

Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons

A Program for Parents

by Siegfried Engelmann

Introduction and Parent Guide

Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons, published in 1983, is a program adapted from a larger classroom program called DISTAR that was developed by a team, led by Siegfried Engelmann, in the late 1960s. From 1969 to 1977, it took part in the largest research program ever conducted and funded the by the United State Department of Education. It out-performed all the other contestants. The DISTAR program has since been up-dated and renamed Reading Mastery, a publication of McGraw/Hill Publishing. It has continually been researched and widely used throughout the US. This Introduction and Parent Guide is a shortened version written by Engelmann. The excerpts from the original will either be in quotes or a border.

“The program has been streamlined somewhat and modified for home use. If you follow the program, you will teach your child to read quite well in one hundred days.”

The instructions for each lesson are complete, telling you exactly what to say and do. Each lesson is designed so that it takes only about half an hour each day. That time includes all preparation time and the time that you spend presenting the lesson to your child.

After you complete the program, you'll know more about teaching reading than most public-school teachers, because you will have carefully observed and participated in the step-by-step development of your child's reading skills. And because the program works, something very nice happens: perhaps not on the first lesson or on the fifth, but long before Lesson 100 your child will turn on to reading. The child's surroundings are full of written words that the child will read with great pride. Your life will be enriched as you watch your child grow in a wonderful way.

Parent Guide

“A reasonable teaching program (on any subject) would build one step at a time at a time, designed so that the student achieves mastery of each step before moving to a more difficult one.”

So it is with reading instruction. A reasonable program begins *at the beginning* and builds. The skills that are needed for more complicated tasks are first taught in their simplest form. Once the child has mastered these skills, the program presents more complicated variations.

The following are the four most important points about *an effective sequence for teaching reading*:

1. The beginning exercises are simple and do not resemble later exercises (just as beginning piano exercises do not look much like advanced ones).
2. The program provides teaching for every single skill that the child is expected to use when performing even the simplest reading exercises.
3. The exercises change form slowly, and the changes are relatively small, so that the exercises are always relatively easy for the child.
4. At every step, the program provides for very clear and unambiguous communications with the child.

Teaching Progressions

that start at the beginning and build from the simplest to the more complicated.

1.

Speech Sounds

Where to start? Reading builds from what children already know. They know how to speak. All reading is built on speech. We can read because we can speak. The problem is, the human ear is not tuned enough to hear the smallest bits of sounds in speech. So, the first task is to become more aware of the SOUNDS used in SPEECH. This means getting children to listen more closely to and learn about the

sounds in their speech. This is necessary because they are learning to read English, an alphabetic language.

(Say the Sounds in words: Lessons 1-15.)
(Rhyming: Lessons 5-25)

Because the alphabet represents the sounds in speech, children need to learn more about these sounds in order to learn to read. This is not a natural tendency. Children have little awareness of the sounds in words that they speak. In speaking or listening, they mostly think about the whole word and its meaning. Thinking about the sounds takes some special instruction.

This is a relatively new idea in the scientific knowledge of reading words. Whole books have been written on the subject. Books have also been written about how children can be taught to listen and pay more attention to the sounds. Many kinds of exercises have been developed that help. They include listening and speaking activities like oral word games, rhyming, words in sentences, compound words, syllables, first and last sounds, middle sounds, phonemes in variously spelled words, blending and segmenting phonemes in words and changing or removing phonemes in various ways.

To be effective the activities must not only increase knowledge of and skills with speech sounds but teach skills that can be directly applied to reading words. Teach Your Child to Read teaches verbal rhyming and blending activities that have proven to be most effective in accomplishing both of these objectives. They are designed to catch the child's attention to speech sounds that they are not used to hearing in words.

In teaching the sounds that letters make, you will also work on verbal blending..

skills. The child practices saying a variety of simple words slowly and then saying each word fast. Also, you work on rhyming and other skills related to the task of sequencing the different sound parts of words. During the initial lessons, your child will work on these skills, not on reading words. After your child has learned the sounds for the letters that will appear in the first words presented in the program, and learned the other necessary skills, you introduce the simplest form of word reading. At this time your child will have practiced all the verbal components called for by the complex task of decoding. Your child will have made rhymes for the words that are to be read and will have blended them. Now simply put the parts together, add the written word, and presto: your child can read.

Saying Words Slowly

Practice saying words without pausing between the sounds. As noted earlier, the child will have a much easier time identifying words that are sounded out if the child learns to blend the sounds by saying them without pausing between the sounds.

Beginning with Lesson 1, you will say words slowly, without pausing between the sounds. The words that you will say in Lesson 1 are **am**, **me**, **in**, and **she**.

Practice saying these words properly. Start with **am**. Put your hand on your throat. Take a deep breath. Say "aaamm," holding each sound for at least two seconds. Do not stop between the sounds. If you stop, you will feel your throat stop buzzing. Your throat should buzz from the first instant of "aaamm" to the last, with no inter-

ruption. Remember to hold both sounds for about an equal amount of time. Do not say a very fast **a** sound followed by a long **mmm** sound. Try to hold each sound for two seconds.

Practice the other words—**me**, **in**, and **she**. Note that when you practice **she**, your voice will not start until you say the sound **ēēē**; however, you should hold the **shshsh** sound for two seconds, and there should be no time during which there is silence. The **ēēē** sound should begin as soon as the **shshsh** sound stops, but there should not be the slightest pause (silence) between these two sounds.

Beginning with Lesson 1, your child will say words slowly after you say them. Make sure the child does not stop between the sounds. Correct mistakes immediately. Your child shouldn't have any serious problems with this task if you do a good job of saying the words slowly, one sound at a time.

The same rules that apply to pronouncing sounds in isolation apply to saying words slowly. Some sounds cannot be held for more than an instant. To say the word **mat** slowly, you would hold the first two sounds for two seconds each. Then you would quickly say the **t** sound: "mmmaaat." (Remember, this sound is whispered.) (Note that there is a silence immediately before the sounds **c**, **t**, and **p** when they occur at the end of words. This pause is acceptable because a pause occurs when we say the words at a normal speaking rate.)

Letters

Add letters to the speech sounds.

Letters stand for the smallest bits of sounds called phonemes. There are about 40-43 phonemes in the English language. There are only 26 letters that must be used to represent these phonemes. Because phonemes are spoken very fast, in bunches, they are hard to distinguish in speech. This is the basic problem that learning to read must solve at the very beginning. It has been a major barrier that beginners need to surmount. Learning the sounds of speech and the sounds for letters before reading any words helps.

(Letters: Lessons 1-89)

One trick in helping children learn the letters and the sounds they represent is to make temporary modifications to the shapes of letters

Engelmann explains.

Distar ORTHOGRAPHY: WHY THE "FUNNY" PRINT?

Orthography is a fancy word that refers to the letters that make up words, or how words are spelled. One problem with reading from the kind of orthography that occurs in everyday reading is that the spelling is sometimes outrageous. The word **said** is not spelled the way it sounds: "sed." Many of the simplest words that we would use to make up even the simplest sentence are also irregular—the, off, of, what, to, do, where, who . . . An interesting exercise for beginning reading teachers is to try to make up simple sentences in which the orthographic code is perfectly regular. For it to be perfectly regular, each letter would make exactly the same sound each time it appeared in the sentence. **Pam had ham** is a perfectly regular sentence. The letter m oc-

curs twice, but it makes the same sound each time it occurs: "m." The letter **a** occurs in all words. Each time it occurs, it makes the same short-vowel sound. Although it is possible to use conventional symbols and conventional spelling to make up sentences in which all words have a regular spelling, as soon as we move from **Pam** and her **ham**, the task becomes much more difficult. If we try to express the idea that a girl and a boy went to a lake, we may encounter a great deal of difficulty in creating sentences in which all the letters make one and only one sound. Consider the sentence **He and she go to the lake**. The letter **e** has the same function in the words **he** and **she**. In the words **the** and **lake**, however, the letter takes on two different roles. First it makes an "uh" sound (in **the**), and then it becomes silent (in **lake**). The letter **o** has different sound roles in the word **go** and the word **to**. The letter **h** takes on some bizarre roles. First it makes the common "h" sound (in the word **he**). Then it becomes combined with **s** to make the "sh" sound (in the word **she**). Then it combines with **t** for the **th** sound (in the word **the**).

English, clearly, is not a regularly spelled language. It is an amalgam of contributions from Latin, Greek, and French. But there are ways to simplify it for the beginning reader.

Distar solves the problem by introducing an altered orthography. This orthography does two things. It presents variations of some symbols so that we can create a larger number of words that are spelled regularly (each symbol having only a single sound function). At the same time, the orthography permits us to spell words the way they are spelled in traditional orthography. Here is the **Distar** alphabet:

a ā b c ch d e ē f g h i I I j k l m n
o ō oo p qu r s sh t th u ū v w wh x y ȳ z

Notice that there are two variations for the letter **a** and for the letter **e**. By using these letters we can make the words **he** and **went** regular. The word **he** is presented as **hē** and the word **went** as **went**. Now both words are clearly the sum of their letters. Stated differently: if you say the sound value for each letter, you will say the word.

The orthography also provides joined letters. We can use these to make the word **she** regular: **shē**. The clue that **s** and **h** are joined is very important to the beginning reader. We can also make the word **the** sort of regular: **thē**. (We do not normally pronounce the word that way, unless we are making a speech or trying to be super-proper; however, the beginning of the word is now regular.)

One more convention in **Distar** orthography that permits us to spell words correctly and yet make them regular involves *small letters*. The rule about small letters is this: you don't say them. Silent letters are presented in small type. With the small letters we can now make the word **lake** regular: **lāke**. You do not read the final **e**, but the letter is present and the word is spelled as it should be: l-a-k-e.

Here's the entire sentence about **he** and **she**, with all the **Distar** conventions:
hē and shē went to the lāke.

Everything is now regular (one symbol making one and only one sound) except for the word **the** and the word **to**. Your first impulse might be to think, "Isn't that a shame," and then start trying to figure out ways to make these words perfectly regular. Hold the impulse. When we first began working with the modified alphabet, we used one that was completely regular. We discovered that when we attempted to provide a transition to traditional orthography, some children had a lot of trouble. Their trouble was created by our poor communication. By making the code completely regular, we had implied that reading involves nothing more than looking at the sounds for each word and adding them up. We failed to alert them to the fact that some words are different and that a different strategy is needed to approach these words. Later, we discovered that when we introduced some irregularly spelled words early in the program, the transition was much easier because we had provided practice in dealing with the kind of strategy needed for irregularly spelled words like **to**, **was**, and **said**.

But **Distar** orthography permits us to do a lot of nice things. We can make potentially difficult words like **where** and **were** perfectly regular:
(wherē were)

Notice that the word **were** has the joined **er**, which makes the sound "ur." The **e** is silent, so if you say the sounds for **w** and **er**, you will say **were**. **Where** is also regular now. It has the short **e** (as in **end**). By saying the sounds for **wh**, **e**, and **r**, you will say **where**.

The alphabet does not provide for all possible sounds. The goal in using this alphabet is not to replace traditional orthography but rather to create a variation of it that facilitates initial instruction. Once the child has learned to read words written in this modified orthography, we make the transition to traditional orthography. **Distar** orthography does not have to be exhaustive (presenting symbols for every sound) because we do not have to teach all words or all sound combinations at the beginning of reading instruction. We can teach many skills after we have made the transition to traditional orthography. By then the child has many reading skills, which means that the communications do not have to be as careful as those for the initial skills. The most careful part of the program must be the first part, because it develops the most basic skills that are later expanded and made more precise. If poor communications occur in the first part, the later parts cannot build successfully on skills that had been taught. These parts may then have to include the unpleasant job of re-teaching the basics.

TEACHING FIRST THINGS FIRST

A good reading program should introduce actual reading as soon as possible. But before the child is able to perform the simple act of decoding words such as **mat** and **if**, the child must have some important prereading skills. We can figure out what most of those skills are by determining what a child would have to do to read a simple, regularly spelled word like **mat**.

The most obvious skill the child needs is knowledge of the sounds that each letter makes. This fact suggests some preteaching in sound identification. **Distar** does not initially teach letter names, because letter names play no direct role in reading words. The simplest way to demonstrate this fact is to say the letter names "em," "ay," and "tee" very fast and see if they

add up to the word **mat**. They do not. They generate something like “emmaytee.” It may not be a dirty word, but it certainly is not **mat**.

Sounds are functional in reading. So we preteach the sounds before we present them in words. Before reading the word **mat** and other words composed of these letters, the child would learn to identify **m** as “mmm.” The repeated letters do not mean that you say the sound again and again. They signal you to hold the sound. Take a deep breath and say “mmmmmm” for a couple of seconds.

Not all sounds can be held for a long time. The sounds that can be held are called continuous sounds. They include **f, s, n, l, z, w**, and all the vowels. The sounds that cannot be held are noncontinuous. This group includes **b, d, ch, g, h, p, j, and t**. To say these sounds, you pronounce them very fast and add no “uh” sound to the end of them. The sound at the end of the word **mat** is unvoiced, which means that it is whispered. It is not “tuh.” It is a whispered little “t.” That is how it occurs in the word, and that is how it is pretaught. When the child has mastered the sounds that will occur in various words, the child has mastered the most obvious skill that is needed to read.

But other skills are quite important. Blending skills are verbal, not visual, skills. A child who does not have them will have difficulty linking the sounds of a word. To teach the blending skills called for by the word **mat**, we get rid of the written word **mat** but require the verbal behavior that the child would use in reading that word. First the child says the word very slowly, holding each sound but not stopping between the sounds: “mmaaat.” Next the child says it fast: “mat.”

Here’s how we might present the task:

“Say **mmaaat**.” (Child says:) “mmaaat.”

“Say it fast.” (Child says:) “mat.”

For the blending task, the teacher does not stop between the sounds. (Learning this skill is sometimes difficult for children; however, it is usually much more difficult for teachers.) The reason for presenting the sounding out without stopping between the sounds is that it creates a much cleaner communication than one created by stopping between the sounds: “mmm—aaa—t.” When the child says the sounds without pausing, the child is actually saying the word slowly. To say the word at a regular speaking rate, the child simply speeds up the word. The

child does not first have to put the parts together and then say it fast.

When we add the written word to the blending exercise, we have an initial word-reading exercise.

You point to the word **mat** and touch under the letters **m, a, and t** as the child says “mmaaat.”

You say, “Say it fast.” Child says, “mat.”

We’ve identified two important skills that are called for by the simple word-reading task. There are others, the most important of which is rhyming. Rhyming points out the relationship of one word to words that are similar. If we start with the ending **op** and add different beginnings (by putting different consonants in front of **op**), we create a series of related words. If the child has basic rhyming skills, the relationship between the words becomes very clear. They rhyme. This understanding promotes important generalizations about word families (which are based on common endings). This understanding helps the child see that a word like **hop** is not an island but is part of a network of words that includes **top, pop, and drop**.

To summarize, you are going to teach your child the sounds the different letters make. You do not teach the letters all at once. You present them one at a time and give your child plenty of practice with each new letter. While you are teaching the letters, you also work on blending skills. The child practices saying a variety of simple words slowly and then saying each word fast. Also, you work on rhyming and other skills related to the task of sequencing the different sound parts of words. During the initial lessons, your child will work on these skills, not on reading words. After your child has learned the sounds for the letters that will appear in the first words presented in the program, and learned the other necessary skills, you introduce the simplest form of word reading. At this time your child will have practiced all the verbal components called for by the complex task of decoding. Your child will have made rhymes for the words that are to be read and will have blended them. Now simply put the parts together, add the written word, and presto: your child can read.

The sequence is designed so that the child who takes the first steps can take the next step and the steps that follow that step. Furthermore, all the skills that are needed are pretaught, which means that you should always be able to correct

mistakes in more complicated tasks by referring to the specific skills that were pretaught.

Irregulars and Comprehension

Initial decoding is certainly not the end of reading instruction; however, it is the major stumbling block. After you guide the child past the initial decoding, you must still teach a great deal. You must introduce different groups of irregularly spelled words (such as the group that contains **ar**, like **part, smart, bark**, and so on). And you must switch emphasis from the reading of isolated words to sentence reading and sentence comprehension. To make reading the key to the discovery of meaning, you first direct the child to read a sentence, then answer questions about the sentence. If the sentence the child has just read is **We went home**, you would ask questions such as “What did we do? . . . Who went home?” This type of comprehension is simple, literal understanding, but like initial decoding, it is the simplest and most basic form that can be presented. In addition to the strictly literal questions about the sentences the child reads, you also introduce comprehension activities to promote the idea that the sentences may tell about pictures, and that these pictures show what the sentence tells. If the sentence is **It is on**, you tell your child, “You’re going to see a picture. And what do you know about the thing you’ll see in the picture?” (Child says, “It is on.”) You present the picture showing a child who has just turned on a light. You now ask questions that relate the text to the picture. “What is on?” You also ask questions that serve as rewards.

As your child becomes more proficient at handling the simpler forms of comprehension activities, more elaborate ones are introduced. One type is the prediction question. After the child reads a sentence that tells what somebody wants to do, tries to do, or starts to do, you ask, “What do you think will happen?” The next sentence in the text answers the question. Prediction questions help the child develop the skill of “anticipating” what will happen next. These questions help the reader form a tie between the skills used in listening to a story and those involved in the more active role of reading it.

The Outcome

So your child starts the program with presumably very few reading-related skills. Within one hundred teaching days—about two-thirds of a school year—your child reads, although not as well as an adult. But through the course of the lessons your child has learned to read words without first sounding them out—and therefore has learned to read at a rate much faster than that at which the child read during the first lessons that presented word reading. Your child has learned to read from traditional orthography and now reads simple stories that are more than 250 words long (through a transition that begins in Lesson 74). The child has learned basic sentence-comprehension skills (literal comprehension and prediction skills).

And the program provides for teaching you. As you read the description of the various comprehension skills, you may have wondered, “How will I know which questions to present and when to present them?” It’s easy. All the questions that you are to present are written in the program. All tasks and activities that you are to present are written in the program. In fact, all the correct responses that your child should make for the various tasks are indicated. If you follow the program religiously the first time you present it, the outcome is guaranteed. Your child will read, and you will be an effective reading teacher. When you present the program a second or third time to other children, you will understand where each type of exercise is going. You will be able to free-lance more, add, change, possibly streamline. If you try to become too fancy the first time you present it, however, you will probably find out later in the program that you should not have modified some of the things you did earlier. Our discussion of the program was very general. A host of mini-skills is taught along the way, and unless you know how each of these skills relates to others that are to be taught, you may change an exercise from the way it is specified and in so doing fail to teach one of these skills.

GETTING READY

Before you start teaching your child, you should do four things:

- Learn the sounds that are introduced in the program, particularly the first ten.
- Make up a teaching schedule.
- Practice some corrections.
- Practice presenting the first couple of lessons in the program.

The sounds. The following list presents the sounds in the order of their appearance. Accompanying each sound is a brief description of it, indicating whether it is *continuous* or *noncontinuous* and whether it is *voiced* or *whispered*.

Before you present any sounds in the program, make sure that you can pronounce each sound properly. First make sure that you can produce an individual sound in isolation (apart from a word) in a way that is not distorted. The sound will be distorted if you add a funny sound to the end of it.

The simplest procedure is to start with a word that ends in the sound you are interested in. Say the word slowly and loudly, as you would say it to a person who is hard of hearing. For example, to figure out how to say the sound **nnn** in isolation, say the word **fan** very slowly, holding each sound for at least one second. The way you say the **nnn** sound in that word is the way you would say the sound **nnn** in isolation. Note that you do not say “fffaannnuh” or “fffaannnih.” So when you say the **nnn** sound in isolation, you would not say “nnnuh” or “nnnih.” You would say a pure **nnn** with no additional sound tacked onto the end.

To figure out how to say the **t** sound, say the word **fat** slowly and loudly. Note that you cannot hold the **t** sound. It occurs quickly no matter how long you hold the **fff** sound and the **aaa** sound (both of which can be held a long time). Note also that you do not add a funny sound to the end. You do not say “fffaaatuh” or “fffaaatih.” So you would not say “tuh” or “tih” when you present the **t** sound in isolation.

Remember, the simplest procedure for figuring out how to say sounds in isolation is to say a word that ends in that sound. Say the word slowly and loudly, but not in a way that distorts the sounds. The sound that you say at the end of the word is the sound you would produce when presenting that sound in isolation.

A sound is whispered if your voice is not turned on when you say the sound. Place your hand on your throat and *whisper* the entire word **fuss**.

Symbol	Pronounced	As in	Voiced or Whispered	Introduced in Lesson
m	mmm	ram	v	1
s	sss	bus	w	1
a	aaa	and	v	3
ē	ēēē	eat	v	5
t	t	cat	w	7
r	rrr	bar	v	9
d	d	mad	v	12
i	iii	if	v	14
th	ththth	this and bathe (not thing)	v	16
c	c	tack	w	19
o	ooo	ox	v	21
n	nnn	pan	v	23
f	fff	stuff	w	25
u	uuu	under	v	27
l	lll	pal	v	29
w	www	wow	v	31
g	g	tag	v	33
I	(the word I)		v	34
sh	shshsh	wish	w	35
ā	āāā	ate	v	37
h	h	hat	w	39
k	k	tack	w	41
ō	ōōō	over	v	43
v	vvv	love	v	45
p	p	sap	w	48

Symbol	Pronounced	As in	Voiced or Introduced Whispered in Lesson	
ar	ōrrr	car	v	49
ch	ch	touch	w	50
e	ēēē	end(ed)	v	52
b	b	grab	v	54
iŋ	iing	sing	v	56
i	īīī	ice	v	58
y	yyyē	yard	v	60
er	urrr	brother	v	62
oo	ooooo	moon (not look)	v	65
J	j	judge	v	67
wh	www	why	w	69
ȳ	īīī	my	v	71
ū	ūūū	use	v	74
qu	kwww (or koo)	quick	v	74
x	ksss	ox	w	75
z	zzz	buzz	v	75
ea	ēēē	leave	v	79
ai	āāā	rain	v	88
ou	owww	loud	v	89

You should feel no vibration on your throat because all the sounds are whispered.

Now say the word **fuss** very slowly by holding each sound longer than you normally would. Do not try to whisper the word. Say the word in a normal speaking voice. You should feel no vibrations on your throat for the sounds **fff** and **sss**.

Now say the word **fun** slowly and feel your throat. Your throat should not buzz for the **fff** sound. But it should buzz for both **uuu** and **nnn**. The sound **nnn** is a voiced sound.

Now say the word **run** and feel your throat. Your throat should buzz for all sounds—**rrr**, **uuu**, and **nnn**. The **rrr** is a voiced sound.

Do not present a lesson that introduces a new sound until you can produce the sound accurately and consistently. (If you misteach a sound, your child will have a lot of trouble later in the program when trying to read words that include that sound.)

Pay particular attention to the pronunciation of the following sounds:

- **r**. Do not say “urrr” for this symbol or the child will have a lot of trouble reading words like **run**. The child will try to call the word “urun.” Use the sound that is at the end of the word **bar**. It is a single sound that can be held.
- **th**. The sound for this symbol is *voiced*. There is a whispered **th** for words like **math** and **thing**. The voiced sound occurs in words like **them**, **then**, **that**, and **those**. This sound is the one that is taught in the program.
- **h**. The **h** sound is very tricky. It is produced quickly by letting out a little air *with no voice*.
- **y**. The sound we use for this symbol occurs only at the beginning of words (**yēard**). It is quite similar to the sound **ēēē** (as in **eat**), but it is slightly more restricted. If you have trouble with the sound, say **ēēē**. It will work pretty well.
- **oo**. This symbol refers to the sound in **boo**, **moon**, and **toot**, not to the sound in **look**, **soot**, or **book**.
- **wh**. This sound is pronounced differently in different parts of the country. In the East it is unvoiced. In the Midwest and West it is voiced. Use the pronunciation that is appropriate for your speech.

In addition to indicating whether a sound is voiced or whispered, the column of the sounds chart labeled “Pronounced” shows whether the sound can be held or must be said very rapidly.

If a sound can be held, three symbols are shown for the sound (such as **mmm** and **sss**). These symbols tell you that you should be able to hold the sound for at least two seconds without distorting it. Note that you are not to say the sound repeatedly (“m—m—m”). You are to take a deep breath and say it one time, holding it for at least two seconds.

The sounds that cannot be held are shown in the “pronounced” column as single letters, **d**, **c**, **t**. These sounds must be said very quickly. Say the word **mad** slowly and loudly. The last sound you say is the appropriate pronunciation for the **d** sound. It is a voiced sound. (Feel your throat.) It does not have an “uh” sound following it (not “mmaaaduh”), and it must be said very quickly.

To use the sounds chart, refer to the last column. That column tells you the lesson in which a new sound is introduced. In Lesson 1, the sounds for **m** and **s** are introduced. Practice these sounds before presenting the lesson. Both sounds are voiced. Check the column labeled “As in” to make sure that you are using the right pronunciation for the letter, particularly the vowels. The symbol **a** is introduced in Lesson 3. It has many different pronunciations when we deal with traditional orthography. For the beginning of the program that you will use, the symbol **a** refers to only one sound—the first sound in the word **and**. Note that you will *never* say “aaa as in **and**” to the child. The model word is to show you the sound you are to say for **a**.

3.

Matching and Combining Letters and Sounds

Learning how they can make up words. Because the alphabet is not a perfect match of speech, learning this match can be difficult for a child. Applying phonemic stretching and blending of words to letters in words enables the beginner to surmount this hurdle. All together, this is **called decoding**. This too must start with the simplest and build to the more complicated. (Lessons 9 – 95)

Here is how Engelmann explains this process.

Decoding—is the central skill in initial reading. Most of the other skills are nothing more than language skills. Once a sentence has been decoded, it is like a spoken sentence that may have been presented slowly. If the child has the language skills necessary to understand the spoken sentence, the child has the skills necessary to *understand* the decoded sentence. The central issue is not that of teaching the child to understand, but of teaching the child how to decode the sentences that *are to be understood*. (We should not require the child to read sentences that are beyond the child’s understanding, any more than we would require somebody to read a Spanish text if the person had no understanding of Spanish. But if we have met this obvious language requirement, the central thrust of initial reading becomes the emphasis on decoding.)

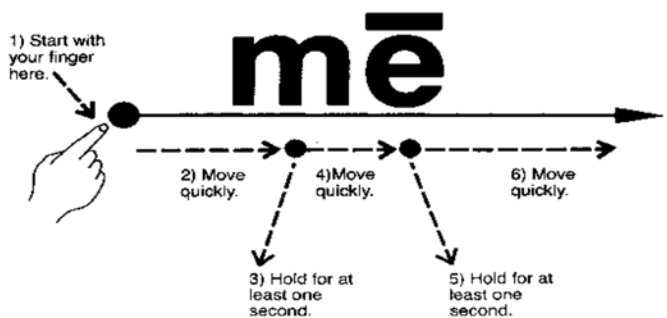
Sounding Out Words

Beginning with Lesson 9, you will direct your child to sound out written words and then say them fast. The words to be read look like this:



For each word, you will first touch the big ball at the beginning of the arrow that runs under the word to be read. You tell the child to “sound it out.” Then you move to each ball on the arrow and stop for at least *one second*. (One second is not one instant. It is a fairly long time.)

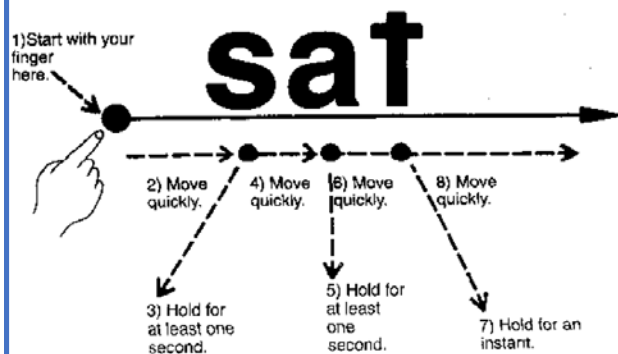
The illustration below shows what you are to do.



Practice moving quickly along the arrow and then stopping for at least one second at each ball. After you have stopped at the last ball for at least one second, move quickly to the end of the arrow.

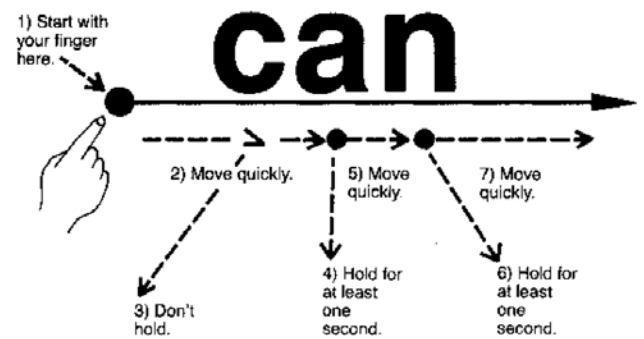
The child is to say the sounds as soon as you touch the ball for each sound. The child is to keep holding the sound until you touch the ball for the next sound. The child is then to say the next sound without stopping. (The child is to say “mmmee,” not “mmm”—pause—“eee.”) The child’s task will be much easier if you remember to move fairly quickly from one sound to the next. (Note that if you move too quickly, the child will not know what sound to say next and will not be able to respond when you touch the next ball. If you move too slowly, the child will run out of air before saying the last sound.)

Some words end in sounds that cannot be held for a long period of time. You present these words almost the same way you present words with sounds that can be held. The only difference is that you don’t stop at the last sound for a full second. You stop for an instant and then move quickly to the end of the arrow.



The program script for each task indicates the response the child is to produce. The response for the word above is “sssaaat.” The response shows that the child holds the first sounds but does not hold the last sound. The way you touch the sounds should parallel the response the child is to produce. Hold the first sounds for at least one second each. Stop for a moment under the t.

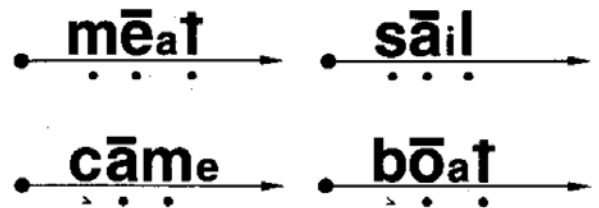
In Lesson 21 a new type of word is introduced. This type begins with a sound that cannot be held. It is the most difficult type of word the child will read. The illustration below shows your behavior for presenting these words.



As you point, the child produces the response “caaannn.” Note the symbol under the **c** in **can**. It is an arrow shape, not a ball. You do not stop under the **c**. The arrow symbol indicates that although you do not stop, the sound is to be pronounced. It is pronounced when you stop under the next sound (**a**). At that time the child says “caaa.”

Remember, when an arrow shape appears under a letter, you do not stop or even pause under the sound. The child says the sound in combination with the next sound when you stop at the next ball.

Some words would be regular if they did not have “silent letters.” Among these words are **meat**, **sail**, **came**, and **boat**. When these words are first introduced in **Distar** orthography, they are written this way:



Note that there is neither a ball nor a small arrowhead under the silent letters. You do not pause for these letters or stop at them. When the child says the sounds for the letters that are marked with balls and arrowheads, the child says the sounds for the word. Later in the program, beginning with Lesson 74, the small letters become full-size. The child typically has no trouble reading them because the child has dealt with each word many times by Lesson 74. The transition is therefore not difficult.

4. The Final Goal:

To Read with Comprehension without Decoding.

Demands from reading texts require the application of word reading skills. These demands are increased gradually. To meet this increase, the program gradually teaches the child to transfer, step-by-step, from decoding to reading the fast way, taking in the alphabet almost automatically. The brain is equipped to do this just like it does for speech.

Engelmann explains:

The goal of decoding instruction is to make decoding an automatic practice, not something that requires a great deal of thinking time or a great deal of effort. Therefore, the program should progress at a rate somewhat slower than what would be possible if the only criterion for decoding were, Can the child do it? In other words, if your child is on Lesson 30 and you were to skip ahead to Lesson 50, you would find that indeed your child can read some of the words—maybe most of them. But simply being able to read the words is not enough. You must make sure that the child has enough practice to become relatively fluent. The task of decoding should not be a supreme effort. The goal of fluency and ease of reading is achieved if you stay well within the bounds of what the child is capable of doing. No harm will come of the child's reading the words **was** or **ram** ten or fifteen more times before reaching Lesson 50. The additional practice will simply make Lesson 50 easier and provide more reinforcement for the child. So do not skip.

Also, do not introduce such skills as "reading the fast way" (without sounding out words) before the program introduces them. Certainly the child can learn these skills earlier. But unless the child is very firm on sounding out, you may have no ready way to correct the mistakes made later when the child begins to "word guess." If the sounding out is very firm, you will easily be

able to correct mistakes when the child later reads words the fast way. If the child has learned simply to say words, the child may have very little trouble early in the program but may encounter very serious problems when highly similar-looking words begin to appear. (After **that**, **this**, **those**, **them**, **then**, and **than** have been introduced, the child is not able to use a simple word-reading strategy that works when **the** and **that** are the only words that begin with **th**.)

Reinforcement and Corrections

To work effectively with your child, you must convey the information the child needs. You must also respond to your child's efforts. In responding to these efforts, you should reinforce appropriate behaviors and correct mistakes.

Although the lessons should be overwhelmingly reinforcing, do not confuse being reinforcing with being soft. You are soft if you "overlook" mistakes or if you let the child get by with a sloppy effort. This behavior is not reinforcing. Furthermore, it is not realistic. The skills that are taught early in the program will be used later—all of them. If they are weak when they are presented in their simplest form, early in the program, they will most certainly be weak later, when the child is expected to use them in complex tasks. If the child is weak in all the components of the complex task (which is what will happen if you use a very low standard on all skills), the child will fail hopelessly. The only remedy would be to take the child back to the beginning of the program and start over, this time with a firm criterion on performance.

Some statements of reinforcement are specified in the script for the daily lessons. However, the script does not tell you how to respond to all the good things that should be praised. To be reinforcing, follow these rules:

1. If the child is working hard, praise the child: "You are a really hard worker." (You can use this kind of praise even if the child's performance is not perfect.)
2. If the child performs well, praise the child: "That's amazing. You are really smart."
3. If the child performs well on a task that presented problems earlier, express surprise. "You got that right this time. I thought you'd have a lot more trouble than that. You're terrific."

4. Give the child a chance to show off skills that have been mastered. "Wait until your father sees you do that tonight. He'll never believe it."

Note that three of these four points express surprise. The most effective reinforcement that you can present is built around surprise, because the surprise shows that the child did not merely do what you expected, but more. Doing better than you expect is one of the most reinforcing experiences a child can have. Therefore, the most effective procedure you can use to assure that the child will find learning to read very reinforcing is to challenge the child. If you challenge the child to do something you think the child can do, and if the child succeeds, you can act amazed. Start by expressing a challenge. Ideally, the challenge should involve a group of tasks, not a single task. "Let's do the say-it-fast tasks for today. I'll bet that you can't do them all without making more than two mistakes. These are very hard words in the lesson today."

Present the tasks. If the child makes fewer than two mistakes (which will probably happen), respond by saying something like "You didn't make one mistake. I think you just got lucky. There is no way you could be that good at say-it-fast."

Even if the child does make more than two mistakes, you are in a good position to permit the child to save face without feeling defeated. "Those were hard words, weren't they? Let's go over them one more time and make sure that we can do them. I'll bet some of them will come up again tomorrow."

To make the challenge effective, pick a group of tasks that you are pretty sure the child can do. If the child is firm on sounds, say, "I don't think you'll be able to get all the sounds today without making a mistake."

Remember, the goal of the challenge is not to tease the child or to make fun of failure. The challenge is designed to let the child show you that she can do more than you expect. If you say, "I wouldn't be surprised if you missed two or three of the sounds today," the stage is set for the child to make *no* mistakes (or possibly one) and for you to say, "Wow, you did it. I don't believe it. Those were hard." Remember, if you cannot say, "Wow, you did it" at the end, the challenge was either a complete flop or less than a total success. The "Wow, you did it" is what the challenge is all about.

Two technical points about reinforcement:

1. If you reinforce the child after *every* task, you will actually be teaching the child to go off-task rather than to work through the lesson. The child learns that following each task will be a "reinforcement break."
2. The same thing will happen if you frequently use elaborate (lengthy) reinforcement.

Do not reinforce the child after every single task. The challenge should always be presented for a group of tasks. As you present each task within the group, make *very* brief comments such as "That's it" or "Good job." These interruptions should take no more than a second or two at most. Try to maintain very fast pacing from one task to the next. As soon as the child successfully completes a task, present the next task with the smallest interruption possible. This procedure is important not only from a "management" standpoint, but from a communication standpoint also. If the examples are presented quickly, one right after the other, the child will more readily see how the examples are the same and how they are different. If long pauses intervene, the child will not receive a message that is as clear.

If the child interrupts you while you are presenting, do not reinforce the behavior. If you listen to the child or permit the interruption, you reinforce interruptions, and they will occur with increasing frequency. Simply tell the child, "Whoa. Not now." Continue with the task. After you have completed a group of tasks (such as the say-it-fast tasks specified for the lesson), praise the child (if the child performed well). Then, "Now what was it you wanted to say earlier?"

In addition to discouraging the child from interrupting you, praise the child for not interrupting. Do not overdo this kind of reinforcement. But if the child has a tendency to interrupt and if the child does not interrupt during a group of tasks, say, "You are really a big person. You didn't interrupt one time. That's great. I didn't know you could work that hard."

A final reinforcement procedure: Occasionally a child becomes frustrated, has a bad day, and may produce a tear or two. A good way to respond to this behavior is to say, "Do you know how I know that everything is going to be all right tomorrow? You're crying. That means you care. That's good, because if you care, you'll keep working, and if you keep working, you'll get it. Do you know why? Because you're very smart."

Corrections

When the child makes a mistake, correct it immediately. If the child makes a mistake on the second letter of a word that is being sounded out, do not wait until the child finishes sounding out the word before correcting. Correct immediately. Correction procedures are specified for the most common mistakes the child will make. These corrections are based on the three things a good correction should do:

1. Alert the child to the mistake and where it occurred.
2. Provide practice with the skill the child needs to overcome the mistake.
3. Test the child within the context in which the mistake occurred.

If the child makes a mistake in identifying the third sound that is presented in a sound exercise:

1. Signal the mistake: "Stop."
2. Provide practice with the skill: "This sound is **aaa**. What sound?"
3. Test the child within the context in which the mistakes occurred. "Remember that sound. Let's go back and do those sounds again." Repeat the sounds in order, starting with sound 1. If the child is able to respond to the third sound correctly, the mistake has been corrected. (This assertion does not mean that the child will never misidentify the symbol again; it means that you know the child is able to handle the activity in which the mistake occurred.)

All three steps are important. If you simply tell the child the "answer" without testing the child, you have no way of knowing whether the correction was transmitted.

Step 2 of the correction does not always mean that you "tell the answer." The only way the child will know the sound that is called for by a given symbol is if you say it; however, some mistakes are different. If the child uses a particular skill, the child will be able to figure out the answer. For instance, if the child is sounding out the word **ram** but is unable to say the word after sounding it out, you would not tell the child the word. Instead, you would make it easier for the child to say the word fast.

Here is the correction:

1. You stop the child after a few seconds. You do not let the child flounder. "Stop."

2. "Listen: **rrraaammm**. Say that." (Child says:) "rrraaammm."

"Now say it fast." (Child says:) "ram."

"That's it."

3. Point to the written word **ram**. "Now do it here. Sound it out."

(Child says:) "rrraaammm."

"Say it fast." (Child says:) "ram."

"You did it."

Learn this correction procedure. You will probably have many occasions to use it. Note that it follows the same three steps as the correction for sound identification. You first signal that a mistake has been made. You then provide practice in the skill needed to overcome the mistake. Finally, you test the child on the word in which the mistake occurred.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

The program includes sound writing as part of each lesson. It does not specify other activities that reinforce reading skills. Note that the purpose of sound writing is not to teach writing or penmanship. The rationale for sound writing is that if the child copies sounds, the child must attend to the shape details of the sounds. If the child attends to these details and associates them with the name of the sound, the child will learn the sounds faster and better. The sound-writing exercises, in other words, are included because of their reading-related value.

Note: It is not necessary to make **sh**, **th**, **wh**, **ch**, **er**, and **qu** so that they are actually joined. But identify each combination by the sound presented in the program.

To make it easier for the child to see how complex letters are formed (**a**, **w**, **t**, **h**, and other letters shown with two or more arrows), use two different-colored chalk (or pencil) lines. *Always* make the first part of complex letters with the same color and *always* make the second part with the same second color. (For instance, always make the first part with yellow and the second part with white.)

You may also teach writing and spelling. In fact, the reading program sets the stage for both additional activities. What follows is an outline for the more basic reinforcement activities that you might present.

Copying words. Beginning with Lesson 30, you can introduce copying words. Pick any words that have been presented in the reading lesson. Write three or four words on paper or the chalkboard (using **Distar** orthography). Leave a space below each word and a line on which the child is to copy the words. Direct the child to sound out the words that you have written, then to copy each word.

Writing words from "dictation." Beginning in Lesson 35, you can present a more sophisticated writing activity (one that is presented in addition to the copying activity, not as a substitute). Use this procedure:

"You're going to write a word that I say.

"Listen: **mat**. I'll say the word slowly: **mmmaa**. Say that."

"Write the first sound in **mmmaa**."

"Now listen again: **mmmaa**. Write the next sound in *mat*."

"Listen again: **mmmaa**. Write the last sound in *mat*."

If the child has trouble isolating the sounds from the word, first say the word, then tell the child the first sound. Say the word again. Then say the next sound. After presenting the third sound in the same way, present the exercise above. Use any of the words that have been presented in the lessons.

Writing stories from pictures. Beginning in Lesson 50, present pictures to the child. For each picture tell the child, "Make up a story for this picture." Reinforce the child for spelling words phonetically. Do not expect the child to spell words conventionally (particularly irregular words). Typically, the child will have very few inhibitions about expressing very elaborate ideas and tackling any word composed of known sounds. The result will be horrible misspellings but very clever recordings of the way we say those words.