

Essential

Phonics

A simple, multi-sensory programme
for teachers and parents
to teach reading.

by Mona McNee

Essential Phonics

This is a simple programme to teach children the letters and how they work. It teaches reading, writing and spelling at the same time, at the very beginning. This programme is suitable for any age, initial or remedial teaching.

When are they ready to start?

Most children are ready for this by their 4th birthday if not earlier. They are ready when they can talk and when they can identify letter shapes. (For convenience, the pronoun SHE is used for the teacher/parent, and HE for the learner.) Make an alphabet card, large letters $\frac{3}{4}$ " or 2 cm high, with one letter on each small card. On another card 5" x 6" write 9 (3 rows of 3 letter), or 12 (3 x 4), large. Give the child one of the letters on a small card and see if he can match it. Can he pick it out of the 9 he can see? If he can, he is ready to start learning letters and sounds.

Letters and sounds

Teach that each letter has a sound, that letters are wonderful way of putting sounds on paper. Mention briefly that there are capitals used for the first letter of names. Use dot to dot, and explain what **dot**, **dash**, **arrow**, **letter**, **sound**, and **word** mean.

Start with the word *cat* as the framework for learning 3 letter/sounds and right-left direction. Explain that you start at the black dot, and go the way the arrow points, along the dots, and there-and-back over the dashes. The aim is to produce straight lines and smooth curves, so you do not go too slowly from dot to dot but fairly fast, only taking care to start and stop at the right place Draw attention to the straight parts, the tall, the tails, and how letters sit on lines Have the whole class "draw the letter in the air." swinging their arms from the shoulder, to get the big feel of the shape of the letter, then go over the dot to dot words over and over, until each letter is learned, named, sound and shape (the feel, learned in the muscle.).

It is better next to learn letters that can be kept going. You can sound an **f** until you run out of breath. The whole class can try to see how long they can keep the sound going, and this gives you a chance to see that their lips are the correct shape. This is why the next letters to be learned are: *I, fox, zip, man*. It is at this point that the child realizes that sounding out is really saying the word slowly.

To learn the 26 letters, fifteen words are presented giving those letters except **q** that starts with a **C**, keeping those that start with **l** to the end, **l, h, k, b**, and you explain that if you start with an **l**, you can only add on further along the line. This means keeping **b** to the end, and this helps to prevent confusion of **b/d**. You can also say **b** is a bat and a ball, and the bat must be able to hit the ball along the empty line (to write) and “along the line the way we read” for reading. If there is still **b/d** confusion, teach the first 4 letters of the alphabet **a.b.c.d**, and have the whole class tap out **A-B** with their non-writing hand, then with their writing hand form a **c** as they say it, and keep going up tall to make the **d** as they say it. Starting a **d** with a **c**, it cannot go wrong.

l is a long line. The short **u** goes under and up – and down. **M** hums, the mouth closed, not mer. **V** is a valley – explain what a valley is (in the mountains).

Aim to learn a letter a day. Combine new letters to make new words to practice precise word-building. A child who knows how to read *red* and *fox* can then read *rod*. When he knows *van*, he can read *ran, fan, den, vex, nod*, and so on. He therefore does not need to learn words.

Notice if the pupil is holding his pencil correctly and comfortably, avoid a tight grip. It is easier to get everything right first time than to correct a bad habit. He should not press too hard. If he does, buy a propelling (mechanical) pencil with a thin led which simply breaks when you press too hard! This works when nagging does not.

Teach every single thing. Do not hope your pupils will “catch on.” Make sure they are learning *because you are teaching*, direct instruction. Always provide at least one line to write on. Double-lined exercise books help to establish even-sized writing.

Teach first the 5 letters starting with **C** (as in *cat, dog*) then play with the letters to show that he can now read **a, at, act, tag, got, cog** (and explain it). You must be very clear in your own mind that the pupil is learning how letters work and is not learning words as wholes. He is learning to sound out.

The first two things you teach are 2 letter/sounds and how to hear sounds in words (auditory ability, phonological awareness), how to hear that c.a.t. makes cat, and that dog starts with **d**, leaving **og** which starts with **o**, **do...g**. This is fundamental to spelling.

Teach the sounds of letters, ‘e’ as in red. There is no harm in teaching the names of letters also, “ee say e”, but at first the sounds are essential.

There are no 3-letter words with a **q**, so this letter is introduced with “quickly” along with the idea that sometimes two letters must be together: **au**, that if you have a sound twice (c.k.), you only say it once, and that words can be longer than 3 sounds. “Quickly” introduces **q** (with **u**) and short **y**.

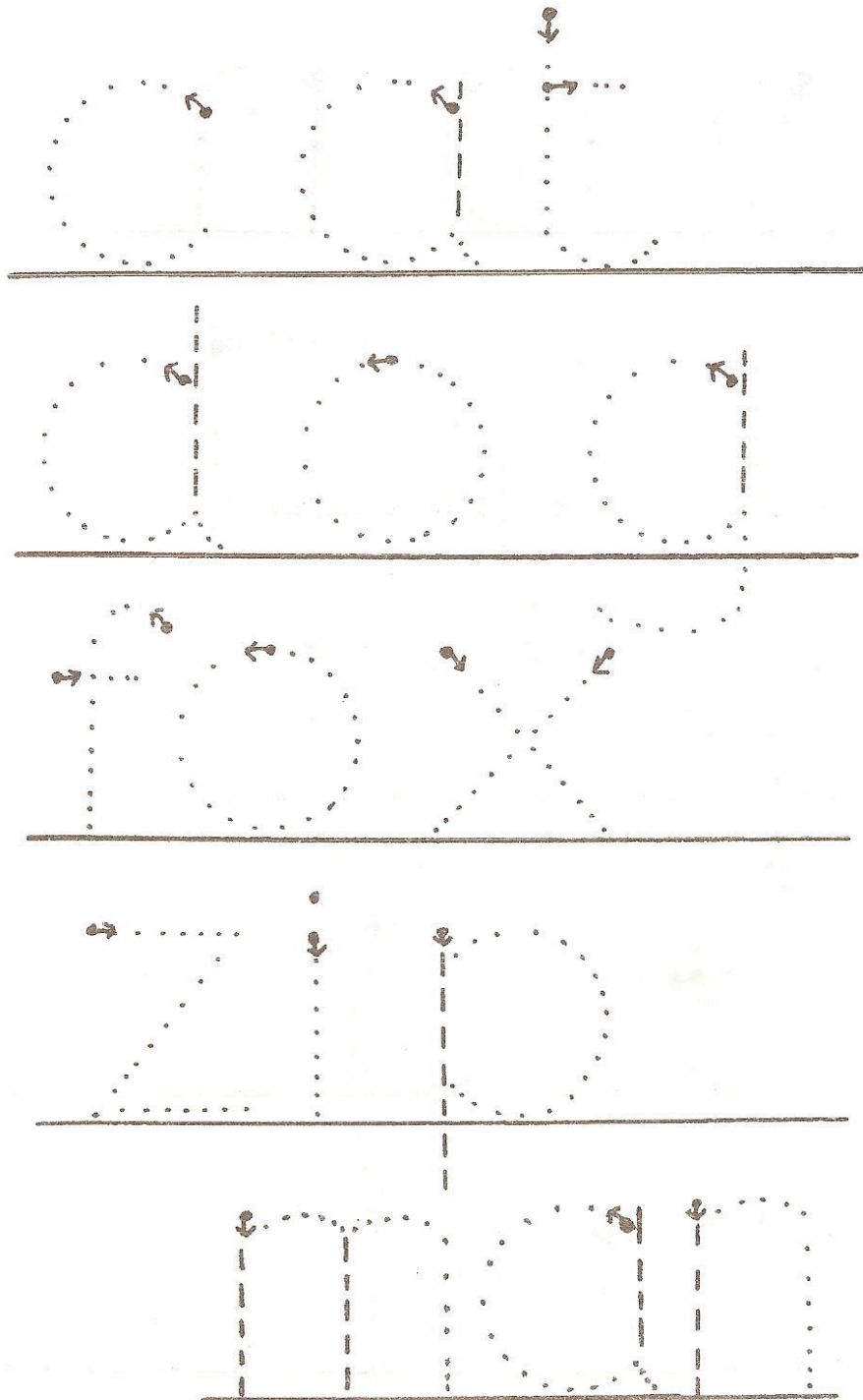
Practice

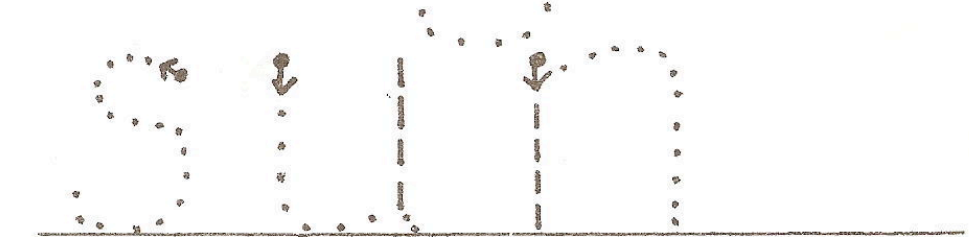
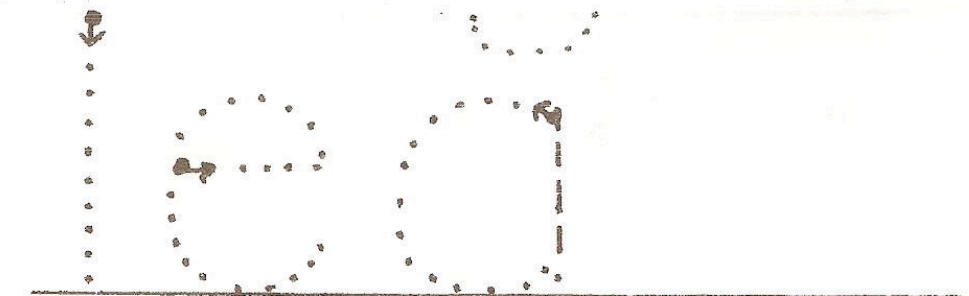
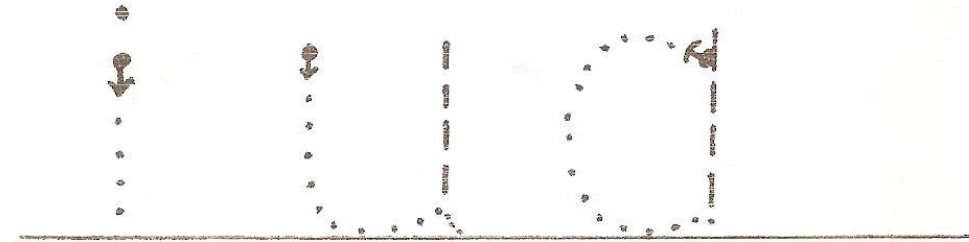
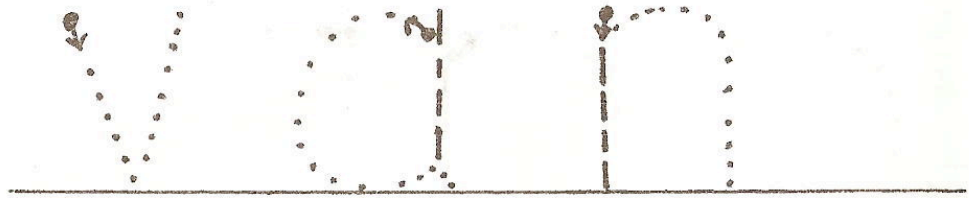
Small cards are useful, with the word writ large on one side and the picture on the other, so that they can NOT get the word from the picture. Rather, “Sound this out and you will know what a picture is on the back with seeing it!” and when they say the word, and you show them the picture, you can see the smile of satisfaction on their faces. I also use words that start with the same letter, to prevent 1st-letter-and-guess: *man, map, mat, cat, cup, can, cap, cot, dog, gun, hat*, and so on. The children readily grasp that all 3 letters are needed to get the word right – and that they can do this. **Nothing succeeds like success.**

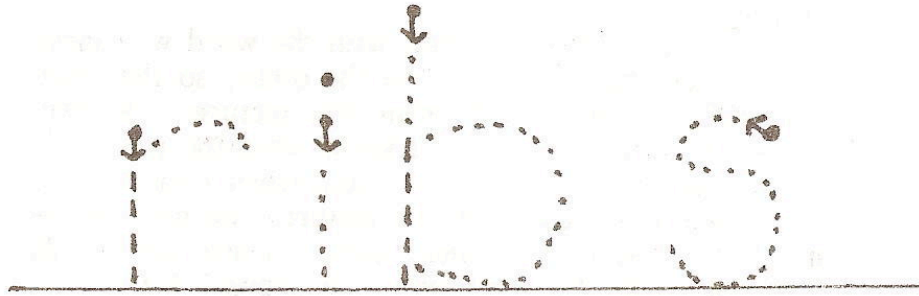
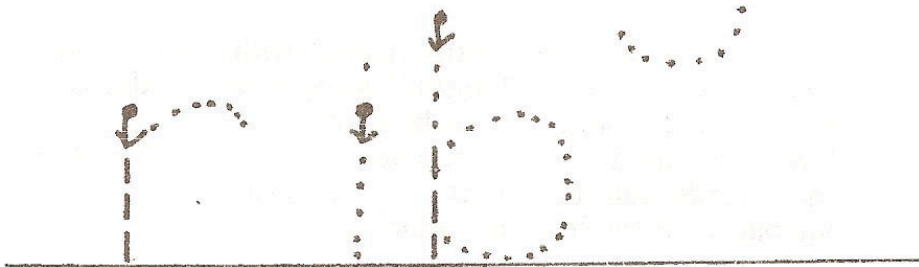
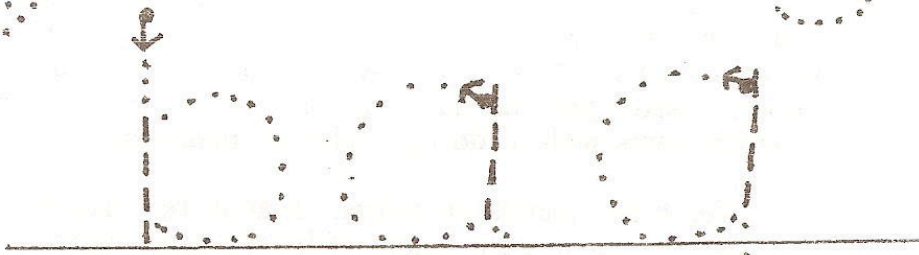
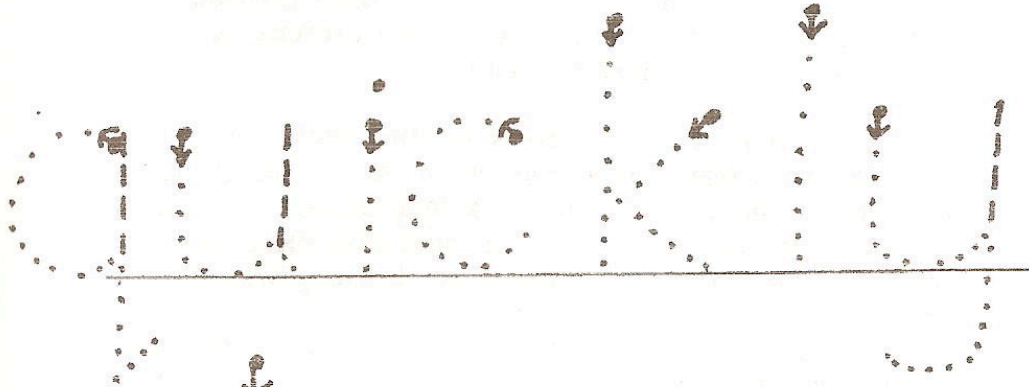
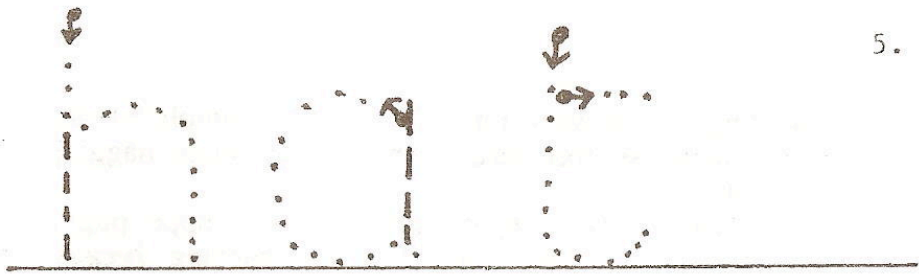
You can make games (bingo, slides and ladders, Pairs), “clocks” with moving parts and other cardboard arrangements to put a vowel inside different endings, or to put different vowels into two letters (pat pet pit pot put). The games are essential today because so few storybooks are available. Level one of “Primary Phonics” is good. Once you have made a bingo set for 30 children, you can use it for 10 years; it is well worth the effort. There is so much to do, with writing, sounding out words and playing the games, that you can go quite a long way without asking the children to read books. Then when you do, they are far better placed than if you start with books before they can read at all. You can always read a story, letting the child read the words he CAN read, but letting a child learn a book by heart means he is spending too much time on that one book. Telling him words subtly tells him he can do it on his own.

To promote listening to sounds of words, dictate single words; then as you go straight through the course, dictate sentences. “Alpha to Omega” provides graded sentences.

Fifteen Words for Learning the 26 Letters







The **main letter-groups** which must be learned after the 26 letters are given in the following pages, one side with the pictures to help if the learner forgets what the two letters say, and NOT words to be “learned”. It is the letter-groups (sounds/spelling) that have to be learned. The front of each “card” gives the child independence, so that he can work out what the letters say without asking Mum or dad all the time.

Have the whole class say three times “Two o’s says \overline{oo} ”, and the same for each new letter-group, then ask. “What do two o’s say?” “If you want to write the oo sound, what letters do you put?” then have the class read out the six words to practice the new letter-group. Make games, materials, use the blackboard, to give practice in learning each group of spellings.

Main Letter Groups

<u>Card</u>	<u>Front</u>	<u>Back</u>
	Letters picture	key word practice words
1	ee tree	tree , feel, week, seem, green, heel
2	oo moon	moon , cool, soon, room; look, cook, book
3	-ng ring	ring , bang, sang, bring, song, long, hung, stung
4	sh fish	fish , brush, flash; shop, ship, shut
5	ch chin	chin , chips, chop; rich, such, crunch, fetch
6	th bath	bath , path, with, think; this that, the, then
7	ar arm	arm , park, start, sharp, farm, yard
8	or fork	fork , storm, short, corn, north, morning
9	er fern	fern , term hammer, butter, faster, ladder
10	ir skirt	skirt , shirt, first, thirty, girl, firm
11	ur fur	fur , burn, turn, curl, murmur, hurt
12	a.e cake	cake , paper, plate, spade, skates, make

13	e.e	even (numbers) (2, 4, 6, 8, 10)	even , see, tree, Steve, evening, these, concrete, extreme
14	i.e	pipe	pipe , time, wine tiger, stripes pie, tie
15	u.e	cube	cube , tune, flute, excuse, fumes, clue, rescue
16	-le	table	table , Keble, trifle, noble, bugle, raffle, pebble, little, bottle, struggle
17	ai	sail	sail , aim, nails, exclaim, hair, upstairs
18	ay	tray	tray , play, spray, away, Sunday
19	oi	coin	coin , boil, spoil, join, toilet, point
20	oy	toy	toy , boy, annoy, destroy, oyster
21	ea	sea	sea , beach, teach, cream, steam, hear, appear
22	ea	bread	bread , ready, heaver, healthy, head, leather
23	ce	fence	fence , princess, dance, advance, necessary, success, December
24	ci	pencil	pencil , city, accident, scissors, decide, excite
25	cy	cylinder	cylinder , Cyril, Cynthia, fancy, Nancy, bicycle
26	ge	fringe	fringe , sponge, village, bandage, garage, danger
27	gi	engine	engine , magic, tragic, digital, imagine, register, ginger
28	gy	gymnastics	gymnastics , energy, allergy, biology, Egypt
39	gu	guitar	guitar , guess, guest, guilty, guinea-pig, Guy
30	oa	loaf	loaf , soap, road, float, groan, boat
31	ou	cloud	cloud , shout, ground, south, count, trousers
32	ou	double (2x8 =16)	double , nourish, country, cousin, famous, curious
33	ow	owl	owl , cow, town, crowd, powder, now, how

34	ow	bowl	bowl , snow, throw, pillow, borrow, yellow
35	au	launch	launch , automatic, August, laundry, Paul, because, haunted
36	aw	saw	saw , paw, claw, lawn, straw, crawl, outlaw
37	al	ball	ball , tall, fall, mall, small, walk, talk, also, almost, bald, scald, salt.
38	wr	wrist	wrist , wrong, wrap, wriggle, wreck, write
39	kn	knot	know , knit, knob, knee, knuckles, know
40	ph	telephone	telephone , dolphin, alphabet, elephant, Joseph, photograph
41	ch	anchor	anchor , school, chemist, echo, Christmas, stomach-ache
42	mb	limb	limb , lamb, comb, dumb, crumb, thumb
43	tion	addition	addition , action, attention, mention, portion
44	sion	mansion	mansion , confession, expression, impression
45	ie	field	field , yield, shield, chief, thief, relief, relieve
46	ie	eight	eight , vein, veil, reign, weight, weigh, sleigh
47	be	behind	behind , become, because, belong, behave, believe
48	re	refuse	refuse , remind, forget, realize, result, remember
49	de	decay	decay , delay, defy, defend, desire, depend, declare

RULES

Here are a few general rules to help understand how letters work.

If a vowel is followed by **e**, the first vowel says its name: see, tie, toe, clue.
This is a very strong rule and works even if the two vowels are split by a consonant (sometimes called **magic e**): game, Peter, wine, home, cube; but NOT by two consonants which are a barrier: hammer, better, winner, hotter, blubber.

The ending **-le** works like the e above.

The ending **-ing** works like the e above so if there is **-ing**, we do not need the **e**:
bake, baking; dine, dining, tune, tuning.

If you WANT to keep a short vowel before **-ing**, double the last letter
hop, hopping, hopped; hope, hoping, hoped
strip, stripping, stripped; stripe, striping, striped

No English words (except I, you) ends in **q, u, v, j, or i**.

q followed by **u**

u is followed by **e**, or changed to **w**:- value, rescue: ou/ow, au/aw.

The sound of **j** at the end is spelt **-ge** or **-dge**.

i/y: **i** at the end is changed to **y** (except foreign words like *ski*, or *spaghetti*):
fry, fries, fried, frying; hurry, hurries, hurried, hurrying: With **-ing**, we
come back to **y** to avoid two **i**'s together (except ski-ing that has a hyphen);
happy, happier, happiest, happily, happiness; pony, ponies; cherry, cherries
(change y to i, and add **-es**). This works just the same after **a** and after **o**:
ay, change the **y** to **i**: pay, paint; and **oy**, change the **y** to **i**: boy, boil.

Remember **y** (like i) can say both short and long sound:

Short: funny, silly, family, syrup, dyslexia, yes, yellow,

Long: python, hydrant, dynamite, multiply, cycle, defy, apply, reply.

Notice that **ea**, **ou**, and **ow** have two sounds each.

ea can also say **ay** in a few words: steak, break, great, bear, pear, wear, tear.

ou can say **oo**: you, youth, group, soup, coupon, route.

-ght: **gh** has Gone Home (is silent). light, might, fight, sight, bright, flight. etc.
eight, weight; weigh, neigh, sleigh; ought, bought, brought, thought, fought,
taught, caught, daughter, slaughter, naughty.

BUT laugh, laughter.

ough: cough where **ough** says ÖFF
 trough ÜFF
 enough
 rough
 tough
 plough OW as in OWL
 bough
 through \bar{o}
 dough \bar{O} as (oh)
 although
 thorough \check{U} as in cup
 borough

In Greek words, **ph** says f (dolphin, photograph), and **ch** says k (echo, chemist).

-ti- can say sh: patient, cautious, essential, confusion, confidential,
 on often says un: won, son, done, front, person, onion
 ti+on = tion (shun) action, mention, direction, sensation

The vowel before –tion is usually long: sensātion, ventilātion, mōtion,
 pollūtion.

zhun is spelled sion: precision, television. (Note: cushion; transition, volition,
 demolition)

WA usually sounds like WÖ: was, want, what, swan.

QUA usually sounds like QUÖ: squash, quality.

WAR sounds like WÖR: warm, warning, swarm.

The long sound of ū can be:

ue: statue, tissue, rescue, residue

u.e: cube, tune, amuse, computer

ew: new, few, screw, chew, stew

ui: suit, fruit, recruit, bruise, cruise

u: music, union, usual, uniform, duty

al always says aw in b-al-l, call, fall, tall wall

w-al-k, talk, chalk, stalk

and also, always; altogether; bald, scald, salt

Silent letters:

k-: knot, knob, knit, knee, know

w-: wrong, wring, wrestle, wreath, wrap

-b: climb, comb, lamb, limb, dumb, thumb, crumb

-l: half, chalk, palm psalm

-n: hymn (hymnal), autumn (autumnal), solemn (solemnity),
column (columnar)

-g: sign (signal), malign (malignant), resign (resignation)

-l: yolk, folk, Norfolk

-e: cake, Pete, time, tote, mute; have, blue; chance, change; little; are

This brief presentation is for TEACHING. It is simple, cumulative, logical, thorough and multisensory. you know what you are doing, with clear goals all the way, and it does not confuse. it is safe for all, from 3 up, infants, remedial, adults, dyslexics, anyone. It is called phonics.

The learning task is minimal and brisk. Children who can already read can improve their spelling, and are not wasting their time. Letters and letter-groups make up less than 100 items, whereas with look-say there are taught 250 sight words just to start with, and having learned them the learner still has to learn the letter groups.

Dyslexia is an inborn, latent potential to muddlement, and often goes unrecognized. Look-say makes dyslexics needlessly word-blind. Systematic phonics is safe for all. Good phonics will raise the national average 7+ARQ (average reading quotient at 7+) to 110.

Essential Phonics Decodable Word Reader

by Donald L. Potter

April 4, 2009

cat: cat at.

dog: tag got dot cot dad Tod gag rod.

fox: fat fog fad fax ax.

zip: pat tap pig dig gap pit pot tip top tip zap fix.

man: tan fan not map Nat fin tam mat not mag mit tin pan
nap dam mad tad Dan miff mop nod nit.

van: vat vip vex vim

jug: jazz Jim jam Jill up cut tug gut gum fuzz muff fun cup
mutt mitt jump jut

wig: wag wax wip win wit

leg: pill pal lug lamp lap gal let lad lip lit mill will fill lag
till lip dell log gull flex fell till tell wet set met get den
Ned led

sun: (unvoiced s) less loss sat sit sap sup sis sips sand cats
cots dots pots tips fuss sad cuts fast last fist list cost
lost muss as is sag gas pass moss toss miss lass

hat: hit hill fill will gill hand hot hum hug hag had hut hunt
huff him hip hop

quickly: quack kid keg kit kiss back lack Mack sack wick
lick yes yet Mick sick kill kiss kit Kim crack quit
quick quiz duck pack pick lock rock dock mock
neck tack tick

bag: big bug bog beg hen web boss bid bit dab ban cab tab
Bill sub bus slab stab blak blag but ban nan jab bin
Ben bless nab buzz tub bump bum tab

rib: run ram rat rig rust rip rug Russ rill rack rick rag rock

ribs: (voiced s = z): dads fads pigs digs fans fins pills laps
lip legs kegs bins runs rags has

Letters are underlined when they are introduced.

When the pupils can read and spell all these words, start them on the **letter-groups**.

Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

April 3, 2009

It appears to Mona McNee and myself that curriculum designers (for inexplicable reasons) are unaware of how a good phonics-first program is to be structured for maximum effectiveness. Mona has graciously given me permission to publish in somewhat altered format her excellent little phonics booklet, *Essential Phonics*. This little pamphlet outlines what Mona and I consider an optimum program. No program that teaches less should be considered for school adoption. More detailed instructions are available in her complete program, *Step by Step*.

In Mona's program, phonics is encapsulated in real words. The student learns to read the words slowly in order to extract the sounds. The words serve as anchors for the memory.

For more information on **why** and **how** we should teach intensive, systematic, synthetic phonics-first, visit Don's web site: www.donpotter.net

For a critical evaluation of reading instruction in the Great Britain, read *The Great Reading Disaster: Reclaiming Our Educational Birthright* by Mona McNee and Alice Coleman, Imprint Academic, 2007.

Mona McNee's concern about reading started in 1970 when, having seen her Down's syndrome son fail with professional teaching, she found that with *no* training but relying on a phonic scheme, *Royal Road Readers*, old-fashioned sounding out and common sense, she was able to teach him.

In May 1975 she became the remedial teacher at a Middle School, and soon concluded that nearly all her pupils could have got it right first time if they had been spared look-say, the whole-word start.

She retired in 1981 and by now has taught well over 500 dyslexics, plus other young children and some adults. She believes we could be better off starting with letters/sounds. Mona was a key person in founding the U.K. Chapter of the (American) Reading Reform Foundation. She did the newsletter from 1989 to 2000, then handed it over others.

Her book (*Step by Step*) provides the vital phonics base the National Curriculum (British) now requires. Teachers who want to TEACH reading can use it. Otherwise, parents can use it to schoolproof their own child. It can be used for any age, pre-school to adult, dyslexic or not, and for people just learning English.

Mona writes in her *Step by Step*: "Guessing is a terrible thing. It is not a "strategy" for reading, but a danger signal telling the teacher that the pupil is not reading from the letters. The only "Don't!" in my lessons is "Don't guess!" (25)

Geraldine Rodgers has published a major history of reading that includes British and American programs: *The History of Beginning Reading: From Teaching by Sound to Teaching by Meaning*.

Mona tells me that *Step by Step* is available for \$10.00 bill and address. Mona McNee, 2 Keats Avenue, Whiston, Merseyside L 35 2 XR, England.

Notice that *Essential Phonics* and *Step by Step* work from letters to sound, rather than from sounds to letters. Mona tells me this is an important distinction.

Last edited by Donald L. Potter, Odessa, TX. 4/12/09.