

Questions and Answers



Do children move to different stages for different groups of words?

They certainly do. The important thing to be aware of is that the transition from conscious decoding to instant visual recognition is a process, not an instant switch. Think of it this way:

Stage 1	See new word for the first couple of times	consciously decoding that word	Word is now being 'mapped' to the VWFA*
Stage 2	Next few times the word is seen	Much quicker to decode/recognise	Student starting to retrieve that word from the VWFA
Stage 3	See that word again	Word instantly recognised without consciously decoding.	Word securely mapped in VWFA

*VWFA = Visual Word Form Area

And once a particular pattern, i.e. -ough, has been orthographically mapped to the VWFA, you'll be quicker to recognise another word with the same pattern.

The reality is that students can move at very different speeds through this stage. And even when they get to the optimum speed of 50-100ms, they'll still need to consciously decode a new word when it comes up.

Even at our level of literacy, we occasionally need to decode an unfamiliar word. However, what appears to happen is that the process of orthographically mapping that word becomes much quicker.

Even a learner in the very beginning stages of literacy can learn to recognise words instantly if they are familiar enough. And the more words in a text which can be instantly recognised, the easier it is to comprehend the text, even if some still need to be decoded.

This is why it's so important to include activities from the early stages to facilitate this process.

Useful activities include:

- Re-reading familiar texts (and there's lots of evidence that this is extremely beneficial for a variety of reasons).
- Speed reading activity, where learners are exposed frequently to the same words and put under a little bit of time pressure so they start to abandon decoding and adopt instant visual recognition. This is particularly useful, as it is an activity which explicitly practices retrieving that word from the VWFA.
- Word Flash activity on StepsWeb. This activity is adaptive and works at the student's speed. Again, it's developing the ability to instantly retrieve words from the VWFA.

What are the successes like when comparing the programme between EAL children and non-EAL? Is there any data on this?

StepsWeb is very widely used with EAL students and by many language schools. The phonic progression is equally appropriate, of course, but there is also a strong emphasis on vocabulary and comprehension, which is particularly valuable for EAL students.

We don't actually have any data directly comparing progress between the two groups, but there are a number of case studies available on our [website](#) and [Support Site](#), which include teacher feedback. You might also be interested in taking a look at this recent research project in 6 Auckland schools. These schools are in South Auckland, which is a very deprived area in New Zealand. The area also has an extremely high proportion of migrant families. The study covered full year-groups, including EAL students and those with special needs.

Spelling Age and Visual Recognition Gains

Primary Schools	Total Students	Average gain in 6 months	Average Visual Recognition Speed - Initial*	Average Visual Recognition Speed - Current*
Chaucer	28	14 months	243ms	144ms
Fruitvale	42	20 months	268ms	121ms
Glenavon	33	14 months	456ms	219ms
Laingholm	52	14 months	332ms	164ms
Prospect	36	12 months	344ms	151ms
St Leonards	85	14 months	388ms	196ms
Overall	276	14 months	339ms	166ms

* A lower number indicates a faster visual recognition speed.

A more comprehensive report document has been uploaded to the Linked Resources section for information.

Something that I have noticed when working on syllables is that children are counting the number of sounds or letters in words instead. How should I help them with this?

I think this is potentially a confusing area for students. We normally refer to 'beats' in a word, rather than syllables. We also teach them to hold their hand under their chin and count the number of times their chin touches their hand as they say that word aloud. That usually clears up any confusion.

And obviously it helps to only focus on one aspect in a particular lesson. In other words, it's helpful to avoid asking about how many sounds there are and then ask how many syllables there are.

Can you use StepsWeb alongside Read Write or other materials?

Absolutely. The StepsWeb Course is absolutely consistent with the UK literacy curriculum, so it is fine for students to receive explicit teaching using other research-based literacy courses, such as Read Write. The reinforcement they will receive online will consolidate and accelerate their learning.

You'll find the full Scope & Sequence [here](#).

You can also tap into the Wordlists section, which has thousands of individual wordlists covering, among others, every phonic pattern and spelling rule.

It's also very quick and easy to create your own wordlists if you specifically want certain words, rather than the list provided for that spelling pattern. This will enable a huge range of online activities and printable reinforcement for your own list. Some schools build a whole bank of wordlists covering other aspects of the curriculum or reading materials they use as part of their literacy curriculum.

Where would you start with an 11-year-old who has missed all the basics of reading?

When a new user signs into StepsWeb for the first time, they will do a diagnostic Placement/Spelling Test. This is a standardised spelling test which will give you a spelling age. However, it will also analyse that learner's literacy knowledge and place them on the right Level of our structured Course.

StepsWeb is designed to be non age-specific. In other words, older learners can work at a relatively low level of literacy without being patronised by childish images or activities.

How do I help learners who are already past the age of 9 and are having difficulty with reading and comprehension?

See the answer above. A learner who is working through the StepsWeb Course at the right Level will automatically be developing comprehension and vocabulary, as well as reading and spelling skills. Diagnostic information will be available to you on exactly what his needs are at each point and the programme automatically analyses each learner's errors and creates individualised reinforcement.



92%

Overall accuracy

89% Reading / Spelling Accuracy

77% Comprehension / Language

97% Phonic Knowledge / Skills

100% Phonological Awareness

Will you be looking at the processing and perceptual skills from the point of view of 3-5 year olds?

We hadn't planned to, but we are collating and uploading a range of resource banks and would certainly include information and reference material covering this age-range. We'll keep you posted via our newsletter when resources become available. In the meantime, please feel free to contact us directly with any specific queries.

StepsWeb can be used with 5-year olds as important reinforcement of letter/word/pattern sounds which have been introduced using the workbooks and hands-on materials. Activities reinforce these processing and perceptual skills in a literacy context.

Would the use of flashcards help with words so they become fluent with those words?

Absolutely! Although some people see flashcards as being hopelessly old-fashioned and repetitive, you can create simple, fun games which provide a bit of variety. This can include visual memory, matching, comprehension and vocabulary.

For this reason, we've made it possible to print flashcards out for every wordlist on StepsWeb, including lists you've created yourself. The other printable game resource you can create on StepsWeb is the Stargame. See this link for a fuller explanation: [Stargame Intro](#).

Using the Stargame cards has the same advantages as flashcards, but enables a wider range of enjoyable, group games. In fact, the Stargame is our most popular hands-on game!

Do you have any more resources on a multi-tiered approach to literacy?

StepsWeb and its supporting workbooks, printable worksheets and gameset resources cover every level of literacy. There is a structured Course, which goes from the very beginning stages (introducing letter sounds) to advanced extension levels for older learners.

However, you can also tap into extensive Wordlists, Supporting Activities and Games sections with literally thousands of words covering every spelling pattern and rule, plus word study and topics. If you can't find exactly what you want, it's quick and easy to create your own lists, with your own words, recordings, sentences, definitions and even images.

The teaching approach incorporates a huge variety of activities developing all of the core skills needed for reading and spelling, with a particular focus on developing the processing and perceptual skills needed for literacy.

What can I do for children who substitute words and word endings?

I would want to know more about how those children are processing information and what specific difficulties they are experiencing. In the absence of a full Ed Psych report, I'd suggest using our range of screening tests, which are designed for classroom/home use. They're available on our Support Site if you have a StepsWeb login: [Screening Tests Introduction](#). If you don't have a login, but would like a copy of the tests, just drop me an email (ros@stepsweb.com) and I'll send you a copy at no cost.

As a general point, however, I would emphasise that the StepsWeb progression is designed to develop a far greater awareness of word structure and using the correct form of words in the right context. It will also develop both phonological awareness and visual perception, which should also help resolve this issue.

If this is an issue with writing words, rather than with reading, I would also recommend using our 3,3,3 method, which is incredibly effective with learners with processing/perceptual difficulties. If you're using our workbooks/online programme, I can send you instructions on using these worksheets, which you'll find at the back of each workbook.

Some of the downloadable resources mentioned here can only be accessed if you have a StepsWeb login. If you don't already, you are welcome to sign up for the free trial, which will give you access. If you need longer than 14 days, please email us and we can extend it for you.



Have any more questions?

Contact us

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