

PHONICS BOOKLET

INTRODUCTION

Despite much criticism, the English language actually IS quite regular; in fact, approximately 87% of it “follows the rules”. Therefore knowing its basic “rules” means that only 13% of English words need to be individually learnt as “whole pictures”.

A **phoneme** is the smallest contrastive unit of sound. There are approximately 44 phonemes in English. (These phonemes are represented by symbols called **graphemes**.) A phoneme can be represented by one, two, three, or even four letters, (e.g. ‘u’, ‘ea’, ‘ble’, or ‘ough’.) The same phoneme can sometimes be represented by more than one letter or groupings of letters, (e.g. shoe, to, through).

The movement away from the following three fundamental steps in the teaching of reading/writing/spelling, are arguably the main contributors to the Literacy problems that exist today throughout the English-speaking Western world.

1. Failure to properly clearly teach children at the very beginning the actual sounds made by each of the initial consonants and the sounds of the short vowels as represented by the single graphemes a, e, i, o, and u.
2. Failure to teach the patterns of long vowel sounds.
3. Failure to continue on from this point with a consistent and logical progressive presentation of groups of words utilising the same graphemic structures which result in similar appearance and sound (word “families”).

When such a phonetically ordered approach is used, students are given a comprehensible, systematic “ladder” or “scaffolding” which greatly assists them in learning to spell correctly.

Where such scaffolding is NOT in place, students are forced to memorise words as complete “pictures”. The majority of students do not have the type of memory that this task requires.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET.

N.B. The booklet is intended for teacher use only. The only part that needs to be physically seen by the student is page 1, where there are two lists:

- ‘Initial Consonant Sounds’, and ‘Short Vowel Sounds’,
- ‘Short Vowel “Reminder Chart”’.

(1) Ask the student to tell you the sounds that each of the initial consonants on Page 1 makes. Remember, you want the sounds the letters make, not the names of the letters. e.g ‘t’ should be pronounced as it is heard at the end of the word ‘hat’. It should not be pronounced in such a way that it sounds like the word ‘tea’.

From your aural observation of what the student says, you should be able to determine where any remediation of initial consonants sounds is necessary.

(2) Ask the student to tell you the sounds that each of the short vowel sounds on Page 1 makes. Remember, you want the sounds the letters make, not the names of the letters. e.g ‘i’ should be pronounced as it is heard at the middle of the word ‘hit’. It should not be pronounced in such a way that it sounds like the word ‘I’.

From your aural observation of what the student says, you should be able to determine where any remediation of short vowel sounds is necessary.

Do not accept Maori renditions of the vowels as being acceptable. It is noticeable that most New Zealand students today will give some or all of these in place of correct English pronunciation. This is consistent with the manner of language teaching in New Zealand schools – correct phonetic pronunciation is well taught in Maori, but little or none is currently being given in English.

(3) Ensure that the student is thoroughly familiar with the correct pronunciation of all initial consonant sounds and all short vowel sounds before continuing. **This step is vital to future success.**

On a piece of folded card, clearly print the Short Vowel “Reminder Chart” and leave this visible to the student for as long as he/she wishes. The words on this chart are the “key words” which assist the student to pronounce the English short vowel sounds correctly.

(4) From this point on, the student can be told words and sentences to write, and

then to read back again, step by step, just as they appear in order in the booklet. Once familiar patterns have been established (e.g. ‘man, fan, ran, ban’ and ‘bed, red, fed, led’ etc), the teacher may then vary words out of order to test whether or not the student truly has grasped the way the individual phonemes are connected together to form different words, (e.g. man, bit, get, hot’).

Where older students may already have learnt many simple 3 letter words, but still need remediation with vowel and consonant sounds, give them simple words backwards so that they are forced to write what they hear, and not what they are recalling from memory. e.g Use ‘nug’ instead of ‘gun’, and ‘nep’ instead of ‘pen’ etc.

(5) When a new term or expression is encountered, such as ‘blend’ or ‘digraph’, clearly explain to your student what the term means.

(6) Once a student is confident with 3 letter short vowel words, begin with the formal spelling programme which is described below, using the first fifty words from the 300 basic sight word list located at the end of the booklet. (This list is divided up into “weeks”, with 10 words assigned for each week. This number is for younger students – older students initially may well be able to handle double or more than that number.)

Spelling Programme

(Acknowledgement to Mary Andrew for the approach).

(1) Rule up an initial 4 pages of an exercise book up in the following manner.

WORD	DAY1	DAY2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	WEEK	MONTH

(2) Insert the first week's words in the word column on the first week.

WORD	DAY1	DAY2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	WEEK	MONTH
an							
can							
man							
ran							
and							
dad							
had							
at							
am							
as							

(3) Test the student daily by

- a. reading out the word
- b. using the word in correct context in a sentence
- c. saying the word again.

(4) Ensure that the student **WRITES** the word down and then reads it back to themselves out loud, following the sounds with their pen/pencil as they say it. Do **NOT** allow a student to simply spell the word back orally. **Hearing, doing, seeing,** and **verbalising,** are all powerful ways of reinforcing what you are attempting to teach.

(5) Mark each word as it is done. Reinforce and encourage all correctly spelt letters in a word. Where a letter or letters are incorrectly used, look at them (have a “post-mortem”) together. Then model the correct spelling and have the student rewrite the word but without seeing your model.

(6) Place a tick where the word was spelt correctly on that day, and a dot where it was not spelt correctly the first day. (Over time this provides you with a history of words/structures that learner has difficulty with.)

e.g.

WORD	DAY1	DAY2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	WEEK	MONTH
an	√	√	√	√	√		
can	√	√	√	√	√		
man	•	√	•	√	√		
ran	•	√	√	√	√		
and	√	√	√	√	√		
dad	√	√	√	√	√		
had	√	√	√	√	√		
at	√	√	√	√	√		
am	•	•	√	•	√		
as	√	√	√	√	√		

(7) After 5 days, begin with a new list on the next page, following the same format and approach. Return to the first list after one week and retest it. Return again one month later. If a student makes a mistake on the month test, take that word forward into their next new list and begin the entire process with it again.

(8) Complement the phonics and spelling programme with plenty of reading. This may take the form of you reading to the student, the student reading stage-appropriate material to you, or shared reading (such as one line each, turn about). Reading, writing, and spelling are closely interwoven and interrelated.