



How to Cure Dyslexia: Part 2

The process is the same, except that if you didn't speak Russian, someone who did would have to articulate the sounds for you. Some Russian instruction books give the equivalent sound in English of a particular Russian letter. In other words, if you were shown their equivalents in the English alphabetic system, you would be able to articulate the Russian sounds yourself. However, since the letter writer quoted in part one of [How to Cure Dyslexia](#) is an intelligent and "posh" speaker of English, he should have no trouble articulating the isolated sounds our letters stand for.



Teaching Is Reasonable, Orderly

In both *Alpha-Phonics* and *How to Tutor*, I teach our English alphabetic system in a logical, systematic way, so that by the time the learner reaches the end of the course, he or she knows the spelling forms of all our speech sounds and should be able to read anything in English with accuracy.

While both books teach the English alphabetic system, *How to Tutor*, in addition to teaching reading, also teaches cursive writing and basic arithmetic. In other words, it teaches the three Rs in the traditional manner. The lessons are all printed in regular book-size type with instructions appearing on the same page as the lessons. *Alpha-Phonics*, on the other hand, is a large-format book with a spiral binding with large lettering devised specifically for use by a tutor. All the instructions are in the back of the book. No special training is needed to teach anyone to read with *Alpha-Phonics*. Thus, it is ideal for any parent or tutor to use in teaching a child or an adult to read. Foreigners love it because it enables them to learn not only how to read English but how to pronounce it as accurately as possible.

Neither book has pictures. You don't learn to read with pictures. They are a distraction. However pictures are lavishly used by look-say programs to help children guess the words on the page. They look at the pictures and try to correlate them with the text, which leads to inaccurate reading, wild guesses, and "miscues."

The reason why the English alphabetic system must be taught in a logical, systematic way is because of our special problem: We have 26 letters to stand for the 44 sounds of the language. This mismatch is due to the fact that the Roman conquerors of Britain brought their Latin alphabet with them and the native Brits did not have an alphabet of their own. And so they adapted the Latin alphabet to their own language. Indeed, they did such a splendid job that English writers have managed to create the world's greatest literature, including the King James Version of the Bible, the plays and poems of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, etc. And because of the spread of English to the New World, it has become a world language in science and commerce that everyone now wants to learn.

However, when you are forced to use 26 letters to stand for 44 sounds, you have to make some rather ingenious and novel accommodations. Some of the letters will have to stand for more than one sound, and some sounds will have to be represented by more than one letter. For example, the "th" sound is



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represented by t-h; the “sh” sound is represented by s-h; and the “ch” sound is represented by c-h. Ch also stands for k in some words. The letter “a” stands for at least four different vowel sounds: long “a,” as in apron and April; short “a” as in cat or hat; the “ah” sound as in car and father; and the “aw” sound as in all and call.

How does one know which sound to make when the letter “a” appears? By having learned the appropriate sounds in their spelling families. And that is the way the sounds are taught in *Alpha-Phonics* and *How to Tutor*. In both books the sequence of lessons takes into account all the special aspects and eccentricities of our alphabetic system. The short “a” is taught first with the consonants. Then the rest of the short vowels are taught with the already-learned consonants. Next, the final and initial consonant blends are taught, and finally the long vowels are taught in their variety of spelling forms. Lessons on the other vowel sounds and spellings are interspersed in the last third of the program.

Actually, there are about 20 vowel sounds in English, but we use only six letters to represent them. That’s one of the reasons why English spelling requires a little effort to master. Another is that English pronunciation has changed over the centuries but the spellings have not. Also, English has incorporated many words from Latin, Greek, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Hebrew, Yiddish, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, etc., all of which has complicated our spelling. Attempts have been made to simplify English spelling, but with very limited success.

This should not disturb us, for our spelling, or orthography, is a remarkable repository of information about the history and origins of our language. In addition, our wide range of vowel sounds has made English a beautiful language to recite and listen to.

Once the learner has mastered the English alphabetic system, he or she must learn how to apply this newly acquired knowledge to his or her reading. The letter writer from part one was aware that he misreads, inserts “the odd word,” misses words, or doesn’t see them. He also has difficulty in pronouncing new words, and he mutilates words by reading too quickly. In short, he makes all the errors that look-say readers typically make.

Now comes the more difficult part: transforming or changing a sight reader into a phonetic reader. That can be done only by having the pupil read aloud, interrupting him whenever he makes an error, no matter how small, and by teaching him to apply his phonetic knowledge.

My own experience as a tutor has taught me that look-say reading habits do not automatically disappear after a pupil has learned the alphabetic system. It requires conscious effort on the part of the pupil to overcome these bad habits. And that is why it is very important to make the pupil aware of his misreadings.

Many look-say readers are not aware of the errors they make because they were taught that accuracy is not important and they were encouraged by their teachers to guess and “take risks.” Today’s teachers, in particular, do not even bother to correct sloppy reading, let alone sloppy spelling. But pupils know the difference between what is correct and what is not. And that is why they don’t want to read aloud in class, for fear of appearing stupid. Accuracy may not matter to the teacher, but it does matter to the pupil who is terrified at the thought of making a fool of himself before his classmates.

The Importance of Accuracy

The letter writer knew the feeling all too well. He wrote: “I have a fear of reading aloud in public even with family or a child.” Why? Because he knew that accuracy is not only important but is also a



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reflection of his competence and intelligence. In other words, he desperately wanted to be accurate but was prevented from being so by the way he was taught to read. In short, he was crippled by the teaching methods used in his primary school.

And the crippling goes on. In the United States today children are taught to read by the much-touted “whole language” method, which is just another form of look-say. The *Washington Post* of 11/29/86 reported, “The most controversial aspect of whole language is the de-emphasis on accuracy.” When Julia Palmer, an advocate of whole language and president of the American Reading Council, was questioned about word substitutions, she said, “Accuracy is not the name of the game.” What, then is the name of the game? Sloppy reading!

How can we help the letter writer become an accurate, confident reader? It is unlikely he will be able to find a suitable tutor who will listen to him read aloud and correct him when he makes mistakes and show him how to use his phonetic knowledge in deciphering the new words he will encounter. It would be ideal if he could find such a tutor. But, if not, there is a way he can do it himself.

If the letter writer will read aloud into a recording machine so that he can listen to how he reads a specific text and see if he reads it correctly, he may be able to see and hear his own errors, and note them on the text. Then he ought to reread the text and record it and see if he can hear the improvement. Over a period of time, by becoming aware of his errors, the letter writer should be able to achieve the accuracy he wants, in spite of the way he was taught to read.

I recommend that he also keep a notebook in which he can write down all the new words he encounters, breaking them up into syllables, thus learning to pronounce them correctly. Over a period of a year he will accumulate thousands of new words, and he should make it a habit to read down that list of words in order to become more familiar with them and develop quick recognition.

The ability to see the syllabic structure of our multisyllabic words is the key to becoming a phonetic reader. That is why it is so important to break up each new multisyllabic word into its syllables so that one can actually see the phonetic structure of the word.

To be continued in my next column.

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