

Welcome to the Reading Lesson

We all want our children to read. With great pride we watch our children learn the alphabet and sing the ABC song. We buy picture books and read to them every night. When she can recognize a particular word or he can write his name, we are thrilled. But this is still far from *reading* the way we understand it. We try to teach reading, but often do not know where to start. So easy for us, reading seems so difficult and confusing to teach.

We found ourselves in this situation when our daughter was four years old. She learned the alphabet, and we were waiting for her to start reading some simple words. We sent for several commercial reading programs, the same ones you often hear advertised on the radio. What we got back was a slew of cassette tapes and flash cards. Our daughter would not sit and listen to the tapes, and the flash cards were all over the house. We also bought software programs for learning to read and found them too shallow and haphazard. Disappointed, we began to make our own simple exercises and stories for her to read. We read books on reading instruction for children, researched academic material, talked to parents and teachers, and began to develop a simple daily reading program. Michael's understanding of child psychology and development, and my desire for a simple, easy-to-follow method, led to the program you hold in your hands.

We have created the Reading Lesson™ for parents who want to teach their children to read and for instructors teaching basic reading skills to children. The program is suitable for both homeschooling and classroom use. It is structured, clear and simple but it does require direct involvement of the parent or a teacher, which we believe is a key element in learning to read.

the Reading Lesson is designed for any child who shows interest in books and reading. Some unique features of this course also make it useful for older children with reading difficulties. the Reading Lesson was first published as a software package and tested with over 200 families and schoolrooms. The excellent results and the enthusiastic feedback we received has encouraged us to publish this book.

The right way to teach reading to children

Learning to read is the most important task facing the young child and to fail at it is a serious matter. Although most children learn to read during the first two years of elementary school, they do not necessarily go on to read fluently or with pleasure.

Currently, there are two popular ways of teaching reading – the Phonic method and the Whole Language method. For some years now, there has been an ongoing controversy regarding these techniques, and each has its strong supporters.

The Phonic method, the basis of this book and considered superior by many, focuses on teaching the child to read small sound units first, and then to combine them into larger units – words. The awareness that combinations of letters represent unique sounds is the key essence of the Phonic method.

The Whole Language method, also known as Look-and-Say, does not break the word into sound units. Instead, it teaches the child to recognize the word by memorizing it as you would a picture. The theory is that the brain can translate directly from the written unit (the word) to the meaning. By knowing the context, the reader anticipates what is coming, and can often speed up the recognition process by guessing.

Research tells us that a fluent reader employs word-recognition while reading, but reverts to a process of breaking down the unfamiliar word into recognizable sound units. The fluency comes after years of decoding new and unfamiliar words using phonics and then incorporating them into memory. The key factor in fluency is developing this ability to effortlessly recognize letter units and words. Without this essential skill, we would be limited in vocabulary and reading comprehension.

At first glance, Phonics and Whole Language methods sound contradictory, but in fact, they complement one another in building reading fluency. Phonics if used alone is not enough. Although most English words can be read using simple phonic rules, there are many that defy these rules. English is a hodgepodge of words from many cultures and countries. For the young reader, it appears confusing and inconsistent. The vocabulary is vast, the pronunciation is often irregular, and the exceptions are as numerous as the rules. Phonics combined with Whole Language as needed is better equipped to take this complexity into account.



The majority of children – nearly 80 percent – can learn to read regardless of the teaching method used. But for the other 20 percent – particularly those with reading difficulties – the combination of Phonics and the Whole Language is the best way to teach reading.

What makes this program special

- the Reading LESSON offers an easy-to-follow recipe for teaching children to read. It takes a child with no reading skills to about the second grade level in reading. Never-too-hard and never-too-easy, step-by-step the lessons teach phonics and build the sight vocabulary.

- We begin the lessons with three to four sounds and introduce sight words as we go along. Word recognition skills develop through the use of *key words*. Once these *key words* are learned using Phonics, we encourage the child to read them as sight words to gain fluency. Certain words such as *you* and *do* are difficult to explain using the phonic principles. These and other non-phonetic *key words* are presented as sight words.
- the Reading LESSON uses a controlled vocabulary of developmentally appropriate words. The vocabulary of the program closely corresponds to the 500 most commonly used words in English. We use many of these words as *key words*.
- the Reading LESSON does not follow the alphabet. Instead, we begin by teaching the most common letters in the English language. That way, the child can begin reading words and simple stories from the very first lesson. There are no boring drills. All reading is context oriented. You will hear your child say, “Look, I can read!” after the very first lesson. Happiness is knowing that you are making it possible.
- the Reading LESSON uses only lower-case letters in the first ten lessons of the course. Often young children do not know the lower-case letters well. Realizing that ninety-five percent of all letters in print are lower-case letters, this is where we start. Upper-case letters are introduced later in the program. For children who know the capital letters of the alphabet, the transition from the lower-case to the upper-case letters is easy.
- the Reading LESSON uses special typography. The letters are large in the early lessons and get smaller as we progress. The words are spaced far apart, and page clutter is kept to a minimum. We use special symbols to help the child learn the complex and irregular rules of English pronunciation. Children often confuse certain letters, such as **b** and **d**. There are special marks to help the child distinguish these two letters.
- the Reading LESSON is designed for children ages 4 to 8. Since most children in this age group cannot follow *if-then* rules, or rules such as *i before e except after c*, we have kept all rules to a bare minimum. Your child will learn these rules in due course as part of the school curriculum. We do not even teach the difference between vowels and consonants. As you will see, your child can learn to read just as well without knowing any of these rules.
- the Reading LESSON concentrates primarily on teaching the child to decode, that is, to read. Decoding should not be confused with reading comprehension. Our goal is to give the children basic reading skills so they can begin to read independently.



How to use this course

How to do the lessons

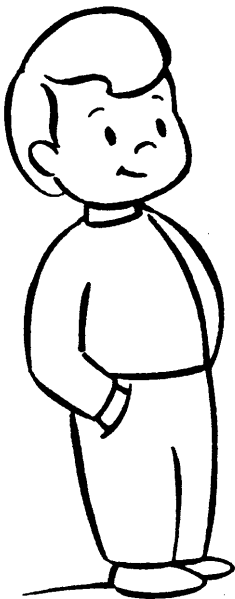
There are twenty lessons in this book. Before starting a lesson, we suggest that you read the instructions for that lesson. Take a moment to practice how to say the sounds. Each letter is paired with a picture. This paired-associative learning technique is the most effective mnemonic tool to enhance your child's memory of the new sounds.

You need to be consistent in how you sound out the letters. However, a word of caution is needed: no two children or even adults will say a sound in exactly the same way. Regional accents and children's relatively weak auditory and articulation skills account for the variations. In the classroom this fact is particularly obvious. It is impossible to make all children say a sound in the same way. Encourage your child to make the closest possible sound to the one suggested in the lesson but allow some leeway. Blending sounds and reading new words is what counts. Learning phonics is an important, however, an intermediate step. So do not insist on absolute accuracy in sounding out the individual letters if it is difficult for your child.

You may consider purchasing the Reading Lesson CD-ROMs. Through animation and simple games, these multimedia companions will make learning to read fun. For very young children, we suggest, the Sounds of Letters videotape, another good way to teach phonics. You will find information about these products in the back of this book.

For many young readers (including children who are familiar with the alphabet), the letters in words seem to melt together. The instructions in Lesson One show how to blend the sounds. The bars under each sound unit will help your child to identify and separate the letters she already knows. These bars are there as guides and are used to blend the sounds into words. This process is called *sounding out*. At first, blending is difficult for most children. You will need to help the child but he will get better at it with practice.

Each lesson consists of words, exercises and short stories. When reading the words, ask the child to tell you what the word means. Before you read the story, read the title and talk a little bit about the content of the story. In the first five lessons you might read the whole story aloud to the child before he tries it himself. Ask your child to tell you what happened in the story afterwards. Your child may also enjoy these stories on our animated the StoryBook™ CD-ROM.



Approximately 250 key words form the basis of reading skills in this course. Each lesson introduces a set of key words. Your child should learn them well before you proceed to the next lesson. These words are used in later lessons. If the child has problems recognizing these words, please go back and redo them.

How fast should you go

The length and the pace of the daily lessons will vary with the child's age and abilities. We suggest the following schedule:

- For children under five, one page per day
- For children between five and six, two to three pages per day
- For children over six, three or more pages per day

Children have a very short attention span. Try to keep each lesson under fifteen minutes and spend no more than five to seven minutes per page.

If your child is young, don't rush. Work at a leisurely and comfortable pace. Remember: you have plenty of time to complete the course and, if necessary, to go back and repeat the course before your child starts reading instruction in school.

Your child will need assistance. Be ready to help with the difficult words by sounding out the letters. In first three lessons, try to do each page twice. You will notice how much more easily the child reads the second time – but don't let her skip pages, even if she is sailing through the program. We also advise not to repeat the pages more than twice. It serves no purpose. Just go on ahead even though the child has difficulty with some words. Some pages may be harder than others. Just keep going. Repeated exposure to the key words assures success.

If your child is reluctant to do the lessons, you may be going too fast. Slow down the pace. Always try to stop the lesson just before the child gets bored. If your child is having real trouble staying on task and learning the material of the first lessons, he may not be ready for this program. Put it aside for the time being and try again in a few months.

In every lesson, there are individual sentences as well as little stories. Most children prefer to read only the stories. They are happy to show-off, and love to be praised when they do it right. The sentences, although they contain words from the stories, present somewhat greater reading difficulty because the child cannot guess the words from the context. Stories make guessing easier. Children need to develop both of these types of reading abilities, so we advise not to skip the sentences just because the child does not want to do them.



Children learn to read faster and more easily if they learn to write letters and words at the same time. Our brain receives direct messages from the movement of our finger joints and remembers the shape of each letter. Through writing exercises, a connection between sound and letter is made. We highly recommend the Writing LESSON™ companion course for daily practice to learn complementary hand writing skills.

Bear in mind that at first the progress will be slow. Most children do not do as well as you might expect until about the seventh lesson. This is not surprising, for many concepts are complex and new. Each lesson presents new challenges. But reading fluency *will* come with repeated exposure as the child learns to decode words and recognize them by sight. It will be your responsibility to maintain a regular schedule. Most children need a lot of encouragement and praise during this period. How well the child does at this point largely depends on how motivated and involved you are.

How to stay on course

All new learning is hard. The common hype that learning has to be fun is just that – hype. All real learning requires effort, and this is true for both adults and children. It is our experience that even the brightest children may sometimes resist doing the lessons. Young children do not understand the value of reading and wonder why they must make all this effort when mom can just read it to them.

Here are some techniques that might help the child stay interested and motivated:

Give your child a little reward for finishing each page. Let him put a sticker in the corner. Let her color the pictures or the lesson number at the top of the page. You can also ask your child to “autograph” the page when it is finished. All these rewards will also serve as bookmark for the next day’s lesson while giving your child a feeling of accomplishment.

We have included a progress chart in the back of this book. You may want to put a copy on your refrigerator. After finishing a lesson, the child can add stickers, stars or his signature to it. A color version of this chart can be downloaded from our website.

Your child may enjoy playing the token game. In this game, the child earns a token (a penny, a sticker, or even a kiss) for each word done correctly and loses a token (instead of losing a token, he might get a gentle pinch) for each word done wrong. You may also read the story to the child (immediately after he has read it), and make deliberate mistakes while reading (such as changing the word **sat** to **swim**, or **dog** to **dinosaur**). Your child will have great fun correcting you.

We have found that children enjoy many of these games. But even more important, as they learn to read, children build self-confidence. And this confidence your child will carry through life.

How to work with the computer program

If you have purchased this book with the Reading LESSON software, we suggest that you first do each lesson on the computer and then work with the book. The computer brings the sounds alive and helps the child grasp the blending and phonic concepts. We would like to emphasize that the Reading Lesson CD-ROM is not a computer game and will require guidance. You will need to sit together with the child as she goes through the lessons on the computer.

We would like to hear of your experiences with this program, and we welcome your comments and suggestions.

Michael Levin

Charan Langton