

*The Proven SRA DISTAR Reading
Program Adapted for Parent and Child*

TEACH YOUR CHILD TO READ IN 100 EASY LESSONS

Siegfried Engelmann

author of Give Your Child a Superior Mind

Phyllis Haddox

Elaine Bruner

*In only 20 minutes a day, this
remarkable step-by-step program
teaches your child to read—with
the love, care, and joy only a
parent and child can share!*



- Is your child halfway through first grade and still unable to read?
- Is your preschooler bored with coloring and ready for reading?
- Are you worried that your child will become lost in overcrowded classrooms?
- Did you know that early readers hold an advantage over their peers throughout school?
- Do you want to help your child read, but are afraid you'll do something wrong?

SRA's DISTAR® is the most successful beginning reading program available to schools across the country. Research has proven that children taught by the DISTAR® method outperform their peers who receive instruction from other programs. Now for the first time, this program has been adapted for parent and child to use at home. *Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons* is a complete, step-by-step program that shows parents simply and clearly how to teach their children to read.

Twenty minutes a day is all you need, and within 100 teaching days your child will be reading on a solid second-grade reading level. It's a sensible, easy-to-follow, and enjoyable way to help your child gain the essential skills of reading. Everything you need is here—no paste, no scissors, no flash cards, no complicated directions—just you and your child learning together. One hundred lessons, fully illustrated and color-coded for clarity, give your child the basic and more advanced skills needed to become a good reader.

Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons will bring you and your child closer together, while giving your child the reading skills needed now, for a better chance at tomorrow.

Siegfried Engelmann is a professor of education at the University of Oregon, and has written many books on teaching, including *Give Your Child a Superior Mind*. He is the originator of Direct Instruction, the most successful approach to teaching, and he has developed more than thirty direct instruction programs. He has provided teaching demonstrations with a wide range of children—consistently showing that they could learn much more than had been achieved with traditional teaching.

Phyllis Haddox worked as a reading specialist before coming to the University of Oregon, where she is currently a teacher trainer and a project manager. She has co-authored several direct instruction programs with Engelmann, and has served as consultant and trainer for many school districts.

Elaine C. Bruner co-authored DISTAR® reading programs with Engelmann, pioneered training of teachers in direct instruction methods, and has worked at the University of Illinois on computer applications of direct instruction.



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Teach Your Child
to Read in 100
Easy Lessons

Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons

Siegfried Engelmann
Phyllis Haddox
Elaine Bruner

A FIRESIDE BOOK

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In 1955 Rudolph Flesch rocked the educational community with his book *Why Johnny Can't Read*. The theme of the book was that phonics methods are more effective than the look-say methods used in schools, but phonics methods are not used in schools. Twenty-five years later, Flesch's follow-up book came out—*Why Johnny Still Can't Read*. The title says it all. Although words and epithets flew during those years, very little changed. According to Flesch, the look-say, or whole-word, method is still being used in three out of four schools.

The bad news is further explained by Robert Benjamin in his book *Making Schools Work*. Benjamin, a newspaper reporter commissioned by the Ford Foundation to identify educational programs that work, says, "Teaching children to read well from the start is the most important task of elementary schools. But relying on education to approach this correctly can be a great mistake. Many schools continue to employ instructional methods that have been proven ineffective. The staying power of the look-say or whole-word method of teaching beginning reading is perhaps the most flagrant example of this failure to instruct effectively."¹

So much for the bad news. The first part of the good news is that there is a program that works. This program—**Distar**, published by Science Research Associates, Inc. (SRA)—involves no snappy motivational tricks and no instructional magic. It is simply a very, very careful program, and research consistently shows that **Distar** does the best job of all commercial programs in teaching reading. Benjamin writes:

The program bears almost nothing in common with the way students are taught in most of America's public schools. But DISTAR works. It consistently has delivered what other programs usually just promise. . . . In the largest, most expensive, most ambitious social experiment ever conducted in the United States—in which nine different instructional programs representing the major educational theories of the 1970's were pitted against each other to find out what works best with low-income children—DISTAR far and away came out on top.²

Research on DISTAR shows it has had dramatic effects with almost every kind of child. . . . DISTAR is particularly effective with young children.³

The second part of the good news is that the hundred-day program presented in this book is an adaptation of the **Distar** Fast Cycle Reading Program. The program has been streamlined somewhat and modified for home use. If you follow the program, you will teach your child to read quite well in one hundred days.

¹Robert Benjamin, *Making Schools Work* (New York: Continuum, 1981), pp. 94–96.

²Benjamin, *Making Schools Work*, p. 71.

³Benjamin, *Making Schools Work*, p. 79.

The hundred-day program is appropriate for preschool children (bright three- and-a-half-year-olds, average four- and five-year-olds).

The hundred-day program is also appropriate for children who have been in school but who have not learned to read.

The program is *not* recommended for “poor readers” who have been taught how to read but who make frequent mistakes.

The only materials that you’ll need to teach reading are this book and some paper (or a chalkboard)—no flash cards, lesson plans, special books, or machines.

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

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

THE COMPLEX SKILL OF READING

The sophisticated reading that adults do is analogous to playing a concerto on the piano. The ultimate goal of reading instruction is to prepare children for the concerto of reading—reading complicated material silently, at a reasonably fast rate, and understanding the details of the message the author presents.

The program that prepares the child should be a careful one, just as good instruction in playing the piano starts with simple skills that are modified and expanded to create more complicated ones. A piano-playing program is poor if it requires the naive student to play a concerto. The student will not be able to perform and will understandably become frustrated. A more reasonable program would build toward the concerto one step at a time, designed so that the student achieves mastery of each step before moving to a more difficult one.

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

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

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

THE DISTAR® READING PROGRAM

The major force that has determined the design and content of the **Distar** program is feedback about specific, detailed problems that children experience. When **Distar** was developed, the authors assumed that if students had problems with any of the exercises presented, the program—not the students—was at fault. So the program was changed, and tried out with new students, and changed again until it was smooth and manageable. In its final form it has the potential to teach virtually any child who goes through it. Note that it has only the *potential*. For this potential to be realized, the “teacher” must present the various exercises as specified and must make sure that the child is able to perform every task presented in each lesson.

Research Involving **Distar**

Distar has been involved in more than a dozen comparative studies. The results are fairly uniform: children taught with **Distar** outperform their peers who receive instruction in other programs. These results hold after one year of instruction, after two, after three, and after four. The largest single study in which **Distar** was involved was the comparison of U.S. Office of Education Follow Through sites—the largest educational experiment ever conducted. Various geographic sites in the United States selected a specific educational program from those made available. Each site agreed to implement the chosen program for teaching poverty children in kindergarten through grade three. The University of Oregon Follow Through model, which used **Distar** instruction in all grades and for all major subjects (reading, language, math), consistently outperformed all the other sponsored programs in reading achievement, arithmetic achievement, language performance, and measures of self-esteem. The more than ten thousand children in the University of Oregon model

10 came from various cities and counties in the United States—some from Indian reservations; others from poverty neighborhoods in cities like New York and Washington, D.C.; still others from rural places like DeKalb County, Tennessee, and Williamsburg County, South Carolina. The **Distar** programs worked better than any other program in the cities, better in rural areas, better with whites, with blacks, and with brown, better with poverty children and with middle-class children.

The **Distar** programs are more effective than other programs because they control more of the details that are important to successful teaching. Some beginning reading programs control the reading vocabulary that is presented to the child. **Distar** goes far beyond this. It controls vocabulary, the specific tasks that are presented, the type of example, the number of times the example appears, and even the teacher's wording—including specifications about how to effectively correct different types of errors that may occur. The control involves all the details that might make a difference in how the child receives the communication. Some things that **Distar** controls may seem quite reasonable and necessary to a person not familiar with educational practices, (for instance, the control of how to correct the child's mistakes.) Yet the "basal reading" programs that are most widely used in schools do not provide teachers with this type of information. We analyzed the four most widely used basal reading programs in grades four through six and discovered that none of them contains any specific correction procedures. The teacher's guides simply provide general suggestions cautioning the teacher to work longer with the children who learn more slowly than others.

COMMUNICATING CLEARLY WITH THE CHILD

Traditional reading programs are poor devices for teaching *all* children because they do not have provisions for communicating clearly. To appreciate the pitfalls that are involved in clear communication, we have to put ourselves in the place of the child who is trying to learn to read. This child may not understand exactly what reading is or precisely how one goes about doing it. Adults may have a clear idea of what they are trying to tell the child, but things may look quite

different from the child's perspective. Let's say that we teach the child to look at the first letter of words and identify those words (an activity common in poor reading programs). We might begin by presenting words that are easy to distinguish by looking at the first letter. Here's a possible list of such words:

he go fat run with

Although the naive child might quickly "read" those words by looking at the first letter, the child may later encounter a serious problem. As soon as we introduce a new word that begins with the same letter that one of those first words begins with, we will probably discover that the child confuses the new word with the familiar word. For example, when we introduce the word **him**, we will probably discover that the child calls the word **he**, because both words begin with **h**.

This example points out a very important feature of poor communication in a teaching sequence. *The problem that the communication creates is not evident at the time the teaching occurs.* The child in the example reads the initial set of words without a hitch. Everything seems to be fine. Only later, when we introduce examples that call for more difficult discriminations, does the problem emerge.

If we examine the communication involved in early instruction, we can identify the kind of confusion that it may create and predict the kind of problem the child may later encounter. One of the more popular (but less effective) techniques for teaching initial reading skills is called the language experience method. This method involves doing something with the children, then talking about the experience, then writing sentences on the board that tell about the experience, then pointing to the words in the sentences and showing the children how to "read" them. The most obvious problem with the method is that it is far easier for the children to *remember* the sentences than it is for them to identify the individual words. Remember, these children do not know anything about reading. The teacher stands up, makes some squiggles on the board, points to them, and talks slowly. While pointing to the different squiggles, the teacher then requires the children to repeat what was said. Although it is possible for some children to extract the intended meaning from this communication,

the communication is very poor. Some children predictably come away from it with the idea that when you read, you simply point to the squiggles and talk slowly as you recite one of the familiar sentences. If we were to put up one of the charts the children worked on earlier without first cueing them about the content, some children would point to the words in order and say sentences for *another chart* with great fidelity.

Another communication problem occurs if we try to teach too much during the initial reading exercises. This problem is characteristic of most of the basal reading programs that are used in schools. These programs are extremely poor at communicating the difference between decoding and understanding. Decoding is the simple act of identifying the words in a sentence. Decoding does not necessarily imply understanding. To decode the sentence **Ruf unter glop splee**, you simply say the words. This illustration points out that you may be able to decode without understanding what the sentence means. Traditional reading programs typically confuse the beginning reader about whether the teacher is trying to teach decoding or understanding. These programs typically begin with the teacher discussing details of a picture. If the picture shows a girl named Jan, the teacher talks about Jan—what she is wearing, the color of her hair, and so forth. After discussing Jan, the teacher points to the word below the picture. The word, of course, is **Jan**.

It might seem that this communication is effective because it promotes interest and gives the children the motivation for both reading and understanding the written message. However, this communication may prompt the child to formulate a serious misconception about how to read. If the teacher always talks about the picture before reading the word, and if the word is always predictable by referring to the picture, the child may reasonably assume that:

- You read words by referring to a picture.
- You must understand the word that is to be decoded before you can read it.

Unfortunately, most children who fail to learn to read in school learn either one or a combination of these misconceptions. The typical poor reader in the upper elementary grades, for instance, reads some words by saying a *synonym* that bears no resemblance to the word on the page. The word may be **fine** and the reader calls it **good**. Consider the machinations that must occur in the reader's confused mind for this type

of mistake to occur. The reader must approach the task of decoding with the idea that before reading a word, you must understand that word. The child looks at the word and seems to understand it, but when the child tries to say the word, a synonym comes out. (After all, the synonym and the word have the same meaning.)

A careless teaching communication permits the child to succeed for the moment, only to experience a serious setback later. To avoid these pitfalls, we must use a program that proceeds very carefully, tiptoeing around the pitfalls without taking costly shortcuts. The communications make it very clear when the child is simply to figure out the word and when the child is supposed to attend to the meaning. The communication arranges the order of these events so that the child *first* decodes, *then* discovers the meaning. The communication further shows the child a workable set of procedures for decoding or figuring out the word. At first this procedure is directed, a step at a time. As the child becomes adept at linking the steps, the directions shrink and the child assumes increasing responsibility.

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

MAKING TEACHING EASIER

Just as some of the control measures used in **Distar** may seem reasonable, others may initially seem contrainduitive or simply unnatural. An example of this control is the script that the teacher is to present verbatim when teaching

12 the lessons. A typical response to the scripted presentations is “Why would a program have to choreograph what the teacher says?” The answer becomes apparent only if you observe teachers trying to teach without carefully controlled scripts, particularly when the presentation is delicate (which is the case when trying to teach a naive five-year-old to read). We know about these problems because before designing **Distar** we ran a master’s training program at the University of Illinois. We provided our interns with detailed instruction in how to present tasks to children—the rate at which to pace them, procedures for stressing different words, and procedures for reinforcing and correcting the children. Unless you are a teacher who has had a great deal of training, the amount of information that you must attend to when carrying out an effective presentation of this type to a group of eight fidgety five-year-olds is overwhelming. If you add the requirement that the teacher must also supply the wording for each example that is presented, the overwhelming becomes impossible. Typically, the interns attended either to the content they presented or to the behavior of the children they were trying to teach. When they attended to the behavior, they frequently became verbose, repetitive, and often bumbled. When they talked too much (which they frequently did), their delivery suffered because their pacing became poor. The children became confused and lost interest. The solution was to remove some of the variables from the teacher by scripting what the teacher was to say. The teacher was left with plenty to do because the material still had to be presented in a way that was both effective and dynamic. But the teacher could now concentrate primarily on delivering the content, not on trying to create it or design ways to “get it across.” After all, sitting in front of a group of children, each of whom may produce an incredible variety of responses at any moment, is not the best place to create smooth presentations.

Effective communication is the sum of many *details*. Unless all these details are controlled, the child will receive poor communication from the teacher, and the teacher will receive poor information about the child. The naive child fails to perform very well unless all details are carefully controlled. The information that the teacher receives is that the child cannot perform and therefore must be slow, must have some sort of visual perception problem or emotional prob-

lem. This information is categorically wrong. Each author of this book has worked with thousands of children, from gifted to “severely retarded.” The authors have never seen a child four years old or older with an IQ above 70 who could not be taught to read, and read well, within a reasonable period of time. We have seen hundreds of children who have not been taught to read in school. We have worked with children at preschool to college levels who could not read and whose parents probably believed in the finality of the labels with which the school had adorned these students: dyslexic, perceptually handicapped, learning-disabled. These labels are nonsense. Almost without exception, the “disabled” students that we have worked with had two obvious problems. The first was that they had not been taught properly. Their confusion suggested that the malfunctions existed in the teachers’ techniques, not in the children’s minds. The second problem was that these students seemed to *believe* the labels. They hated reading (or trying to read). But the cure for these problems did not involve neurosurgery or wonder drugs. It involved nothing more than starting over and teaching carefully. The children soon discovered that they could learn, that their progress impressed their teacher, and that reading (or learning) was not so bad after all. A child’s self-image goes through a remarkable growth spurt when the child receives powerful demonstrations of success.

Distar ORTHOGRAPHY: WHY THE “FUNNY” PRINT?

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

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

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

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

a ā b c ch d e ē f g h i I I j k l m n

o ō oo p qu r s sh t th u ū v w wh x y ȳ z

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

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

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

Here’s the entire sentence about **he** and **she**, with all the **Distar** conventions:

hē and shē went to the lāke.

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

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

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

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

TEACHING FIRST THINGS FIRST

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here’s how we might present the task:

“Say **mmmaa-at**.” (Child says:) “mmmaa-at.”

“Say it fast.” (Child says:) “mat.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Irregulars and Comprehension

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

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