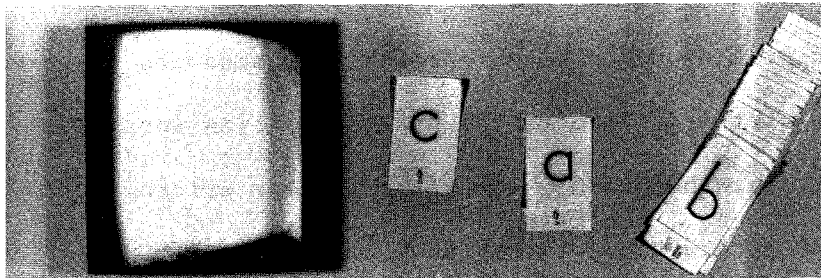


The description of the levels of activities associated with stamping and writing is now complete. The next set of descriptions is an overview of the handwriting activities which lead eventually to the use of decoding charts. Although the handwriting activities do not make use of sounds until the decoding charts are introduced, you will learn which handwriting activities are meant to parallel what you have already learned about picture packets, worksheets, books, and writing activities.

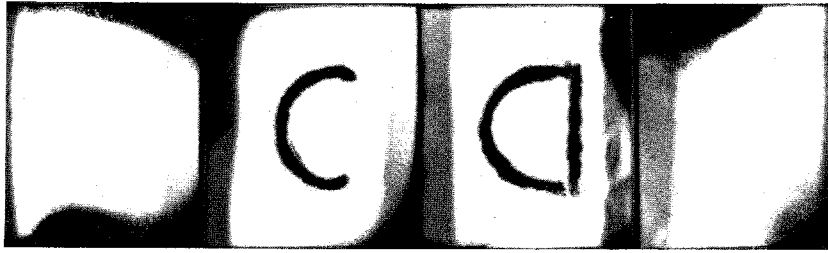
HANDWRITING/DECODING

Letter Sequence Flip Books and Salt (or Sand) Trays

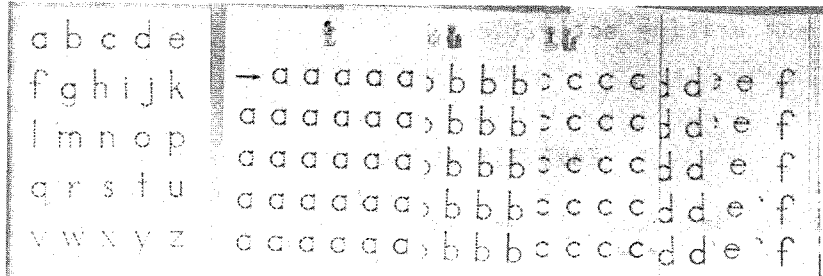


The letter sequence flip books allow students the opportunity to experience what it feels like to write each letter without yet having to record on paper any perceptual or coordination difficulties they might encounter.

To practice writing the letter 'a', for example a child uses the 'a' flip book and a salt tray. Using his or her finger as a writing instrument, the child draws the first stroke of the letter in the salt by copying the blue line on the top of the flip book. When the first stroke of the letter has been drawn in the salt, the child flips to the second page of the book and draws the orange line in the salt. When done, the child simply gives the salt box a little shake and the letter disappears. The salt is now ready to let the same letter be written again or to accept the drawing of a new letter. The salt permits each child to practice writing each letter as often as he or she wishes without having to leave a record of any mistakes made along the way.



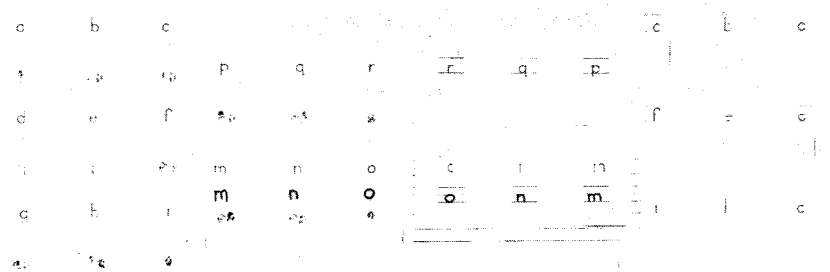
Letter Writing Worksheets



The letter writing worksheets represent the students first opportunity to write (or at least trace) each letter using a writing instrument. At this point, students learn how to use a marking pen for writing letters. Although there will be no record of what they have done when they complete the worksheet and then wipe it clean, there is now, at least temporarily, a page of letters which the students have written and which they can show to their teacher.

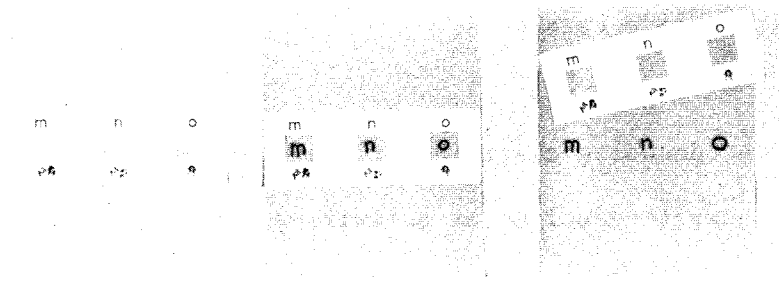
The worksheets use the same blue and orange codings for how each letter is to be written as did the alphabet wall cards and the letter sequence flip books.

Letter Writing Templates (unlined on one side and lined on the other)



The unlined letter writing templates represent the student's first opportunity to transfer onto a piece of paper what they have learned about writing letters. This time there is a lasting record of what they have written. The stu-

dents place the template on a piece of paper and, using the blue and orange reminding codes, they copy the letter on the template through the square hole and onto the paper.



The lined side of the letter writing templates offer students the opportunity to refine their letter writing skills. Each of the letter writing activities which have preceded the lined template have taught the children how to write individual letters. When letters are learned in isolation, however, there is no way to tell how large or how small each letter is when compared to another. The natural assumption the child might make is that all letters are written the same size. Although the wall card letters, as well as the letters to which each child is exposed as a natural part of daily life would indicate otherwise, a child who has learned to write letters without regard to their relative size is apt to write a group of letter which look like this:

a b c d e f g h i j

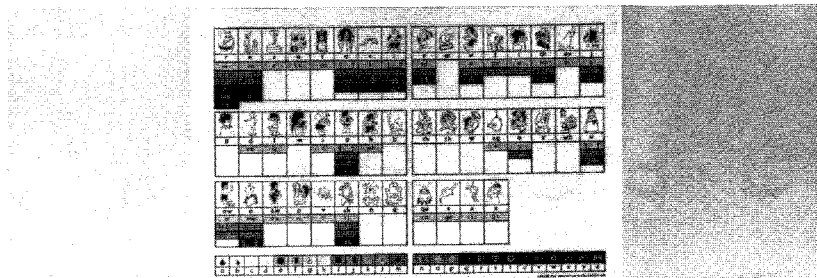
The lined letter writing templates provide students a model for both how large each letter is supposed to be compared to all other letters and a frame of reference for knowing which letters are to be extended above the line, which below, and which are quite comfortable not being extended in either direction.



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 letter


writing templates are introduced as the last handwriting activity before children begin learning about the decoding charts. Use of the decoding charts marks the beginning of learning to write words. Words, of course, are made up of letters written side by side.

Although the decoding chart (described next) is listed on the components chart in the handwriting column of activities, it really isn't a handwriting activity at all. It simply makes use of the handwriting skills which are acquired before its introduction. Only children who are at the transition level of activities are introduced to use of the decoding chart, even if they still write all their letters upside down and backwards. However, children who still do not 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.

Decoding Charts

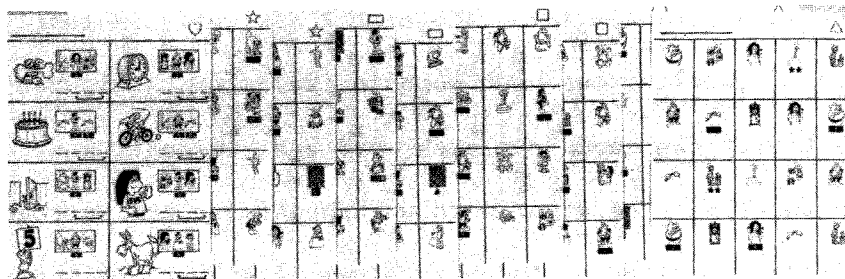


Each decoding chart contains the pictures of all forty-four sounds arranged in the same rows and in the same order within each row as they were in the sound review charts and the stamp trays. Beneath each sound picture are various ways that sound may be spelled. Some sounds may be spelled several different ways, while others are spelled a single way. According to the chart  can be spelled seven different ways, while  offers only one spelling option. The spellings listed beneath each sound appear in order of frequency of occurrence in the words which beginning readers are most likely to encounter.

For example, the  sound is spelled much more frequently with an 'f' as in food than it is with a 'ph' as in phone.

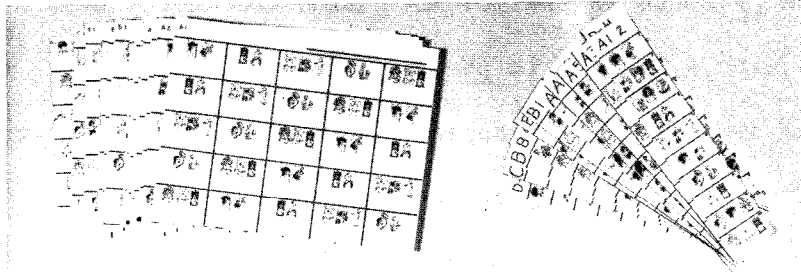
Each of the spellings which appear beneath the sound pictures have been color coded. The first spelling of each sound is coded white. If a second spelling is listed on the decoding chart, it is coded yellow. Third spellings are red, fourth spellings are blue, fifth are green, sixth are brown and seventh are purple. The decoding charts does not contain all possible spellings for each sound. It does, however, contain the spellings which appear in between ninety-five and ninety-eight percent of the words the students will encounter while learning to read and write. The color codings indicate to the child which spelling is to be used to write the letters for a word.

Decoding Chart Practice Worksheets



There are eleven worksheets for practicing the use of the decoding charts. Each of the first ten worksheets is coded with one of the five geometric shapes (triangle, circle, square, rectangle and star) used to indicate levels on picture packets, two and three-sound worksheets, books, and stamping worksheets. These codes continue to carry the same meanings as they did in earlier uses. Use of the geometric codings on the practice worksheets allows the children to become familiar with the structure of their decoding charts one new row at a time. The eleventh worksheet is coded with a heart. It teaches the students a special rule for the use of their decoding charts that isn't covered by the first ten worksheets. This rule will be discussed in Chapter 5.

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 recognize fifty out of every one hundred words in almost any library book. Sixty-five percent of all the words students will encounter in their first years of reading consists of just one hundred basic words. The sight word worksheets stress the teaching of a fundamental vocabulary so that these and other essential words may be read and written easily.

The 'sight' in sight word refers to the ability of the students who make use of the sight word worksheets to recognize these words instantly on sight, without the need of sounding out each word in isolation. Children who reach this level of activity can sound out each word and, in fact, must do so to learn what each word is. 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 which they can both read and write with ease.

Knowledge of (as opposed to memorization of) a basic set of words gives students an extensive writing vocabulary for use in their creative writing activities. 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, 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 quickly lose track of what it was they wanted to say.

The sight word worksheets give students a sufficient vocabulary of words they know how to spell so that they are able to get on with the more important job of writing creatively. The purpose of the activities in this reading program is to allow students to learn to read and write comfortably and with enjoyment. The sight word worksheets are a valuable component in making this purpose a realistically achievable one.

The sight word worksheets encompass four separate levels of difficulty. The easiest level is the 'A' level, the next easiest is 'B', the next 'C', and the hardest, 'D'. The absence of the geometric codings (triangle, circle, square, rectangle, star) implies correctly that each of the worksheets, even at the earliest level, involves the child in the full use of his or her decoding chart. The sight word worksheets are meant to be introduced after children have already finished using the two and three-sound worksheets for transition activities. It is assumed, therefore, that when work with even the earliest level of the sight word worksheets is begun, the children are well practiced at using their decoding charts.

The description of the levels of activities associated with handwriting and decoding is now complete. The next set of descriptions is directed at providing an overview of the parental involvement activities which serve as the link between school and home.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND HOMEWORK

The final column of the components chart describes the parental involvement and homework components of the program. The homework activities are all included in the pad of takehome blackline masters. Each of the other components of the reading program about which you have already learned is carefully interwoven with all other components to form an integrated learning experience. In terms of the academic learning which is to take place, however, it makes no substantial difference if children complete the takehome activities or not.