

## Handwriting and Decoding Station

In the [Picture Packet Station](#) section, I said that all but one of the 26 letters of the alphabet are included in the Two-Sound Picture Packets. I also said that even though the Reading Program allows children to begin reading and writing before they even know the alphabet, letters are introduced from the start. The Handwriting and Decoding Station is that start. Learning to write letters passes through three stages: Flipbooks and Salt (or Sand) Trays, Worksheets, and Templates.

### Alphabet Flipbooks



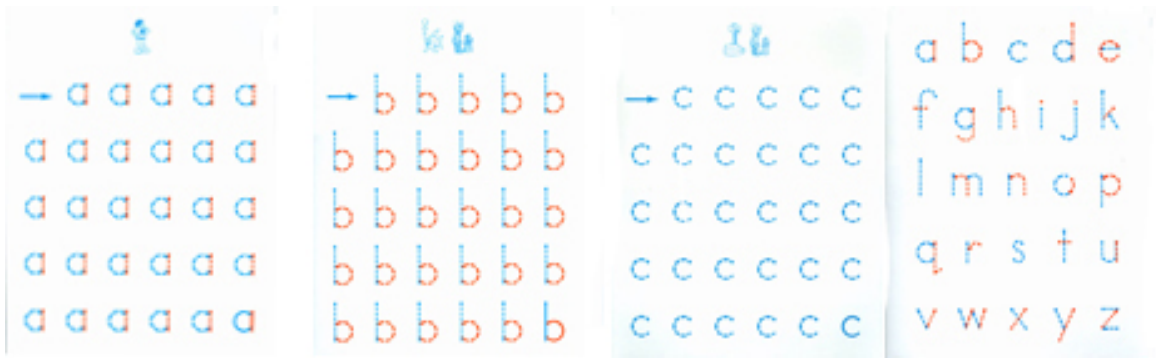
The Alphabet Flipbooks are the first activity students use in learning to write each letter. No assessment is made to determine if any children already know how to write letters. All children start at the beginning. For this activity, children use their fingers to write letters, one letter at a time, in Salt or Sand Tray Boxes, one box for each child at the Station.

The Tray is a small box, the bottom of which is covered with either sand or salt, whichever is easier for the teacher to come by. An example of the kind of boxes that can be used is 7 x 7 x 2 individual pizza boxes.

The Flipbooks for the letters a, b, and c are shown above. The bottom edge of each Flipbook has that Flipbook's letter-name in sound-pictures. The top of each Alphabet Flipbook starts with the first stroke of its letter in blue. Once the child draws that first stroke in the Salt Tray, the first-stroke page is flipped up, and the second stroke of the letter is revealed in red. After each letter is written, its sand image is erased with a gentle shake of the tray, and another letter's Flipbook is selected.

### Letter-Writing Worksheets

After practicing drawing letters with their fingers, children use erasable marking pens to trace each letter on a Letter-Writing Worksheet. Erasable marking pens are used on all the Program's many worksheets.



Each of the 26 letters of the alphabet has its own worksheet. The 27<sup>th</sup> worksheet contains all 26 letters and is useful as an assessment tool for measuring the progress of students in mastering the art of letter-tracing.

### **Alphabet Templates**

When children are reasonably proficient at letter-tracing, they are introduced to the first set of Alphabet Templates.

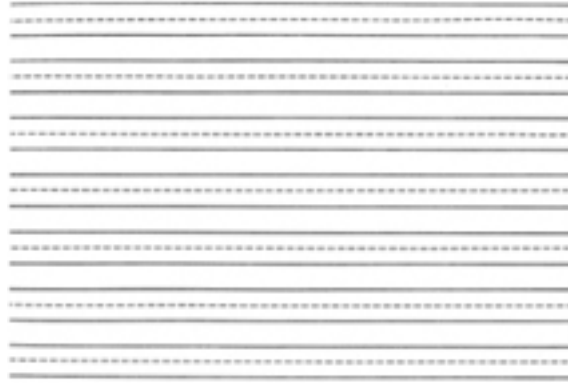


They now use pencils or crayons to draw the letters on paper. There are nine templates - eight with three letters each and the ninth with just two.

Once they have practiced writing every letter on unlined paper, the set of lined Alphabet Templates is introduced.



The letters are now to be written on lined paper. The kit includes a blackline master for the lined paper that matches the lined Templates.



Each of the letter-writing activities that preceded the lined Template taught the children how to write individual letters. When letters are learned in isolation, however, there is no way to tell how large or small each letter is compared to another.

The lined Alphabet Templates provide students a model for how large each letter is supposed to be compared to all other letters, and a frame of reference for knowing which letters are to be extended above the line, which below, and which are quite comfortable not extended in either direction.

This frame of reference was not introduced at any of the earlier handwriting levels because it was not needed. Prior to this point in the sequence of letter-writing activities, the writing of each letter was practiced in isolation. The only time children need to know how individual letters relate to one another is when these letters are to be written side by side.

The lined Alphabet Templates are introduced as the last handwriting activity before children begin learning about the Decoding Chart. Use of the Decoding Chart marks the beginning of learning to write words. Words, of course, are made up of letters written side by side.









The Decoding Chart is introduced at the Handwriting Station because it makes use of the handwriting skills acquired before its introduction.

### **The Decoding Chart**









As soon as any children are ready for transition-level activities, all children are introduced to the Decoding Chart. Children who cannot yet print legibly by the time they begin use of the Decoding Chart with their transition activities, continue to work with the handwriting components of the Reading Program until what they write can be read by people other than themselves.

The [Worksheets Station](#) section described the Decoding Chart's layout. Two examples of the Practice Worksheets the children use to learn the Chart's rules were also shown. The transition activities start with the triangle-level worksheets and progress through each level in turn.









What was not included in the [Worksheet Station's](#) description were the Decoding Chart's rules. The rules are basic enough that someone who already knows how words are spelled can figure them out just by looking at the codings on the worksheets and the spellings on the Chart.

							
r	e	s	n	t	o	c	i
er	ea	c	kn	ed	ow	ck	ie
ir	y				ow	ck	y
ur	ie				oa	ch	ie
or	i				oe	ch	igh
ear	ey						
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





  

							
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a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h
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			n	u			u
				ou			ew
							you

			
qu	s	x	x
ch	ge	cks	gs

							
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u
v	w	x	y	z			

The rules are straightforward. If a sound-picture has no codings beneath it, its spelling is the first or white spelling beneath that sound on the chart. Two stars below a sound mean that sound's white spelling is to be written twice. If the sound has a colored rectangle beneath it, its spelling is in that sound's colored rectangle on the Decoding Chart.

Each colored rectangle also has a number inside it. Every yellow rectangle has a 2 inside it. Every red rectangle has a 3 inside it, and so on. The numbers are there as a separate reference point for color-blind children for whom the colors may not be as easily identifiable. They are also there because there are times when only the numbers are used and not the rectangles.

The shaded rectangle with the symbol beneath it represents a letter that makes no sound (silent letter). The code beneath the shaded rectangle indicates where that silent letter is to be found in the row of letters at the bottom of the Decoding Chart.



Five spellings on the Chart contain two letters separated by a line with arrows on each end, pointing to the two letters. The rule:



### **Capital Letters**

You may have noticed that none of the handwriting activities involved the writing of any capital letters. The capital letters were included in the blue square, rectangle, and star Picture Packets to teach them to children who might not already be able to identify them. However, none of the transition activities require the use of any capital letters. The focus of the transition activities is connecting sounds to letters. The use of capital letters is something that can be taught after the children have already become confident readers and writers.

### **Sight Word Worksheets**

Seventy-five words comprise one-half of all the words that appear in books written in English. Mastery of these seventy-five words as sight words allows a child to immediately recognize fifty or more of every one hundred words in almost any book.

Sixty-five percent of all the words students will encounter in their first years of reading consist of just one hundred basic words. The Sight Word Worksheets present each child with a one-hundred sixty-one-word sight vocabulary so that these and other essential words may be read and written easily and quickly.

Children who are ready to begin the Sight Word Worksheets can already sound out each of the Worksheets' words and must do so to know what each word is. The "sight" in sight word refers to the ability of the students who make use of the Worksheets to recognize all one hundred sixty-one words in letter form instantly on sight, without the need of sounding out the word each time it is seen.

The Sight Word Worksheets are not surrogate flash cards whose purpose is to cause students to memorize lists of words for instant parroting on demand. The Sight Word Worksheets have as their purpose allowing students to internalize a basic vocabulary of words that they can then read and write with ease.

Students who can already spell words like 'the', 'is', 'and', 'we', 'they', 'with', 'on', 'can', 'down', 'all', 'from', and so on, without having to stop their writing to check with a classmate or the teacher on a word's spelling, are much more capable of writing out what they want to say.

Conversely, students who must ask for assistance with even the most basic words spend so much time thinking about how to write and spell the words in their story that they often lose track of what it was they wanted to say.

The overall purpose of the Reading Program is to allow students to learn to read and to write comfortably and with enjoyment. The Sight Word Worksheets are an essential component in making this purpose realistically achievable.

### **A Necessary First Step**

The first step in transitioning children from reading sounds to reading the letters used to record them is the two- and three-sound worksheets. This deliberately designed first step uses the two- and three-sound worksheets' Triangle, Circle, Square, Rectangle, and Star sequence to teach children the use of their Decoding Charts, one new eight-sound row at a time.

The Sight Word Worksheets are only introduced to children who have used their Decoding Charts to complete the Star level of the two-sound worksheets. This is because children will be using their entire Decoding Chart even at the earliest level of the Sight Word Worksheets.

### **Four Levels**

The Sight Word Worksheets present four separate levels of difficulty. The easiest level is the 'A' level, the next easiest is 'B', the next 'C', and the hardest is 'D'.

#### **A-Level**

The A-Level Worksheets introduce students to fifty different sight words. Forty-eight of the words are two or three-sound words. The remaining two are four-sound words. All fifty words use only the white or first spellings for each of their sounds on the Decoding Chart.

The A Worksheet pictured on the following page has twenty-five two or three-sound words on it. Twenty-five words per page is the word count for all A, B, and C Worksheets. The D worksheets have 30 words on each page. The child is instructed to read each word in turn and then use the Decoding Chart to write its spelling beneath it.

The twenty-five words on each worksheet are actually five words repeated five times each. The more quickly each child figures this out, the more quickly he or she will complete each worksheet. Each worksheet gives the child an opportunity to write the same word five times. However, to write it, it must first be read. Its frequency on the worksheet leads to its speedy recognition and its subsequent speedier writing.



Initially, a child may skip the reading of the word and simply write its spelling. Pictured next to the worksheet above is the test strip used to test the child's ability to spell each word. Once a child has completed the A-1 and A-2 worksheets, the test strip is used to determine if that child can write the ten words from the two worksheets with or without the aid of the Decoding Chart.

The words on the test strip are read to the child either by another child or by the teacher. If a child has not read the words on the worksheets before writing their spellings, that child is not likely to be able to spell them, since the words to be written now are heard and not seen. Once written, the words are given to the teacher to assess the child's learning.

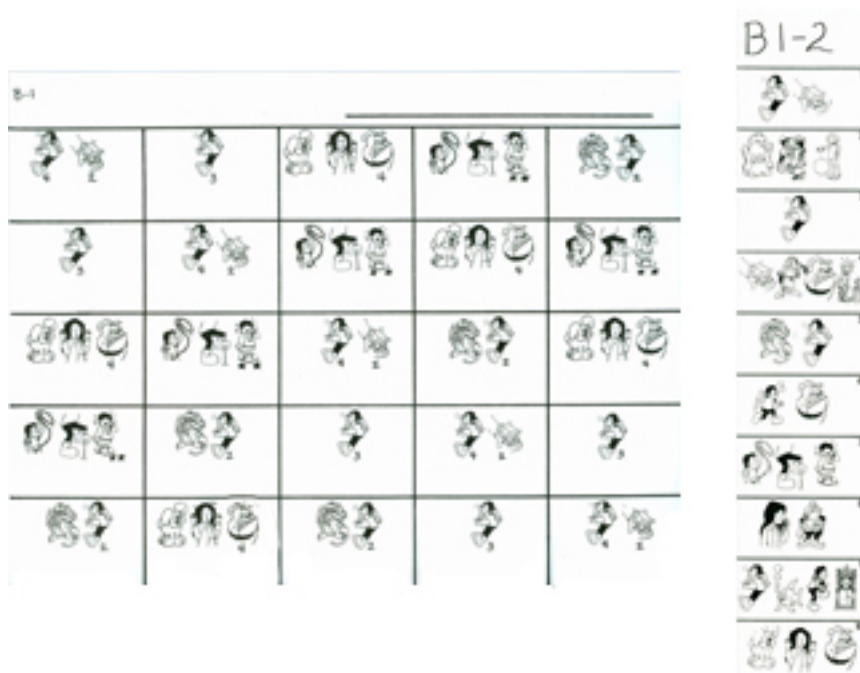
The program's Teacher's Manual contains a list of the sight words on each test strip that the teacher uses for checking. If the child has written every word correctly, he or she moves on to the next worksheet. If not, the use of the same worksheet is repeated until 100% success has been achieved. A child who has skipped the step of reading the words before writing them the first time will not skip this step the second time.

The purpose of the worksheets is both to teach the child the sight words and to teach the child the Decoding Chart's spellings. A child sees the sound in the word and looks at the Decoding Chart for that sound's spelling. At each recurrence of that sound, the child again checks the Decoding Chart for the spelling. Eventually, however, the child will no longer need to look at the Chart because he or she has internalized that sound's spelling.

Children with better memories pass through the internalizing process more quickly. The rate of learning is different from child to child. However, every child is capable of learning. And, for any spelling the child has not yet internalized, the Decoding Chart is always available. As I have said before, learning takes time, when there is time, it takes place.

What can be said for individual sounds is true for the sight words themselves. The faster learners will only look at their Decoding Chart once or maybe twice before being able to write the five words on the worksheet page. Other students may take much more time, but their level of learning will end up the same. All of the students will know all of the words. Every student is still a little learning machine.

## B-Level



The B-Level Worksheets introduce students to forty new sight words. Thirty-five of the words are two- or three-sound words. The remaining

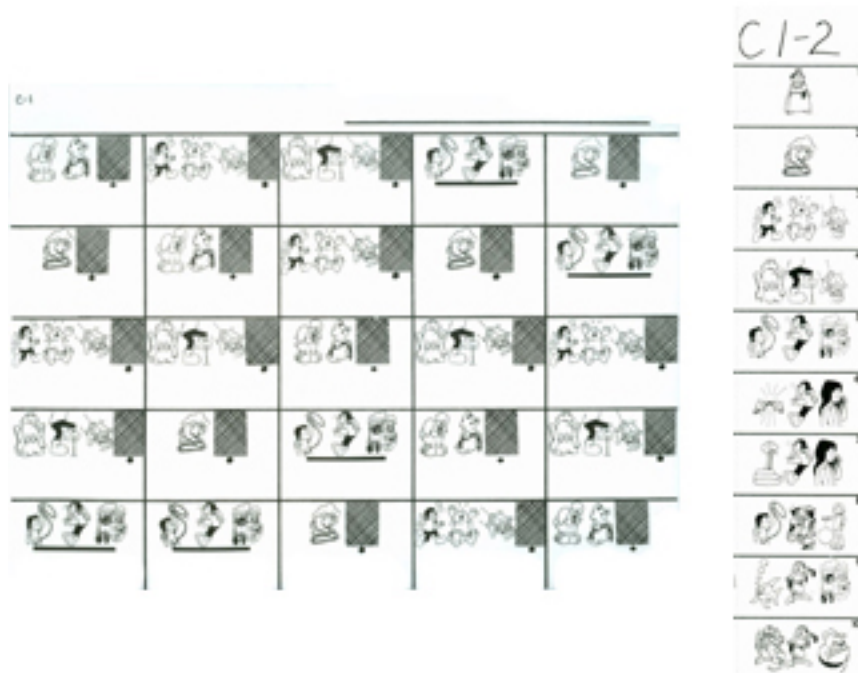
five are four-sound words. All forty words use white or first spellings and the second, third, fourth, or fifth Decoding Chart spellings, as well. Once again, the child sees the sound in the word and looks at the Decoding Chart for that sound's spelling. Once again, at each recurrence of that sound, the child checks the Decoding Chart for the spelling.

For the A-Level worksheets, every time the child looked for a sound's spelling, the same spelling would be found. Now, however, a different spelling will be found depending on the number that appears beneath that sound. The process of internalizing still takes place, but not for every spelling of every sound.

How quickly a spelling is internalized is directly related to how many times that particular spelling is used. And, as was true for the A-Level Worksheets, for any spellings the child has not yet internalized, the Decoding Chart is always available.

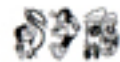
The time it takes individual students to learn all the words will vary, slower students may take more time, but once again, their level of learning will end up being the same. And, once again, all of the students will eventually know all of the words.

## C-Level



The C-Level Worksheets add fifteen new sight words to the ninety words already learned. Of the fifteen new words, only one is a four-sound word.

The C-Level Worksheets add the silent letter code. They add something else as well – Outlaw Words.

 = won = one

The three sounds above are the sounds for the words won and one. WON is written with the first spelling of the first sound, the fourth spelling of the second sound, and the first spelling of the third sound. However, there is no way to write the word ONE using any of the spellings on the Decoding Chart. ONE is an Outlaw Word.

As you can see in the C-Level Worksheet on the previous page, Outlaw Words are identified by a solid black line drawn under all of their sounds. When the first outlaw word is introduced an Outlaw List is posted conspicuously in class and added to as new words are found.

    
outlaw words

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 one

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 once

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 weigh

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 sew

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 eye

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 eyes

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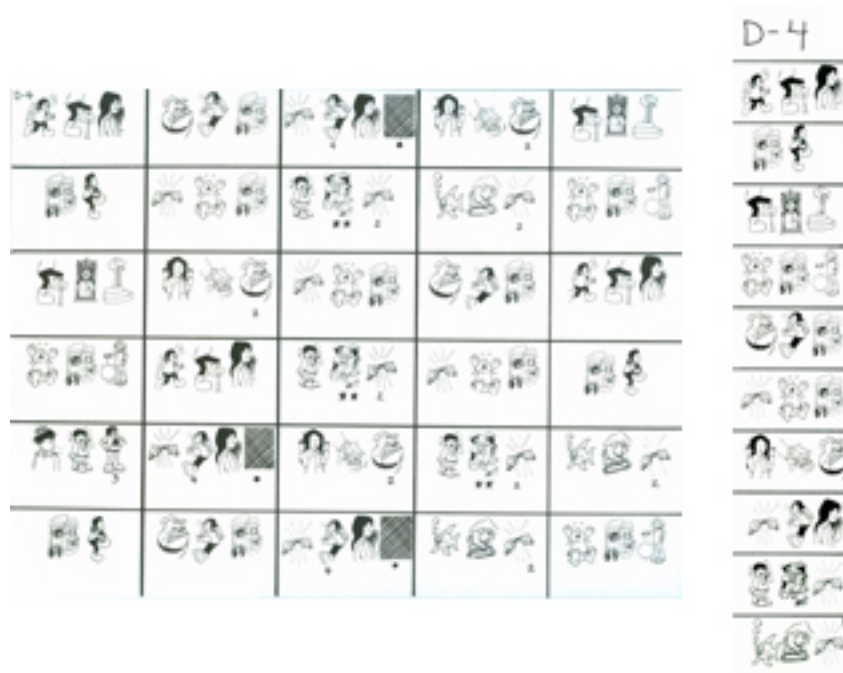
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### D-Level

There are fifteen D-Level Worksheets. Each worksheet has ten unique words on it, with each word repeated three times. A child completes each individual worksheet as many times as he or she wishes before asking another child or the teacher to read that worksheet's test strips words to him or to her.

Of the one hundred fifty words on the fifteen D-Level worksheets, fifty-six are new, bringing the total of the unique sight words on all the Sight Word Worksheets to one hundred sixty-one. ( $50 + 40 + 15 + 56 = 161$ ) The one hundred fifty words are a mix of new words and words from all three earlier levels. Twenty-nine of the ninety-four words that also appeared on A, B, or C worksheets are repeated from two to as many as seven times on D-Level worksheets. The mix of new and old means that

the fifty-six new words the students are now learning are surrounded by words they have already mastered.



A child who has completed the A, B, C, and D Level worksheets now has a minimum of a one-hundred sixty-one sight word vocabulary. Even more importantly, each child has now mastered the art of listening to a word said aloud and then writing out the letters that spell that word's sounds.