can. The timing is the same as for the Alphabet Recognition Fluency. Notice pencil grip, letter formation, legibility, reversals, stress, seating posture, tendency to correct letters, etc.

Kindergarten students should be able to write the alphabet from *A* to *Z* at 40 letters per minute. Each grade level thereafter should increase about 10 letters per minute by the end of the next year.

Alphabet letter writing and identification fluency are good predictors of later reading success. My experience giving this simple assessment has changed my ideas of the importance of having "total recall of the alphabet." Many older students with reading difficulties will score low on both parts of the assessment. This is a clear indication that they did not receive adequate instruction in alphabet fluency and need remedial work in letter writing and identification.

A foggy (blurred) knowledge of the alphabet leads to a foggy (insecure, inaccurate) recognition of words in their serial spelling aspects and difficulties in recall.

Most reading problems could be prevented by teaching student to write and spell in fluent, legible hand all the words in a comprehensive developmental phonics program like Hazel Loring's *Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for First Grade.*

Remember to teach the student that "we **spell** with the letter names," and "we **read** with the letter sounds." This distinction should always be kept in mind. I always have the student spell orally and write the words when learning to read with phonics. This makes for deeper learning from the start and avoids problems later.

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Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

August 16, 2010

Odessa, TX

These materials will enable students to develop fluency with the alphabet very quickly. There is convincing evidence that alphabet identification and writing fluency is a very excellent predictor of early student reading and spelling ability.

The use of these materials is very simple, especially when used in conjunction with my edition of Hazel Loring's highly effective 1980 *Reading Made Easy for First Grade with Blend Phonics*.

Clarence Barnhart, the dictionary expert and co-author of the Leonard Bloomfield *Let's Read* reading system wrote, "Under no circumstance should you start to teach your child to read until he has the necessary muscular skills to see the small distinctions between letters of the alphabet. You can tell he has the necessary muscular coordination when you notice that he can button his clothes or see and pick up a pin on the floor." (3)

June Brown in her excellent 1981 *Guide to let's read*, says, "Every child I worked with learned to read providing he or she could see a pin on the floor and pick it up, could button clothes, and *had total recall of the alphabet.* No one can read an alphabet language without total recall of the alphabet. 'Total recall' means that he student can recite the letters in alphabetical order, can identify them when they are presented in random order, and can print any word when it is pronounced and spelled. These three goals must be met with absolute perfection before the student can become a good reader. Unfortunately, many schools do not insist on total recall. They teach children to recite the letters in alphabetical order, and sometimes they teach them to identify the letters in random order. However, very few schools teach children to print any word when it is pronounced and spelled. The foundation of reading success is total recall of the alphabet." (7)

Concerning dyslexia, June Brown had some interesting comments, "Let's get the facts straight! There is no such thing as dyslexia among children who know the alphabet. Any child who can learn the alphabet is not dyslexic. Therefore, if your child knows the alphabet, can see normally, can button clothes, your child can and will learn to read. "Dyslexia" is a very confusing term. Many educators no longer use it because no one is quite sure what it means. Generally it means that a child can only read with great difficulty, but sometimes it means a child cannot read at all. I have seen many children labeled dyslexia. But every one of them who knew the alphabet learned to read." (12)

Bob Rose, in his important book *Forget the Bell Curve,* maintains that there is strong evidence that kindergarten students who are taught to write the letters of the alphabet at a rate of 40 letter per minute will have no problem learning to read. (See the excerpt of Chapter 12 at the end of this document.). Note: Mr. Rose has used the words in Hazel Loring's 1980 *Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for First Grade* to teach reading using his methodology

My recommendation for developing fluency is simply have the student write the alphabet from *A* to *Z* everyday until they reach the desired fluency as measured by letters for minute. My preference for timing the students is simply to time how long it takes them to write the alphabet from *A* to *Z* and divide 1560 by the results in seconds (LPM = 1560/Seconds). The Flashcards are excellent for developing fast letter identification responses and for practice in alphabetization.

Learning Letter Names

Students should learn the names of the letters of the alphabet as they learn to write the alphabet. The names of most of the letters have elements (hints) of the sound represented by the letter, which are of great assistance to children beginning their first steps in reading. The underlined letters contain at least one of the sounds of the letter in the name: a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z.

The following have the sound value at the **beginning** of the letter name:

a /ā/, b /b/, c /s/, d /d/, e /ē/, g /j/, i /ī/, j /j/, k /k/, o /ō/, p /p/, t /t, v /v/, z /z/.

The following letters have the sound value at the **end** of the name.

f /f/, l /l/, m /m/, n /n/, r, /r/, s /s/, x /x/, y /ī/

This leaves only h, q, w, and y to be learned by associations other than the letter name.

Noah Webster's spelling for the names for the letters are very helpful, yet little known today:

a (ā), b (bē), c (cē), d (dē), e (ē), f (ĕf), g (gē), h (aytch), i (ī), j (jā), k (kā), l (ĕl), m (ĕm), n (ĕn), o (ō), p (pē), q (cū), r (ar), s (ĕs), t (tē), u (ū), v (vē), w (double ū), x (ĕks), y (wī), z (zē).

You can download *Blend Phonics* free from www.blendphonics.org or my website, www.donpotter.net.

The best method for teaching the sound-to-letter correspondences is the Phonovisual Method, consisting of two easy-to-teach wall charts: Consonants and Vowels. www.phonovisual.com.

I would like to recommend my own *Shortcut to Manuscript* (2014).

http://www.donpotter.net/pdf/shortcut-to-manuscript.pdf

I also created *Shortcut to Cursive* for the students at the Odessa Christian School in Odessa, TX. It has proven very effective with a wide range of tutoring students from kindergarten up. The evidence of its effectiveness was proven beyond doubt when three of my students at the Odessa Christian School won first for their grade level in an International Handwriting Competition with *Cursive Is Cool*, and I was awarded Outstanding Cursive Handwriting Teacher of the Year. This year (2016) six of my student won prizes for their cursive!

http://donpotter.net/pdf/shortcut-to-cursive.pdf

This page last revised 5/15/14 and 7/14/16 by Donald L. Potter.

Pangrams

http://www.rinkworks.com/words/pangrams.shtml

A ***pangram*** is a sentence that contains all letters of the alphabet. Less frequently, such sentences are called ***holalphabetic*** sentences. Interesting pangrams are generally short ones; constructing a sentence that includes the fewest repeat letters possible is a challenging task. However, pangrams that are slightly longer yet enlightening, humorous, or eccentric are noteworthy in their own right.

By far the most well known pangram is, "The quick brown fox jumps over a lazy dog." Frequently this is the sentence used to test out new typewriters, presumably *because* it includes every letter of the alphabet. Curiously, this sentence is often misquoted by changing "jumps" to "jumped." The past tense version, lacking an "s," is not a pangram. Often, too, it is misquoted as "the lazy dog" rather than "a lazy dog." This error is not as grievous; the sentence remains a pangram, just a slightly longer one.

A number of pangrams are given below, listed from longest to shortest.

1. Forsaking monastic tradition, twelve jovial friars gave up their vocation for a questionable existence on the flying trapeze. (106 letters)
2. No kidding -- Lorenzo called off his trip to visit Mexico City just because they told him the conquistadores were extinct. (99 letters)
3. Jelly-like above the high wire, six quaking pachyderms kept the climax of the extravaganza in a dazzling state of flux. (96 letters)
4. Ebenezer unexpectedly bagged two tranquil aardvarks with his jiffy vacuum cleaner. (71 letters)
5. Six javelins thrown by the quick savages whizzed forty paces beyond the mark. (64 letters)
6. The explorer was frozen in his big kayak just after making queer discoveries. (64 letters)
7. The July sun caused a fragment of black pine wax to ooze on the velvet quilt. (61 letters)
8. The public was amazed to view the quickness and dexterity of the juggler. (60 letters)
9. While Suez sailors wax parquet decks, Afghan Jews vomit jauntily abaft. (59 letters)
10. We quickly seized the black axle and just saved it from going past him. (57 letters)
11. Six big juicy steaks sizzled in a pan as five workmen left the quarry. (56 letters)
12. While making deep excavations we found some quaint bronze jewelry. (56 letters)
13. Jaded zombies acted quaintly but kept driving their oxen forward. (55 letters)
14. A mad boxer shot a quick, gloved jab to the jaw of his dizzy opponent. (54 letters)
15. The job requires extra pluck and zeal from every young wage earner. (54 letters)
16. A quart jar of oil mixed with zinc oxide makes a very bright paint. (53 letters)
17. Whenever the black fox jumped the squirrel gazed suspiciously. (53 letters)
18. We promptly judged antique ivory buckles for the next prize. (50 letters)
19. How razorback-jumping frogs can level six piqued gymnasts! (49 letters)
20. Crazy Fredericka bought many very exquisite opal jewels. (48 letters)
21. Sixty zippers were quickly picked from the woven jute bag. (48 letters)
22. Amazingly few discotheques provide jukeboxes. (40 letters)
23. Heavy boxes perform quick waltzes and jigs. (36 letters)
24. Jinxed wizards pluck ivy from the big quilt. (36 letters)
25. The quick brown fox jumps over a lazy dog. (33 letters)
26. Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs. (32 letters)
27. Jackdaws love my big sphinx of quartz. (31 letters)
28. The five boxing wizards jump quickly. (31 letters)
29. How quickly daft jumping zebras vex. (30 letters)
30. Quick zephyrs blow, vexing daft Jim. (29 letters)
31. Sphinx of black quartz, judge my vow. (29 letters)
32. Waltz, nymph, for quick jigs vex Bud. (28 letters)
33. Blowzy night-frumps vex'd Jack Q. (26 letters)

To figure letters per minute, multiply the numbers of words by 60 and divide that number by the number of second it took the child to write the sentence. **Example**: I just wrote, "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" in 21 seconds. 33 x 60 = 1,980. 1980 ÷ 21 = 94.28 letters per minute.

Information on Fluency
from
The Morningside Model of Generative Instruction

Mr. Bob Rose brought the Morningside Model of Instruction to my attention in his thought-provoking book, *Forget the Bell Curve*. In June 2011, I got a copy of Ken Johnson and Elizabeth M. Street's book, *The Morningside Model of Generative Instruction: What It Means To Leave No Child Behind,* Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies, 2004.

I simply want to show insights that I gained from the book that relate to the nature of fluency as it relates to the development of alphabet letter writing and identification fluency. I have two main point: 1) to show that insufficient fluency does not support student advancement in the same way that higher levels of fluency do, and 2) to encourage teachers to help students achieve the necessary levels of fluency through well designed daily practice exercises.

In the following paragraphs I will present information from that book as a series of quotations with comments. My comments are in [brackets].

> The elegance of an instructional program depends on the programmer's ability to detect and teach some minimal response or generative set which can combine and recombine into the universal set of all possible relationships. One is looking, very simply, for the exponential value of key instructional events, in which behaviors that emerge are in a power relationship to the elements which are taught (28f). [Generative is also called "contingency adduction," in which the contingency "draws out" the additional (novel) behavior. Learning the alphabet to fluency is a "key instructional event" which has a "power relationship" (possessing exponential value) with learning to read and spell. The paragraph goes on to illustrate by comparing sight-word and phonics instruction. Sight-word instruction possesses no power-relationship (exponential value) to reading because it does not generalize to other words, phonics, on the other hand, "will reliably produce recombinative reading behavior, guaranteeing successful reading of thousands of words beyond those taught in the original instruction."]
>
> The goal of fluency building is to build hardy academic behaviors – behaviors that weather periods of no practice, occur with short latencies, are impervious to distraction, and are easily accessible in new situations (30). [Each of these goals is important. Alphabet fluency makes the letters of the alphabet available for learning to read and spell. For maximum effectiveness this fluency needs to be developed even before reading instruction begins. "Easily accessible in new situations" means that once the alphabet is learned to fluency the students can use it for the practical purposes of learning. Students whose alphabet fluency is low will have to look repeatedly at a word on the board, overhead, or paper in order to copy the complete word. They will not be able to store the spelling of the entire word in their memory. They are also easily distracted.]
>
> Precision Teaching was conceived by Dr. Ogden Lindsey at the University of Kansas in his quest for a mechanism that brought continuous measurement and rate data into educational practice. Lindsey was heavily influenced by Skinner's allegiance to rate as the primary datum for studying behavioral change, and he recognized that traditional educational measurement systems that depend on percent correct and letter grades placed artificial ceilings on performance and lead students and teachers to a false security about the strength of their performance. Both Skinner and Lindsey believed that high rate behavior not only looked different than low-rate behavior, it also had fundamentally different features (66). [Note that high rate behavior is fundamentally different. There is a quantum of difference.]

In Precision Teaching parlance, once a performance demonstrates retention, endurance, and application, it is *fluent*. As a metaphor, performance fluency is flowing, flexible, effortless, errorless, automatic, confident, second-nature and masterful. When performance is fluent, it becomes a highly probably activity. Fluent performance is fun, energetic, naturally reinforced behavior. Dr. Carl Binder (1993, 1996) coined the term *fluency building* to refer to practice activities that are designed to achieve these goals. [My Alphabet Fluency Exercises are designed with this purpose in mind.] Currently at Morningside, we use five characteristics of performance to set fluency performance frequencies, changing the acronym to RESSA: Retention, Endurance, Stability, Application, and Adduction (67).

References on Fluency

1. Carl Binder's brief explanation of Precision Teaching: "Behavioral Fluency: A New Paradigm."

   http://binder-riha.com/behav_fluency_new_paradigm.pdf

2. Carl Binder & C. L. Watkins (1990) Precision Teaching and Direct Instruction: Measurably superior instructional technology in school.

   http://www.binder-riha.com/PT_DI.pdf

3. Fluency: Achieving True Masterly in the Learning Process (2002) by Carl Binder, Elizabeth Haughton & Barbara Bateman. (Note: Bateman wrote the special education edition of Open Court many years ago, before it was purchased by SRA/McGraw-Hill.). This is a very clear and helpful article.

   http://special.edschool.virginia.edu/papers/Binder-et-al_Fluency.pdf

Quotes Regarding Alphabet Fluency from Marilyn Jager Adams' 1990 *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*

The following quote is taken from Chapter 13 of Adam's well-respected and much quoted book. I am afraid that Chapter 13 on "Print Preliminaries" has been largely overlooked and unfortunately underestimated in the designing of reading curriculum.

> Both theory and data suggest that instruction on neither the sounds of letters nor the recognition of whole words should be earnestly undertaken until the child has become confident and quick at recognizing individual letters (363). [This is the reason behind the creation of these Alphabet Fluency materials. This may be the most frequently violated principle of reading acquisition.]

In Chapter 6 of *Beginning to Read,* Dr. Adams gives a **summary** and the **instructional implications** of the Orthographic Processing Module of the reading process according to the Parallel Distributed Processing (Connectionist) Model of Reading. It merits careful consideration.

> When the skilled reader fixates on a word, each letter activates is own recognition unit in the reader's memory. These directly activated units, in turn, send activation to teach other, with the result that the associations between them are strengthened as the automatic consequence of having looked at the word. Over time, as the reader encounters more and more words, the associations between the letter units will ultimately come to reflect the more general orthographic structure of the printed language.
>
> Strong associations develop between the units representing sequences and patterns of letters that have been seen frequently. As a result, any word composed of these sequences and patterns is perceive more or less holistically: Because of the learned associative linkages, every one of its component letters effectively primes and reinforces the perception of every other. In contrast, weak of inhibitory associations develop between letters that have rarely occurred together. As a result, long words are automatically broken into syllables: Because the letter sequences within syllables are quite predictable, the perception of the syllable as a whole coheres; because the sequences of letters that occur between syllables are unpredictable, the perception of the word becomes somewhat disassociated at the syllable boundary.
>
> In short, then, although the skilled reader's Orthographic processor requires sequences of individual letters as input, it effectively perceives whole words and syllables. In reverse, however, the ability to perceive words and syllables as wholes evolves only through complete repeated attention to sequences of individual letters. With concern toward how to develop word recognition skills, the theory thus carries several implications.
>
> First, it is extremely important that young readers be able to recognize individual letters accurately before word recognition instruction begins. Individual letters are input to the network. If a child cannot recognize a letter, it will not activate the appropriate unit within the network. Unless it activates its appropriate unit with the network, it cannot share the excitation with the other letters of the word under study. Unless the letters share excitation with the other letters of the word under study, the associations between them cannot be strengthened. Only through strengthening of these associations can word study enhance word recognition capacity.
>
> Second, for the development of word recognition proficiency to proceed at its optima rate, young readers must be able to recognize individual letters relatively quickly. The associations between one letter and another is strengthen or created only when both recognition units are active at the same time If the child spends any measurable amount of time recognizing the second letter in a word, then, by the time it is resolved, the activation of the first will have uselessly swindled away. Difficulties in individual letter recognition thus subtract directly from any potential profit to be gained from studying whole words.

Third, for immature readers – readers who have not yet acquired a set of associations to math the print before them, it is important not just that they look at the word before them but that they attend carefully to its completed ordered sequence of letters.

Toward hastening the development and refinement of the letter recognition network, students should be engaged in activities that encourage attention to the ordered, letter-by-letter structure of the syllables and words they are to read. (Remember that the order of letters in a sequence is poorly perceived until the sequence becomes familiar.) Many of the most common practices of reading programs – including synthetic phonics, writing exercise with frequent blends and digraphs, and practice with word families – seem ideally suited to this end.

In this context, the allure of phonics, or the exercise of discovering words by sounding out its spelling, is that it inherently forces the child to attend to reach and every letter of the word, in left-to-right order. The motivation for its recommendation has little lto do with the value or importance of actually sounding out words. It is, from this perspective, merely a gimmick to focus the child's attention on its spelling. Note too that phonics activates that direct the child's attention to individual letters rather than sequences of letters do not seem useful to this end.

The value of having children write and spell is also strongly reinforced. It has been shown that the act of writing newly learned words results in a significant strengthening of their perceptual integrity in recognition.

By writing and spelling, I mean writing and spelling of whole words, as when a child composes her or his own story, writes to dictation, or even copies words over. (See Endnote) Workbook exercises that have children fill in the appropriate letter in a blank do not serve the same purpose because they do not force the child's attention to the spelling patterns of the words as wholes.

Exercise on frequent blends and digraphs such as *bl, st, pr, th, sh* and *ch* also seem worthwhile. As attention to such letter groups serves to strengthen the associations among their letters in memory, it should hasten the children's ability to perceive such strings quickly and holistically. In the same spirit, instruction on frequent prefixes and suffixes may similarly be helpful for the reader who is sufficiently advanced to be working on polysyllable words.

The theory suggests further that children be discouraged from skipping or glossing over words that are difficult for them. When the encounter a word that is hard to read, they should take the time to study it. They should look carefully at its spelling and sound out its pronunciation; then they should repeat this process until they can read off he word with something close to normal ease and speed. Happily, for children who are normal readers, this level is reached with only a couple encounters of the word, even if the encounters are separated by several days.

Importantly such focused word study during corrected reading should be relatively infrequent in practice. Intuitions and research concur that students' reading abilities are best advanced by giving them tests in which the vast majority of words are manageable. When students are stumbling on too many words, the best solution is no longer to ask them to reread; it is go tive them an easier text. Note further that the objective here is not to force children to study and reread difficult words while your are watching; it is to help them develop the inclination to study and reread words they they are reading by themselves.

These qualifications notwithstanding, repeated readings of difficult words and passages result in marked improvements in children's speed, accuracy, and expression during oral reading and, most important, in their comprehension. In view of this, we should choose texts that are worth rereading and, and whenever it seems worthwhile, we should have children reread them.

In view of the importance of syllabification skills, one might infer that they to ought to be taught. Is this inference supportable? Opponents of syllabification training have argued that it is circularly unproductive. In order to break a word down into syllables, they argue, the readers must first sound the word out. Being able to sound the wod out was the goal of breaking it into

syllables in the first place. Consistent with this argument, various efforts to teach children to divide words into syllables have generally produced very little improvement either in children's ability to divide new, untrained words into syllables or in their overall vocabulary and reading comprehension scores.

As exceptions, several recent studies have obtained improvement in children's ability to pronounce two-syllable words by training them to compare the syllable to known one-syllable words (e.g., *problem-rob, them*) …

Overall, the best instructional strategy for orthographic development is to induce children to focus on likely sequences that comprise syllables, words, and frequent blends and digraphs. As the children become familiar with these spelling patterns their ability to syllabify will natural emerge along with the automaticity with which they will recognize the ordered spellings of single syllables. Beyond that, the strongest implication of the theory toward developing solid word recognition skills is that children should read lots and often.

Endnote

It is worth taking time to watch individual students copying words. Some persist in looking at the word to be copied, writing down one single letter and then looking back for the next letter. With respect to orthographic learning, however, the benefits of copying are expected to come from looking at the text to be copied, remembering the whole word or syllable, and writing that down before looking back to check one's spelling or to get the next word or syllable to be copied. Sometimes letter-by-letter copying seems to be nothing more than a habit, as though it simply has not occurred to the child to go for whole words or syllables. In these cases, the problem may be fully remedied by providing a little guidance on the method and increase efficiency of treating the to-be-copied materials in a word-by-word or syllable-by-syllable manner.

Quotes Regarding Alphabet Fluency from Marilyn Jager Adams' 2013 *ABC Foundations for Young Children: A Classroom Curriculum*

I was overjoyed recently to learn that Dr. Adams has published a new book: *ABC Foundations for Young Children: A Classroom Curriculum*. It is published by Paula H. Brookes Publ. Co, Baltimore, Maryland, 2013. In this book, Dr. Adams has translated the most current research into classroom practice. It is basically the outworking of the principles laid down in chapter 13 of her 1990 *Beginning to Read.* I am surprised that it took 23 long years for someone to finally write the book we have need all along. I had surmised from reading the book that there was one very creative and practical mind behind it. Dr. Adams recent emailed me that my suspicion was correct, and that she had written it herself from start to finish. Let's proceed to my quotes. I will not be including the references. I trust that everyone who reads these quotes will have their appetite whet sufficiently to purchase the book and read it for themselves.

Children need to know the alphabet. To use phonemic awareness for reading, children need to know which letter represents which phoneme. In turn, learning letter-sound correspondences requires that children not only be able to discern each letter but also to identify each letter by shape, confidently and securely. To use their phonemic awareness to write, children must also be able to form the letters with legible accuracy and reasonable ease. For much of their classroom instruction on reading and spelling, they must be able not only to recognize each letter, but also to seek, recall, or even image the letter given only its name or sound. (2).

Even so, the issue is deeper than that, for children's letter knowledge is a good predictor of their responsiveness to phonemic training. … It may well be, as several have argued, that gaining phonemics awareness *depends* on prior letter knowledge. (2)

In all, children's knowledge of letter names and sounds at school entry is the single best predictor of their reading and spelling growth, not just at the outset but throughout the elementary school years. Moreover, this is so even when other weighty predictors such as phonological awareness, language development, and intelligence measures are factored out of the equation. Children who enter school with poor knowledge of letters names and sounds face a far higher risk of reading delay and disability. (2)

Studies commonly show that only a minority of children are able to name or write all letters of the alphabet by the end of first grade and that the number who know the letter sounds is still smaller. (2) [Three years ago, I developed a simple alphabet knowledge and fluency assessment, in response to reading Bob Rose's *Forget the Bell Curve*. Bob maintained that children who know the alphabet to fluency will generally learn to read with little or no problem. I have a very busy tutoring practice for children, teens, and adults with reading problems, getting students from a wide range of local public and private public schools. My assessment revealed that NONE of the student coming to me for tutoring had alphabet fluency. That came to me as a shock, but confirms Dr. Adams' research observation.]

How can this be? Alphabetic knowledge is so fundamental and so pervasively important to literacy development. Without a comfortable familiarity with the alphabet, the student is effectively locked out of virtually everything that formal education has to offer. Our schools *must* do far better in helping children learn their ABC's. What could be the problem? [Adams then explains that most reading programs allocate too little attention and time to developing alphabet fluency, being only a small or incidental portion of a larger literacy program. (3, 4)

Of all the challenges that the child will ultimately confronting the letters of the alphabet is the *only* on that depends exactly and only on sheer rote memorization, and it must be over-memorization, at that. (4)

If the support they need is offered neither at home nor at school, then how will they learn? And without solid alphabetic knowledge, how much else will remain unlearnable? (4) [These are soul-searching questions. As the situation stands all across America, most first-graders do not know the alphabet at the end of first-grade. Here Adams was contrasting children coming to school from families that teach the alphabet and families that don't.]

Alphabetic knowledge refers to the children's familiarity with the names, forms, and sounds of the letters of the alphabet as measured by recognition, production, and writing tasks. The **goal** of this book is provide teachers with lesson plans, materials, and assessments that will help them give their students the instruction, practice, and support needed to master each of these dimensions of alphabetic knowledge. (5) [Emphasis by DLP. Here Adams is summing up the rationale and purpose for the book.]

> There are two underlying motivations for this design. The first, of course, is to help the children learn to print each letter efficiently and legibly. The second is that learning to write the letters significantly hastens children's ability to recognize them as, deep in the brain, the motor habits involved in writing each letter become tightly tied to the letter's visual representation. (6) ["Design" here refers to her explicit letter writing instructions. This is why Dr. Rose and I insist on having children *write* the letters of the alphabet in ABC order on a daily basis until they attain true fluency (automaticity).]

In the introduction to "Writing Uppercase Letters," Dr. Adams has some very important information that should be carefully considered.

> There are several strong reasons for anchoring letter writing as soon as possible. The most obvious, of course, is to engage children in writing as soon as possible – yet students will not be able to write much as long as the letters are insecure or onerous for them. A second reason is that spelling activities, both structured and independent are shown to be a superlative means of advancing children's phonemic awareness, their grasp of the alphabetic principle, and their internalization of spelling patterns and conventions. However, spelling activities are thwarted to the extent that children are struggling with letters. (59)

> Even so, learning to form letters so that they *look* right is only part of the challenge. Mature readers and writers do not "draw" letters in the way they draw faces, bunnies, or trees. Instead, each letter is tied to a highly overlearned series of movements that are executed almost automatically as people write. Thus, most people can write more legibly with their eyes closed than they can with their nondominant hand. A more important consequence is that as letter formation becomes automatic, people can devote their attention to their message, choice of wording, and spelling as they write. (59)

> Leading children to practice a consistent set of strokes for each letter serves to accelerate the development of letter-writing automaticity. Furthermore, as the hand movements involved in writing each letters becomes bound to the visual representation, they serve to hasten and secure the child's ability to recognize the letters. (59) [The term "bound" here refers to the connections model of learning that is the psychological theory behind Dr. Adams' work – and mine. This would apply to any letterform, cursive, manuscript, or italic. I prefer cursive.]

In the introduction to "Writing Lowercase Letters," Dr. Adams has some very important information that should be carefully considered.

> The lowercase letters are far more difficult to learn than uppercase letters. [I do not think most parents and teachers are aware that lowercase letters are "far more difficult to learn than uppercase letters." It is my personal preference to teach uppercase first and then go to lowercase cursive; but it takes a good knowledge of cursive instruction to do that. I come from the last generation in America to have learned cursive-first in first grade, before lowercase manuscript for math and drafting. I do not force my personal preference on other, although it is my consistent practice with my tutoring students; and I can vouch for its effectiveness.]

As mentioned in the introduction to Unit II, visual representation of the letters is integrally bound to the movements that the hands make when writing them. But there is more. Although learning to recognize uppercase letters is *hastened* by learning to write them, research indicates that learning to recognize lowercase letters *depends* on learning to write them. This is the reason that, for survival purposes, the visual system itself is preprogrammed to ignore differences in orientation of objects; yet, orientation is integral to letter identity and, indeed, makes al the difference between *b, p, q* and between *n* and *u.* (121)

What matters is not just *writing* the letters, but linking the appearance to a common habitual stroke sequence for its writing. Thus, letter-writing lessons are designed to help the children write letters such that each is represented by a consistent set of strokes, produced in a consistent order. You will be able to tell whether children are using the proper stroke sequence by examining their written work. The tendency to write letters backwards is a strong indication that children are not adhering to recommended starting spots or stroke sequences, as is inconsistency in rendering of a letterform one occasion to the next. (121) [I consider these words of wisdom that are worthy of serious consideration. Dr. Adams' advice applies to any form of writing. Most children coming to me have either received no handwriting instruction or were not paying attention when proper handwriting strokes were taught. While she does not mention it, proper posture and grip are also vital. To get to the heart of why handwriting instruction has been neglected for decades in American schools just read Gail Harold-Taylor's 1989 *Administrator's Guide to Whole Language*, where the author clearly says that formal handwriting instruction is not necessary in the primary grades. My own school district has gone without any formal handwriting program for over 25 years. Just ask any first-grade teacher. Yes, it is hard to believe, but true!]

Quotes from Unit 4: "Introducing Letters and Sounds." Here Dr. Adams recommends teaching long-vowel sounds **before** short-vowel sounds, in accordance with only a hand full of phonics programs such as the Priscilla McQueen's method which was based on the Association Method of Mildred McGinnis, the Weiss Method, Stevenson, Open Court before SRA/McGraw-Hill switched from long to short vowels first, and a few others.

The vowels, by contrast, are exercised by having children listen for such sounds as /ē/ when it occurs in the medial (*meet* versus *moat*) or final (*see* versus *sow*) position in words. This is a relatively difficult challenge. However, it is also an important one. Children must learn to hear vowels in the middle and end of word as they develop phonemic awareness and learn phonics and spelling. To make this challenge easier, only the *long*, sounds of the vowels are introduced in Chapter 12. One advantage of the long vowels is that they require tensing of the mouth that must be held long enough to make a relatively clean and distinct sound. A second is that the long sounds of the vowels are the same as their names. As such, each long vowel sound is already familiar to the children, allowing them to concentrate their attention on finding the sound within the words. (185)

> Awareness of vowel phonemes is notoriously difficult for young children. How many times to young spellers have to be reminded that every syllable must have a vowel? One reason is that consonants are intentional, ballistic movements. They are articulated, whereas the vowels are shapes of the mouth. Awareness of short vowels is particularly difficult. Because they are short in duration and lax in pronunciation, the short vowels are hard to detect, and their sounds may vary far more as a function of the phonemes that surround them than do those of the long vowels. (185)

Sidney Ledson in his book, *Teach Your Child to Read in Just Ten Minutes a Day,* recommended uppercase for very young children in order to avoid any possibility of developing word-shape guessing. Here is his reasoning:

> "But first, you may be wondering why we teach children to read in capital letters rather than lower-case. There are two reasons. First, some of the earliest opportunities for beginning readers to use their newly acquired reading skills are when they see street signs, company names, car names, and advertising captions, all of which are usually printed in capital letters. The second reasons has to do with *configuration clues*: a technique used to help children who haven't been taught letter sounds (or if taught letter sounds, haven't been adequately exercised in using them). *Configuration clues, context clues,* and *picture clues* make up what are known as *word attack skills* - a collection of tricks that often promote guessing reading. Configuration means "shape," and in this instance it refers to the overall shape of a word. To illustrate: the first two words in our reading program are UP and CUP. Printed in lower-case letters - up and cup - the two words take on distinctive shapes that could help a child distinguish between them if he or she weren't able to puzzle them out solely by the sounds of letters. By teaching children words in capital letters - which are uniform in height and having no projecting components to their shape we oblige learners to rely solely on their knowledge of letters and letter sounds. Such is the no-fail, non-guessing route of skillful reading. (38, 29)

Concerning the controversy over whether to teach letter names when teaching beginning reading, the following material from Marilyn Jager Adams' famous 1990 *Beginning to Reading: Learning to Think and Learning About Print*, pages 61 to 62, gives sound reasons for teaching letter names.

> "First, it is not simply accuracy with which children can name letters that gives them an advantage in learning to read; it is the easy or fluency with which they can do so - it is their basic familiarity with the letters." Now that hit me right between the eyes. On the next pages she states what should be obvious, "The speed and accuracy of letter naming is an index of the thoroughness or confidence which with the letters' identities have been learned. A child who can recognize most letters with thorough confidence will have an easier them learning about letter sounds and word spellings than a child who has to work at remembering what is what." She then goes a step further, "The speed of letter naming is an index of the automaticity or effortlessness which letter recognition occurs. Children who automatically see the letters as wholes will see the words as patterns of individual letters as well. To the extent that they invest effort in identifying uncertain letters, they will have less attention and capacity left for figuring out,

processing, and remembering words. To the extent that they instead gloss over the uncertain letters, they do so at the cost of needed growth in their visual vocabularies and, possible, the correct meaning of the text." Finally she remarks, "The names of letters are quite closely related to the sounds. There is evidence that a comfortable knowledge of the names of the letters hastens children's learning of their sounds because it mediates their ability to remember the sounds. That is, if I, as a learner, know that this particular symbol is called *b*, then I can use that fact to help myself remember that sound is /*b*/.

Importance of Letter Names:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/theimportanceofteachingletternames

Last edited on 5/12/2013, 4/25/2016, 8/17/2016