

The Teaching Structure

“A good reading programme must structure lessons in such a way that neither the teacher nor the pupils are ever confused or confronted by something they can’t do. In other words, information must be introduced systematically so that it is easy to assimilate.”

Diane McGuinness, Early Reading Instruction, MIT Press 2004

It is obvious by now that we are dealing with a complexity that is beyond the average five year old, unless we take into account the learner’s brain, ‘how the mind of a child works’, and how to work with their memory and therefore enhance their understanding.

The only way we can move from an almost impenetrable, opaque code to a transparent or clear code is by organising the code in such a way that the learner understands it. This is achieved by simple systematic lessons and by organising the teaching of the code from simple to complex.

A clear pathway into the complexity of the English alphabet code is to recognise four concepts or characteristics of *how the English spelling code works*. We have identified these as ‘**keys**’ that literally unlock the complexity of the code in an incremental sequence that makes logical sense and works from the simplest element through to the more complex.

Discovering the Four Keys

Many words in English work at the ‘alphabet’ or basic code level. These are words that are entirely represented by **one sound to one letter**, for example c a t or d o g. **This is SRS Key 1.**

It is the entry point to teaching the code at its simplest level. Teaching this first will establish the **fundamental building blocks of reading** and the understanding that sounds are represented by a letter or that a letter represents a sound.

The next concept to be unlocked is that **a sound can be represented by two letters**, for example, hil or fuss. **This is SRS Key 2.**

The easiest introduction to this idea is to teach double letters (hill) followed by the sound /sh/: fish, the sound /ch/: chop and the sound /ng/: sing. This will lead on to being able to teach words like: chopping, singing and swimming (simple two syllable words).

Once Key 2 is in place, the learner is ready to be introduced to the more complex concept that **the same sound may be represented by more than one spelling**, for example, the sound /a-e/: day, train, lake, table, eight. **This is SRS Key 3.**

The sounds are introduced lesson by lesson following the SRS order of teaching and using interactive activities.

With Key 3 in place, the learner then needs to understand the ‘instability’ of letters – **that one spelling may represent more than one sound**, for example, the letter ‘o’ can be hot, open, to, won. **This is SRS Key 4.**

This can be summed up like this:

The Four Keys of the Code

The English spelling code follows four principles. SRS provides four keys that unlock these principles for the learner.

KEY 1 Sounds (phonemes) may be represented by single letters:

c-a-t d-o-g s-w-i-m

KEY 2 A sound (phoneme) may be represented by two or more letters:

h-i-ll f-i-sh th-ere

KEY 3 The same sound (phoneme) may be represented by more than one spelling:

p-l-ay t-r-ai-n c-a-k-e b-a-b-y
eigh-t th-ey b-r-ea-k s-t-r-aigh-t

KEY 4 The same spelling may represent more than one sound:

h-o-t o-p-e-n t-o w-o-n

These keys form a firm base from which to teach.



The teaching structure of the Sound Reading System is based on the 44 sounds of spoken English, on the knowledge of the spelling code that represents the 44 sounds, the skills required for reading and the incremental nature of the teaching, arranged from simple to complex. The teaching incorporates the logic of the four 'Keys' and a healthy respect for the limits of memory. The teaching of how to manage multi-syllable words is included.

If teachers understand the principles of English spelling, it is easy to pass on the understanding, especially if the lessons are logically planned to unfold in careful steps that emphasise the reversibility, from sound to symbol and from symbol to sound, throughout the teaching.

If we take 'the mind of a child' and 'the structure of the writing system'- how do we get the two to mesh? The next section focuses on the skills the brain uses to access a sound to symbol code and how to teach the learner the code, using these skills.