



## Literacy Tuition: Principles.

### 1. Specialist literacy tuition.

Specialist literacy tuition is

- **Phonic**
- **Structured**
- **Cumulative**
- **Multi-sensory.**

#### Phonic.

English words have 43 phonemes (speech-sounds) which are expressed by 26 letters as graphemes, singly or in groups. Groups may be blends in which you can perceive the single sounds, e.g. [bl, cr, spl] or consonant digraphs, in which the sounds of single letters are changed, e.g. [th, sh, ph] or vowel digraphs e.g. [ea, ow, air]. There are several ways of reading some letter patterns, e.g. [ea] as in [meat, bread, steak] and several ways of writing some phonemes, e.g. the long /e/ sound in [be, see, real, these, piece, receive, people, elite, key]. Those who learn easily learn by rote, by visual memory, by analogy, by experience. Dyslexic learners have to be taught all the rules and conventions and exceptions of English reading and spelling in an organised way. English is not as phonetically regular as many other languages.

#### Structured.

The structure needs to start with the most frequently used ways of reading each grapheme and spelling each phoneme, and gradually add the dominant alternatives, the rules for doubling consonants and adding suffixes, and multi-syllabic words, the less frequent alternatives and the exceptions. **Take nothing for granted. Check everything.**

#### Cumulative.

Each step of progression must build up on what has previously been securely taught, e.g. "How do you spell the long /a/ sound in a word? That's right, [acorn a] or [cake a-e] with magic e. Today we have two more ways of spelling it: [rain ai] in the middle of a word and as [day ay] at the end of a word."

Reading and spelling work, e.g. dictation, needs to include earlier phonics for reinforcement, but never anything not yet taught.

This is why worksheets, games and computer program options must be selected very carefully to fit the chosen structure and progression. You can rarely mix and match from different schemes, because they progress in different orders.

## **Multi-sensory.**

This is the hallmark of dyslexia tuition. "See it, say it, hear it, write it" involves visual, aural, oral and kinaesthetic senses. This is utilised in the well-known "Look, (Say/Hear), Cover, Write and Check" routine. In that, the learner should say the word being practised and the letter-names as well. Writing of words from recall (not copying) reinforces them for reading as well as for spelling.

## **2. Withdrawal v Inclusion.**

Dyslexic learners do not pick up these literacy skills. They have to be taught deliberately. This is best done in a one-to-one or very small group situation. In-class support is also necessary to enable learners to access the curriculum while these literacy skills are being mastered.

## **3. Resources.**

Alpha to Omega (O-A) is one good comprehensive scheme with supporting materials. The "Before Alpha" materials lead up to the main scheme. Wordshark 3 software was originally based on A-O structure, but now also has National Literacy Strategy words and curriculum words. The typing tutor software Touch-Type, Read and Spell (TTRS) is also organised in A-O order.

A-O, Wordshark and TTRS can each be used independently or can be used in conjunction, each reinforcing the content in different ways for much-needed overlearning. Computer programs are very good, but there needs to be off-screen reading, spelling of single words and sentence dictation as well.

### **Other resources.**

There are many other schemes, materials, worksheets, equipment, software, teaching aids. See [Literacy resources](#)

## **4. The Alphabet.**

Parents and teachers are often very keen to teach the alphabet sequence when dyslexics do not know it. Being able to recite or arrange the letters of the alphabet is not as important as being able to use it, i.e. knowing the names and sounds of each letter. Plastic or wooden letters for wordmaking are the equivalent of counters for numeracy. They are used by most specialist teachers. At the stage of finding words in a dictionary, a chart or alphabet strip for reference is useful. A dictionary with a cut-out letter index is helpful.

## **5. An oft-repeated myth.**

**"When two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking."**

It sounds so good. If only it were true!

**These say the first vowel name:**

ai- train, ea- eat, ee- tree, ei- receive, ie- lie, oa- road, oe- foe, ou- though.

ue- due- (depending on how you pronounce that).

ui- suit (depending on how you pronounce that).

**These do not say the first vowel name:**

ae- aeroplane, aesthetic, air chair (is not really long/a/+r).

**ao-** chaos (it says its name, but the 'o' has a sound as well.)

**au-** caught, **ea-** bread, great (only 3 words), **ear** hear (is not really long /e/+r).

**ear** earth, **ei** -eight, **eu-** Europe, **ia-** diary (it says its name, but the 'a' has a sound as well.)

**ie-** chief, **io-** violent (it says its name, but the 'o' has a sound as well.)

**oi-** coin, **oo-** moon, book, **ou-** through thought.

**ua-** dual (it says its name, but the 'a' has a sound as well.)

**ue-** blue is /oo/, duel ('e' has a sound as well), **ui-** fruit is /oo/.

You would not count 'y' as a vowel for the purpose of this misleading rhyme:

**OK:** ay, ey, **Not OK:** ey- they, oy- boy.

Nor 'w' in its function as a semi-vowel or vowel-modifier.

**Not OK:** aw- jaw, ew- few, grew, ow- blow, down.

