





Learning to Read
Signs/Characteristics
Assessments
A Strengths Based
Approach

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How Children Learn to Read



ASSUMPTIONS

Article : [Why Aren't Kids Being Taught To Read?](#)

Main Points :

- There is an assumption made that reading is a natural process
- The human brain is not wired to read
- We are born wired to talk but not to read
- Written Language is only a recent invention in human history
- Children need to be explicitly taught how to connect sounds with letters (phonics)
- The starting point for reading is sound, children then need to be taught how letters represent speech sounds
- Whole Language needs to include explicit and systematic phonics instruction
- It needs to include a defined progression of concepts about how speech is represented by print



Useful links with more information :

[Ensuring That All Children Learn to Read - Kevin Wheldall](#)

[How Do Children Learn to Read - Reading Rockets](#)

[The New Zealand Dyslexia Handbook - Part 3: Chapter 5: Dyslexia and the Simple View of reading and writing](#)

[Useful Website with information on Reading Accuracy and Phonics](#)

How Children Learn to Read



Understanding the challenges of acquiring literacy

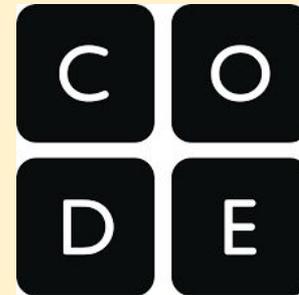
The ministry's handbooks *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4* and *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5 to 8* describe literacy acquisition and development as having three aspects: learning the code, making meaning and thinking critically. The aspect that appears to be most challenging for people who have dyslexia is learning the code. This may be seen in the early primary years as a lack of phonological awareness (for example, an inability to detect rhyme or record sounds), but the persistent nature of the literacy learning difficulties can be seen through primary and secondary school and into adulthood. Most typically, dyslexia is shown through difficulties with learning the code (specifically, decoding and spelling) that fail to improve with general instruction. This often results in attitudinal and motivational problems, and can present challenges for both students and teachers in the acquisition of literacy.

[*About Dyslexia - Teacher Resource \(Ministry of Education\)*](#)



Learning the code

Learning the code refers to the ability to decode and encode written forms of language. It encompasses the various processing strategies that proficient readers use as they read and write letters, words and texts. In order to learn the code, students must develop phonological awareness and an understanding of the alphabetic principle.



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Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is the broad term that refers to the ability to become aware of the sounds (phonemes) within spoken words. Phonological awareness is essential for discovering the connections between sounds and letters and, therefore, for literacy development. There are several kinds or levels of sound units involved. They include whole words, syllables within words, onsets and rimes (a rime is the sound in a word made by the letters after the first consonant, see page 24) within syllables and individual phonemes.

The onset is the initial sound in a syllable. The rime is the part of a syllable that follows the onset (the initial sound), as in th-at. When written down, many of the most common rimes can be represented by spelling patterns that are always the same (for example, -ill, -ack, -ing, -am) but rimes may have different spelling patterns (sky, high).

A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound within a word: there are about 43 phonemes in English, represented by the 26 letters of the alphabet. As an example, the word telephone has three syllables and uses nine letters, but it has only seven phonemes (/t/, /e/, /l/, /ee/, /f/, /o/, and /n/). Phonemic awareness is a subset of phonological awareness – it is the ability to hear, differentiate and attend to the individual sounds within words.



The alphabetic principle

Most children start school knowing that sounds make words. Associated with phonological awareness is the 'discovery' that many young children may make spontaneously – that the sounds they already know and can identify in spoken words relate to letters or groups of letters of the alphabet. The alphabetic principle includes learning the names of the letters of the alphabet as well as understanding the following key concepts:

- we use letters to record sounds
- there are different ways to write sounds
- we can use more than one letter to write a sound (for example, the letters 'ch' make different sounds in chicken, chemist and chef).

Students who have poor phonological awareness will probably not be able to make these discoveries for themselves and will need considerable support to use the alphabetic principle. Some students may be unable to link letter names with the sounds they are trying to write, or to move past letter names when reading.

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Phonological awareness and phonics

There is sometimes confusion about the terms phonological awareness and phonics. Young children develop attending and listening skills that enable them to 'hear' sounds within words; that is, they develop phonological awareness. As they achieve this they also learn the relationship between spoken sounds and the letters that represent them. Phonics refers to the correspondence between sounds (phonemes) and symbols (letters) in an alphabetic writing system.

These two sets of knowledge then become reciprocal and intertwined. During spelling and reading, students combine their knowledge and use of both. *(See link for further information on understanding the challenges of acquiring literacy)*

The building blocks of Phonemic Awareness

Laying a strong foundation for reading

