



National Research and Development Centre  
for adult literacy and numeracy



**PRACTITIONER GUIDE**

# Improving reading

**PHONICS AND FLUENCY**

Maxine Burton, Judy Davey, Margaret Lewis, Louise Ritchie and Greg Brooks  
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# Improving reading

## PHONICS AND FLUENCY

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# Introduction

One of the main aims of the Skills for Life strategy has been to improve the quality of teaching of adult literacy, language and numeracy, and thus to enable learners to make more progress. However, right from the inception of the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), it has been clear (Besser et al. 2004, Brooks et al. 2007, Burton 2007) that the research base for knowing how to improve the teaching of adult literacy is markedly deficient. A few factors were found to correlate with better progress (e.g. more time on task, learners spending less time working alone in class and more time working in groups), but none of these was strictly speaking a matter of pedagogy. The first project to investigate directly a number of teaching strategies which held out the promise of better progress for learners was the NRDC research project, 'Improving the quality of teaching and learning in adult literacy' which ran from 2007–08, was funded through the Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills (DIUS) and carried out by a research team at the University of Sheffield. This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of three different teaching strategies with adult learners; it is the two reading strategies which are explored in this guide.

It was the almost complete lack of evidence relating specific teaching strategies to adult literacy learners' progress that gave rise to the project, which ran in three distinct phases:

1. Development of materials and methods, and training of a group of teachers in each of the three strategies;
2. Implementation and evaluation of the teaching approaches during the autumn term 2007; and
3. Refining of methods and materials in the light of the previous phases; preparation of guidelines and resources for teacher training and classroom practice.

This guide draws on the first and especially the third phases of the project. The

teachers all received preliminary training in their chosen strategy of phonics or oral reading fluency. The training was specially devised by the research team at Sheffield in the light of available research evidence and in consultation with practitioners experienced in the delivery of the relevant strategy in the classroom. Drawing on these training materials, on the project findings and especially on the expertise and experience of the practitioners who used the strategies with their classes, and the views of the learners themselves, we are now able to offer some guidance to practitioners on how to use the strategies in the classroom.

### How to use this guide

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The design of the project, reflected in the way this guide has been structured – dealing as it does in turn with sections on phonics and oral reading fluency – was never intended to be a means of comparing the relative merits of each strategy, nor endorsing them as the only ways of teaching adult literacy. Nor should the strategies be regarded as mutually exclusive – they are complementary. Most of the learners who took part and received teaching in one of the strategies made significant progress both in their literacy attainment and in the important areas of self-confidence, engagement and enjoyment in class, and increased peer support. But we don't claim that the progress they made was dependent on any of the strategies in isolation.

An outline of the research background and the main findings from the project forms the opening part of both of the sections, followed by guidelines on methods and recommended resources. These are illustrated throughout by means of examples from practice and comments from teachers and learners.

Although the strategies are dealt with in two separate sections in the guide, this is not intended to imply that the strategies are to be regarded as mutually exclusive, nor that they are the only strategies for teaching adult literacy. On the contrary, we must emphasise that using a variety of teaching methods, tailored to the needs of the learners, remains essential good practice. Phonics and reading fluency are only two strategies out of many possibilities, which could include, for example, reciprocal teaching, language experience, and the teaching of explicit comprehension strategies. These are all featured in the *Reading* practitioner guide (Burton 2007) which also highlights the importance, above all, of professional wisdom – the insights and experience of practitioners – when it comes to making judgements about appropriate teaching methods.

This guide is informed by the reflections and judgements of the teachers and observations of their classroom practice. Below is a summary of some of the recommendations that they felt should apply across the strategies and inform good practice in general in adult literacy teaching and learning.

- Acquaint yourself with underpinning knowledge for any strategy so you are confident in the classroom.

- Inspire your learners with your enthusiasm and conviction – not your prejudices.
- Keep your learners informed, consult them as democratic partners and let them exercise choice.
- Take it slowly. Build it up step by step. Don't move on just because you are afraid of boring your learners. Lots of repetition/consolidation may be needed.
- Facilitate and cherish peer support.
- Involve your assistants and volunteers – but ensure they understand the principles of any strategy, particularly if working with lower level learners.
- Use humour in your teaching.

## References

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Besser, S., Brooks, G., Burton, M., Parisella, M., Spare, Y., Stratford, S. and Wainwright, J. (2004) *Adult learners' difficulties with reading: an exploratory study*. London: NRDC. (A study that, inter alia, assessed phonemic awareness and identified learners' 'spiky' profiles.)

Brooks, G., Burton, M., Cole, P. and Szczerbiński, M., (2007) *Effective Teaching and Learning: Reading*. London: NRDC.

Burton (2007) *Developing adult teaching and learning: Practitioner guides – Reading*. London/Leicester: NRDC/NIACE. (This is the guide which arose from the findings of the Effective Practice Study on reading.)

# 1 Phonics

## BACKGROUND

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By phonics we mean an approach to teaching reading and spelling which focuses on the association of phonemes (sounds) with particular graphemes (letters or groups of letters) and of graphemes with particular phonemes. More precisely, by 'phoneme' we mean the smallest unit of sound in a language that makes a difference of meaning, e.g. /b/ v. /p/ makes the difference between *bit* and *pit*. There has been a renewed interest in phonics in initial literacy, and conclusive evidence that systematic phonics instruction, within a broad and rich literacy curriculum, enables children to make better progress in word identification than unsystematic or no phonics instruction.

## What about phonics for adults?

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There has been little guidance about how this might be implemented in the adult literacy classroom and whether it is even an appropriate method for adults. Moreover available phonics schemes all seem to be designed primarily for use with children. The only teaching manual which gives a reasonably full account of a phonics approach for adults is an American one by Susan McShane (2005) and even this is based on school-level evidence.

Although there has traditionally been some reluctance to use phonics with adults in the UK, there are teachers who have been convinced of its value and have been implementing it by means of phonics schemes such as *Toe by Toe*<sup>1</sup> (in widespread use in prisons and with young offenders) or by adaptations of other established schemes, e.g. *Sounds~Write*<sup>2</sup> and *THRASS*<sup>3</sup>. Of the nine teachers who took part in the research project on which this guide is based, and received

1 For further information see: [www.toe-by-toe.co.uk](http://www.toe-by-toe.co.uk)

2 For further information see: [www.sounds-write.co.uk](http://www.sounds-write.co.uk)

3 For further information see: [www.thrass.co.uk](http://www.thrass.co.uk)

training in phonics, only two had used the approach to any extent with their learners before. They were encouraged to base their phonics teaching on the Department for Children, Schools and Families scheme, *Letters and Sounds* (DCSF 2007) (of which more later) and use a systematic phonics approach with their learners over the autumn term of 2007.

### Project findings

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What we found at the end of that time was very encouraging.

- The learners (mainly Entry 1–3) made significant progress in reading comprehension and spelling.
- This progress was achieved in a very short time (on average only between five and six sessions were attended between the two assessments of reading and spelling).
- The learners' confidence in a range of language and literacy tasks also improved.
- Most teachers expressed enthusiasm for phonics, with eight of the nine saying they would definitely continue to use the strategy with their learners.
- Phonics was popular with most of the learners.

For a fuller account of the findings see the associated report (Burton et al. forthcoming)

### PREPARATION FOR TEACHERS TO DELIVER SYSTEMATIC PHONICS

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Our teachers attended four training days, which included a course in the basics of English phonetics and phonology. This was useful underpinning knowledge and was intended to give the teachers the confidence to adapt phonics schemes and materials, and the flexibility to deal with learners' queries in the classroom. We assumed that a completely rigid scheme and progression would not be appropriate for adults. Certainly some teachers valued this theoretical underpinning:

'I think it is essential to fully understand this aspect before we begin to teach a structured programme of phonics to our learners. For instance this underpinning knowledge is invaluable when designing handouts and worksheets where we can hopefully avoid words and sounds which would confuse our learners.'

Others found phonetics rather more challenging and less useful for their practice but even these teachers found it a helpful way of raising awareness of 'the sounds we use and the way we enunciate the sounds'.

We have included some background information about phonetics below but there are also elementary textbooks (some with accompanying CDs) which provide greater detail, e.g. Roach (2000). However what is absolutely essential is an accurate knowledge of the sounds of English.

We can begin by asking what exactly we mean by 'phonetics' and 'phonology'. Phonetics is the study of the sounds of speech and how they are produced. Phonology is the study of the system of sounds in a language, how they are organised and what patterns there are. Another way of looking at it is to realise that, on the one hand, a very wide range of sounds can actually be produced by the human vocal apparatus (think of 'kissing' and 'tut tut' noises<sup>4</sup>!). On the other hand a relatively small number from this wide range of sounds is ever used in any given language to construct its words.

Phonetics is the study of all possible speech sounds: phonology studies the way in which a language's speakers systematically use a selection of these sounds in order to express meaning. (Crystal, 1987:160)

Thus, phonology is the study of the range of sounds which are meaningfully used in a language. The name given to these individual sounds is 'phoneme', the smallest contrastive sound in a language. By contrastive, we mean that a phoneme can make a difference in meaning. So, for example, if we look at initial sounds, the sequence *pig, big, gig, fig* etc. we see that the phonemes /p/, /b/, /g/, /f/ are what distinguish one word from another. The other sounds /ɪ/ and /ɔ/ which make up the written form <ig> are common to all four words<sup>5</sup>.

The sounds produced depend on different positions of the speech organs (tongue, lips etc.) and can be described in terms of where in the mouth they are produced and the way the air is expelled from the lungs. There is neither time nor space to go into detail here about how speech sounds are produced by the speech organs or include diagrams of the vocal tract. However, you can see demonstrations of these in videos downloadable from websites. For example the University of Sheffield Linguistics Department has produced a useful resource at [www.shef.ac.uk/ipa](http://www.shef.ac.uk/ipa).

However, to whet your appetites about articulation, here is one short activity.

## TASK 1

Return to our /p/, /b/, /g/, /f/ sounds.

Watch a companion saying 'big' and 'gig' in turn (or look in the mirror at yourself). Note the lip movement for 'big'. This is, of course, the origin of the ventriloquist's 'gottle o' geer'.

Now produce a long drawn out fffffff...fig. Then try to produce the same effect for pppppp...pig. Try and work out why you can't.

To represent sounds accurately we need a reliable transcription system. Since there are many more sounds than the 26 letters of the alphabet, English can't have consistent one-to-one symbol-sound correspondences (often known as grapheme-phoneme correspondences<sup>6</sup>). **Vowels** (and **diphthongs**) are particularly difficult to represent if you hope to rely on the pool of five vowel letters. This is where the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is so useful. You can see the full chart of IPA symbols in any phonetics textbook (or on [www.shef.ac.uk/ipa/ipachart.pdf](http://www.shef.ac.uk/ipa/ipachart.pdf)). However, we will only be looking here at the set of symbols for the English phonemes; these are on pages 44-45 of this guide.

What accent of English is to be used as our reference point? British phonetics textbooks usually choose Received Pronunciation (RP), formerly without comment. Nowadays the choice is no longer felt to be quite as self-evident. The range of accents that are prominent in the media is very wide these days and even the alternative name of 'BBC accent' can no longer be taken to refer to a single accent. The RP accent (like the Standard English dialect) has traditionally reflected prestige and status. (Note that RP speakers tend to speak Standard English but Standard English can be and is spoken in a variety of accents.) Arguably it is no longer the case that RP's status is secure, indeed some more conservative forms (as spoken by older members of the royal family) may be regarded as a liability! The decision to base our discussion of phonetics on RP is not a value judgement but merely a decision of convenience, and based on a recognition that RP is still probably the accent which is the most universally understood, if not spoken, and is one of the most studied. If you are particularly interested in issues of other varieties of English, then there are books which provide good accounts of the variety of accents of English (e.g. Hughes and Trudgill 1987, 1996).

## Consonants and vowels

This is a familiar distinction and we know, for instance, that there are 'five vowels' in English. However our alphabet-based knowledge of vowels and consonants needs to be revised to accommodate a far greater variety of vowel and consonant phonemes, in fact for RP there are 24 consonant phonemes and 20 vowel phonemes. Other accents of English have quite a similar number and range of phonemes, with some additions (e.g. Scottish <ch> in *loch*) and omissions, and also some variation in the contexts in which they are used. To take one easy example, the Southern long /ɑ:/ in <bath> is replaced by a short /æ/ in the North, but the long /ɑ:/ is still part of the Northern phoneme inventory in words such as <card>.

Having abandoned the alphabet as our reference point, how do we distinguish our 24 consonant phonemes from 20 vowel phonemes on phonetic and phonological

<sup>4</sup> There are, however, languages in which these noises form part of the sound system.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this text we use the linguistic convention of identifying sounds in slanting brackets // and words and letters within angled brackets < >. Thus, /pɪg/ is the sound of the word <pig>. We use the system of transcription known as the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) – see pages 44-45 for a full IPA chart.

<sup>6</sup> The use of the term 'grapheme' is well established in literacy teaching, but since it means 'the smallest contrastive unit in the writing system' it can be taken to include on occasion more than one actual 'letter' in digraphs and trigraphs.

grounds? The main way is whether the articulators – the speech organs – obstruct the flow of air. With vowels there is no obstruction at all whereas with consonants the airflow is obstructed either completely – e.g. in <pig>, /p/ has full obstruction at the lips – or partially – in <fig> /f/ has partial closure so that some air can still escape. (This explains the difference you found in Activity 1.)

**Consonants**

If this were a phonetics textbook we would go through each group of consonants in turn, arranged according to their manner of articulation – that is how the airflow is constricted by the speech organs according to whether it’s completely blocked e.g. /p/, or partially blocked e.g. /f/, or only slightly obstructed. We will avoid such technicalities here, but do remember that one of the good things about phonetics is that you can test everything on yourself. You can try out sounds, and, as well as hear them, see or feel where and how they are being articulated.

**Voiced/voiceless**

Pairs like /f/ and /v/; /p/ and /b/; /t/ and /d/ are referred to as **voiceless** and **voiced** pairs; the only difference in the way in which they are produced is that for voiced phonemes the vocal cords vibrate as the air passes them and for voiceless phonemes they don’t. You can’t look into your larynx to see this happening, but try saying *ffff* and then *vvv* while putting your hand on your Adam’s apple – can you feel the difference?

**Aspiration**

This is an interesting phenomenon. When there is a voiceless ‘plosive’ (/p/, /t/, /k/ see chart below) at the start of a word or syllable (e.g. in <pig>) it is accompanied by a puff of air or is ‘aspirated’.

**TASK 2**

Holding the back of your hand close to your mouth, say ‘pig’ and ‘big’ in turn. What difference do you feel on your hand? It is actually the **aspiration** that distinguishes *p* from *b* rather more than the voicing. Try to produce /p/ without **aspiration** and it begins to sound more like /b/.

**The six English RP stop/plosive consonants**

Voicing	Bilabial	Alveolar	Velar
Voiceless	p	t	k
Voiced	b	d	g

## Vowels

Vowels unfortunately present more of a challenge than consonants:

- There are more symbols to learn as the existing five vowel letters are hopelessly inadequate.
- There is no exact place of articulation because, unlike (most) consonants there is no obstruction and so they are harder to pin-point.
- Variation between different accents of English, and even between speakers of the same accent, affects vowels more than consonants.

At this point I will not attempt to reproduce the complex diagrams and detailed analyses that phoneticians use to show the full range of vowels. This detail is available in phonetics textbooks if you wish to pursue it. The 20 vowels of RP can be grouped into short vowels, long vowels (shown by the length marks /:/) and diphthongs (where there are two symbols indicating the glide from one sound to another), and this is the order in which they are given on the sheet of phonetic symbols. The simplest way to memorise the sounds and symbols for the vowel phonemes is by remembering for each one an exemplar word in which they feature. Although it is inadvisable to rely on spelling, there are instances where it can be a guide, in the sense that vowel phonemes can have more frequent spellings. But again be very careful. For example, often the letters <a> and <i> are referred to as 'saying their names' in certain circumstances and described as long <a> and long <i>. These are actually diphthongs – /eɪ/ and /aɪ/.

### A word about schwa and stress

The sound /ə/, written like a rotated <e> and known as the 'schwa', is one of the most common of English vowel sounds, and the one which can be spelled using any of the vowel graphemes (although <a> is slightly more common, at 35 per cent, than other alternatives). It is found in **unstressed syllables**, e.g. <about>, <brother>.

By 'stress' we mean the degree of force with which a **syllable** is spoken; a **stressed syllable** is more prominent than an **unstressed syllable**.

### TASK 3

Find the graphemes that represent the schwa /ə/ in the following words: woman, teacher, suppose, colour, oppose, figure, forget, banana.

Answers on page 31.

### Connected speech

So far we have been looking mainly at the sounds that occur in single words, words 'in isolation' or in 'citation form'. But this is not how words normally occur. What actually happens in connected speech, in sequences of words, can be very different.

For example, in natural speech function words beginning with <h> (her, him, have, has, etc.) lose the /h/ except at the start of a sentence – compare ‘take his name’ /teɪk ɪz neɪm/ with ‘his name is Tim’ /hɪz neɪm ɪz tɪm/. The faster the speech, the more changes there can be. Also in phrases such as ‘fish and chips’, the /d/ sound in <and> would only be heard in very slow, careful speech. It is common for one or more consonants in a group of consonants to be omitted in this way. Compare <must go> with <must eat>. Here are some of the processes that can take place.

### Assimilation

This is where a phoneme influences the phoneme or phonemes that come immediately before or after it.

#### a) Assimilation of place of articulation

One of the commonest examples of this is with nasals /m, n, ŋ/. If you think about it, every nasal takes its place of articulation from the consonant that follows it and this is often (but not always) reflected in the spelling e.g. *bump*, *hunt*. What about *sink*?

#### b) Assimilation of voicing

This is very common, especially within words, to the extent that consonant clusters in English are either all voiced or all voiceless e.g. *next* /nekst/, *husband* /hʌzbænd/. Sometimes this is reflected in the spelling, sometimes not. And it is this assimilation of voice that governs the rules for adding the plural suffix <s> e.g. *cats* /kæts/, *dogs* /dɒgz/ and also the third person verb suffix – *likes*, *tugs*; which phonetic variety of ending (or ‘allophone’) depends on whether the preceding phoneme is voiceless or voiced. Assimilation makes the sounds easier to say. If you try saying \*/kætz/ or \*/bʌŋp/ there is more effort involved, as more changes in features of articulation have to be incorporated.

## ACTIVITY 2

The same assimilation principle applies to the past tense ending <ed>. What are the three possible versions of this? Try adding <ed> to *cook*, *hug*, and note that words actually ending in /t,d/ behave slightly differently, e.g. *wait*, *board*.

### Elision

This is when sounds don’t change but disappear altogether. The main ways this can happen are:

- loss of weak vowel (usually schwa or /ɪ/) immediately after a stressed syllable, *preferable* /'prefrəbəl/, *strawberry* /'strɔːbri/ or in a first syllable immediately before a stressed syllable *support* /spɔːt/
- cluster simplification – as mentioned before, in clusters of three consonants (or more) the middle consonant (if it is a plosive) may be elided, that is disappear. This happens across word boundaries and within words, and we have already met

the frequent loss of /d/ in <and> before a word beginning with a consonant. Other examples include *next time* /neks taɪm/, *facts* /fæks/.

The important thing is to keep *listening*. Some people find transcribing from written versions quite misleading and tend to be seduced by the spelling. They are victims, as it were, of their own literacy. Being a native speaker is not always sufficient in itself for accurate identification of the phonemes of English. It is extraordinary how the spelling of a word can mislead the ears into hearing sounds that aren't there and not hearing sounds that are! It may be that 'native intuition' becomes diluted by orthography (the conventional spelling system of a language) and we have to learn to listen again in order to recapture that meaning-changing unit, the phoneme.

To be effective, phonics teaching must be both accurate and systematic. In the absence so far of any scheme designed specifically for adults, we recommend the reliable DfES (DCSF) scheme, *Letters and Sounds* (2007), which comes with a supporting CD and is available free from DfES publications, (phone 0845 60 222 60 or go to [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk) for a download). This comes as a large pack and is not without its critics. Our teachers found that it was quite time-consuming to absorb but useful as a reference source of ideas for activities, and the lists of nonsense words and assessment tasks were found to be particularly helpful. It was regarded as 'easy to follow and provided inspiration for other ideas'. It does not come with a wide range of supporting resources – 'The structure is there but not how to do it' – and most teachers found it was best to create their own materials as there was a shortage of resources that followed the same sequence as *Letters and Sounds*. The texts and ideas for games supplied with the scheme were felt by some to be too child-centred to be useful without considerable adaptation. However, overall it is probably one of the most useful schemes and one teacher reported, 'Having looked at several phonics programmes, I found the *Letters and Sounds* the easiest to follow and most comprehensive as regards assessment tasks and ideas upon which to base activities.' Some suggestions and ideas for resources will be given later.

An at-a-glance overview of the order of progression suggested in *Letters and Sounds* is given in Appendix 2 at the end of the guide. The initial phase (Phase 1) has been omitted as it consists of games, songs and exercises to encourage phonemic awareness – probably less appropriate for adults. The Phase 2 starting point is a fairly standard one, used in other schemes too, of the six graphemes <s, a, t, p, i, n>. *Letters and Sounds* introduces the most consistent grapheme–phoneme correspondences one at a time and then goes on to deal with clusters and alternative correspondences, introducing high frequency/social sight words alongside from the start. Note that it is far more accurate and helpful to talk about sequences such as <igh> (as in e.g. 'high') representing the /aɪ/ sound than trying to suggest that <g> and <h> are 'silent' letters.

This is not the only possible order of progression – other schemes may do it differently, for example, introduce words with initial and final consonant clusters much earlier. This can be fine although it is worth pointing out that some learners struggle at first to blend two adjacent consonant sounds. Also the social sight words can be tailored to individual learners' needs. In general, the order in which items are

introduced can and should be adapted to suit your learners; the order may be less important than an approach which is accurate, comprehensive and above all systematic.

Grapheme–phoneme progressions are particularly helpful for reading. Many of our teachers also wanted to use a phonics approach to help their learners with their spelling. This was particularly relevant with learners above Entry 3 but since writing can, of course, reinforce reading, it is relevant at all levels and, indeed, of our nine teachers, eight used phonics for both spelling and reading and only one (with Level 1 and 2 learners) just for spelling. Spelling ‘rules’ have their limitations; an understanding of the most common ways phonemes can be represented and some of the other possibilities is a more helpful approach. The tables in Appendix 3 provide a useful reference list. Further information can be found in Cruttenden (2001) which lists ways of spelling each phoneme with examples of words.

The essential ingredient in a phonics approach, whether for reading or spelling is helping your learners to be aware of the phonemes involved and giving them practice in ‘sounding out’ and in blending or segmenting. Accurate modelling by the teacher is essential for this. One teacher suggested it could be used as a verbal warm-up at the beginning of each lesson – sounding out a word to each learner to blend and say, then the other way round – saying a word for the learner to segment into its individual phonemes. Remember that some learners (and not just ESOL learners) may have particular problems differentiating between phonemes and will require lots of help with this.

The connection between the marks on the page and the sounds they represent is something that some learners may never have fully grasped. This gap may not be immediately apparent if the learner has memorised a stock of sight vocabulary. It is also possible that learners are able to ‘sound out’ in the limited sense of connecting certain letters with certain sounds but still not know that these can be blended together to produce a word. During one observation, it was noted that an Entry 1 learner (working mainly one-to-one with the Learning Support Assistant (LSA) as he was at a lower level than the rest of the class) was able to name the letters of the alphabet and ‘sound’ them out individually, but could still not use this knowledge for decoding words as he had not fully grasped before that the sounds could then be blended. In another class, after a couple of phonics sessions, the teacher reported cautiously that learner K ‘moved forward with blending I think. He finds it very difficult. He finds three sounds very difficult. Even if I give him two he still can’t always do it.’

## **PHONICS IN PRACTICE**

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Having given some background information, we now come to the implementation of the strategy. To try and explain how it can be used in the classroom, the next headings are in the form of a series of questions, based on those our teachers raised during the project. Most of the suggestions offered come from the teachers’ comments and the practice we observed.

### **How do I introduce phonics to my learners?**

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It is always good practice to keep your learners fully informed about what you are doing and why, and to have them as democratic partners in the learning process. As one teacher commented, 'engagement with any topic is through negotiation'. The crucial aspect to explain about phonics is that it is about sounds and relating letters to sounds, and most of the learners took that concept on board. At the end of the project, when the learners were asked what they had understood by phonics, nearly all mentioned 'sounds'. Some related it to letters, some specifically to spelling. It is probably a mixed blessing that phonics is currently so high profile. During the project a series of television documentaries was shown on the use of phonics to help children lagging behind with their literacy and some learners picked up on this. Those learners with children or grandchildren at primary school may also be familiar with the idea of 'phonics' and some of the associated terminology. One teacher suggested that it was a good idea to find out 'how learners' children (or grandchildren) are being taught and tap into this'. During the first visit to a class the observer noted:

'The teacher explained about the project and that the whole group would work on phonics. One learner said that she had talked about this to her daughter and knew that it was something that was used in schools that helped children learn to read. The teacher explained that it would not be quite the same and they would use the phonics to learn things that they had not already learned.'

This was a good explanation on the part of the teacher, as it celebrated the fact that her learners, as adults, already possess a fund of knowledge, and this helped maintain a distinction for the learners between approaches for adults and for children.

### **Won't my learners think it's too childish?**

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Teachers understand that learners' previous school experiences can be a barrier to learning. However, this need not exclude a phonics approach just because that is what is being advocated for children and/or appears to have been ineffective as a method during a learner's schooldays. Interestingly, at the end of the project only two learners described phonics as 'babyish' and overall there seemed to be a high level of enjoyment – a tribute to the teachers' adaptation of methods and selection of appropriate resources (on which more later).

### **Which learners is phonics most suitable for?**

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The classes which took part in the project included a range of learners from pre-Entry to Level 2, but the majority of the learners receiving phonics tuition were Entry 1 and Entry 2. When we asked the teachers which types of learners might find the approach most useful there wasn't a consensus. Some thought it was suitable for all

learners of all ages, but one suggested it was better for younger learners. On the one hand it was considered good for learners with mild learning difficulties/dyslexia, on the other hand for 'those learners who have missed out on these reading skills at school rather than those who have significant learning difficulties'. The answer is probably that it is worth trying with most learners who need help with reading and/or spelling, and one teacher related it to the purposes for which it could be used: 'I think it is useful for different purposes at different levels, e.g. reading/spelling – Entry levels; spelling – Level 1/2'.

### Where do I start?

This depends on the level of the learners. For a group at pre-Entry and Entry 1, the best group of letters to introduce first is <s a t n i p>. One teacher related in her teaching log her first phonics teaching session with her class:

'I explained the progression of the course over the year – from CVC through to polysyllabic words, so that they understood that one-to-one correspondence in CVC words was just the starting point. I introduced group one sounds within CVC words e.g. sit, mat. I demonstrated word building by segmenting then blending to hear the word. The learners wrote the words on their (individual) whiteboards ... they took home a sheet with those words on. We started a word search of these group one words. They will complete at home.'

Another teacher was observed introducing the first correspondences to her class of Entry 1 and 2 learners:

The teacher explained that they would be looking at letters s a t p i n which she wrote on the flip chart. Teacher and learners sound out the phonemes together. She asked for examples of words which could be made from these letters and learners gave 'pin', 'pat', 'tap', 'tin'. She then gave them a CVC exercise with a missing vowel to complete using these letters.

Even at such a basic level, problems can still arise. In this CVC exercise one learner gave for n\_t, nat (meaning the word 'gnat'!) The teacher explained that this was a special tricky word, one of a group they would look at later. (At this early stage this was probably the best response. Later on, there would be scope to introduce the grapheme <gn> as an alternative representation for the phoneme /n/ in words such as 'gnaw', 'gnome', etc.)

Some teachers feel they want to tackle vowels first as they know their learners have problems with them. For Entry level learners it is advisable to check that consonants (*Letters and Sounds* Phase 2) are also secure, rather than independently focusing on vowels. There may be unexpected gaps in learners' understanding of quite basic correspondences; conversely some learners may surprise you with their knowledge. One teacher found that even with a group of Entry 2 and Entry 3 learners, 'there seems to be a vast difference in their phonic awareness.' Being systematic is

essential. When teachers were asked what they might have done differently when introducing the strategy their responses included:

- Increase the level of detail about phonics and assume that the students had only a small amount of word-attack skills (working out the meaning of a word by means of decoding, predicting from context, etc.).
- Take the first session in smaller steps.
- It is very tempting to move on quickly because you are frightened of boring your learners when they really need a great deal of repetition.

And as we have already noted, for some learners constant practice in the skill of blending is essential if they are to progress.

### **How do I cope with a mixed-ability class of learners?**

This was felt to be quite an issue for delivering phonics – ‘mixed-ability classes can make life harder when using this strategy’ – although arguably this is an issue throughout basic skills teaching and does not apply just to phonics. One teacher reported that two of her learners felt that ‘going back to one-to-one correspondences and CVC words was too easy’. Another said that ‘when I use phonics again with a mixed level group I will ... strive to try and differentiate a little more’. One possible solution was observed in a mixed ability class where after group work on consonant clusters with /r/ (br, cr, fr) and long vowels, the learners were given spelling tests, differentiated at three different levels for learners between Entry 1 and Entry 3, where only at the highest level were words containing both cluster and vowel tested. Even this probably stretched the lower level learners too much.

Where assistants or volunteers are available this can help meet the challenge of mixed-ability teaching. This brings us to the next question.

### **How can I use my LSAs/volunteers?**

One lucky teacher reported that: ‘I have an excellent teaching assistant who is committed to the project. She...was prepared to take one group while I worked with the other. This enabled us to provide the right level of work for the range E1 to L1.’

The key thing here was the assistant’s commitment to the project. Traditionally, assistants are paired one-to-one with the weaker learner(s) but these are the learners who need the most skilled teaching. Involvement by assistants will only work well if the basic principles of phonics are understood, and this will probably involve some training and mentoring. You should not assume that even accurate sounding out and blending are necessarily secure. This explains a well-intentioned

but misleading attempt by a LSA from one of the class observations to help a learner sound out 'ship' and 'that' by pointing out the /h/ 'sound'.

### How do I deal with local accents?

A frequent misconception is that, because phonics schemes tend to be based on the phonemes of RP, they can't be used with learners who speak English with a different accent. Certainly our teachers found this aspect challenging at times but all accents have their own consistent patterns of phoneme-grapheme correspondences. Thus, to take one well-known example, in many words such as 'bath', 'laugh', 'pass' people from the south of England mainly have the long vowel /ɑː/, while many from the North have short /æ/. Long /ɑː/ also exists in northern English but is represented by a smaller range of graphemes, notably as <ar> or <ear>, i.e. where there is <r> in the spelling, in words such as 'farm', 'heart'. Our teachers reported finding vowels the biggest problem in this respect, but consonants can also cause difficulties. One teacher mentioned a learner with a Caribbean accent which caused 'a problem for segmenting' (e.g. <th> being pronounced as /t/ or /d/). The only solution is to be aware of differences, to keep listening and see how the correspondences can be adapted.

### What terminology do I use with my learners?

Most of our teachers referred in class to 'sounds' and 'letters' rather than 'phonemes' and 'graphemes' but the technical terms can certainly be shared with the learners and they may voice a preference. One teacher endorsed the use of accurate terminology as a way of empowering the learners. The term 'blend' is best kept for the act of 'blending' sounds together. What are sometimes referred to as consonant 'blends' – <sm>, <tr> etc. – are really consonant clusters. <ch> <sh> and <th> are digraphs or 2-letter graphemes. Consistency is important to avoid misunderstandings.

The use of alphabet names with the learners is another issue. Some phonics schemes (e.g. *Sounds~Write*) although not *Letters and Sounds*, 'ban' alphabet names altogether in favour of 'sounds' to avoid confusion. However this may be more relevant with children and/or ESOL learners as many, if not most, learners will come to class with a knowledge of letter names. This can be exploited as the most clear and convenient way of referring to the individual letters that make up graphemes. Some learners may well confuse the letter names with the sounds and this needs to be addressed by making the distinction very clear for them.

### How do I use phonics for spelling?

Some of our teachers, especially those with higher level learners, were keen to find good methods of doing this.

One teacher took a 'word frames' approach, writing up on the whiteboard a succession of words with the target grapheme missing:

r clusters – br, cr, fr, gr, pr, tr – are written, \_\_ink, \_\_ank, \_\_ench, etc.

long <er> and <ir> (/ɜː/) – f\_\_n, f\_\_st, f\_\_m, etc.

The learners (mainly Entry 2 to 3) are then asked to call out the words, say how the missing grapheme is spelt and, after discussion, the teacher writes in the correct version on the board. (It was interesting that for f\_\_m a learner suggested 'farm' rather than 'firm' – which suggests identification by word shape, rather than sound.) This is followed afterwards with a spelling test to revise the target sounds and letters.

In another class, with Entry 3 learners, the teacher gave each learner a sheet with a grid of long vowel and consonant graphemes, which, after some help with sounding out, they were to cut up and make words from. When confronted with choices between, e.g. dr-ea-m and dr-ee-m, they were encouraged to check the spellings in the dictionary. The teacher wrote the words as they were built up on the whiteboard. The learners then entered their words onto sheets (one for each long vowel sound) in the appropriate columns, each headed by a different vowel grapheme (e.g. <ee, ea, ie>). This activity was done very interactively with lots of discussion.

Dictionaries were used extensively in a class of Level 1 and 2 learners and the observer noted that the learners seemed to enjoy trying to find unusual words.

When the teacher introduces the long 'a' sound (diphthong /eɪ/) she focuses on the word 'bay', where the grapheme <ay> represents the vowel sound. She then introduces the task, which they can carry out in pairs: use dictionaries to go through the alphabet and find words with the same sound as 'bay'. Examples produced at this point are 'bacon' and 'day'. Then the teacher writes the words found by the learners on the whiteboard. These include 'grave', 'way', 'yea', 'array'. The teacher asks, 'Do you see how many ways there are to get the 'ay' sound?' The teacher gives out a sheet, 'Full list of 'ay' graphemes' and asks them, 'Is it surprising that there are so many?'. Then she gives out a crossword worksheet on this /eɪ/ sound and gives them the first word, 'paid', to get them started...

(In other sessions this teacher asked her learners to generate spelling 'rules' from words found in the dictionary. Here it could be pointed out, for instance, that when this is the final sound in a word the commonest spelling is <ay>.)

### **How long do I do it for and how do I integrate it with other activities/reconcile it with other pressures on my time?**

The amount of time spent on phonics by our teachers ranged from the entire class time (130 minutes) to 10 minutes, with an average of 48 minutes spent per session.

Some teachers reported the challenge involved in combining the phonics work with the requirement for learners to achieve a qualification (which did not necessarily test skills resulting from phonics work). This could restrict both the time spent on phonics and what was taught as part of it. One teacher integrated her phonics teaching (focusing on sound /s/) by using a poem to highlight other points about the use of language (similes, onomatopoeia) and linking to learners' own experiences. Limiting the time spent on phonics was unsatisfactory when learners 'were so positive and involvement was complete'; spending less time on phonics was also difficult to reconcile with having to take it slowly and keep reviewing progress, a necessity identified by several teachers. Not all teachers felt they were operating under such restrictions, however, claiming the strategy was easy to implement, although planning lessons and finding resources was reported as being quite time-consuming.

### How will my learners react to the strategy?

At the end of the project, nearly all the learners said they found phonics helpful and wanted to continue to learn in this way. There seemed to be a high level of enjoyment involved, with learners singling out various resources for praise such as 'games', 'flip-flap books', 'powerpoints'. One learner commented with great enthusiasm:

'I wish it would carry on. It's a great way phonics is put across to us. And it's an easy way of remembering the words. I would never have remembered as many words without this. In [the] 60s we never learnt this.'

The project assessments did show that there had been a measurable effect on the learners' reading and spelling skills in a relatively short time. Most teachers saw improvement in their learners' ability to decode and spell, and in reading comprehension, with even more progress judged to be in the areas of peer support, enjoyment/engagement and confidence.

Finally, some additional advice from our teachers. When we asked them at the end of the project for advice they would give to other teachers who wanted to try phonics, their responses included:

- Have a clear, planned structure – 'know where you are going next'.
- Have a firm understanding of the theory behind phonics – 'take time to study underpinning knowledge so that when the time comes to deliver the strategy, you thoroughly understand it yourself' and 'understand the importance of developing the skills of blending and segmenting'.
- Have a range of resources to use – 'gather a good range of resources and activities to meet the needs of all learning preferences'.
- Maximise the use of games and fun activities – 'find/devise games to support your teaching and to provide plenty of revision – use humour'.

- Incorporate regular revision and assessment – ‘don’t move on until you are sure learners are ready’ and ‘Take it slowly! Don’t assume learners have prior knowledge or natural ability at using phonics. Keep reviewing and recapping every week’.

## WHAT DOES PHONICS LOOK LIKE IN THE CLASSROOM?

### Using a poem to reinforce phonics learning

The aim of this lesson was to revise CVC words and look at different ways of writing the /s/ sound (with extension work on <le> at the ends of words for the Level 1 learner).

(Note: The poem used is ‘Bryan’s Fish Shop’ by Lucy Newlyn, from her anthology, *Ginnel* (2005). Oxford Poets/Carcanet Press Ltd.)

The teacher tells the learners: ‘All I need now is your ears. You can have a little rest from writing. I’m going to give you a few more sound words ... we’re moving on to food’. Someone suggests *Oliver Twist* and the teacher makes the connection with the song ‘Food, glorious food’.

She holds a pack of small cards and reads out from one of them the word ‘sizzling’ with a lot of expression and emphasis. She asks the students to tell her what the word makes them think of and the response is immediate – ‘bacon ... sausages ... bacon and egg...’. She hands the cards with ‘sizzling’ on them to learners V and C. Still getting the students to respond to the word she says ‘bubbling and frying in the pan. ... What smell goes with it? ... Very nice ... an appetising smell’. She hands a ‘sizzling’ card to L too and asks the learners to listen out for what is sizzling in the poem she is going to read. She mentions the word ‘onomatopoeic’ and says that it imitates the sense of a word. The next card is ‘spit’ and she reads it dramatically and jokes ‘M over there wipes her eye’, handing over the card to A. There is talk of the pain ‘spit’ can suggest when cooking – the teacher says ‘It stings! It hurts!’. Z says ‘I think I’m having my tea now!’ The teacher asks ‘What makes it spit – something wet ...?’ She gives ‘spit’ to C too. ‘Spit ... and sometimes we can have the word “spatter”. It’s going everywhere ... all over your clothes!’, as she gives a ‘spit’ card to S. ‘M has “spit” and “spatter”. “Spit”, “spatter” and “sizzling”. Keep those words in front of you.’

The teacher tells students they can all relax, as she sets the scene for the poem. She says ‘I’m taking you off into Headingley...’ (at which the students laugh) ... ‘We’re going to the fish and chip shop called “Bryan’s”’. Z calls out ‘That’s still there!’ and there is some discussion about the shop. The teacher asks if they remember the name Lucy Newlyn, but no-one does. She points to the poster at the back of the

room showing the clock in Thornton's arcade in Leeds, which some members of the group and their children visited with the teacher; she tells them that Lucy Newlyn wrote a poem about this clock. One student now remembers and talks about her child's response to the clock. The teacher tells the group that Bryan's was the poet's favourite shop back in the 1960s. She says she wants them to 'Really focus ... to have a picture in your mind of what's happening in the shop...'. She reminds them that this is a listening exercise, and reads out the poem.

As she reads, expressively and really bringing the poem to life, M gestures with her arms when she hears the word 'spatter'. Afterwards, M clearly enjoys telling the group how she likes to share fish and chips off newspaper with her family, describing the scene with words and gestures. There is general discussion about how plastic trays (emphasis by teacher on the 's' in plastic) have replaced newspaper for hygiene reasons in fish and chip shops.

Talking about reactions to the poem, V says that the poet 'describes what's going on' in the shop. Words and phrases picked out are 'red faces', 'sizzling', 'spitting' and 'spatter'. M enjoys saying 'Fish and chips, please, with salt and vinegar!' and then laughs. The teacher asks 'Does anyone remember the adjectives used to describe "wedges"? ... "Thick, white wedges"'. She asks what 'gutting' means and M tries to explain, using actions too, 'Pulling it out'. The teacher asks if anyone guts their fish, but no-one does. Then she asks about 'fillet'. M describes the filleting process, using actions. V talks about going to Scarborough and there are a few moments of animated discussion among the group as she announces that she eats fish with heads on, eyes and all. 'Oh, no, you don't?!' asks M.

The teacher brings the talk back to the poem itself. She asks what is happening in the shop and gives them the words 'gutting, filleting, chopping the chips, battering, frying, serving'. She does the action for hands for this last verb and says 'busy, busy, busy'. The teacher says 'Those women were multi-tasking. Can you imagine at the end of the evening how those women were feeling? ... Tired... red faces ... shiny' (the students seemed to recall all these words when the teacher said them). She asks if anyone can remember what 'net' was used in connection with, in the poem. She says 'meshed like a net ... . What does "meshed" mean?' The LSA comes to the whiteboard at a signal from the teacher and draws a basket and then a fishing net. The teacher tells the group 'the writer says "it was meshed like a net"' and tells them that if they were a GCSE group they would be told that this is an example of a simile and that the poet 'tries to link the fish and chip shop with the sea. She's a clever poet'. She uses the word 'onomatopoeia' again and asks them to listen out for the 's' sound as she reads out the last few lines again. M gives the last 's' sound, saying - 'this<sub>s</sub>'. V says there are 12 's' sounds in the passage the teacher has just read.

The teacher followed up the reading of the poem by:

- Handing out copies of the poem and highlighters. The learners worked in pairs to find words that they had heard and highlight them. She and the LSA went round the group and listened to the learners read out the words they had picked out. They were encouraged to write down on their record sheets any of the sound words that they particularly liked reading out.
- Handing out a worksheet, showing a chart with the different ways the sound 's' can be written (s, ss, se, ce, st). Learners were asked to pick out words from the poem and put them in the appropriate column and to try and add six more of their own words for each column. During this activity, the LSA took the lower level learners onto a separate table and they played a game of Snakes and Ladders.
- Starting a memory game with 'I'm going to the market and I'm buying a whistle', each learner had to add on another item containing the /s/ sound, increasing the list each time.

### Revising one-to-one correspondences and CVC words

This was the third session on phonics for a class of six Entry 1 learners, (two of whom were ESOL learners) – a 20-minute session on short vowel sounds and CVC words, building systematically on the previous week's work on *Letters and Sounds* Sets 1-4 sounds, and giving practice in sounding out and blending. The pair work encourages peer correction and support.

The teacher introduces the phonics session with 'We're going to do a little bit of phonics work now', reminding them briefly of the work they've done on phonics in the previous two lessons.

The teacher says they will be working on the sounds of vowels and asks them what they know about vowels. When the students give the letter names for a e i o u, the teacher asks if these are the *names* or the *sounds* of the vowels. W says 'sound!' but D corrects this with 'name!' when the teacher prompts. She says 'These are the letter *names*' and tells them that today they will be looking at the *sounds* of vowels.

The teacher goes over to the interactive whiteboard and presents a list of CVC words with a medial /æ/ (short 'a' sound). These are 'pat, sat, map, Sam, man and nap'. She says to the group 'If I say your name, just read the word and think about the sound the vowel makes in the word you're reading'. N gives 'pat'. After the learners have decoded the words, the teacher asks 'What sound is the vowel making?' and R gives her /æ/.

The next list is /ʌ/ (short 'u' sound in the South) words. The words come up on the screen one at a time as they go round the group decoding in turn, 'fun', 'gun', 'nut',

'but' and 'bun'. The teacher asks 'What sound is the /u/ making?' N gives her /ʌ/.

The teacher uses the same process for /ɪ/ (short 'i') using the words 'sit, rip, sip, kit, pin, tin' and then asks 'What sound does that make?' No correct response is given so the teacher reads the words out from the board again and asks again. This time she is given the correct response and she says 'Perfect! Can everyone say /ɪ/?'

Then the teacher presents words with /e/, beginning with 'pet'. She asks R to read the word and he says 'Pete!'. Other learners offer clues, including J's 'Teacher's \_\_\_!'. Eventually the correct answer is given and the learners read the following words that appear one at a time on the whiteboard: 'fed', 'red', 'den', 'ten' and 'wed'. (For N, an ESOL learner who first offers 'din', differentiating these two vowel sounds proves quite a challenge for her throughout the lesson). The last word, 'wed', stumps D at first and she doesn't recognise the word at all. The teacher supports her with 'What's that first letter?' and D sounds out and then blends to arrive at 'wed'. She is praised with 'Well done, D!' and the teacher points out that D has really used the sounding out technique that she has been trying to develop with the group.

Finally the teacher repeats the process with /ɒ/ (short 'o' sound). The words they read out in turn are 'log', 'lot', 'pot', 'not', 'tom' and 'got'. The teacher asks about the word 'tom' and D tells her that it should have a capital letter. 'What sound is in the middle?', the teacher asks when all the words are on the board.

The teacher gives out cards with CVC words on them and introduces an activity where the learners work in pairs with the cards. They are told to put the cards face down and take turns to pick up a card and say the word to their partner. The teacher gives an example working with J. She picks up a card with 'tim' on it, reads it out and says 'J's going to *sound out* the letters, not the names, the *sounds*'. J struggles so D takes over and offers /t/. Then the teacher asks what the middle sound is. D gives /ɪ/. Then T asks about the end sound. D gives /m/. The teacher models the sounding out 't - ɪ - m' then tells the group 'say the letter *sounds*'.

Then the teacher says 'Let's have a go and do one all together'. She picks up 'din' and leads the learners to sound out 'd - ɪ - n'. She suggests they do one more together and picks up 'pan'. D gives the letter sound /p/ and another learner supplies both /æ/ and /n/. The teacher says 'Now you're good at this' and gets them to begin the activity in pairs.

The pairs are N and D, W and R, and H and J. To begin with the learners are using the letter names frequently; for example, N and D give the initial letter name for 's' /es/ and at the end 't' was /ti:/. The teacher helps another learner to sound out 's - æ - p' for their partner. D reads 'pit' as 'pin' initially but then gives the word correctly. N sounds this out. D says when it is her turn, 'I can't do the sound!' but actually does manage to give the sound /s/ for 's'. N shows D the card. At one point D says the letter name for <i> instead of the sound.

J reads out the word 'tin' to H who sounds this out as 't-ɒ-n'. The teacher says 'No' and helps with the correction then says 'have another go'. H picks up another card and reads 'did'. J sounds this out and the teacher says: 'Excellent, J – well done!'. D sounds out 'fat' correctly and the teacher says 'Well done!'. R tries to sound out 'rip' but says the vowel name /aɪ/. H reads out 'dip' to J who says the name for the letter 'd' but then corrects himself and goes on to sound out the rest of the word. W reads out 'dip' and R initially says the name for the letter /aɪ/ before correcting this. W picks up a card and sounds out the word 'Sam' after saying 'That's easy!'. (W and R are doing a slightly different version of the game, in which they take it in turns to pick up a card and sound out the word while the other watches and listens.)

The teacher instructs W not to let R see what is written on the card. W reads out 'pan' and R sounds out 'p – æ – n'. D and N are told by the teacher 'You're getting much quicker with that now!'. Back with W and R, the teacher asks 'What were the sounds?' and W sounds out 'd –ɪ– n'. Then R can't sound out 't –ɪ– m' so W does it for him.

The teacher says 'Well done!' and ends the activity. D says the game was 'OK' and N laughs: 'We've all got different accents!'. The teacher thanks the learners and collects in the cards.

## WHERE CAN I FIND RESOURCES?

This was a major issue for our teachers as there is an almost complete absence of phonics materials aimed at adults and certainly no resources for adults using a progression that follows *Letters and Sounds*. Therefore we divide this section into two parts:

- 1) available resources, based on what the teachers told us they used/adapted; and
- 2) ideas for creating your own resources and games, etc. since most teachers said they did have to create most resources themselves.

Note that the use of phonics should never be taken to restrict reading materials just to phonics ones – an interest in wider reading must still be encouraged. Indeed, our teachers confirmed that 'it is important to say how important reading is' and ensure that the phonics work is related to reading in the outside world. Thus in one class, as the learners arrived, the teacher started by hearing them read a short section in turn from an Avanti story book before going on to recap the previous week's new sounds; during another session the learners read a page each from the King Street series. In another class the learners spent about half an hour reading plays, each taking individual parts; and in another they read a poem. See below for details of where to source such materials.

What emerged during the project was that the lessons the teachers rated their most successful involved an element of fun in the form of games and other activities using multi-sensory/kinaesthetic approaches.

### Available resources

- *Letters and Sounds*. As previously mentioned many teachers found this a good source of ideas. (The 'stories' on pp 160–5 were regarded as too child-centred but could be adapted.)
- Resources from other phonics schemes, e.g. *Sounds-Write* and *THRASS*. Resources from these had been demonstrated on the training days by teachers who had been using them with adults. One teacher also downloaded a bingo game from the Jolly Phonics website: [www.jollylearning.co.uk](http://www.jollylearning.co.uk). The teacher told the learners that they were going to play bingo in pairs. The learners had a list of six CVC words (based on s a t n i p letters). She called out the words and the learners had to identify them on their list and cross them off when the words were called. The teacher also sounded out the words as she called them out. (The observer noted that the learners enjoyed the game and that it worked well.)
- [www.sparklebox.co.uk](http://www.sparklebox.co.uk) where teachers can access flashcards, matching cards, snap cards, dictation passages, etc., with many materials usefully linked to *Letters and Sounds*.
- MSL (Multi-sensory structured learning) for phonemic awareness. See: [www.msl-online.net](http://www.msl-online.net).
- Dictionaries, including the *ACE Spelling Dictionary* (Moseley 1998) which is now in its 7th edition.
- (Individual) whiteboards, which can be used for instantly correctable writing and also a background on which to arrange individual graphemes.
- Existing worksheets, such as those available from abc Productions: [www.abcproduction.co.uk](http://www.abcproduction.co.uk) and Brown and Brown: [www.browncandbrownpublishing.co.uk](http://www.browncandbrownpublishing.co.uk); but use with care and check that they don't give contradictory or confusing information.
- Phonic reader *Sam the Man* (Hinde 2006) for work on short vowels – it has a useful accompanying workbook with photocopiable resources. Note that the second in this series, *Mudlake* (Hinde 2007), also with a workbook, deals with long vowels/diphthongs. Both are published by Gatehouse Media Ltd.
- Other readers, plays and poems to encourage reading, e.g. those available from New Leaf Books and Avantibooks such as the King Street series, Spirals, etc. See [www.avantibooks.com](http://www.avantibooks.com).

- Resources from BBC schools website: [www.bbc.co.uk/schools](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools).
- Spiral bound 'Flip-flap' books with three sections to create CVC words; these are widely available under different names such as 'Flipping Phonics' available from Avantibooks (same uses as sliders, see below).

### Created materials

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There is insufficient space here to do justice to the creativity and inventiveness of our teachers in designing resources! Some of these were based on ideas from *Letters and Sounds* and many involved games. The games included:

- Blockbusters (observed in action): the teacher suggests a game of blockbusters, rearranging the chairs so that everyone can see. The answers to the clues are all words beginning with ch or sh, e.g. What <ch> goes with fish and sausage? What <sh> sails on the sea? Group one plays group two (the class of eight learners has been divided into two groups), and one of the two LSAs works with each.
- Four in a row: this involved printing grids of 16 words (arranged 4 x 4) onto cards, (one for each learner), with individual words cut out and put into a bag. The teacher/assistant (or perhaps one of the more able learners) picks out one word at a time and reads it aloud. The players cover that word with a counter; the first person to get four in a row is the winner.
- Snakes and ladders (land on a square and complete the CVC word, e.g. p\_t).
- Dominoes – matching words and pictures; or beginnings and ends of words.

### Other resources

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- Sliders (created by an LSA). These are strips of laminated card listing initial and final consonants with a middle section (vowels) that can be slid up and down alongside the letter to produce different words.
- Short readers. One teacher wrote and illustrated a series of books for her learners. One learner wrote a phonic story for her grandchildren.
- PowerPoint slides. Presentations with sound effects for introducing graphemes; bringing in words one at a time for learners to sound out.
- Teacher-recorded tapes of sounds/words with accompanying worksheets for homework.

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<http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/html/mcshane/chapter4.html>.

Moseley, D. (ed.) (1998) *ACE Spelling Dictionary*. Wisbech: LDA.

Newlyn, L. (2005) *Ginnel*. Oxford Poets/Carcanet Press: Manchester.

Roach, P. (2000) *The phonetics of English: A practical course*, 3rd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (One of the most useful textbooks, it has a reasonably

accessible introduction to phonetics and also has the merit of including tapes/CDs and lots of exercises with answers.)

### Websites

[www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/](http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/) is a wonderful new resource of British accents, present and past (including some from people who grew up in Victorian times).

[www.abdn.ac.uk/langling/resources/phonetics.html](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/langling/resources/phonetics.html) has links to many other phonetics and phonology websites, including non-British ones.

[www.shef.ac.uk/ipa](http://www.shef.ac.uk/ipa) is an easy-to-use site for articulation of phonemes and what they sound like.

[www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/IPA/index.html](http://www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/IPA/index.html) is the homepage of the International Phonetic Association, with useful information about phonetic fonts etc.

[www.toe-by-toe.co.uk](http://www.toe-by-toe.co.uk) is a highly structured multi-sensory reading manual for teachers.

[www.sounds-write.co.uk](http://www.sounds-write.co.uk) is a phonics programme for classroom practitioners.

[www.thrass.co.uk](http://www.thrass.co.uk) THRASS stands for Teaching Handwriting, Reading And Spelling Skills. It is a phonics programme for teaching learners using pictures and key words.

### Answers to TASK 3

woman, teacher, suppose, colour, oppose, figure, forget, banana

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# 2 Oral reading fluency

## BACKGROUND

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Oral reading fluency is more than just 'reading out loud'. By oral reading fluency we mean reading aloud to one or more people in a rapid, accurate and expressive way, with the momentum unbroken by the need to decode. We'll look at the various elements of this in more detail later. The main research on this strategy was carried out in the US and the findings (on children's literacy acquisition) formed the basis for recommendations that reading instruction for adults should include reading fluency (Kruidenier 2002). Reading fluency is widely used in the US at adult level as well as in schools and it has been shown to increase reading achievement in terms of comprehension and word recognition, as well as reading rate and accuracy. A US teaching manual by Susan McShane (2005) includes a detailed chapter on reading fluency methods to use with adult learners.

In the UK the situation in adult literacy teaching is rather different, with a traditional reluctance on the part of practitioners to expose their learners to what is perceived as potential embarrassment about reading aloud. We ran a pilot project in 2006–07 on using this strategy with adults (Burton 2007a) and found that, for the six practitioners involved, their worries proved for the most part unfounded; most of their learners actually seemed to enjoy the opportunity to read aloud and became more confident in the process.

## The project findings

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With this encouragement, a further oral reading fluency research project – on which this section of the guide is based – was undertaken, this time involving eight adult literacy teachers who used oral reading fluency in their classes over the autumn term of 2007. The findings were again very positive:

- The 40 learners (of a wide range of levels) who took part made significant gains

in reading comprehension, equivalent to about half a level in the National Qualifications Framework.

- This progress was achieved in a very short time (on average only five or six sessions were attended between the two reading assessments).
- The learners' confidence also improved, not just with regard to their oral skills but in a range of language, literacy and learning activities.
- Most teachers expressed enthusiasm for using the strategy and all but one definitely intended to continue using it with their classes.
- All the learners reported that they had found reading fluency helpful and over three-quarters said they wanted to continue learning in this way.

For a fuller account of the findings from the project on which this guide is based, see the associated report (Burton et al. forthcoming).

The eight teachers attended a training day in preparation for teaching the strategy in the classroom. This included details and demonstrations of different possible ways reading fluency could be used, based on research and findings from the earlier project. What follows is an account of these methods, further amended in the light of the classroom observations, and the comments and experiences of the participating teachers.

## METHODS FOR READING FLUENCY

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Do remember that these methods are not intended to be mutually exclusive. Many can be used in tandem (e.g. modelled reading with choral, paired with repeated, etc.) and indeed preparation for performance reading for example, could include all of them.

### Paired reading

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This is a specific, structured technique, developed by Keith Topping with guidelines which can be downloaded from [www.dundee.ac.uk/eswce/research/projects/trwresources](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/eswce/research/projects/trwresources). The learner starts off reading a text aloud in unison with another learner or teacher/assistant; when the learner feels confident enough to read alone, they will signal to this effect, and carry on by themselves. If the learner then gets stuck on a word, the teacher supplies it after no more than four seconds. This aims to take pressure off the learners in giving them the choice as to if/when they read alone, and not leaving them to struggle over words. In interventions in reading, paired reading has been found to be one of the most effective with children (Topping 2001, Brooks 2007) but was not actually used very much in its 'official' form by our teachers (see 'Partnered reading' below). When carried out by two learners, the

technique is of benefit not only to the tutee but also to the learner acting as tutor in boosting confidence. It was also used successfully as a way of coaxing a very reluctant learner to read when other methods seemed to have failed (see example in 'Which method do I start with?' on p.37).

### **Choral reading**

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This is a group version of the above, with learners all reading the text aloud at the same time. Again this takes pressure off individuals; they can choose to read alone and if they falter, the rest can all join in again. The teachers had mixed reactions to this method, some finding it difficult to manage, but others finding it one of the most successful. One teacher said that it:

'enabled me to hear and observe student participation and progress. I thought this would be a less exposed way to encourage the students to read aloud...this would also help them to keep going if they lost their place and could join in again.'

Note too that most examples of choral reading included the teacher doing some form of 'modelled reading' (see below). This was one way of trying to ensure that the learners read at roughly the same pace.

### **Partnered reading**

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This was the name we gave to a variation on paired reading which emerged from the project (similar to the American term 'buddying'). Here two learners read aloud to each other; they can use either the same or different texts. One teacher reported that it 'provided a safe way for learners to practise and make mistakes without everyone else knowing.' Another teacher claimed it was good for developing peer support: 'the learners naturally helped and supported each other'. It is important to remember that this method, unlike paired reading, did not have any backing from previous research as to its effectiveness but was very popular with many of the teachers. Furthermore, recent research has shown that creating opportunities for learners to work together is beneficial in terms of progress (Burton 2007a p.7). About one learner, L, her teacher said, 'she really took on board the idea of reading with expression. She also began to support and encourage another learner which was a real boost for L's self-confidence.' Another teacher noted that a high spot for her was 'the confidence one learner gained by being able to help one of the other participants. He used to give him the word if he was unable to read it. The two students continued to work collaboratively after the strategy time which was excellent.'

## Repeated reading

With this technique the same text is read again and again over the course of a few weeks so that faultless fluency is achieved. Most teachers tried this method and the number of repetitions of one passage varied from only twice to more than 10 times. According to McShane (2005), readings should be repeated at least three times but do be careful not to flog a text to death.

## Modelled (echo) reading

As the name suggests, here the teacher reads out (models) a short phrase first for the learner to repeat (echo). Two things are important to remember here.

1. The modelling must be not be of too long a piece of text, or the learner will not be able to retain it. There is no point in reading out an entire paragraph or entire poem – a line at a time is enough, or a phrase or short sentence.
2. Reading should also be expressive – signalling comprehension – and the teacher can take the lead here, modelling to the extent of including what may feel like an element of exaggeration at times. There is also scope for discussion and negotiation with the learners of different possible interpretations of ‘expressive’ reading, as the following vignette shows.

A class using a poem for reading fluency (‘Billy McBone’ by Allan Ahlberg) were reading it one or two lines at a time, modelled by the teacher.

The teacher asked the learners to think about the expression and how it can change the meaning. She gave the examples of lines four and five of the first verse:

The teachers all thought

That he couldn’t be taught

She read the two lines, emphasising firstly the word ‘thought’ and then the word ‘taught’. She asked the learners where the emphasis should be placed. The learners agreed that word ‘couldn’t’ should be emphasised. The teacher re-read, emphasising the word ‘couldn’t’ ... asked for their interpretation of the meaning of the lines. F said that it was ‘more assertive’. W said that he was ‘not able’. The teacher read, emphasising the word ‘thought’ and F said that this was different and could be interpreted as ... ‘he’s better than they think’.

## Performance reading

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This involves preparing for/rehearsing for a performance and will probably involve a mixture of the preceding methods to achieve. This works particularly well with a play, with learners taking the parts but can be used with any suitable text. An essential element of a performance is the presence of an 'audience'. As part of the project, we asked the teachers to prepare their learners for a performance-read to our researchers during the last class observation. This provided an audience from 'outside', but colleagues or learners from other groups could be invited to fill this role. It also provided an opportunity for learners to read to the entire class as well – in some cases this was the first time this had happened if learners had only worked one-to-one before.

The definition of reading fluency contains the word 'rapid' because a certain pace in reading is essential so that meaning is not lost. Timing the learners' reading and restricting the time allowed – a feature of reading fluency suggested by McShane (2005) – may be beneficial, but more often puts learners under too much pressure (as we found in the previous project, see Burton 2007a p.7). The important thing is not to lose momentum and this means not letting the learner struggle over particular words. This is not the place to encourage decoding techniques – if after a few seconds the learner fails to read the word correctly it should be supplied. On successive readings more will be remembered.

## ORAL READING FLUENCY IN PRACTICE

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Having explored something about the basis of reading fluency, we now come to the implementation of the strategy. To try and explain how it can be used in the classroom, the next headings are in the form of a series of questions, based on those our teachers raised during the project. Most of the suggestions offered come from the teachers' own comments, and the practice we observed.

### How do I introduce/'sell' the idea of reading fluency to my learners?

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It is always good practice to keep your learners fully informed about what you are doing and why. At the end of the project when the learners were asked what they understood about reading fluency, about a third mentioned improving confidence or overcoming shyness. Most of the other responses mentioned improving reading skills, apart from seven learners who seemed unclear about why they were doing it. It is important to explain that it will help the learners with their reading and their confidence and to explain this with conviction, otherwise it could seem like a meaningless exercise. Some teachers were anxious about how it would be received by their learners and made the mistake of empathising almost too much with anticipated nervousness. However, with only a few exceptions, the learners and teachers actively enjoyed the experience. One teacher said at the end of the project, that with the wisdom of hindsight:

'I would have taken a less worried mind state with me into the classroom';

another teacher said:

'Initially I was open to [the strategy] and now I am an advocate of it and will continue to use it within my sessions';

and a third:

'I was worried about how it would work, but this was more to do with my confidence. Now I'm a total convert! ... Don't set up barriers for yourself. Have self-belief!'

### Which learners is it suitable for?

A wide range of learners from pre-Entry to Level 2 took part in the project. Most teachers concluded that the strategy would work with all levels and ages of learner – 'the strategy can be adapted to fit', although two teachers thought it was more suitable for Entry level learners. Some variations actually need a more fluent reader helping a less fluent one. Indeed some wished they had included more of their learners in the strategy – which is one way of solving the problem of how to keep learners who are not practising reading fluency occupied. Most thought there were few learners it would not suit – 'not if they want to do it!' – with one caveat: 'needs care and tact, e.g. may want to read aloud only to you'. One teacher even found it could be used with a learner with cerebral palsy, who 'is unable to form clear speech. Nevertheless she joined in the reading aloud and engaged with the text and group discussion'. The key here is careful preparation, involving dialogue with the learner.

### Which method do I start with?

Although 'partnered reading' was popular because it was felt to be 'safe' – regarded as a gentle introduction to reading fluency before moving on to more structured methods – paired reading was effectively used where a learner, A (E3 or L1), had to be coaxed to read a poem to her partner, M (E2 or 3).

The teacher had read the poems out earlier in the session to the class and then asked learner pairs to read to each other (partnered reading). A was reluctant: 'I don't want to read anymore' and sighed...The teacher is now supporting A and M. 'Go on, A, have a go at reading it again'. She was reluctant so M and the teacher began reading the poem ('The Digital Age') together. The teacher then asked A if she was ready to read alone ... A was still reluctant so the teacher suggested reading another poem ('The Diet') as it was shorter. A did read, the teacher joining in for the first part, but she let her continue on her own for the last two verses. A read quietly but she did it.

In practice, there is no one 'right' method to start with or stay with, and most teachers used several methods according to the circumstances. In the following vignette the teacher moved through a range of modelling, choral reading, and individual reading techniques.

The teacher first gave the class of six learners the choice of reading from a Level 1 test or some poetry – they chose poetry. The teacher gave out a poem ('The Orange' by Wendy Cope) and read it aloud to the class. (The learners discussed what it was about and their reactions to it.) Then the teacher said she was going to read the poem again and the group were going to try a choral read. She modelled the poem with more expression [than before]. The class then read the poem together...The teacher suggested they read the poem again but this time she wanted them to split into two halves and read half a verse each. This worked really well and everyone read with more expression and seemed to really enjoy it. The teacher gave out another poem ('Footy Poem' by Roger McGough). She read it to them very expressively. The group found the poem funny and were laughing as she read. She modelled the poem again and then asked the learners to read a verse each aloud to the whole group. She reminded them about reading the poem with as much expression as possible. Each learner then read a verse in turn. (The group were obviously enjoying the poem and seemed comfortable and relaxed.)

When the teachers were asked which methods they found worked best for them, most used a variety – 'a hybrid' as one teacher referred to it – but partnered, repeated and choral reading seemed to be the most popular. The next questions deal with points that arose from all of these methods.

### **Is this not all very time-consuming?**

There was concern about finding time to hear learners read individually. If you have assistants or volunteers, press them into service, making sure first that they realise that words the learners struggle to read must be given quickly; encouraging strategies for decoding are not appropriate here. In the absence of help, more reliance can be placed on group methods. It might be helpful to acknowledge that time spent practising oral reading fluency is time well spent if it enhances and progresses learning. Learners need to be made aware of this too.

### **How do I deal with noise levels, especially when paired/partnered reading is going on?**

Small classrooms with no 'overflow' space can present a real problem. One teacher managed to rearrange the furniture in a way that spaced the pairs of learners further apart. To an extent the methods you use will be constrained by individual set-ups. Involving the entire class if possible will always be easier to manage than working with a sub-group within the class.

### How can reading fluency be integrated with other teaching and learning activities?

Our teachers used the strategy on average for about 25 minutes per session (with a range of 7 to 35 minutes). Many used reading fluency as a self-contained part of the lesson but it is perfectly possible to integrate it with other activities.

'This can be used on so many different levels and so many other skill areas can be incorporated – versatility!'

We have already seen examples of it being used as a vehicle for discussion of different interpretations and the use of language (the 'Billy McBone' poem). Further examples show it being used to support other work – a choral reading of the traditional rhyme, 'Monday's Child', led on to practice in spelling the days of the week and provided the stimulus for a further related writing task. Reading fluency also supported work on punctuation, i.e. paying attention to the role punctuation plays in meaning and expression; and work on phonics:

The teacher told the learners at the start that they were going to match pictures and words with consonant clusters and then look for them in the poem – this included work on <br> and <fr> which they had done the previous week. After matching practice for about 15 minutes, they went on to read the poem ('Billy McBone') and practise reading fluency (for 25 minutes). Then the learners were asked to look for consonant clusters in the poem, starting with <br>. The teacher wrote these up on the whiteboard and asked for words using them – some words the learners offered came from the poem and some from the earlier matching game.

Some teachers did try and create other opportunities for extra practice in reading fluency by asking learners to read aloud from the whiteboard or worksheets during other learning activities. Whether this is a helpful practice depends on the learners and whether it would make them feel under pressure. Some teachers did note increased confidence in class, with learners volunteering to read aloud in other situations.

### How will it affect my learners?

Yes, there will be some learners who find the experience of reading aloud nerve-racking; they must be supported but gently encouraged if possible. Don't take 'no' for an answer too readily. For the majority, the gains in confidence and peer support within the class were noticeable and welcomed; teachers mentioned 'sheer pleasure' and 'sheer enjoyment and pride'. Additionally, there were significant gains in reading comprehension in a relatively short time, according to the reading assessment undertaken by the learners.

### How do I cope with choral reading if they all read at different speeds?

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There are three ways of dealing with this.

- Have a pointer or electronic device to point at the words and control the pace.
- 'Conduct' the reading – works best with text with a definite rhythm, i.e. poetry.
- The method favoured by our teachers – modelling short pieces of the text first in order to set the pace of the 'echo'.

### How long should I do repeated reading for?

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This is a difficult one to answer as it all depends how long it takes an individual learner to achieve his or her best possible reading. It is important not to underestimate the number of repetitions that may be needed for this, even if you feel anxious to move on to avoid boredom. In the previous pilot project, one teacher used a successful method, endorsed by McShane (2005), of keeping track of the readings; she attached a slip of card to the text, noting the date and whether it was the first, second or third reading, to be filled in each time, thus also involving the learner.

### How do I set up a performance read?

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Any suitable texts can be used for this but plays or screenplays worked particularly well, with each learner taking a part and 'rehearsing'. Intermittent attendance was found to be a problem with this, although, as long as there aren't too many absentees, the teacher or assistant can always be an 'understudy'. In the previous project, a reading of the play script of *To Kill a Mockingbird* was part of a successful integrated activity which included a class visit to the theatre to see a performance of the play (Burton 2007a p.7).

To provide an authentic performance experience, ideally an 'audience', to include someone from outside the class, is needed. This was set up as part of the project, with learners practising their reading in order to perform to the observer during the last class visit. There had been some concern about whether this would put learners under too much pressure, but they actually rose to the occasion in ways that surprised and delighted their teachers. One teacher identified one of the high spots as the fact that one of the learners 'did a fantastic performance read'.

In one class the learners (E2 to L2) were allowed to choose freely whatever text they wanted to practise for the performance. Their choices included poems, an extract from a Sherlock Holmes story, an extract from *Wuthering Heights* and a piece of autobiographical writing the learner had written herself. In previous sessions the learners had only ever read to each other in pairs. On performance day, they surpassed themselves, with all but one reading for the first time to the whole class

as well as to the observer. One learner, E, was so disappointed when she knew she would be absent that day, that she asked to record her reading and left it with the teacher to be played back to the class as part of the performance. Another learner, S, who had been one of the most nervous and reluctant in the class to get involved in reading fluency, afterwards astonished her teacher, who reported that S:

'went on to read out her poem [Wordsworth's 'Daffodils'] at her brother's works do to about 40 people and was ok about it! Quite an achievement!'

## WHERE CAN I FIND RESOURCES?

One place to start is with the learner's own writing and this means that a reassuringly familiar text can be used (the basis of the 'language experience' approach); this was used in one class along with partnered reading as a 'safe' starting point. However, there is a possible drawback if the learner feels self-conscious about reading his or her own words.

The three most popular types of resources were poems, plays and readers.

### Poetry

Poetry lends itself very well to reading aloud – 'natural rhythm of words, relatively short text, plenty of white space'. Humour works well here. Examples of poems used included:

- 'The Orange' by Wendy Cope (*Serious Concerns*, Faber & Faber, 1992) downloadable from [www.poetryoutloud.org/poems/](http://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems/)
- 'Billy McBone' by Allan Ahlberg (*Heard it in the playground*, Penguin, 1989) (used by more than one teacher)
- 'Footy Poem' by Roger McGough downloadable from [www.sparsholt.ac.uk/skillszone/newszlit/newszlit/literacyresources/pack3/poems/poemex4.doc](http://www.sparsholt.ac.uk/skillszone/newszlit/newszlit/literacyresources/pack3/poems/poemex4.doc)
- Poems by David Axton – 'Nice and easy does it', 'The Digital Age' and many more to be found at [www.itsbullfrog.com/a\\_general.htm](http://www.itsbullfrog.com/a_general.htm)

A wide choice of poems can be downloaded from websites.

### Plays

Plays were also well regarded and one teacher found them better with her class than poetry because it was possible to do 'much more follow-up work by creating

comprehension examples'. Screenplays and TV scripts can be downloaded from websites such as [www.scriptcrawler.net](http://www.scriptcrawler.net). With Entry level learners, Spiral plays in particular were mentioned as useful – *Package Holiday*, *The Operation*. Also Livewire plays (Hodder Education), e.g. *We're in this together* (a coming of age play).

## Readers

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Readers were also used, such as *In the Doghouse* and *The Binmen* by Gatehouse Books, and also Exegesis readers (Avanti Books). New Leaf books publish writing by learners, some with accompanying CDs [www.newleafbooks.org.uk](http://www.newleafbooks.org.uk)

However almost any type of text can be used, non-fiction as well as fiction, so there is no need to worry too much about finding 'special' resources. Learners can be encouraged to state their preferences and/or be given choices (as some of the vignettes have demonstrated). It was a request from a learner that led to the use of a simplified bible text (a passage about the Nativity, in the run-up to Christmas) from [www.easyenglish.info](http://www.easyenglish.info)

Finally some additional advice from our teachers. When we asked them at the end of the project for advice that they would give to other teachers who wanted to try reading fluency, their responses included:

- Make sure learners understand why repeated reading is important.
- Don't put your own prejudices about reading aloud onto your students – ask them without bias.
- Consult with your learners about types of text; keep listening to their comments so that they continue to enjoy the reading.
- Take time choosing the text – continue using it for several sessions – it takes time for a group of students 'to get into' the new activity.
- Encourage and praise learners at all times.
- Enjoy the activity with the learners.
- Believe in it!

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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[http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/literacy/pri\\_lit\\_what\\_work\\_s0068807/pri\\_lit\\_what\\_works0068807.pdf](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/literacy/pri_lit_what_work_s0068807/pri_lit_what_works0068807.pdf)

Burton, M., Davey, J., Lewis, M., Ritchie, L. and Brooks, G. (forthcoming) *Progress of adult literacy learners*. London: NRDC. (The research project on which this guide is based – Chapter 5 describes the reading fluency strand.)

Burton, M. (2007a) *Oral Reading Fluency for Adults*. London: NRDC. (An account of the pilot project from which this project was developed.)

Burton, M. (2007b) *Developing adult teaching and learning: Practitioner Guides – Reading*. London/Leicester: NRDC/NIACE. (Summarises the findings from the large-scale Effective Practice Study on reading, including the value of pair work and the absence of several teaching strategies in the classroom including oral reading fluency.)

Kruidenier, J. (2002) *Research-based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction*. Portsmouth, NH: National Institute for Literacy. (Basis of much US adult literacy policy.)

McShane, S. (2005) *Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults: First Steps for Teachers*. (A useful American teaching manual. Chapter 5 deals with reading fluency and can be downloaded from:

[www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/html/mcshane/chapter5.html](http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/html/mcshane/chapter5.html))

Topping, K.T. (2001) *Thinking Reading Writing: A practical guide to paired learning with peers, parents and volunteers*. New York and London: Continuum. (Aimed at school level but good advocacy for the benefits of pair work, as well as further details on the structured technique of paired reading.)

# Appendices

## APPENDIX 1

**Table 1: The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols for the 24 consonant phonemes of the Received Pronunciation accent of English, with symbols used in *Letters and Sounds (L&S)* where these differ**

L&S	IPA		Sample word	IPA transcription
	/b/	as in the first sound of	<i>buy</i>	/baɪ/
	/d/	as in the first sound of	<i>dye</i>	/daɪ/
	/g/	as in the first sound of	<i>guy</i>	/gaɪ/
	/m/	as in the first sound of	<i>my</i>	/maɪ/
	/n/	as in the first sound of	<i>nigh</i>	/naɪ/
	/p/	as in the first sound of	<i>pie</i>	/paɪ/
	/r/	as in the first sound of	<i>rye</i>	/raɪ/
	/t/	as in the first sound of	<i>tie</i>	/taɪ/
	/k/	as in the first sound of	<i>coo</i>	/kuː/
/ch/	/tʃ/	as in the first sound of	<i>chew</i>	/tʃuː/
	/f/	as in the first sound of	<i>few</i>	/fjuː/
/j/	/dʒ/	as in the first sound of	<i>jaw</i>	/dʒɔː/
	/l/	as in the first sound of	<i>loo</i>	/luː/
	/s/	as in the first sound of	<i>sue</i>	/suː/
	/z/	as in the first sound of	<i>zoo</i>	/zuː/
	/v/	as in the first sound of	<i>view</i>	/vjuː/
	/h/	as in the first sound of	<i>who</i>	/huː/
/ng/	/ŋ/	as in the <b>last</b> sound of	<i>ring</i>	/rɪŋ/
/sh/	/ʃ/	as in the <b>third</b> sound of	<i>fission</i>	/'fɪʃən/
/zh/	/ʒ/	as in the <b>third</b> sound of	<i>vision</i>	/'vɪʒən/
/th/	/θ/	as in the first sound of	<i>thigh</i>	/θaɪ/
<b>/th/</b>	/ð/	as in the first sound of	<i>thy</i>	/ðaɪ/
	/w/	as in the first sound of	<i>well</i>	/wel/
/y/	/j/	as in the first sound of	<i>yell, union</i>	/jel, 'juːnjən/

**Table 2: The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols for the 20 vowel phonemes of the Received Pronunciation accent of English, with symbols used in *Letters and Sounds (L&S)* where these differ**

L&S	IPA		Sample word	IPA transcription
/a/	/æ/	as in the first sound of	<i>ant</i>	/ænt/
	/e/	as in the first sound of	<i>end</i>	/end/
/i/	/ɪ/	as in the first sound of	<i>ink</i>	/ɪŋk/
/o/	/ɒ/	as in the first sound of	<i>ox</i>	/ɒks/
/u/	/ʌ/	as in the first sound of	<i>up</i>	/ʌp/
/oo/	/ʊ/	as in the <b>second</b> sound of	<i>pull</i>	/pʊl/
	/ə/	(‘schwa’) as in the first sound of	<i>about</i>	/ə'baʊt/
/ar/	/ɑː/	as in the first sound of	<i>aardvark</i>	/'ɑːdvɑːk/
/ur/	/ɜː/	as in the first sound of	<i>earl</i>	/ɜːl/
/or/	/ɔː/	as in the <b>whole</b> sound of	<i>awe</i>	/ɔː/
/ee/	/iː/	as in the first sound of	<i>eel</i>	/iːl/
/oo/	/uː/	as in the sound of	<i>ooze</i>	/uːz/
/ai/	/eɪ/	as in the first sound of	<i>aim</i>	/eɪm/
/igh/	/aɪ/	as in the first sound of	<i>ice</i>	/aɪs/
/oa/	/əʊ/	as in the first sound of	<i>oath</i>	/əʊθ/
/ow/	/aʊ/	as in the first sound of	<i>ouch</i>	/aʊtʃ/
/oi/	/ɔɪ/	as in the first sound of	<i>oyster</i>	/'ɔɪstə/
/air/	/eə/	as in the <b>whole</b> sound of	<i>air</i>	/eə/
/ear/	/ɪə/	as in the <b>whole</b> sound of	<i>ear</i>	/ɪə/
/ure/	/ʊə/	as in the <b>second</b> sound of	<i>juror</i>	/'dʒʊərə/

**APPENDIX 2**

**A. Overview of suggested order for introduction of grapheme–phoneme correspondences** (broadly following *Letters and Sounds* (L&S)). Pace to suit your learners – suggested school timescales are inappropriate.

**STAGE 1**

Letter progression, Sets 1–6 (L&S, Phase Two, start of Phase Three)

**Consonant graphemes/digraphs and short vowels (1-syllable words and 2-syllable words from Set 6 onwards)**

Phonetic representations are given in some instances to avoid confusion.

Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Set 4	Set 5	Set 6	Set 7
s	i /ɪ/	g /g/	ck	h	j /dʒ/	y /j/
a /æ/	n	o /ɒ/	e /e/	b	v	z, zz
t	m	c /k/	u /ʌ/ (south) /ʊ/ (north)	f, ff	w*	qu /kw/
p	d	k	r	l, ll	x /ks/	
				ss		

\* grapheme <wh> (also /w/ in most words) could be introduced here if appropriate.

**Sets 8–11**

**Consonant digraphs and vowel/diphthong di/trigraphs (1-syllable and 2-syllable words)** (L&S, Phase Three, cont.)

Note that the order of introduction of long vowels, diphthongs and schwa is left to the teacher’s judgement in *Letters and Sounds*. However here a suggested order is based on the consistency of these grapheme–phoneme correspondences.

Set 8	Set 9	Set 10	Set 11
ch	ai /eɪ/	oo /uː, ʊ/	ow /aʊ/
sh	ee /iː/	ur /ɜː/	or /ɔː/
th /θ, ð/	igh /aɪ/	oi /ɔɪ/	ar /ɑː/
ng /ŋ, ŋg/	oa /əʊ/	air /eə/	ear /ɪə/
		ure /(j)ʊə/	er /ə/

By this stage all phonemes will have been learnt in at least one graphemic representation except for /zh/ /ʒ/.

<y> representing the vowel /iː/ as in e.g. <very> (in addition to /y/ /j/) from Set 7) could be usefully introduced during this stage.

## STAGE 2

### Consonant clusters (L&S, Phase Four)

Then introduce CVCC and CCVC words, i.e. those with initial and final consonant **clusters**. Start with clusters using the graphemes in Sets 1–7, e.g. pest, spin, etc., and progress to those from Sets 8–10 – burnt, swing, etc., building up to 3-consonant clusters.

## STAGE 3

### Alternative correspondences (L&S, Phases Five and Six)

Alternative graphemes for the phonemes, and alternative pronunciations for known graphemes, can be formally introduced, although some may well have arisen and been explained already in the course of wider reading. And by now it is possible that new graphemes are being assimilated through the use of high-frequency words. In particular ensure that the split digraphs <a.e, e.e, i.e, o.e and u.e> (informally referred to as ‘magic e’) are known. If not already encountered, the phoneme /zh/ (/ʒ/) can also be taught medially in words such as <leisure> and <vision> where graphemes <s> or <si> provide the commonest representations. (If appropriate it can also be taught as <ge> in final position, e.g. <rouge> and <beige>.) Note – this phoneme does not occur at the start of native English words.

### B Suggested order of introduction of less easily decodable high-frequency words

To accompany grapheme order:

Stage 1	Sets 1–5	to, the, no, go, I, into
Stage 1	Sets 6–11	he, she, we, me, be, was, my, you, they, her, all, are
Stage 2	Consonant clusters stage	said, so, have, like, some, come, were, there, little, one, do, when, out, what
Stage 3	Alternative graphemes stage	oh, their, people, Mr, Mrs, looked, called, asked, could

**APPENDIX 3: The phoneme-grapheme correspondences of British English spelling, with IPA symbols, and Letters and Sounds symbols where different**

**1: Consonants**

IPA	Phoneme L&S	Grapheme(s)		As in ...	Common words with rare graphemes for the phoneme
		Basic	Other		
/b/		b	bb	bed rabbit	<bu> buy
/k/		c	ck k q ch	come back look queen Christmas	<cu> biscuit
/tʃ/	/ch/	ch	tch	children match	<t> picture
/d/		d	dd ed	dad teddy called	<gh> cough enough laugh rough tough
/f/		f	ff ph	from off elephant	<gh> ghost <gu> guy
/g/		g	gg	get jogging	<wh> who whole
/h/		h		horse	
/dʒ/	/j/	j	dg(e) g ge	just budgie bridge giant orange	
/l/		l	ll	leg ball	
/m/		m	mm	my mummy	<mb> climb lamb thumb <me> come some <mn> autumn
/n/		n	nn	now dinner	<ne> done engine none <kn> knife knot know
/ŋ/	/ng/	ng	n	sing sink	<ph> shepherd
/p/		p	pp	pen apple	<wr> write
/r/		r	rr	red berry	<st> castle Christmas listen
/s/		s	c ce se ss	sit city once horse grass	<ch> machine <ci> special <s> sugar sure <ssi> permission
/ʃ/	/sh/	sh	ti	ship station	<s> treasure usual
/z/	/zh/	si		vision	<th> Thomas <tw> two
/t/		t	tt ed	but little looked	
/θ/	/th/	th		thing	<the> breathe
/ð/	/th/	th		that	<f> of
/v/		v	ve	very have	<wh> what when (etc.) /wɪ/ spelt <o> once one
/w/		w	u	went queen	<t> onion
/j/	/y/	y		yellow	<ss> scissors
/z/		z	s se ze zz	zoo is please sneeze puzzle	

**APPENDIX 3: The phoneme-grapheme correspondences of British English spelling, with IPA symbols, and Letters and Sounds symbols where different**

**2: Vowels**

IPA	Phoneme L&S	Grapheme(s)		As in ...	Common words with rare graphemes for the phoneme
		Basic	Other		
/æ/	/a/	a		and	<ar> sugar <i> possible <our> colour <re> centre <ure> picture
/ə/			e er o re	a the butter button centre	<aigh> straight <ea> break great <eight> eight <ey> they
/eɪ/	/ai/	a.e	a ai ay	came bacon paint day	<ear> bear pear tear wear <ere> there where <eir> their
/eə/	/air/	air	are ar	fair fare parent	<al> half <are> are <au> aunt laugh <ear> heart
/aː/	/ar/	ar	a	far ask	<a> any many <ai> said <ay> says <ie> friend
/e/		e	ea	went bread	<e.e> these <eo> people
/iː/	/ee/	ee	e ea ey ie y	see he beach key field city	<ier> fierce
/ɪə/	/ear/	eer	ear er ere	cheer hear hero here	<ear> early earth heard learn <ere> were <our> journey
/ɜː/	/ur/	er	ir or ur	her girl worm fur	<a> sausage
/ɪ/	/i/	i	e y	is England gym	<eight> height <eye> eye /aɪə/ spelt <ir, ire, yre> biro fire tyre
/aɪ/	/igh/	i.e	i igh y	like I night my	<au> because sausage <ou> cough
/ɒ/	/o/	o	a	not was	<oa> boat <oh> oh
/əʊ/	/oa/	o	o.e ow	so bone blow	<oul> could should would
/ɔɪ/	/oi/	oi	oy	boil boy	<oe> shoe <o> do to two who <ou> you <ough> through <ue> blue
/ʊ/	/oo/	oo	u	book put	<ui> fruit
/uː/	/oo/	oo	ew u u.e	too blew super rule	<our> tour
/ʊə/	/ure/	oor	ure	poor sure	<ough> caught naughty <oor> door floor <ough> bought
/ɔː/	/or/	or	a ar au aw ore	for all warn sauce saw before	<our> four your
/aʊ/	/ow/	ou	ow	out down	/aʊə/ spelt <our, ower> flour flower
/ʌ/	/u/	u	o	but some	<ou> country young /wʌ/ spelt <o> once one

3: 2-phoneme sequences frequently spelt with single graphemes

2-phoneme sequence	Grapheme(s) sequence		2-grapheme spellings for same sequence	
	Basic	Other	As in ...	
/əl/ (only word-final)	le		little	animal label pencil carol
/juː/ (L&S:/yoo/)	u	ew ue u.e	union few	view you
/ks/	x		box	banks tricks politics

N.B. The 2-phoneme sequence /kw/ is almost always spelt <qu> and should also be taught as a unit.



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