
Teaching Beginning Reading in English

**A Practical Guide For EFL Teachers
With Sample Activities**



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About the Author



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Mohamed Ramadan is the founder of elttguide.com to provide EFL teachers with practical ideas, steps, tips and procedures for teaching & testing English language effectively. Mohamed's elttguide.com has been visited by a lot of teachers worldwide.

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Before becoming an author and teacher, Mohamed had a dream to be a famous public speaker. If you ask him about that, he will say he has already achieved his dream by teaching and inspiring many students and teachers.

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Introduction

Reading is one of the main sources through which students can discover and interact with the world around them so, developing reading skills is very important to all students.

Students who fail at reading are unlikely to do well at school, that is why teachers and administrators place much emphasis on developing the reading skills of their learners.

Most students in schools are challenged with learning to read in English. EFL teachers in primary schools are constantly searching for techniques that can engage their young learners and produce effective results.

Each EFL teacher usually asks, "How can I get my students read English?"

Researchers suggest many strategies and techniques to be used in class. But the question is not only related to the strategy itself but, it is also connected with the reader with whom the technique will be used.

So, how can teachers engage their students in reading tasks and get them to read in English with ease and in a fairly short time? What techniques should be followed and what guidelines should be taken into consideration while teaching beginning reading in English? What useful reading activities should be done with students in the classroom?

All these questions are what this eBook tries to answer to help EFL teachers get their students to read in English easily and effectively.

Chapter One



What is Reading?



Chapter 1

What is Reading?

Reading is one of the key skills in language learning. It reinforces the skills students acquire in speaking, listening and writing. On the other hand, it really isn't enough just to put a word or short text in front of students and ask them to read, whether silently or out loud.

Also, reading is not only translating written symbols into corresponding sounds and pronouncing them, but it is mainly knowing the meaning of words and sentences.

In fact, reading is a combination of seeing and recognizing printed words clearly, pronouncing them correctly, and understanding their meaning.

According to the definition of reading mentioned above, we can assume the following points about the nature of reading:

- ❖ We should be aware of the letters and their sounds in order to be able to read words.
- ❖ We can read words by identifying its general visual shape without necessarily being able to identify single letters.
- ❖ We should understand the meaning of the words to understand a text.
- ❖ Getting the meaning should go hand-in-hand with just reading.

Chapter 1

What is Reading?

Taking these points into account, teachers should do the following when teaching their students reading words or individual phrases:

- ❖ Identify the common sounds in English, name the letters of the alphabet and show the shape of letters.
- ❖ Encourage students to recognize whole words.
- ❖ Focus on meaning of written words or phrases.
- ❖ Make a connection between familiar sounds and written words.

Reading and Other Language Skills.

Reading & Listening:

Students need some periods of listening with attention before starting to read because listening provides the foundation for acquiring and learning any language. Being able to listen properly is essential in the first stages of learning to read.

Reading & Speaking:

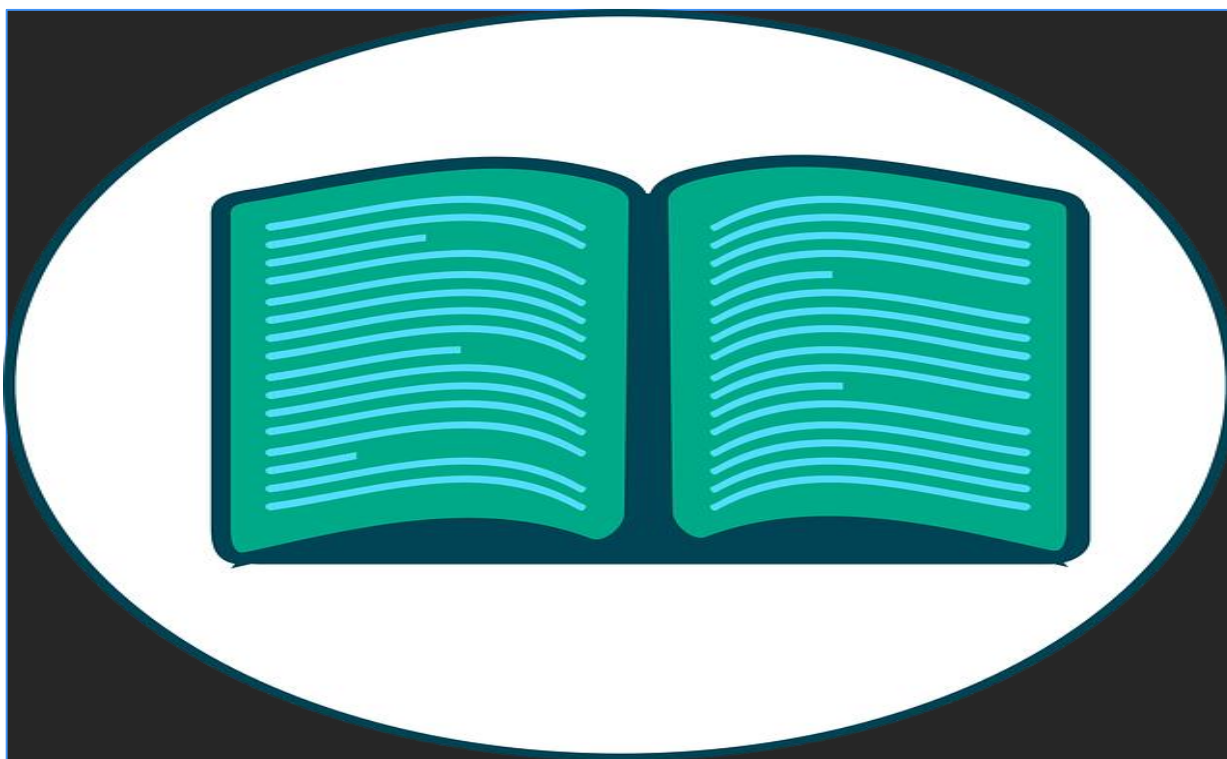
Before being able to read, students must know the meaning and usage of some basic vocabulary. They will understand words they see in printed if they come across these words in speech. So, students should be taken enough time and encouraged to talk to the teacher, to each other, to express opinions and ask questions before starting to read.

Chapter 1

What is Reading?

Reading & Writing:

Writing as a skill should come and be developed immediately after students began to read. The better students are in reading and understanding what they read, the better developed their writing becomes. Students do write well about what they've read. Research shows that reading leads to better writing performance.



Chapter Two



Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

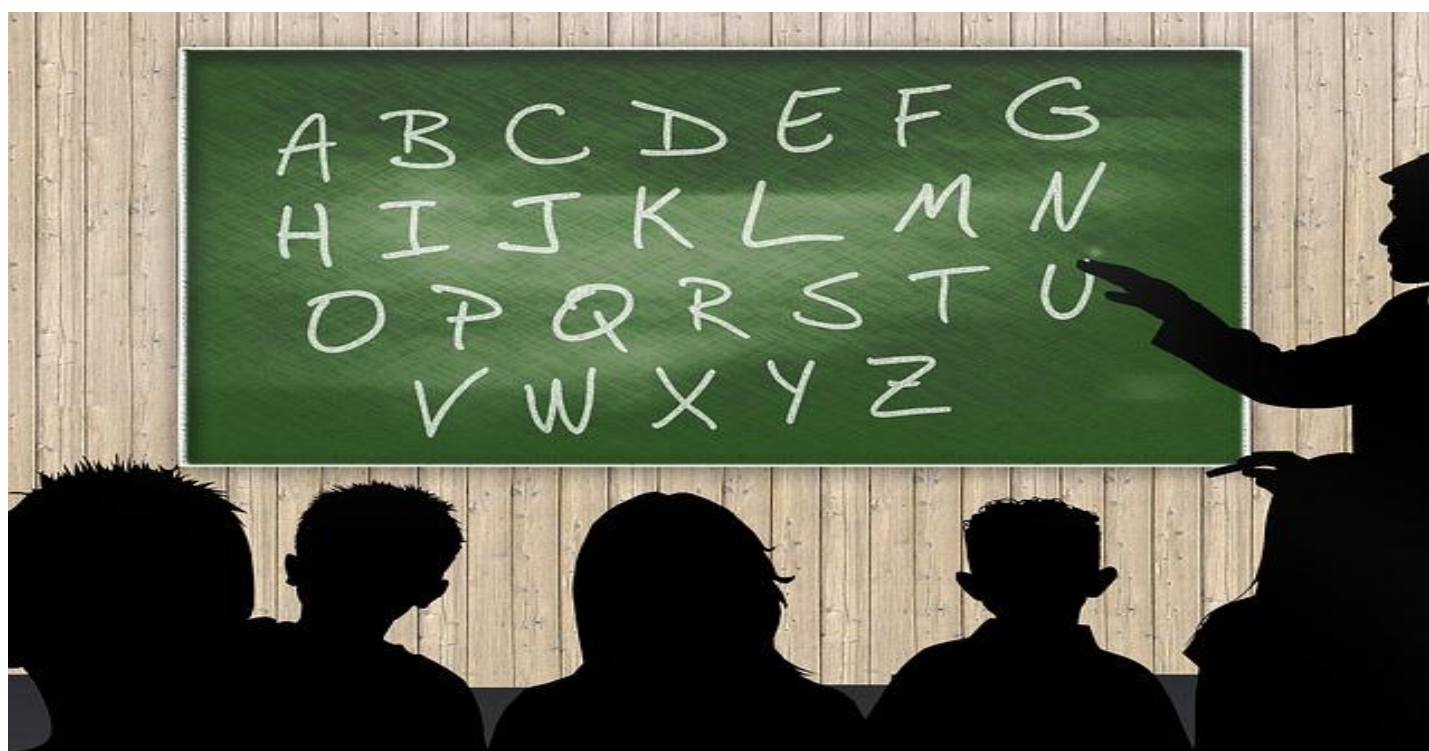


Chapter 2

Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

When teaching beginning reading students have to understand the association between what they hear and what they read. English reading would not be difficult for students if they were able to read in their own language, even if English is written in a different script.

Starting with the ABCs



Chapter 2

Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

The alphabet is the most basic reading text you can choose. For EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers, using the English alphabet may come later, but this isn't the case for all EFL students. It may surprise you to know that few students, even those at beginner level, are comfortable with all 26 letters in their various shapes and sizes – capitals, lower case, handwriting and print.



Chapter 2

Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

It never hurts to run through the alphabet at the outset of a course. Make sure that everyone in the class can recognize and say the letters out loud. Actually, you can organize the letters of the alphabet in a memorable way to help students pronounce them accurately.

If you're already familiar with phonemes (the symbols used to represent all the different sounds in the language), you can use them to group the letters. Even if you don't use the phonemic symbols, rhyming the letters makes things clearer for your students.

Pay particular attention to the vowels. Even higher-level students get them wrong. Make sure that your students have a copy of the alphabet in the correct order as well. They need it when using the dictionary.

Practise the alphabet in a fun way by using popular acronyms or abbreviations and see if the students know what they mean. Try these for example:

- ✓ ATM: Automated teller machine
- ✓ BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation
- ✓ DVD: Digital versatile disc
- ✓ SMS: Short message service.



Chapter 2

Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading:

There are three main approaches to teaching English reading: phonics, whole word and multisensory approaches.

1. Phonics Approach (Letters Used to Make Sounds):

As English spelling is difficult, students need to learn how to recognize sounds and letters. It is better not to teach the names of letters when starting to teach reading, as of course some of the letters of the English alphabet no longer match the actual sounds of the language. When you use phonics, you are teaching students the way the letter sounds, not the name of the letter. Students will not need to know the formal names of the letters until they start to write and spell.

According to this approach, students learn the relationship between letters and their sounds in order to recognize and pronounce individual words. Once they have learnt letter sounds, they will begin blend two letters or more together to make and read simple words. There are 26 letters in English and nearly 44 sounds.

Using visual aids can make words and phrases easier to remember. Another way to help students with sounds is to let them play with the sounds repeating a word they are reading on a card or in their book, e.g. singing it or saying it loudly or quickly or slowly or whispering. This playing with words obviously helps pronunciation and it also helps students remember the word.

Chapter 2

Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

Approaches to Teach Phonics.

There are two main approaches to teach phonics:

1) The synthetic approach (direct or explicit phonics)

Students begin by learning to recognize letters' sounds, and then blend words, and finally read connected text.

Steps to follow:

1. Teach the sound of each letter and review it frequently.
2. Teach the principle of blending sounds to form words.
3. Give opportunities to blend unknown words in context.

Model:

1. Write letter (s) on the board,
2. Explain that it stands for /s/ sound as in the word /sat/
3. Write the word /sat/ on the board and have a student circle the letter (s).
4. Slowly blend the word as you run your finger under each letter.
5. Ask students for other words that begin with /s/ sound.
6. List these words on the board.
7. Ask students to circle the letter (s) in each word.
8. Provide students with more simple words containing the /s/ sound to blend.

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Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

2) The analytic approach (indirect or implicit phonics):

Students begin with words and asked to deduce (the sound-spelling relationship)

Model:

1. List words with common phonic element (sat / send / sun).
2. Students examine the words and tell what they have in common.
3. Then the spelling that stands for the sound might be discussed.
4. Students verbalize a generalization about the sound and spelling such as the letter (s) stands for the /s/ sound.

Phonemic vs Phonics Awareness.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear the individual sounds and syllables that make up words but Phonics awareness deals with the learning of sound-spelling relationships and is associated with printed words.

Elements of phonemic awareness:

- Rhyming: Students can recognize rhymes easily when they hear it.
- Hearing syllables: Students can break up words into syllables.
- Blending: Students can blend phonemes to make words (c / a / t).
- Segmentation: Students hear the word sound by sound (ba/na/na).

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Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

2. Look & Say (Whole Word Approach):

In this approach, students learn to recognize whole words or sentences rather than individual sounds. The teacher can apply this approach by following these two steps:

1. Writing down individual words (Word cards can be used here) or a short sentence on the board with displaying a picture that represents the sentence or using pictures related to individual words.
2. Saying the words or the sentence and ask students to repeat it while looking at and pointing to each individual word. They look at each word as you sound it and in turn, they will repeat the sound (word).

This approach depends on that most students have good visual memory and their interest in the written text can be increased when there is few numbers of words and when the text is accompanied with related pictures or flashcards.



Chapter 2

Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

Reading Whole Words:

Remember how you were taught to recognize individual words back in primary school. The teacher would hold up flashcards and the kids shouted the words out. Well, in EFL, lower-level students can learn word by word too. Write new words on the board and ask the class to repeat their pronunciation.

At the same time, help your students to read well by pointing out spelling patterns. After all, English is notoriously difficult to spell and pronounce even for native speakers, so you can tell your students these simple English spelling rules to make a difference in their learning to read in English:

- ✓ The letter "e" after a vowel and consonant together softens/lengthens the vowel sound. Compare "rid" and "ride", "mad" and "made", or "cut" and "cute".
- ✓ When the letter 's' is between two vowels, it is pronounced like a "z" – rise /raiz/, present /prezənt/ and pose /pəʊz/.
- ✓ At the beginning of a word, gn, kn, and pn are pronounced /n/.
- ✓ Wh is pronounced /w/. There's no need to pronounce the sound 'h'.
- ✓ Wr is pronounced /r/. The 'w' is always silent.

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Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

You probably know all these rules instinctively, but your students need you to spell them out. If you think of any other rules, make a note of them as your students will be eternally grateful.

You can also help students connect sound recognition with clusters of written letters by:

- Making students aware of the clusters in both word endings and beginning.
- Using words with clusters that rhyme in songs and chants.
- Displaying and emphasizing their sounds. E.g. pl cluster in plant-planet-plane, and the st cluster in star-stamp-story.
- Talking about these patterns with students to be aware of them and use this awareness to recognize words.
- Letting students point to these patterns/words when you are all reading something together.
- Coloring or highlighting these patterns on word cards.

Also, don't be lazy about using question marks and capital letters when you write on the board. Many teachers take these things for granted only to wonder why their students read and write so poorly. Students quickly pick up your bad habits.

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Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

From the first lessons you're likely to teach whole phrases such as, 'How are you?' and 'I'm from England'. Get your students to repeat whole sentences as they read from the board and you point out the words one by one. It doesn't mean that students should only read the words one by one as you should aim for fluent, connected speech. If you do so, students would learn to recognize the words and also know how to use the appropriate intonation for a statement or question.

You certainly don't want your students to read like robots so, don't slow down too much when you read aloud. You will find that you start to sound unnatural if you don't use the typical rhythm of the language. Encourage students to chunk words together too. In this way they're less likely to translate word for word. If they do so, it will often lead them to lose the sense of the sentence.

Use "Look and Say" With New Vocabulary:

Teachers can use 'look and say' approach as part of vocabulary teaching. When students learn to say a new word, they learn to read it. You can help students with whole word recognition by using printed material (e.g. handouts and worksheets) as much as you can in your classroom. Also, use word cards for directions and labelling things in the classroom. Of course, you should encourage students to use new words and phrases in context. This would increase their recognition skills and remembering of the word or the phrase.

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Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

3. Multisensory Approach:

This approach assumes that learners learn best when content is presented in several ways (hearing, seeing and writing). In fact, this approach can be used mainly with both phonics and whole word approaches. For a language, you have to combine teaching phonics with whole word recognition.

Some Reading Problems and Solutions.



1- Inadequate word recognition:

- ✓ Stop providing more words for the learner.
- ✓ Allow him/her time to analyse the word and then provide prompts.

Chapter 2

Approaches to Teaching Beginning Reading

2- Sound-spelling relationship:

- ✓ Provide letter cards or magnet letters for word building.
- ✓ Have the learner frequently use simple, meaningful text.
- ✓ Provide other cues such as picture cards for each sound-spelling, so the learner associates a letter with an image.

3- Multi-syllabic words:

- ✓ Give practice in analysing words into usable parts (police+man/ white+board)
- ✓ Help learners to blend more words (bed+room/ class+room/ head+master)

4- Reading word by word in a slow manner:

- ✓ Ask the learner to read a passage from a book at a lower reading level. If he/she reads the passage slowly, the problem is probably a result of poor fluency. If he/she reads the text easily, the problem is due to comprehension difficulties.

Chapter Three



Stages of Teaching Beginning Reading



Chapter 3

Stages of Teaching Beginning Reading



From my experience, I suggest that teaching beginning reading should go in the following three main stages:

1. Pre-reading stage (Reading pictures)

In this stage, students should look at pictures in books and talk about them. It is very useful for them to take clues from the pictures when they start to read. These clues give confidence when they try to read the words underneath. Books without words, where pictures tell the entire story are useful for encouraging reading. The teacher can also use some simple picture-sequencing activities in this stage.

Chapter 3

Stages of Teaching Beginning Reading

2. Letter & Word Recognition:

** Letter (The Alphabet) Recognition:*

The alphabet is a series of abstract symbols that by themselves are mere curves and lines. Identities and sounds have been attached to these symbols to give them purpose and utility. They are used ultimately to create “Printed Words”. Alphabet recognition is the ability to read the letters of the alphabet in random order.

When learning the alphabet, **students** should:

1. Memorize the two sets of letters (upper–lower case)
2. Distinguish among similar-looking letters. (E,F/ d,b/ m,w/ p,q ...)
3. Be able to identify the printed forms of letters in and out of sequence.
4. Learn the most frequent sound that is attached to each letter.
5. Know that each letter has a name, a sound and motor movement involved in its formation
6. Be able to (listen - see - say - touch - read - write) the letters.

Chapter 3

Stages of Teaching Beginning Reading

When teaching the alphabet, **teachers** should:

1. Do simple “Show me” activities using flashcards.
2. Be patient and tolerant of individual differences considering that some students are slower than others at remembering and identifying the letters and the sounds.
3. Remember that beginning to learn, read and write letters is a very personal process like learning how to walk. Just as each of us learns things at different speeds, so do our students who are beginning to read.

** Word Recognition (Letters & their Sounds):*

When students start to recognize letters and their sounds, **teachers** should:

1. Concentrate on showing them words that have real meaning for them.
2. Not teach isolated words without giving some context or clues to their meaning.
3. Use pictures with words and labels on objects that help put words in a context.

Chapter 3

Stages of Teaching Beginning Reading

3. Reading Words:

In this stage, **teachers** should:

1. Provide children with well-known words as sometimes unknown words present problems to students. They cannot always recognize them as whole words or guess their meanings.
2. Pronounce the words for students. Focusing on the sound of the first letter can provide a powerful clue. Concentrate only on the initial letter sound.
3. Teach students the sound of the whole word not to sound out each letter but sound the whole word.



Chapter Four



Sample Activities for Beginning Reading



Chapter 4

Sample Activities for Beginning Reading

First teach your students that in English, when talking about what is written down, we nearly always use the word *say*. Then practise saying these questions out loud and give their answers.

- *What does this sign say?*
- *What does this word say?*
- *What does this letter say? What sound does it make?*
- *What do these letters say when they are together?*
- *What sound do these letters make together?*
- *What sound does this word start with (end with)?*
- *What other words start with (end with) that sound?*
- *Look, there's an "e" on the end, so does it say bite or bit? Etc.*

Phonics Approach Activity:

Use sets of flashcards with words and letters on them, whose sounds were taught, for example, h, s, w, n, ... etc. and cat, fat, pen, banana, wolf, etc. Ask students the following questions:

- *Who can find/point to/pick up a letter which says /s/, /h/, etc.*
- *Can you point to a word beginning with a /w/ sound?*
- *Can you find a word that ends with /n/ sound?*
- *Who can point to the letter for /b/?*
- *Can you find the word that rhymes with /cat/? Etc.*

Chapter 4

Sample Activities for Beginning Reading

Word Recognition Activities:

Activity 1:

Use two or three sets of flashcards with words on them, for example, *animal words, color words, sports words*. Ask students the following questions:

- *Who can find his/her (Can you find your) favorite food/drink/color/animal? Pick it up and show us.*
- *Who can name this card? Can you read it out to us? Can you tell us what it says?*
- *Who can find a word for a color/the word for "blue"/a card with an animal name on?*

Word Recognition



Chapter 4

Sample Activities for Beginning Reading



Activity 2:

Write on blank cards other words that students may be familiar with, and will not have too much trouble reading such as: video, CD, golf, T.V., bus, sandwich, kangaroo, football, etc. Then ask students the following questions giving an example each time. And, you can divide students into groups when doing this activity.

- *Find/ group "A", come and find a word for drink/food/animal, etc.*
- *Choose three words you like best.*
- *Match each word with a picture.*
- *Draw a picture for this word.*
- *Read out aloud two words for sports. Etc.*

Chapter 4

Sample Activities for Beginning Reading

More Tasks for the Beginning of Reading:







Task 1:

Draw lines linking small with capital letters.

F	Y	D	f
t	T	y	d

Task 2:

Which letter begins which word? Write the two forms of the letter under the picture.

E	p	D	t	p	c	d	e	H	C	T	h
											

Task 3:

Copy out words that are the names of animals.

head	dog	table
pencil	cow	horse

Chapter 4

Sample Activities for Beginning Reading

READING TASKS

Task 4:

Which words go together?
Copy out the words in pairs.

table	man	hand	woman	foot
up		down		chair

Task 5:

Copy out only the sentences that are relevant to the picture.

1. There is a table here.
2. They are under the tree.
3. They are not happy.
4. They are eating.
5. They are drinking.





Guidelines





Guidelines

Final Guidelines Before Teaching Beginning Reading

- Before beginning reading, it is generally preferable for learners to have some time speaking to be aware of the spoken language so that reading and recognizing meanings will become easier and quicker.
- It is most practical and productive to begin with single letter sounds (the phonic method) starting with the most common ones. These known common letter sounds enable students to cope with a lot of words.
- It is more useful for learners who start learning to read to know the most common sounds of letters. Letters' names can be taught later.
- The different forms of the letters can be taught together for learners to recognize the letters in the context.
- About alphabetical order, it can be learned later when the learners need to know it for dictionary use.
- Phonetics learning is only an entry stage and our aim is efficient reading that involves recognition of whole words and understanding their meanings.
- Whole-words recognition and meaning understanding should be used as soon as possible.
- Some very common words should be taught very early such as he/she/is/are/the and practising their recognition through tasks.

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