Articles on Reading and Spelling

by

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Success with Phonics the Easy Way

Practical Homeschooling # 11, 1966

By Mary Pecci

The #1 sign of homeschool success is a child who can read fluently and well. Nothing equals the thrill of teaching your own child to read, or seeing him or her reading the encyclopedia on their own for the first time!

Now, how can homeschool parents achieve the satisfying result of a houseful of fluent readers?

I receive calls all the time from parents across the country who are trying to teach their children to read. They confide in me that they have not achieved the results they had expected with their phonics instruction. Their main concern: their children are bored or turned off by overly complicated, confusing phonics methods.

The Two Phonics Obstacles

In this article, I would like to share a short cut, easily incorporated phonics technique. This technique will allow you to steer safely around the two major problems encountered when teaching phonics:

1. Some children have developed the habit of sounding-out controlled sentences letter-by-letter, such as "*Pat and Sam ran and ran*," and attempt to sound-out natural sentences letter-by-letter, such as "*Once upon a time there were three little bears.*" Sounding-out doesn't work, of course, because English can't be sounded out letter-by-letter.

2. Most children do very well with phonics at first, when they learn one sound for each consonant, digraph, and vowel. These children can independently decode a multitude of one-syllable words containing these sounds, such as *cat, bed, chin, got, sun*, etc. However, English is an inconsistent language. Eventually, we must introduce alternate sounds for some consonants and digraphs and many alternate sounds for the vowels. The following are a few examples of what children must learn:

   s as in: sun has treasure

   ch as in: chin school machine

   a as in: cat father want away

   ea as in: read head great learn heart

   ai as in: paid plaid said aisle captain

   ou as in: shout soul soup young could thought

. . . and the list goes on—constantly challenging rather than reinforcing basic instruction. Rather than getting an immediate response from your child to each letter or letter-combination, you get immediate hesitation and confusion—and the problem gets more serious with more information.

Sight Word? Or Sound-It-Out Word?

If this isn't bad enough, SIGHT words add more confusion. For example, the child learns, "The word 'once' is a SIGHT word because you can't sound it out. Therefore, you have to memorize it whole." Instruction continues along this pattern: "Here's another SOUND for this—but here's another SIGHT word. There's another SOUND for that—but there's another SIGHT word, etc."

So, what happens when your child tries to read? As a result of this prevalent teaching method, most children can't retain the mountainous, conflicting information. But even if they could retain it, they would still be frozen by indecision—"What SOUND does this have this time or is it a SIGHT word?"

When you consider these problems, it's easy to understand why some children experience difficulty in learning to read—and why some parents have difficulty convincing their children to get with the program.

How to Avoid Phonics Overload

I will teach you an easy way to avoid these problems. Here's the key: TEACH ONLY THE RELIABLE FACTS. This means teach just one sound for each letter or letter-combination—no exceptions. What will this accomplish?

You get an immediate response to each letter or letter-combination because only one sound is known.

It covers about 90 percent of the phonics information needed to read.

When students have 90 percent of the phonics information they need to read at their fingertips, they can easily figure out the exceptions on their own. When we attempt to teach that small 10 percent of exceptions, we confuse 100 percent of the words.

Following is the 90 percent reliable phonics information needed to read. Teach only one sound for each letter or letter-combination as given in the key word:

Consonants

Be (ball)   L (lion)   V (vase)

C (cat)   M (milk)   W (wagon)

D (dog)   N (nest)   X (box)

F (fish)   P (pie)   Y (yo-yo)

G (girl)   Q (queen)   Z (zebra)

H (house)   R (ring)

J (jar)   S (seal

Consonant Blends

Teach your child to blend the following consonants. This will provide the skill to blend any other consonants:

bl, br, cl, cr, dr, fl, fr, gl, gr, pl, pr, sc, scr, sk, sl, sm, sn, sp, spr, st, str, sw, tr, tw

Consonant Digraphs

ch (chin)   th (the)

sh (she)   wh (what)

Long Vowel Rules

(1) "e" on the end makes the vowel long.

Ex. ate, ete, ite, ote, ute

(2) When two vowels are together, the first one is long and the second one is silent.

Ex. ai, ea, ee, ie, oa, oe, ue, ui

Phonic Families

alk	(walk)	eigh	(weigh)
oo	(zoo)	all	(ball)
eight	(weight)	ou	(out)
ange	(range)	er	(her)
ew	(new)	ound	(found)
ow	(now)	aught	(caught)
igh	(might)	oy	(boy)
aw	(saw)	ir	(sir)
sion	(mission)	ay	(day)
oi	(oil)	tion	(station)
ur	(fur)		

Four Phonics Families

Teaching only this reliable phonics information will enable you to avoid the above reading problems because children won't get locked into sounding-out every word letter-by-letter. With no exceptions taught, we make an "inconsistent" English language "consistent."

Now we can divide the entire English language into four clear-cut groups, which we will call "families."

1. **Short Vowel Families.**
   This includes all families with one vowel. Ex. *at*.

2. **Long Vowel Families #1**
   (e on the end). This includes all families with e on the end. Ex. *ate*.

3. **Long Vowel Families #2**
   (two vowels together). This includes all families with two vowels together. Ex. *ait*.

4. **Phonic Families.**
   This includes the 25 phonic families listed above. Ex. *ay*.

Let's test your technique. See how quickly you can place the following families under their correct headings below. Then check your answers with the answers at the end of this article. This will give you a clear perspective on just how easy the next step will be:

ake	in	cap	igh
ound	ete	ed	ile
ust	ail	ope	ew
eet	ur	alk	ot
ack	oy	on	une
ome	eap	uel	oe

SHORT Vowel Families

_____
_____
_____

LONG Vowel #1 Families: (e on the end)

_____
_____
_____

LONG Vowel #2 Families (two vowels. together.)

_____

_____

_____

PHONIC Families

_____

_____

_____

We can now decode words by these family units (the actual phonetic structure of our English language) rather than letter-by-letter. For example:

Short Vowel Families: c<u>at</u>, b<u>est</u>, ch<u>il</u> dr<u>en</u>, cl<u>ock</u> tr<u>ust</u>

Long Vowel Families #1: g<u>ate</u>, th<u>eme</u>, f<u>ive</u>, st<u>ore</u>, c<u>ube</u>

Long Vowel Families #2: (two vowels together) w<u>ait</u>, n<u>eat</u>, p<u>ie</u>, g<u>oal</u>, f<u>uel</u>

Phonic Families: d<u>ay</u>, r<u>ight</u>, c<u>ow</u>b<u>oy</u>, gr<u>ound</u>, t<u>alk</u>

Combined Families:

<u>un</u> d<u>er</u> line	<u>in</u> t<u>en</u> t<u>ion</u>
<u>ex</u> pl<u>ain</u>	b<u>oard</u> w<u>alk</u>
<u>en</u> l<u>ight</u> <u>en</u> ing	c<u>on</u> tin <u>ue</u>
s<u>ur</u> v<u>ive</u>	<u>un</u> d<u>er</u> n<u>eath</u>
in t<u>er</u> r<u>upt</u>	<u>en</u> t<u>er</u> t<u>ain</u>
<u>in</u> cr<u>ease</u>	v<u>al</u> <u>en</u> t<u>ine</u>

Children won't get submarined by a mixed bag of phonics rules and sight words because now every word can be decoded phonetically in exactly the same way. Children will simply decode every word from left to right by family units.

What About Exceptions?

No doubt your next question is, "How do the children handle words which are exceptions to the 90 percent of reliable phonics information?"

Another simple solution. The children will know immediately when they hit an exception because they will come up with a "nonsense" word. Ex. *said, was, come, give, head, laugh, once.* How do they handle these exceptions? They simply "twist" the mispronunciation of these words into the meaningful context of the sentence. And what if they can't "twist" a particular word into the meaningful context of a sentence, you ask? They simply look up these few words in the dictionary. Next to each word, they will find the phonetic respelling. Ex. (*sed*), (*wuz*), (*kum*), (*giv*), (*hed*), (*laf*), (*wuns*).

Therefore, there's no hesitation or confusion—the children decode every word exactly the same way. They know exactly what they're dealing with at all times (a phonic word or an exception), and they know exactly how to handle an exception ("twist" it into the context or look it up). Consequently, there are no traps. They're at the top of their game—success!

Spring Your Child from the "Sight Word" Trap

Practical Homeschooling #76, 2007

By Mary Pecci

What is the Sight Word Trap? Most of you home schooling parents know only too well what the Sight Word Trap is. Just when your child is decoding words on the fly, in start coming those unavoidable Sight Words – words that can't be decoded phonetically and, therefore, must be memorized "whole."

This doesn't present much of a problem at first. But as the number of Sight Words continually increases, many children get caught in the dilemma: "Is this a *Sound* word or a *Sight* word?"

This causes hesitation and confusion - especially for those children who have great difficulty retaining the Sight Words. As a result, learning to read becomes a painful experience - and on comes that power struggle.

Yet, there is an easy way to avoid the Sight Word Trap... and it's fun, too.

It must be noted that inconsistent vowels create most of the Sight Words. For example, note these exceptions to the "two-vowel-together" rule for *ai*, as in *main*: *plaid*, *said*, *aisle, captain.*

However, rather than requiring your child to "memorize" these exceptions as Sight Words, you can play a fun detective game with your child called "What's the Clue?"

Here's how it works:

First, tell your child the Sight Word. Then explain that when you ask, "What's the Clue?" your child is to sound and simultaneously underline from left to right the sounds in the Sight Word that he or she can hear. Ignore all other letters, as shown in the following examples:

PARENT: This word is *plaid*, as in "This jacket is plaid." What's the clue?

CHILD: p l a i d

PARENT: This word is *said,* as in "I heard every word you said." What's the clue?

CHILD: s a i d

PARENT: This word is *aisle,* as in "Please walk down this aisle." What's the clue?

CHILD: a i s l e

PARENT: This word is *captain*, as in "He is the captain of the ship." What's the clue?

CHILD: c a p t a i n

Although your child may be hesitant at first, he will quickly pick up speed with practice. You will find that these relevant, left-to-right phonics clues are powerful in assisting children with retention and fluency with these Sight Words. Give your child a special detective name, such as "Secret Agent" or "Private Eye" to spark interest and introduce every Sight Word this way with "What's the Clue?"

Children, no less than adults, can't resist a good detective game. Consider how easily contestants on the popular TV game, "Wheel of Fortune," are able to solve a word puzzle with minimum letter clues. You will be amazed at children's ability to sleuth out the left-to-right phonics clues within Sight Words and you will share in the burst of excitement they exhibit while reading when they come across a Sight Word they can easily sleuth out.

Now, test yourself. Let's play "What's the Clue?"

Following are 20 sample Sight Words. Using your super-sleuth skills, go through each word and underline the left-to-right phonics clues. Just ignore all other letters. Then check your responses with the answers at the end of this article.

have	are	tongue	give
the	would	come	friend
where	though	gone	warm
listen	you	enough	sign
double	learn	what	guess

Remember that children also have the "context" of a story to boost their fluency with Sight Words, while these left-to-right phonics clues will lift them up over the top.

By approaching Sight Words with "What's the Clue?" you can transform a threat to your child's reading ability into a fun detective game and free yourself to experience the joy of teaching.

For you trivia fans, here's a question from *The Guinness Book of Records*:

What are the Most Common Words in Written English - the 12 most frequently used words?

Answer: In order, the Most Common Words are: *the, of, and, to, a, in, that, is, I, it, for, and as.*

Access your super-sleuth ability and decide which ones are Sight Words and how you're going to introduce them with "What's the Clue?" Continue to play the "What's the Clue?" detective game with your child for every Sight Word that crosses your child's reading path. And voila! You will spring your child from the Sight Word Trap!

Answers to Clues Check

h̲ a v̲ e	a̲ r̲ e	t̲ o n̲ g u e	g̲ i̲ v̲ e
t̲ h̲ e	w̲ o u l d̲	c̲ o m̲ e	f̲ r̲ i̲ e n̲ d̲
w̲ h̲ e r̲ e	t̲h̲ o̲ u g h	g̲ o n̲ e	w̲ a r̲ m̲
l̲ i̲ s̲ t̲ e̲ n̲	y̲ o̲ u̲	e̲ n̲ o̲ u̲ g h	s̲ i̲ g n̲
d̲ o̲ u̲ b̲l̲ e	l̲ e a r̲ n̲	w̲ h̲ a̲ t̲	g u e̲ s̲ s̲

Help for the Child Struggling to Read

The Link Homeschool Newspaper, 2006

by Mary Pecci, Reading Specialist

As a Reading Specialist for over 35 years, I have found that struggling readers inevitably get caught in the same reading traps over and over again. Yet, when these reading traps are avoided, reading-challenged children are able to make steady progress in reading just as are typical achievement students. These reading traps are detailed below, followed by techniques that can be used to spring struggling readers from all of these reading traps:

Trap 1: Whole Words

When struggling readers are taught to memorize words "whole," rather than being taught how to decode words phonetically, their memory soon reaches a saturation point. Many words begin to look alike (Ex. *boy-dog*). Since they have no way to decode words independently, they are unable to read words even on a beginning reading level. Symptoms of this trap can be easily observed because these students approach words with wild guesses and word reversals.

Trap 2: Endless Phonics Exceptions

When seemingly endless alternate sounds for many of the letters and letter-combinations are introduced to struggling readers, this constantly challenges their basic instructional foundation (Ex. "a" as in *cat, want, father, away:* "ea" as in *neat, head, great, learn, heart*; "ch" as in *chin, school, machine*; "ou" as in *out, soul, soup, should, thought*; etc., etc., etc.). These students have great difficulty switching signals or retaining the mountainous information. Symptoms of this trap can be easily observed because they approach words with frustration and prolonged hesitation.

Trap 3: Letter-by-Letter

When struggling readers are taught to sound out "decodable" text letter-by-letter (Ex. *A cat sat and sat.*), they have great difficulty making the transfer to "real English" text because "real English" text can't be sounded out letter-by-letter (Ex. *Once upon a time there were three little bears.*). Symptoms of this trap can be easily observed because these students approach words with slow, painful, cacophonous, attempts to read.

Trap 4: Adding SIGHT words to Phonics Exceptions

To add to the above confusion, when struggling readers are confronted with a gradual introduction of SIGHT words (unphonetic words that must be memorized Ex. *said*), they are constantly confronted with the dilemma, "What SOUND does that have this time or is it a SIGHT word?" Symptoms of this trap can be easily observed because these students approach words with sputtering and paralyzing confusion or, in some cases, they can't read at all

.

However, you will be encouraged to know that there are simple techniques that can be used to AVOID every one of these reading traps:

Trap 1 (Whole Words) can be avoided simply by introducing EVERY word with intensive phonics, as will be shown.

Trap 2 (Endless Phonics Exceptions) can be avoided simply by teaching ONLY the RELIABLE phonics facts, i.e., teaching only ONE sound for each letter or letter-combination and NO exceptions. Years of research "on the firing line" with every possible type of reading problem have uncovered these RELIABLE phonics facts, listed below, which you will note consist of minimal information to be learned:

> **Consonants** - b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z
>
> **Digraphs** - ch, sh, th, wh
>
> **Vowels** - a, e, i, o, u (long and short sounds)
>
> **Phonic Families** - This is a special group of 25 phonetic components. Just ONE sound for each of these families is taught, as in each key word below:

ay (*day*)	oo (*zoo*)	ew (*new*)	ar (*car*)	oy (*boy*)
oi (*oil*)	ow (*now*)	ou (*out*)	ound (*found*)	ight (*night*)
igh (*high*)	alk (*walk*)	er (*her*)	ir (*sir*)	ur (*fur*)
all (*ball*)	eight (*weight*)	eigh (*weigh*)	aw (*saw*)	au (*auto*)
aught (*caught*)	ought (*thought*)	ange (*range*)	tion (*station*)	sion (*mission*)

Note what teaching ONLY these RELIABLE phonics facts accomplishes:

(1) Struggling readers will have an immediate response to every letter or letter-combination because only ONE sound is known.

(2) These RELIABLE phonics facts cover about 90% of the phonics information needed to read.

(3) When struggling readers have this 90% of RELIABLE phonics facts at their fingertips, they can easily figure out that small 10% of exceptions on their own, as will be shown. However, when that small 10% of phonics exceptions is taught, it just confuses the total 100% of words.)

Trap 3 (Letter-by-Letter) can be avoided because when you teach ONLY the RELIABLE phonics facts and NO exceptions, you can make an "inconsistent" English language "consistent" by dividing the entire English language into four simple groups, which we will call "families":

1. **Short Vowel Families** (any vowel with consonants): Ex. *at, et, it, ot, ut*
   Rule: When there's only ONE vowel, it has the short sound.

2. **Long Vowel Families** ("e" on the end"): Ex. *ate, ete, ite, ote, ute*
   Rule: When there's an "e" on the end, the first vowel is long and the "e" on the end is silent.

3. **Long Vowel Families** (two-vowels-together": Ex. *aid, ead, ied, oad, ued*
   Rule: With any two vowels together, the first one is long and the second one is silent.

4. **Phonics Families**: (The special group of 25 phonetic components detailed above.) Words can now be decoded by these family UNITS rather than letter-by-letter. A special bonus is that EVERY word can be decoded exactly the same way with a UNIFORM APPROACH, i.e., EVERY word can be decoded from left-to-right, UNIT by UNIT:

   Ex. p <u>et</u>, f <u>in</u> <u>ish</u>, t <u>oast</u>, h <u>ope</u>, <u>un</u> t <u>il</u>, m <u>ain</u> t <u>ain</u>, w <u>alk</u>, <u>ea</u> g <u>er</u>, c <u>ube</u>, st <u>ay</u>,

   n <u>ight</u>, <u>in</u> t <u>er</u> <u>est</u> <u>ing</u>.

Trap 4 (Adding SIGHT words to Phonics Exceptions) has already been avoided because there are NO sight words. EVERY word is decoded phonetically with the UNIFORM APPROACH.

This leads to the final question to be answered - "How can struggling readers handle the phonics exceptions on their own?" Here's how:

When children encounter an "exception," they will know it immediately because they will come up with a "nonsense" word. Ex. SAID: When just one sound for "ai" has been taught, as in the word "paid," struggling readers will automatically decode this word as "sayd" because they only know ONE sound for "ai." They will know immediately that it's an exception because it's a "nonsense" word. So how will they handle it? They simply fit the word into the meaningful context of the sentence (Ex. *I heard every word you "sayd").* In rare cases when a word can't be fitted into the meaningful context of a sentence, they simply look up the phonetic respelling next to the word in the dictionary (Ex. sed).

So what does this accomplish for struggling readers?

(1) They will have an immediate response to every word.

(2) When they hit an exception, they will know it.

(3) They will know exactly what to do about it.

Therefore, in this way, it is possible to AVOID every one of these reading traps which plague our struggling readers - and spring them from the reading trap! And consider for a moment - if this simplified reading method works with struggling readers, imagine what it could do with typical achievement students!

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This simplified reading method is presented in Mary Pecci's book, *At Last! A Reading Method for EVERY Child.* It was chosen as the Main Selection of three of Macmillan Book Clubs (Early Learning Book Club, Teacher Book Club, and Library of Special Education); is featured in Cathy Duffy's 100 Top Picks for Homeschool Curriculum, is included in the U.S. Department of Education Office of Research Report of the Commission on Reading, "Becoming a Nation of Readers"; is recommended by Dr. William C. Crook in "Help for the Hyperactive Child"; was featured in The National *Right to Read* newsletter; and Instructor Magazine (Teachers are Talking About) concludes, "You may find that Johnny can read after all." Mary Pecci is the author of 14 books and is listed in *Who's Who of American Women* for her Specialist techniques in dealing with reading disabilities.

TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR CHILD OVER

THE ALPHABET HUMP!

By Mary F. Pecci, Reading Specialist

As a Reading Specialist and published author, many frustrated home schooling parents have asked me, "Why does my child still confuse letter names after we have been over and over them time and time again?"

I'd like to share with you some simplified techniques which have received grateful acknowledgements of success from these parents. In addition, it's fun - which keeps the kids coming back for more.

To begin with, when you consider that 11 of the lower-case letters do not resemble their capital letters, there are about 37 symbols to be memorized. Many children become discouraged when they think there is an endless number of symbols to be learned or when they continually give incorrect responses to symbols they thought they had mastered. However, you can avoid all this anxiety and confusion by explaining to the children right from the beginning: HOW MUCH THERE IS and HOW TO FIND IT.

Proceed as follows:

1. Put an Alphabet Strip on your child's desk and teach your child to recite the Alphabet sequence, as follows:

   (a) Point to each letter on the Alphabet Strip as you recite the name of the letter and have your child repeat the letter name after you.

   (b) Sing the Alphabet song as you point to each letter on the Alphabet Strip. Have your child repeat this procedure when you feel your child is ready. The rhythm aids memory and I've yet to meet a child who didn't delight in singing the Alphabet song - now to receive the double pleasure of pointing to each letter while singing it.

2. Make a set of Alphabet Sequence cards. Write both the upper-case and lower-case forms of each letter on the same side of the card. Ex. Aa. Now, have your child recite the Alphabet as you flash these Alphabet cards. This will reinforce the Alphabet sequence and focus attention on one letter at a time.

3. Make a set of Alphabet cards to be shuffled. Write the upper-case letter on one side of the card and the lower-case letter on the other side of the card.

Proceed as follows:

(a) Take out just the first five cards (A through E) and shuffle them.

(b) Flash the cards to your child. When your child can't recall a letter name, say "FIND IT YOURSELF!" and have your child recite down the Alphabet Strip to the unknown letter. Ex. C - "Is it an A?, B?, C? - Yes! It's "C!" In this way, the correct answers are constantly reinforced and children are able to practice letter names "on their own" - remembering that children delight in engaging in activities over which they have control - over and over again. Be sure to flash both the upper-case and lower-case sides of the cards.

(c) When these first five letters are mastered, add a few more letters and shuffle them in. Then proceed as before. Continue this way until all of the cards have been shuffled in.

When you get to the second half of the Alphabet, have your child count down to unknown letters starting from "O" rather than going back to the very beginning of the Alphabet and counting down from "A."

(d) As you go through the Alphabet, teach your child to write each capital and lower-case letter in the same sequence. This really helps bring the message home.

4. For variety and enjoyment, as well as to teach to all modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) reinforce the letters which have been introduced with games and activities, such as: Follow-the-Dots, Bingo, T-Scopes, Letter-Match games with capital and lower-case letters, etc.

5. Last Resort Secret Weapon Technique:

As you may have found, some children may still have difficulty remembering a particular letter name even though it is constantly reinforced independently by counting down the Alphabet Strip to the correct answer. In this case, give any ASSOCIATION clue that will induce immediate recall.

Ex. Y - Hold your hands up high and you make a "Y."

T - This looks like a "Tea" table.

O - Say "O" and you make an "O" with your mouth.

Anything silly will suffice and will serve as a powerful recall device. You'll amaze yourself with your hidden talent for creating unique ASSOCIATION clues.

With this combination of FIND IT YOURSELF, lively REINFORCEMENT activities, and ASSOCIATION clues, you have a sure-fire team to insure mastery of letter names. When your child is provided with a means of consistently and constantly reinforcing correct answers independently, it carves an ever-deepening groove in the memory bank until it finally produces immediate recall.

Give it a try and you may discover that your child can have fun getting over the Alphabet hump!

How to Spring DYSLEXICS from the Reading Trap the EASY Way!

by Mary F. Pecci, M.Ed., Reading Specialist

Henry was referred to my Reading Center when he was in Grade 2 with a diagnosis of "Dyslexia," along with a long list of behavioral transgressions - a boy with "attitude."

As I prepared to take a reading inventory, he remarked, "I don't see things the way other kids do." It was soon obvious that he was unable to read a single sentence in a beginning reader. I asked, "Do you trust me to teach you to read?" He responded unequivocally, "NO!" Then I began the process of springing him from that prison of illiteracy that held him captive.

Over the years, I had observed how some reading methods actually create the reading traps that Dyslexics get caught in and I had gradually comprised a way to avoid these reading traps in order to free them.

What sets the trap:

It became very clear that the following approaches to teaching reading with Dyslexic students are exercises in futility:

1) Expecting them to memorize every word in our written language WHOLE, by SIGHT, as though it were a Hieroglyphic language rather then a Phonetic code-based written language.

2) Expecting them to make sense out of the endless Phonics Rules and Exceptions, along with the numerous sounds given for many of the letters and letter-combinations. Ex. "a" as in *cat, want, father, away*; "ea" as in *neat, head, great, learn, heart*; "ou" as in *out, soul, soup, could, young, thought*; "ch" as in *chin, school, machine*; etc., etc., etc.

The real mystery here is not why Dyslexics CAN'T read - but why some children CAN read - a tribute to the human brain! Phonics is essential - but, as can be seen, you can overplay that card.

How to Unlock the Trap:

First, I found that it is essential that you teach only ONE sound for each letter or letter-combination - and NO exceptions. This RELIABLE Phonics information covers about 90% of the Phonics information needed to read. Dyslexic students are very capable of mastering this 90% of RELIABLE information - and it will give them "mastery at their fingertips." But when an attempt is made to teach that small 10% of exceptions, it just confuses the TOTAL 100% of words.

Before introducing a single word to them, gradually supply them with the following Phonics AMMUNITION - the sounds for:

Consonants: (b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z)

Digraphs: ch, sh, th, wh

Vowels: a, e, i, o, u (long and short) - NO rules yet.

Put these sounds on Flashcards and review them daily. They will easily master these sounds because, like learning to speak, the message will be consistent and repetitious.

Secondly, it is essential that you use "real English" Literature-based text such as, "*This dog can run fast*," rather than "Decodable" text, such as "*Sid hid a big lid*," because Literature-based text provides a meaningful "context" which assists decoding of words, as will be shown.

Now, here's the game changer!

Never require Dyslexic students to "sound out" a word independently at this point. It has been demonstrated time and again that this only leads to struggling, hesitation, and cacophonous agony. Rather, TELL them the word. Ex. dog: This word is "dog." Then, using their RELIABLE Phonics Ammunition, ask "What's the Clue?" and have them simultaneously SOUND and UNDERLINE the Phonics clues from left-to-right. Ex. <u>d</u> <u>o</u> g. Introduce phonetically irregular words the same way. Ex. have: This word is "have" - What's the Clue? <u>h</u> <u>a</u> <u>v</u> e. Ex. friend: This word is "friend" - What's the Clue? <u>f</u> <u>r</u> i <u>e</u> <u>n</u> <u>d</u>. (Just ignore irrelevant letters.) With a little prodding at first, you will find that they will soon become very adept at SOUNDING and UNDERLINING the left-to-right relevant sounds in each word.

Introduce only words that contain the Phonics information that has been introduced. Repeat these words often enough to assist retention. And remember: If you ask them to sound out unknown words independently at this point - it's game over.

Henry was progressing, as would an average-achievement student. He had become very cooperative. I asked him, "Do you trust me now?" He replied cautiously, "Uhh - I'm not sure."

After you have introduced about 50 high-frequency words and arranged them into intelligible sentences, begin to gradually filter in additional Phonics information. Teach just ONE sound for each of the following Phonetic components, as in each key word below. As you introduce each sound, put it on a Flashcard and review it daily

ow (*now*). ou (*out*), ound (*round*), ay (*day*), oo (*zoo*), ew (*new*), ar (*car*), oy (<u>*boy*</u>),

oi (*oil*), ight (*night*), igh (*high*), alk (*walk*), er (*her*), ir (*sir*), ur (<u>*fur*</u>), all (*ball*),

eight (*weight*), eigh (*weigh*), aw (*saw*), au (*auto*), aught (*caught*), ought (*thought*),

ange (<u>*range*</u>), tion (*station*), sion (*mission*).

Introduce words containing one of these Phonetic components as follows:

Ex. now: What's the family? (ow) - What's the word? (now).

After you have introduced about 75 high-frequency words, Dyslexic students begin to understand how Phonics decoding works. So it's time to introduce words with Short and Long Vowel Phonograms - one rule at a time. You will note that these Phonograms can be easily sounded out by Dyslexics because vowel sounds (unlike most consonant sounds) can be prolonged. Ex. and - aaaa-n-d. It's also important to note that although they have great difficulty decoding unknown words letter-by-letter, they have no difficulty decoding words by these phonetic "units." Guide decoding of these words as shown below:

Rule 1: If there's one vowel, it's Short.

Ex. hand: What's the family? (and) - What's the word? (hand).

Rule 2: "e" on the end" makes the vowel Long.

Ex. ride: What's the family? (ide) - What's the word? (ride).

Rule 3: When two vowels are together, the first vowel is Long and the second vowel is Silent. Ex. team: What's the family? (eam) - What's the word? (team).

Continue to introduce all exceptions to these rules with "What's the Clue?"

Ex. gone: This word is "gone" - What's the clue? g <u>o</u> <u>n</u> e. Ex. head: This word is "head" - What's the Clue? <u>h</u> e a <u>d</u>.

This concludes all of the 90% of RELIABLE phonics information. Now it's time for game on - time to ignite a solution for Independent Reading.

Show these students how to decode EVERY word exactly the same way: Begin with the vowel each time and ask:

"What's the family? - What's the word?"

Ex. night: What's the family? (ight) - What's the word? (night).
Ex. need: What's the family? (eed) - What's the Word? (need).

For multisyllable words, just go to the next vowel and proceed the same way.

Ex. contain: What's the family? (on) - Add "c" (con). What's the next family? (ain) - Add "t" (tain). GO BACK - What's the word? (contain).

Ex ignite: What's the famiy?" (ig). What's the next family? (ite) - Add "n" (nite). GO BACK - What's the word? (ignite).

Now how do they handle exceptions independently?

When they hit an exception, they will know it immediately because it is a "nonsense" word. Ex. said: What's the family? (aid) - What's the word? (sād)

So what do they do?

They simply fit this mispronunciation of the word into the meaningful context of the sentence. Ex. *I heard every word you sād*. Fitting words into the meaningful context of a sentence is no problem for Dyslexic students at first because their verbal vocabulary is thousands of words above their reading vocabulary. When their reading vocabulary begins to pull up their verbal vocabulary, at which time they may not be able to fit an unknown word into the meaningful context of a sentence, it's time to teach them how to use the Pronunciation Key in the Dictionary. Then, when they can't fit an unknown word into the meaningful context of a sentence, they can simply look up the respelling (and definition) next to the word in the dictionary: Ex. bouquet (bō kā').

Ex. vignette (vin yet´). Ex. xenon (zē´ non). So there's no unchartered waters.

This is what drives the outcome. They have a UNIFORM APPROACH, a compass, to decode every word. When they hit an exception - they know it - and they know exactly what to do about it. And that's the tipping point. There's no hesitation or confusion - so SUCCESS is assured!

At this point, I asked Henry (who was reading fluently and enjoying it), "Do you trust me now?" He glanced down, shrugged his shoulders, aimed his gaze in my direction, and said with a crooked smile, "I guess so!"

 . . . and that's how to spring Dyslexics from the reading trap the EASY way!

P.S. If this works with Dyslexics, imagine what it can do with average-achievement students!

Unlock that Key in Your Dictionary!

By Mary Pecci

The debate between *phonics* and *whole word* reading methods has been a knockdown, drag-out debate. We need a game changer.

Since our written language is based on a phonetic code, (and not a hieroglyphic code, such as Chinese) it would seem to be "no contest" when it comes to the debate.

However, this is the logjam. There is such a wide variety of sounds for many of the letters and letter combinations in our language that it confuses many children e.g., "ea" as in seat, head, great learn, heart; "a" as in cat, want, father, away, "ch" as in chin, school, machine; etc., not to mention exceptions to the phonics rules. What also weighs into the equation is the influx of "sight words" – words that can't be sounded out phonetically. Some of these words that have been absorbed into our language from other languages without transposing them phonetically, as is done with the Spanish language (e.g., spaghetti: Italian; bouquet: French, etc.).

Therefore, in order to jump through these hoops and fly under the radar, many have opted for the whole word method as the better choice. Yet, reading scores continue to plummet, as does the rise of special education classes.

So which choice is right? They key is to get to the ground level and simplify our phonics system.

After many years as a reading specialist "on the firing line" teaching reading to students with every possible type of reading disability, including dyslexia. I have discovered that when just one sound is taught for every letter or letter combination, nearly ninety percent of the phonics information required for reading is covered. And here's the irony of it all. When the students have ninety percent "reliable" phonics information at their fingertips, the can y figure out the ten percent of exceptions on their own, as will be shown. However, when an attempt is made to teach that ten percent, it just confuses the whole process.

The following is the ninety percent of "reliable" phonics information students need to read, which as you can see, is minimal and will be easy to learn and easy to apply to word.

Consonants: b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z

Consonant Blends: These are easy because consonants are already known and only practice is needed to blend them together: Example: bl, fr, sp, tw, etc.

Consonant Digraphs: ch, sh, th, wh

Vowel Rules:
1. When there is one vowel, it has the short sound: at, et, it, ot, ut
2. "e" as the end gives the vowel a long sound: ate, ete, ite, ote, ute
3. When there are two vowels together, the first one is long and the second one is silent: ai, ee, ea, ie, oa, oe, ui, ue

Phonic Components: ay, oo, ew, ar, oy, oi, ow, ou, ound, ight, igh, alk, er, ir, ur, all, eight, eigh, aw, au, aught, ought, ange, tion, sion

When children are taught to sound out words using *only* this "reliable" information, they will immediately recognize an exception to the rule. For example, when they know "ai" makes the sound heard in the world "mail," they will automatically sound out the word" said" as "sād."

Here's the game changer. We're going to get the best of both phonics and whole word methods because, although every word will be sounded out, we will use literature-based readers that use "real English" text to provide a meaningful context within which to decode words – rather than phonetic readers that used "decodable text" without meaningful context. For example, a student will read, "*I heard every word you said*," rather than something like "*Sid slid and hid a lid.*" Now when a child hits an unphonetic word, s/he can simply "twist" it into the meaningful context of the sentence, based on the left-to-right phonic clues (example s a i d). This also avoids "sight" words because every word is decoded with left-to-right phonics clues.

"Twisting" words into the meaningful context of a sentence is no problem for primary school children in grades K-2 (we have all experienced their proficiency completing our sentences when there is a pause) because their verbal vocabulary contains thousands of words more than their reading vocabulary. It is estimated that children entering school with about 5,000 words in their verbal vocabulary, while many have zero-words in their reading vocabulary.

In rare case when a child is unable to "twist" the mispronunciation of an unphonetic word into the meaningful context of a sentence based on left-to-right phonics clues, the teacher will just tell him the word and then point out the left-to-right clues in the word, e.g., friend: f r i e n d.

Now here is what drives the outcome. When children enter third grade, their reading vocabulary is nearly equal to their verbal vocabulary, and their reading vocabulary begins to pull up their verbal vocabulary. The more the read, the more words they incorporate into their verbal vocabulary. Oftentimes, this is where the problem begins because they will come across words that are not in their verbal vocabulary; many of these word are unphonetic or they have no idea how to pronounce them or what they mean.

What then?

Now it's time to shake things up and *unlock the key in your dictionary!*

Next to each word in the dictionary is the phonetic respelling and definition. For example *vignette* (vin yet´), *bouquet* (bō kā´), *enough* (i nuf´), etc. There is meaningful context in the literature-based readers and the key in your dictionary: (kof), (ruf), (thō). Now you've released the student from the phonics trap and endless exceptions, freed them to enjoy the easy and stimulation of literature-based text, and brought about a truce between the phonics and whole word reading debate.

By following a few simple rules and learning how to unlock the key in their dictionary, every child can succeed.

How to Loose Those Spelling Blues!

By Mary Pecci, M.Ed.

With so many phonics rules and exceptions in our English language, many children have a very difficult time acquiring spelling skills. However, you can put the brakes on this problem because there is an easy way to teach spelling.

Here's the key:

1. Teach only reliable facts

This means teach only one sound for each letter or letter combination and don't focus on exceptions. What does this accomplish?

  a. You'll get an immediate response to each letter or letter combination because only one sound is known.

  b. The reliable phonics facts cover 90% of the phonics information needed to spell.

  c. When the children have 90% of the phonics facts needed to spell at their fingertips, they can easily figure out that small 10% of exceptions on their own, as well be shown. But when an attempt is made to teach that small 10% of exceptions, it confuses the total 100% of words.

Following is the 90% of reliable phonics facts that will be utilized to spell words. Chances are that your child already has learned most of the sounds:

Consonants:

B (ball)	L (lion)	X (vase)
C (cat)	M (milk)	W (wagon)
D (dog)	N (nest)	X (box)
F (fish)	P (pie)	Y (yoyo)
G (girl)	Q (queen)	(my) – end of 2-or-e-letter words
H (house)	R (ring)	(baby) – end of more-than-3-letter word
J (jar)	S (Seal)	Z (zebra)
K (kite)	T (top)	

Consonant Blends:

Teach the students to blend the following consonants. This will provide the skill to blend any other consonants, and it will be easy because they already know the consonant sounds.

bl, br, cl, cr, dr, fl, fr, gl, gr, pl, pr, sc, scr, sk, sl, sm, sn, spj, spr, st, str, sw, tr, tw

Consonant Digraphs:

ch (chin)   th (the)   sh (she)   wh (what)

Short Vowels:

a (apple)   e (Eskimo)   i (igloo)   o (octopus)   u (umbrella)

Long Vowel Rules:

- "e" on the end makes the vowel long. Examples: ate, ete, ite, ote, ute.
- When any two vowels are together, the first one is long and the second one is silent: Examples: ai, ae, ea, ee, eo, ie, oa, oe, ue, ui.
- We will make it a spelling rule in words of not more than three letters, the final vowel is long. Examples: he, she, me, we, go, so, no.

Phonics Families:

Introduce these special phonics components as needed.

ay (day)	eigh (weigh)	igh (high)	ew (new)	au (auto)	er (her)
oy (boy)	ought (thought)	ight (light)	oo (zoo)	aw (saw)	alk (walk)
ar (car)	aught (caught)	ir (sir)	oi (oil)	ange (change)	ow (now)
tion (station)	eight (weight)	ound (found)	all (ball)	ou (out)	sion (mission)

This sets up our arsenal and we're set to go!

2. Analyze each spelling word

Teach the children to analyze each spelling word so that they will have a clear understanding of the difference between a sound word (a word that can be sounded out) and a study word (a word that can't be sounded out). Have them sound out each spelling word utilizing only the 90% reliable phonics facts as shown above.

If the 90% reliable phonics facts supplies them with the correct pronunciation of the words, it is called a Sound Word because you can sound it out. One example is the word "jump."

If the 90% of reliable phonics facts don't supply them with the correct pronunciation of the word, it is called a Study Word because you can't sound it out, like the word "said." Explain to the children that based reliable phonics facts, this word is really "sād."

3. Sound as you write

If a word is a Sound Word, have the children sound as they write the word. Using the example jump, it would go like this: "jj" – "uh" – "mm" – "pp."

If a word is a Study Word have the children sound as they write the 'mispronunciation' of the word, and then follow it by giving the correct pronunciation. Using the example of "said," it would go like this: "s" – "ai" – "dd" > "sed." This will remind them to spell the word with an "ai" instead of an "e." It's like telling yourself the answer *as* you write the word (so you can't get it wrong).

For reinforcement, each day have the children sound as they write one row of each word on the weekly spelling list. Don't underestimate the power of repletion.

Test your technique!

See if you can place the following 10 words in the correct column, either as a Sound Word or Study Word. Check your answers at the end of this article:

have   after   best   please   want   store   from   what   right

Shown below is a beginning spelling list of "basic high frequency" words. It is important to recognize the fact that the purpose of spelling skills is to lead into written language. Therefore, it is essential to use spelling lists which are made up of phonetic words and sight words, from which intelligible sentences can be formed.

You will notice that there is just one sight word on each list as designated by the asterisks, so that children won't be overwhelmed by too many sight words at one time. This will enable them to learn the difference between phonetic words and sight words and how to handle each type of word, as shown below.

After completing the first four spelling lessons, it is now possible to dictate intelligible sentences to the children, while teaching capitalization and punctuation.

Here are some examples:

1. I see a big cat jump.
2. The dog can run.
3. I can play with the ball.

You will find that by teaching only the reliable phonics facts, showing the children how to analyze each spelling word (it is a Sound Word or a Study Word) and having them sound as they write each word, they will be armed with a surefire technique to master every spelling word and lose those spelling blues!

And now, just apply this principle to any further spelling lists of your choice.

Answer to Quiz:

Sound Words: best, coat, after, store, right

Study Words: have, want, from, please, what

Beginning spelling list of "basic high frequency" words					
1. I the* can go and	2. is* dog jump big play	3. get cat this with to*	4. run see ball want* we	5. in too fun do* pet	6. boy now at did look*
7. just little* girl swim fish	8. my mother* tell help she	9. father* now up down he	10. make hop red top come* stop bike mop on shop	11. have* best like rest walk test take nest here chest	12. good back fast tack that sack will black him pack
13. eat came soon game them same must tame put* blame	14. who* ride when side which hide why slide how wide	15. ask joke talk coke are* spoke her woke out broke	16. new mail give* tail us pail ran sail time nail	17. me seat you* neat for heat read wheat then treat	18. your* boat saw coat fly goat bird float street throat
19. under far much car please* jar went bar clean star	20. off tall what* fall ate call may wall store small	21. after law said* paw our jaw let draw keep straw	22. had threw every flew was* blew name grew wish chew	23. sleep night start light try might from* right got bright	19. friend round children sound thank found gave ground food pound

Mary Pecci is the author of *Super Spelling: Book One*, which is listed in *100 Top Pick for Homeschool Curriculum* by Cathy Duffy. All the work is done for you. It includes sentences to dictate from the book after each spelling lesson, along with guidelines leading into written composition.

Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

August 17, 2016

It gives me great pleasure to republish these important articles on reading, spelling, and dyslexia by Ms. Mary Pecci. I became acquainted with Ms. Pecci's method back in 2000, when I purchased her teacher's manual, *At Last! A Reading Method for EVERY Child*. I was impressed with the method, but did not begin to use it at that time because I had several other programs that I had been using and felt no need to switch to her program.

Lately I noticed that the materials I had been developing for teaching reading were curiously close to Ms. Pecci's method. I do not believe I was consciously influenced by her method, but there was a growing realization that there were some rather phenomenal similarities between the methods I had been developing and her program.

The main similarity was the importance that we both placed on teaching the alphabet letter names, letter formation, and basic phonics facts BEFORE beginning any reading instruction. Most phonics programs, curiously, neglect to teach letter names and letter formation in alphabetical sequence to fluency BEFORE introducing the kids to formal reading instruction. Sam Blumnfeld's *Alpha-Phonics* and Leonard Bloomfield's *Let's Read* are notable exceptions. I had noticed the last 5 years that all the students coming to me for tutoring were very weak in alphabet writing and letter identification. I investigated how the students were taught and noticed that their kindergarten and first grade instruction in the alphabet was very poor.

I discovered by studying Ms. Pecci's Teacher's Manual and watching her excellent Training Videos that she had the strongest letter identification and writing program anywhere. She is dead serious about teaching the alphabet to high fluency levels. She teaches only Reliable Phonics Facts to her students and made use of the phonics values of many of the letter names. I am not aware of any other program that does that.

Her method made use of regular developmental basal readers, which unfortunately are no longer published by major school publishers. Fortunately, she has published her own excellent developmental basal readers that dovetail perfectly with her teaching methodology and sequence, greatly simplifying the successful implementation of her program.

I was a bilingual teacher for 15 years in public schools. The core of my instruction was the 1987 Riverside Basal Readers. I can testify to the effectiveness of the basals for teaching young non-English speakers to understand spoken English, to read written English, and to write correct English. It was because of these experiences that I realized the value of Ms. Pecci's program for both English-speaking children and children who spoke languages other than English.

For the best information on reading instruction visit my website: www.donpotter.net. Ms. Pecci's website and storefront is: www.onlinereadingteacher.com

I last revised this document on October 9, 2016, with much appreciated help with from Ms. Pecci. Further formatting improvements on November 3, 2016.