

# READING

# FOR

HIGH QUALITY  
LITERACY  
INSTRUCTION  
FOR ALL

# LIFE

# LYN STONE

A **David Fulton** Book

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# Notation guide

Standard phonemic symbols for English (RP and similar accents) have been used between slanted brackets to indicate phonemes.

## Consonants

- /p/ (pig) /b/ (big)
- /t/ (ten) /d/ (den)
- /k/ (kill) /g/ (gill)
- /f/ (fan) /v/ (van)
- /θ / (thin) /ð / (that)
- /s/ (sip) /z/ (zip)
- /ʃ / (ship) /ʒ / (vision)
- /tʃ / (chill) /dʒ / (chill)
- /m/ (map)
- /n/ (nap)
- /ŋ / (sing)
- /l/ (light)
- /r/ (right)
- /w/ (wit)
- /h/ (hit)
- /w / (whip)
- /j/ (yes)

## Vowels

- /ɒ / (got)
- /ɔ :/ (law)
- /ɜ :/ (her)
- /ʊ :/ (boot)
- /ʊ / (put)

- /e/ (get)
- /ɪ / (sit)
- /i:/ (tree)
- /æ / (bat)
- /ʌ / (gum)
- /ɑ:/ (bar)
- /eɪ / (day)
- /ju:/ (due)
- /aɪ / (die)
- /əʊ / (goat)
- /ɔɪ / (boy)
- /aʊ / (cow)

Letter names are indicated by symbols placed inside angle brackets: < a> to < z> .

# Foreword

I wish I had written this book!

Lyn Stone, with her strong background in linguistics and a deep understanding of the empirical reading research, brings a wealth of expertise to the subject of helping all students embark on the journey to independent reading. It is both a passionate and a research-based explanation of the reading process for teachers (who should have learned this at university, but most of whom did not) and for parents who are struggling to understand why their child has not learned to read. It is a highly readable analysis of the research into reading development; an honest and uncompromising reflection on years of supporting students who have struggled to acquire this critical life skill; and a practical manual for those who seek to do likewise.

The first section of the book examines different models of reading development that have been in favour over the past century, and helps the reader understand why this topic still attracts so much heated debate. It examines in some detail the five key components of reading identified by the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000) – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension – and the underlying role that oral language plays in preparing children for all literacy development.

Subsequent chapters explain, in language that is accessible to both teachers and parents, the underlying processes that have an impact on reading development: difficulties in Rapid Automatised Naming (RAN); short term, long term and working memory issues; and low processing speed. Importantly, ‘interventions’ and training programs purported to develop these processes and thereby improve reading are exposed, as many parents and some teachers are swayed by the claims of those beholden to mistaken ideologies, or motivated by financial gain, rather than children’s reading development. And a brief but powerful chapter highlights the fact that *‘illiteracy is everybody’s problem.’* The

author's professional and personal experiences have clearly resulted in a special empathy and understanding of the impact that *not* learning to read has on individuals, their families and the broader community.

Of particular relevance to teachers is a summary table of the major contributors to the vast body of research that has informed our current understanding of the reading process and how best to teach it. Explanations of the geopolitical and social forces that have influenced broad approaches to education as well as to reading instruction make for fascinating reading and go some way to explaining why consistent recommendations from research reports have not been implemented in the English-speaking world, and the subsequent slide in international literacy rankings.

I, like many of those involved in reading research and instruction, have long been perplexed by the fact that despite the consistent findings of research over the past five decades, approaches that do not reflect this knowledge continue to be both implemented and fiercely defended. One of the ways we can counteract the spread of nonevidence-based practice is to build a greater understanding of the reading process and how it can be taught most effectively. This book will do just that.

A vast store of knowledge has accrued for those seeking advice on how to help their children or students, and this book directs the reader to this knowledge base. Parents and teachers alike will benefit from the information regarding individuals, groups and organisations that now exist to support an evidence-based approach to teaching literacy skills.

While many books about reading difficulties avoid discussion of the contentious topic of dyslexia, this one does not. While acknowledging that the word can mean different things, the author dispels many of the myths surrounding the term, including the myth that people with dyslexia can never learn to read.

The final section of the book provides practical strategies and techniques for helping the 'hard to teach' student along their literacy journey, including comprehensive chapters on teaching phonological awareness and phonics. For over 30 years I have been involved in supporting teachers to teach these important elements of the reading process (and I don't think I have done a bad job), but in these chapters



I discovered new and innovative strategies I had never considered. The author's deep understanding of the sounds of English and how they are formed in addition to her knowledge of the reading process, have led to the development of strategies that deserve wider dissemination. And unlike many (roughly) comparable books, it includes detailed guidelines for teaching fluent handwriting skills (an associated problem for many children who have difficulty learning to read), and for explicitly teaching the letter names and order of the alphabet. As the author says, 'The world is alphabetised!' Children need this important information.

The chapters on teaching fluency, vocabulary and comprehension are briefer, but also include reference to valuable resources and core ideas that will help teachers and parents support these important elements of reading.

Most teachers have taught students who appear to learn effortlessly, and whose rapid achievements we herald as if they are the results of our wonderful teaching. The author reminds us, however, that, 'The mark of a good teacher or system is the output of their *bottom* students, not their *top* ones.' Fortunately, this book will help teachers raise the achievement of those who are struggling with this life skill, so that more children will enter the world of independent reading, and experience all the joys that achievement affords.

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# Preface

I'd love to be out of business. I'd love to wake up one day and make the decision to close my doors forever.

I work with children who struggle to read and write. I work with teachers, designing programs and consulting to schools on how to raise standards in reading, writing and spelling. I wish I were redundant.

There was a point in time when my ego had me believe that when a student of mine learned to read, it was somehow the doing of my own brains and personality. What vanity. I don't have any unique talent. I don't have a magic touch. It amuses me to think that I could ever have entertained such a tragic notion. I politely disagree with parents who send me kind messages about my 'techniques'.

Bringing children to literacy is not a product of *my* methods. I have some experience, I have some tricks up my sleeve, I'm fairly good at establishing a respectful, productive rapport and I enjoy what I do. But none of this actually *teaches* my students to read.

What teaches them to read is systematic, structured lessons in the relationship between speech and print and the practice that they do. They really could have received this at school. They really *should* have received this at school.

I learned how to be a conduit for this by having a degree in linguistics and by lucking into very effective training, under some of the most intelligent, well-trained mentors around.

It was luck, not shrewd insight, which put me in a good position to help children read and write. I was not immune to snake oil and wishful thinking in many aspects of my life. For instance, twenty years ago, if you had said to me that children got sick through no fault of their own, I would have scoffed at you. I would have shaken my head and pitied you for thinking that some people lived in poverty due to circumstances beyond their control. I would have been suspicious of

you if you supported a family member's treatment of cancer through chemotherapy, radiation or surgery. In the back of my mind, a 'karma' type question would have lurked.

Then life hit me with a series of blunt, brutal strokes that turned a very credulous, vaguely spiritual ape into an increasingly prudent and sceptical human. It is this human who offers this book, not from a position of superiority, but of humility. I know what it's like to *think* I'm doing good when actually I'm not.

What works best in teaching *all* children to read is not a mystery. There have been many theories and models of reading and, having run them through the lens of scientific enquiry for the past 100 years, we have arrived at conclusions that point to certain specific phenomena. The first section of this book outlines those phenomena.

Even the trickier question of what can stand in the way of learning to read, and how to assist with that, is not a matter of conjecture anymore. We absolutely have that information at our fingertips and we've had it for long enough now to be doing better than we are.

So how come more people can't read and write? How come there are still so many vastly different methods of teaching literacy? Why do people still argue about it?

This book sets out to ask and answer these three crucial questions. I certainly don't know if there is a simple answer to any of them. They are as complex as many great philosophical questions. They are questions about society, behaviour, power, money, thought, knowledge, education, humanity and science.

The second section documents the history of this great debate, as well as major government-level inquiries that have delved into these questions.

During the research phase of this book, I made vigorous efforts to step outside my own comfort zone and gather information from sources I didn't necessarily agree with. What I noticed was that many of those sources had common characteristics despite the low quality of their offerings. One in particular was the extensive use of catchphrases. I say 'catchphrases' to emphasise that they are distinct from academic language. Catchphrases are associated with particular people and groups, whereas academic language is used across disciplines to describe testable, replicable phenomena. 'Barking at

print' is a catchphrase and doesn't have a distinct definition, whereas 'hyperlexia' is academic language and can be precisely defined.

People who use catchphrases are difficult to argue with, since the imprecise terms they use can then be altered to 'move the goalposts' in discussions.

This reminded me of the way cults use language to simultaneously bind and isolate devotees. So I wrote a section about that. I included dyslexia in that section, as it is a condition that attracts all kinds of weird and wonderful 'remedies'. Dyslexia is also a bellwether for effective teaching. So often I see teachers displaying 'writing samples' to try and convince others of their effectiveness as teachers. Yet I only ever see the samples written by their top-performing students. My contention is that if you want to judge a teacher's effectiveness, you do so by the output and progress of their lowest performers.

The final section is written to provide some resources for teachers of those lowest performers. These are the students who, unless effectively taught from the first day of school, end up in private tuition if they can afford it and, all too often, the criminal justice system if they can't. They are consistently let down by schools that favour low quality methods of reading instruction.

We know what to do and we need to get on with it. At some point, I will write a book about schools that decided to adopt a no-fail attitude to teaching reading. But for now, this book is a starting point to help parents and teachers demand and supply a better deal for all children.

## **Free resources**

Researching the topics outlined in this book became something akin to peering into fractals generated by the Mandelbrot Set. I've had to expunge thousands of words, just to keep it all manageable. Many of the words, resources and sections I have taken out are available on my website as blogs.

I have also recorded videos of many of the lessons described in the final chapters of the book as a free guide. They are available on my website, [www.lifelongliteracy.com](http://www.lifelongliteracy.com) and through my Lyn Stone YouTube channel.

# Acknowledgements

This book could not have existed without the help of my many colleagues, peers and those in the field who have contributed to the betterment of education for all.

It wasn't until I started the chapter on the major players that I began to get really attached to this project. Looking into the history of the great debate and putting faces to the names I'd seen over and over again in my reading on this subject, I began to feel like I was visiting old friends. To make sure I was doing them justice, I wrote to as many of the living candidates as I could, and tried to make sure I was representing their 'big ideas' and notable publications properly.

Many of them graciously answered my questions and steered me with kindness, openness and generosity. I felt like I wanted to do this particular project forever.

Here in Australia, certain living legends of academia need to be thanked for tolerating my dumb questions and letting my voice be heard. They are Jennifer Buckingham, Max Coltheart, Lorraine Hammond, Kerry Hempenstall, Molly de Lemos, Pamela Snow and Kevin Wheldall.

The strength, determination and wisdom of the dyslexia admins and activists here in Australia/New Zealand never fails to astound me. I know I have probably left someone out, but I thank you all, you formidable dissidents: Sarah Allen, Sarah Astone, Kate Bertonecello, Elise Cassidy, Vikki CH, Alison Clarke, Jen Cross, Belinda Dekker, Tanya Forbes, Heidi Gregory, Anita Evans Hellevik, Julie Hermansen, Leanne James, Liz Kane, Victoria Leslie, Sandra Marshall, Julie Mavlian, Carolyn Merritt, Susan Milner, Georgina Perry, Vicky Saville and Sandra Tidswell.

A special word for someone who has become a trusted friend and advisor: Sweet by name and nature, Bob Sweet has been an unexpected treasure. He kindly shouldered many of the major burdens of this

project and without his advice, this book would be so much less.

The UK contingent must also be mentioned, Debbie Hepplewhite and Sir Jim Rose, to be specific. Your sagacity is matched only by your benevolence.

My terrific editing team need thanking. They are the pragmatic and flawless Chris Burdess and the incomparable linguistic genius Isabelle Duquenois. Thanks also to those who have looked at and commented on bits and pieces, all highly valued: Fiona Duffy, Catherine and Richard Riordan, Kenny Reay and Tina Zitzlaff.

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My wonderful family, as usual, have been supportive and resilient. I am very lucky to have you all. So many we grudgingly said to the land o' the leal during this project. I would have given up had it not been for you.

Similarly to my friends, many of whom I have already mentioned, I say this: thank you for checking in on me. We will be fine.

Not least are my fabulous students. You are some of the strongest people I know and it's a pleasure to have worked with each and every one of you. The same goes for the teachers in my life, past and present; such a lot of dedication and good will.

You have all taught me unforgettable lessons.

With thanks to Aidan Potts for artwork for Figures 17.1, 17.2, 17.3, 17.4, 17.6, 17.7, 17.9, 18.1, 18.2, 18.4, 18.5 and to Ailsa Dunnachie-Young for Figures 16.1 and 24.1.

## CHAPTER 1

# A simple view

Some stages of learning to read and write take longer, require more practice and demand better instruction than others. For example, learning whether text in your language goes from left to right or right to left is fairly easy, and once learned, is seldom forgotten.

Learning to convert the symbols on the page to speech is another matter. Language is a reflection of the workings of the mind and is therefore necessarily complex, even at the oral level. Adding writing to the picture puts an additional code-making/code-breaking component into an already complex structure.

Human writing systems have only been around for 3,000 years or so, and though they convey oral language, they did not develop in the same way as oral language. It's a good idea to remember this when thinking about how children are taught to read. Here are some basic principles that can help.

- Reading and writing is not the same as listening and speaking. Therefore, we get better results when we remove the expectation that children will just start reading in the same way as they just started speaking.
- *Learning* to read is not the same as *skilled* reading. Therefore, we get better results when we are aware of the process of learning to read and when we teach towards that. Skilled reading is a destination; the journey is somewhat different.

Falsehoods flourish in the presence of complexity, and, even to this day, there are people who not only believe, but viciously defend outdated, demonstrably incorrect views of reading. The two major

false ideas can be classified as *whole language* and *whole word* approaches to teaching reading.

When poor reasoning occurs, the vulnerable inevitably suffer. In many cases, a lack of understanding of the building blocks of literacy leads to poor teaching and ineffective intervention (Figure 1.1).

Phonics	Whole language	Wholeword
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teach the relationship between sounds and symbols.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Immerse children in language and they will learn to read naturally.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teach children whole words, since they read whole words.</li></ul>

Figure 1.1 The three major theories of reading

## The Simple View and dual coding

To begin with, any theory of reading instruction must have a perspective on what reading actually is.

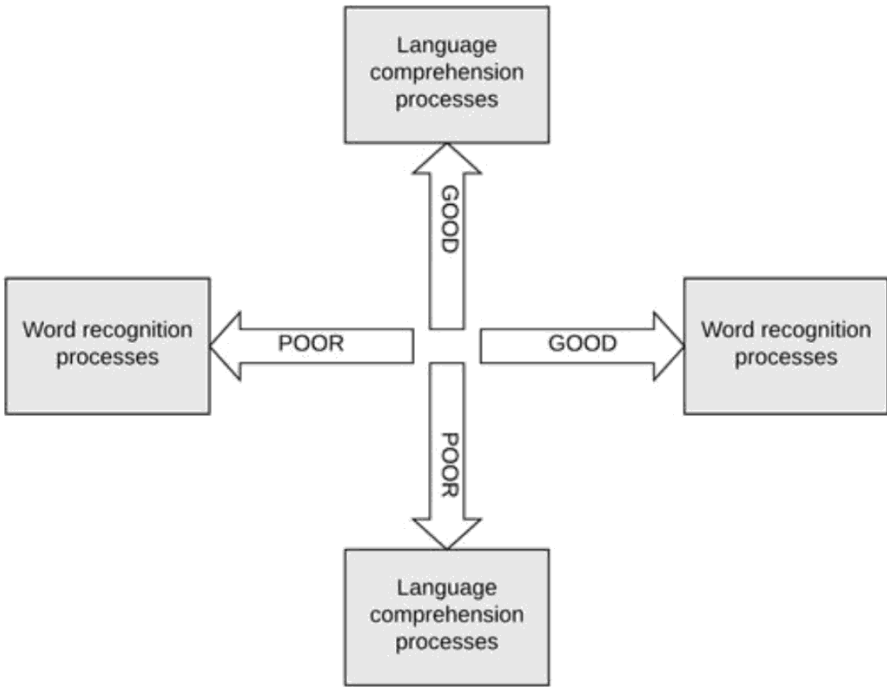
Reading experts often refer to the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer 1986). This is a formula designed to help educators assess and assist readers.

The Simple View states that skill level in reading comprehension can be predicted by measuring two processes:

1. word recognition
2. language comprehension

So, the better you can convert the letters on the page into sounds and words, and the more words you understand, the more you'll be able to comprehend what you're reading (Figure 1.2).





**Figure 1.2** The Simple View of Reading

The Simple View of Reading is a logical, testable formula grounded in decades of research.

Along with this, and slightly more technical, the Dual-Route Approach is a model of reading aloud which suggests that two separate cognitive pathways are involved in and available for the pronunciation of a written word (Coltheart 2007). Those pathways are the phonological and the semantic. The phonological route assists in reading all words, whilst the semantic route can only assist in reading regular or known real words.

Dual Route Theory is fascinating, but too complex for this book. Further reading is highly recommended, however. I mention it because it explains the confusion that educators sometimes experience when comparing the journey to the destination in reading.

## The Big Six

Word-level recognition relies on six key skills. First referred to as The

Big Five (Chall 1983), and later on – with the addition of oral language development – as the Big Six (Konza 2014), they are:

1. oral language development
2. phonological (including phonemic) awareness
3. phonics
4. fluency
5. vocabulary
6. comprehension

This section defines each skill. Later on, Section 4 builds on this information to provide a helpful guide to assessing and teaching these and related skills.

Many in opposition to, or who do not fully understand, the science of reading will lump all of the above under the umbrella of ‘phonics’. A better description would perhaps be ‘structured literacy’.

## **Whole language: A linguistic profile**

There are other perspectives which fail to link decoding to comprehension, or which place undue emphasis on comprehension and dismiss decoding altogether.

Back in the 1960s, there was a movement in educational circles which claimed that a code-based, systematic approach to teaching reading was wrong. This general kind of challenge to convention, conformity and authority was popular and led to many great changes in civil rights, etc. In education, however, it led to the disastrous rise of whole language.

It is not easy to pin whole language down to one single definition. Whole language is more of a force, a set of ideas and a suite of related methodologies. It is based on two flawed principles:

1. That children learn to read in much the same way that they learn to talk (they don’t), because learning to read is a natural process (it’s not).
2. That immersing children in a literacy-rich environment will lead them to discover the structure of the written code by themselves (it won’t).

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