

# TEACHING WITH PICTOPHONICS: THE PARENT/TEACHER MANUAL

How to teach your beginner or struggling reader using pictophonics

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# CONGRATULATIONS!

You are about to start guiding children down one of the most exciting, liberating, world-opening paths they will ever travel in the quickest and easiest way. You will see children learning to read in a fraction of the time using pictophonics. We measure progress in days, not years.

There is no greater educational gift you can give a child, but right now 1 in 5 children don't achieve a basic literacy level by the age of 11. And research shows that children who do not learn to read in elementary school don't catch up. They enter adulthood with a major handicap, one that affects every aspect of their daily life.

Worse still, most of the children who are struggling at the age of 7 are still struggling at 11. The line "it will work out in time" can sometimes be true, but for many children it isn't. The earlier the problem is sorted out, the better.

Pictophonics is a new approach that works with the natural learning processes of your child's mind. Reading is a skill, like walking, talking, riding a bike and hitting a ball. Nobody ever learned the rules of physics to learn to ride a bike. Learning spelling rules is not the best way to learn to read. Pictophonics helps the learner to decode the words and by decoding them they become fluent, accurate readers.



So give pictophonics a go! You will see reading practice become so much easier for your children and less stressful for everyone. And, like magic, you will see each child building confidence and fluency in just 60-90 short daily sessions. If you have any questions or worries, we are here to help.

**David Morgan — Founder of**  
**HelpingChildrenToRead.com and the Easyread System**

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## 1. THE METHOD

### Complexity Made Simple: Matching Letters-to-Sounds

Conventional phonics has a problem. It teaches the rules of phonics, but then those rules do not work. So it's a bad approach for the learner in two ways: Rules are not neurologically the right way to learn a skill and the inconsistent rules lead to confusion anyhow. Look at these three words:

**move love cove**

So much for the magic E and the letter O sounding like the phonetic alphabet representation. Then look at this list of words with the letter O, all representing different sounds:

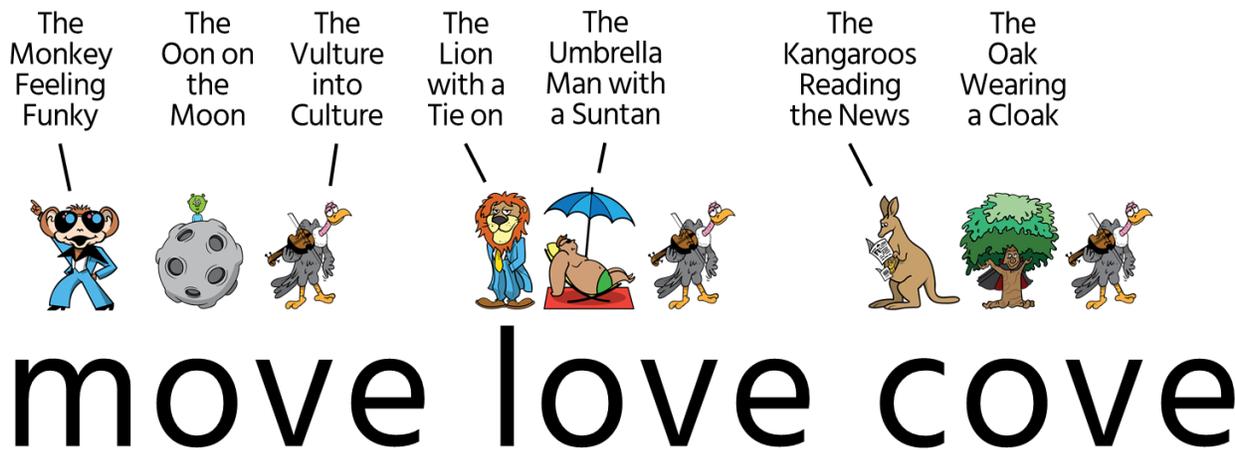
|             |              |                |
|-------------|--------------|----------------|
| <b>one</b>  | <b>cove</b>  | <b>purpose</b> |
| <b>gone</b> | <b>wolf</b>  | <b>women</b>   |
| <b>love</b> | <b>bough</b> | <b>word</b>    |
| <b>move</b> | <b>room</b>  | <b>forest</b>  |

The only word with the letter O representing the phonetic alphabet version is in the last word, which also looks as if it has a magic E, but doesn't. You can see the problem!

Learning to read in English is complex because a single letter in our alphabet can represent multiple sounds. It's a wonder any child ever cracks it through conventional methods, which teach children to chant phonics rules that always seem to break, especially in common words.

We teach a child all of the phonemes (sounds) in English using silly images that they are immediately drawn to. Most children can learn all 46 of them by heart in under a week.

The highly visual nature of the image set appeals to children's highly visual learning style.



Then we drop those images above the letters in a word. So that when they are stuck, kids can check the image and know which sound to make. This process of sounding out words is called “decoding” by the literacy experts. Which makes sense, because every child has to crack the code of our irregular language in order to learn to read.

Most 5-11 year olds are reading pretty confidently without the images after 60-90 sessions. The transfer can feel like magic, but really, it's just science. Read on to see why.

### **Implicit, “Ride-a-Bike” Learning: Skills, Not Rules**

The core reason pictophonics is so effective is that it teaches reading as a skill, rather than a set of rules. The brain learns skills through practice.

The brain needs to learn how to read automatically. When you learn to ride a bike, you are not thinking to yourself: “ok, press down the left foot, tilt to the right, head up, chin out, lift the right foot, push it down...” When you read you are not consciously converting each letter into a sound, holding it in your head, blending those into a word,

then moving on to the next word. That is actually all happening, but it is a subconscious process. It is part of your skills memory system, called the procedural memory.

You need to teach reading as a skill, like riding a bike. You need to teach it through the right kind of practice, not a set of rules. You need to teach it through decoding practice. Once your decoding is fluent and automatic, reading almost any word in the language becomes effortless.

This is called “implicit learning” and it’s a much easier, faster and more comfortable way for the brain to learn the tremendous complexity of our writing system. Not only does reading drop into place naturally, but then the spelling follows too, without the need for endless spelling lists. In fact spelling lists are a very poor way to teach spelling because they encourage a whole-word approach. If you learn a spelling list graphically, it will all be gone again in a week or two.

I was chatting with an Indian educator once who said to me “David, growing up in India I learned four languages. The only language I cannot speak fluently is the one I learned at school”. This illustrates how poorly our teaching methodology can sometimes work, when it does not fit the natural way the brain likes to learn.

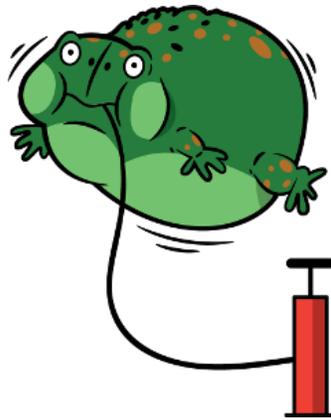
## 2. THE CHARACTERS

Pictophonics is all about making it super easy to match letters to sounds in a given word. That then makes the decoding of the words easy to practice.

The key thing to remember is that each pictophonics character represents just one single sound. They don't represent letters. They stand for sounds only. Image = sound. So a single Easyread character can appear over many different letters, because the letters in English can represent several different sounds in different words.

The sound for each character is simply the **first sound** of each character name.

So the Toad About to Explode is the /t/ sound. We make all the characters a bit crazy because it is a lot easier to remember a crazy image than the usual apple, banana, cup... which are boring. Boredom is bad in a learning environment!



The magical thing about pictophonics is that it works with any accent. So the way you would pronounce the starting vowel in the Ape with a Cape, is the sound that character represents for you, which will be slightly different I am sure to how I would say the /ay/ sound.

In our online system we can also automatically adjust for dialect too. You just select your region. Of course there is usually some variation of pronunciation around a room, let alone across a region, so it can never be perfect. But it can usually get close enough for the learner to work it out.

### **Your First Tool for Success: The Pictophonics Cardset**

On our site you will find our Card Set for the images - you can either print or purchase this from the Pictophonics Resources page on our website. This is a series of sheets you can cut into individual cards for each character. These magical little cards will be the key to teaching your children how to read by decoding.

The first thing to do is become familiar with each character and the sound it represents. Many will be easy, but a few are a bit trickier. So put those into a separate stack to work through a bit more. Most children do enjoy meeting the different characters, so aim to make it fun.

You can then start making little words with these cards, as a special secret code between you and your learners! You can also play with changing the word by switching out a single character. You can either do this directly or ask the learner to pick the right card from a small selection that will change the word. So 'bat' would be turned into 'hat' by switching the Horse for the Bear.

### 3. THE GOLDEN RULES SUCCESS

Okay, we are already stepping into some activities for learners. So before going further, we must introduce our first three Golden Rules of Pictophonics. These are all rules for maximising the neurological development of your learners.

Here are the first three:

#### **Golden Rule 1: Short, Regular Lessons**

This is simple really. First, you must keep a practice session to no more than 10-15 minutes. Any more than that and you will start to lose focus with something as demanding as learning to read. You will also begin to depress the learner emotionally, which slows progress.

Also, we want to aim for as close to one lesson per day as possible. The more regular the lessons the easier it is to build momentum and confidence.

#### **Golden Rule 2: Affirm and Help**

We want the lessons to be positive, happy times, because that makes learning easier. So you should make an affirming noise EVERY time a learner gets something right. That way you can then help too, without your voice being connected to mistakes. We do not want a Pavlovian link to be created between your voice and “oh dear... I have messed up”.

Also, the little affirmation will create a little dopamine spike for the learner, which is how the procedural memory system learns. That is why learning a skill with a weak feedback loop is a lot harder than learning one with an immediate feedback loop.

We have a little technique to help nail Golden Rule 2. We call it the Rule of 5. Yes, we have rules for the teacher rather than the learner in pictophonics! So the Rule of 5 is

that you should always fit in 5 bits of affirmation between each bit of coaching. Record yourself to see if you are hitting the target. It is really quite hard at first.

### **Golden Rule 3: Decode Every Word**

Some children naturally learn to recognize whole words, because they have a good visual memory and early reader books encourage that technique. You need to encourage them to train their brain in decoding, because that is how they will end up being able to read and spell pretty much any word. If they use their whole word memory bank to read words, it will slow down their progress. For any pictophonics lesson they should aim to decode every word, even if they think they recognize it.

## 4. THE PICTOPHONICS ROUTINE

Here is the pictophonics routine that has taught thousands of children to read in 60-90 sessions, sometimes after months or years of frustration.

| Guided Steps                          | Description  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>1. Learn the characters</b>        | Cut out the character cardset and shuffle through the deck until you and your child know the sound for each character. You can play little games, like seeing how fast you can go through the deck or "Find the Sound" type games. We recommend starting by introducing the full character name, then teaching your child the single sound for each card. So that when you hold up the Toad About to Explode, the goal is for them to immediately say: "tuh". And for the Ape with a Cape, they are able to say right away: "ay" |
| <b>2. Play phonics games together</b> | We want to build this phonemic awareness as much as possible. So play some games together: <a href="https://www.helpingchildrentoread.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Verbal-Phonics-Games-HCTR.pdf">https://www.helpingchildrentoread.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Verbal-Phonics-Games-HCTR.pdf</a>   |

| Guided Steps                                 | Description   |
|--|---|
| <b>3. Play games with pictophonics words</b> | <p>Using just the pictophonics characters, start to build little words together. This will begin to help the learner to hear the sounds in each word. Keep it to simple consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words.</p> <p>Now that your learner can see how the pictophonics characters can represent a word, start to play games with them. Change the word by changing out individual cards. Make little messages for each other. Try to think of at least one word for every character in the card set.</p>  |
| <b>4. Learn the letters of the alphabet</b>  | <p>If your child does not know her alphabet, you can make a letter set - one card for each lowercase letter. Then grab the pictophonics card or cards that represent the <b>name</b> of the letter and lay them on the table. So the letter A needs just the Ape in a Cape, whereas the letter B needs the Bear with Long Hair and the Eagle Looking Regal. Place the letter over the characters to create a visual link between the two. We use letter names because the phonetic alphabet teaches one sound per letter when there are really several sounds linked to most letters.</p> |
| <b>5. Short word formation</b>               | <p>Now create the CVC words, but this time with the letters and the pictophonics images. Set out the letters first and then draw in the characters as you say the sounds of the word together. So, if the word is 'cat', lay out the letters, say the word and get the learner to pull in the right character to go above each letter.</p>  |

| Guided Steps                                  | Description  |
|---|--|
| <b>6. Short word reading</b>                  | Now put out a word with the letters and the characters and get the learner to work it out, with your help as needed. Rather than saying the sounds, try to guide the learner towards the characters.   |
| <b>7. Word switching</b>                      | Now you can do the same switching of a single letter and character to change the word. Put out three options of letter plus character for the learner to choose from. Throughout all of this, keep referring to the letters by their name, to build familiarity.   |
| <b>8. Blending practice</b>                   | <p>Some children find the blending of sounds to form words very hard. There is a little trick to help them with this.</p> <p>Ask the child to pick a word of their choice. They should then break it apart into the different sounds and blend the sounds together again to form the word. You will find that 2-5 days of this little process will sort it for them. Be sure to affirm each little step and it does not matter if the break-apart bit is not perfect. There is no need to correct it if the child splits a three-sound word into two sound blocks, for instance.</p> |
| <b>9. Play free online pictophonics games</b> | Go onto our site to play some pictophonics Pinball, Super Search, Tweety Spelling, to get extra practice while having fun:<br><a href="https://www.helpingchildrentoread.com/resources/pictophonics-games/">https://www.helpingchildrentoread.com/resources/pictophonics-games/</a>  |

| Guided Steps                            | Description  |
|---|--|
| <b>10. Create lines of pictophonics</b> | <p>Make short sentences with our online Pictophonics Creator: <a href="https://www.helpingchildrentoread.com/resources/pictophonics-games/">https://www.helpingchildrentoread.com/resources/pictophonics-games/</a></p> <p>If you are reading a conventional book, then you can put individual lines from the book into the Pictophonics Creator and get the learner to read those rather than the words on the page.</p> <p>Always reread a phrase until it is fluent, before moving on to the next one. <b>That is actually Golden Rule 4!</b></p> |

An individual lesson can include a mix of these elements, depending on the stage of development of the learner. It is always best to do 3-4 different things in a 10-15 minute lesson, to keep up some variety. And never do more than 15 minutes!

Of course it is important that the learner is always trying to decode the letters, when they are there, not just reading the characters. You can tell if that is happening when an unusual spelling seems instantly easy! **Golden Rule 5 is that the learner must try to read the letters, and just refer to the characters for help when stuck.**

## 5. THE RESULTS: WHAT WILL YOU SEE?

### **Stepwise Change**

Children tend to have an initial jump forward in the first 15-30 lessons. Working with simple word structures will start to come together for them. That is the first step up.

Then there is often a period of plateau when you are in an “exercise” phase for the next 30-60 lessons. The decoding brain is getting a workout and building up muscle, but you don’t see the effects yet.

Then the second surge comes through as the confidence with more complex word structures starts to drop into place. This is the moment when you will think “ah, she is reading!” There is still be plenty more experience needed to build fluency and confidence with an increasingly wide vocabulary, but the key foundation will be in place.

### **Spelling**

The foundation to good spelling is in how you read. If you read words by decoding them, your subconscious mind is mapping all of the letter patterns and sounds in the different words. So eventually you can start to use that mapping to encode words instead. That is how spelling works.

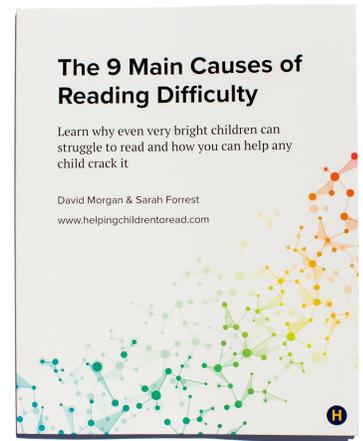
So a successful pictophonics process for reading will lead to good spelling naturally, without using spelling lists. It does of course come through after the reading progress, usually about 30-50 lessons later.

## 6. COMMON ROADBLOCKS TO SUCCESS

This might all sound too good to be true. Well they are the results we routinely see when we are working with someone directly in the Easyread System. But part of that process is an analysis at each stage for any complicating factors.

You see reading is a complex neurological process and if any part of that process has a difficulty, you will see frustration for the learner. There are patterns you can pick up which indicate what the difficulty is and then you just apply the solution.

You can check out our book *The 9 Main Causes of Reading Difficulty*, on Amazon, to see more detail on this: <https://www.helpingchildrentoread.com/resources/for-purchase/>



The main patterns to look out for are:

1. **Skipping words, skipping lines of text, difficulty with small text, difficulty late in the day.** These are caused by weak eye convergence and tracking. It can be fixed in a few days with the right exercise regime. We use a short finger tracking exercise that gets repeated 5-10 time per day for ten days. Golden Rule 6 is that any eye tracking weakness must be fixed.
2. **Particular difficulty reading long words.** This is a sign of some auditory memory weakness. It usually improves slowly using pictophonics, but can take some time. Keep working on the short words.
3. **Rising anxiety and/or tantrums.** This is a sign of a stress spiral. It can be eliminated instantly with the right support habits.

4. **Complaining of the text moving around.** This is a sign of some contrast sensitivity. Try putting a tinted overlay on the page to see if it stabilises the letters.
5. **Can read accurately but with poor comprehension.** Generally the child will hear no little voice in their head as they read. That can be fixed in days by getting them to read to an imaginary audience in their head. Golden Rule 7 is that the learner must be able to hear a little voice in their head as they read.

## 7. SUMMARY

I hope you like the simplicity of the pictophonics approach. It is really a lot simpler to teach than the old-fashioned conventional phonics systems, with all those charts of grapheme to phoneme correspondences!

We are here to make it as easy for you as possible. So if there are resources that would help, just ask — contact us at [helpingchildrentoread.com](http://helpingchildrentoread.com).

We also have the fully integrated online lesson system that we have created, called the Easyread system, for readers ages 6+. Beginners ages 4-5 might want to try the Poop Deck app...you can always try either for free!

