

# About the Teach Reading at Home Course

---



Mary Merrisen

Copyright © Mary Merrsén 2005, 2023  
[Buyinformation@protonmail.com](mailto:Buyinformation@protonmail.com)

*You have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this ebook on screen and in print, and to print a copy for your personal use, as well as printing any pages you need for teaching your student/s. Otherwise, no part of the book may be stored, printed, reproduced, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the express written permission of:*

Mary Merrsén  
[Buyinformationa@protonmail.com](mailto:Buyinformationa@protonmail.com)

To access additional materials, go to:  
[Teachreadingathome.com](http://Teachreadingathome.com)

To ask questions about the Course, email:  
[Teachreadingathome@proton.me](mailto:Teachreadingathome@proton.me)

Cover Image by: 200 Degrees from Pixabay

## Table of Contents

Course – Background.....	1
The Teach Reading at Home Course.....	4
The Purpose of This Course Course aims	
This Course is available as an ebook.....	5
Who can be helped by this Course?.....	7
Keep in mind with this Course.....	8
How the Course is set out	
Older Students.....	9
Warning	
What this Course covers.....	10
How long does it take to finish the Course?	
How Do I Begin?.....	11
Course: These Courses – What’s Different?.....	12
One skill is taught at a time	
Students read real words and real prose	13
The hardest thing to understand	
A Detour – No Sight Words!!!.....	14
Back to – The hardest thing to understand	15
The fourth skill – Reading Comprehension.....	16
Material in these Courses is marked.....	17
Guessing.....	18
Rote Learning.....	19
Conclusion	

## Course - Background

My Courses are phonics-based. They are step-by-step, 'breathe now' type materials. If you can read, you can use them to teach reading.

These Courses have been specifically designed for students who, for no apparent reason, failed to learn to read at school,. These students just didn't manage to 'catch on'. If you read my other articles, you will understand why your child or student didn't 'catch on'.

These students may be classified as dyslexic, but they don't have severe learning disabilities - they appear normal enough at home! And they desperately want to learn to read, so it isn't as though they haven't been trying.

If you have a severely dyslexic student, you might feel that my materials are not for you and your student. For people in this situation, I recommend looking into the Bell-Lindamood Method, or the Orton-Gillingham Method.

Among my articles, I've provided information about a number of topics, but I'm no longer interested in joining the Whole Word versus Phonics debate. The research has been done; it's conclusive, and it's freely available. So, I won't waste further time arguing. From now on, all my attention will go to helping people who have decided to tutor.

Yes, in case you haven't noticed, I'm getting old and cranky. I've spent a lifetime working in this field, and I'm disappointed to say that I've seen no real progress in the large majority of educational bureaucracies, teacher training institutions, schools, and teachers. But that doesn't mean I'm interested in spending time complaining about them!

Instead, I want action. The problem is too big to complain about now. Too much time has been wasted. Too many people have been harmed. Now, let's just get on with solving the problem.

Since looking to teachers, schools, and governments to solve the problem hasn't worked, we're going to have to do it ourselves. Yes, ourselves! Before it really is too late! Yes, as usual, if you want something done, you have to do it yourself. It's always been that way.

This problem has been out in the open all my adult life. I thought, years ago, that all we had to do was work within the system, and we could fix the problem. I'm so old now that I've retired, and I no longer believe the system can solve the problem of illiteracy.

So, now, it's up to us, the grassroots, to do it - so I've written material that a literate teenager or adult can use to teach someone to read.

While I'm not interested in having a group whinge, if you're teaching or tutoring real phonics (of any type) you are most welcome to use my materials to supplement what you're doing.

My motto is: Eat the elephant carefully!

This means: we are dealing with a huge problem, but if we:

- break the problem up into bite-sized pieces;
- take a bite or two a day; and
- concentrate on the students who are in front of us.

Then, we can make sure that our students are literate. Then they can teach someone else (if they want to), and so can we (if we want to). Then, Rinse and Repeat!

This is how people in the Developing World are coping with illiteracy; they're teaching each other. They're not relying on the government, or someone else to do it for them. They're being independent and self-reliant by helping themselves and each other. We can follow their example and do the same!

If you're wanting to teach someone to read, I'd recommend that you begin with the: [How Do I Start Teaching Phonics at Home?](#) ebook. That will be enough to let you know whether my Course suits you and your student.

Remember - we're the only ones who can make a difference! Don't believe anyone who tells you you're not capable or qualified to teach reading. The fact is, if you can speak English clearly, and can read and follow simple instructions, you can teach this Course - even if you're not a native English speaker.

All the best,

Mary

## The Teach Reading at Home Course

The Teach Reading at Home Course is a comprehensive learn to read Course that teaches the sound/letter combinations, from sound /a/ in **a**pple, to sound /zh/ in **explosions**. [Please Note: Letters between slash marks mean a sound, not a letter.]

### The Purpose of this Course

The purpose of this Course is to teach the essentials, not to provide entertainment. So while the material can be interesting, the things students and tutors find most interesting are the speed at which students progress and how rapidly the students become competent and confident readers.

The reason for this rapid and lasting progress is that tutors and students discover that English is not the chaotic, crazy mess they have been told it is, but that 85% of it makes sense if they know the basics (the sounds represented by the alphabet letters, the multiple letter teams, and the rule letters).

Another thing they find interesting is that nearly all the other words (totaling well over 95% of English words) either make sense, or can be worked out, once you learn the sounds represented by the old letters, and the foreign letters. All this information is taught in this Course.

### Course Aims

This Phonics-based Course was designed specifically to help untrained tutors, such as parents, teach students to become independent readers, by:

- making it easy for tutors and students to progress all the way through the Course;
- teaching only the essentials, so students progress rapidly, and see immediate results;

- teaching all the essentials, so students can be confident in their ability to read;
- helping students understand how English works, so they see it's not chaotic;
- requiring the application of simple techniques only;
- teaching in a way that makes sense to both tutor and student;
- helping students understand how words work (even the weird words);
- only expecting students to read words containing sound/letter combinations they have already been taught in the Course;
- progressively building understanding and skills through step-by-step accumulation of knowledge;
- starting at the beginning (with pre-reading skills), and working to the end (independent reading);
- setting out the work that ALL beginning readers need to learn, no matter what their age is;
- teaching students strategies that work, instead of encouraging guessing and other ineffective methods;
- being set up to allow for the different rates at which people can, and want to, progress – slow and steady, or more like a crash course;
- comprehensively covering each layer of English – the alphabet letters, the multiple letter teams, the rule letters, the old letters, and the foreign letters; &
- equipping students so that by the end of the Course, they can read almost anything - even if they can't understand it e.g. a six year old can read the financial pages of the newspaper, but won't be able to understand them.

## This Course is available as an ebook

This Course is set out as a standard, static, A4-sized page PDF ebook that is designed to be read on a desktop/laptop screen, or printed out. It will not work on an ereader or phone screen. This PDF comes in several parts:

- the introduction (the pre-reading work, which is essential for everyone, including tutors);



- the Course sections (the alphabet, the multiple letter teams, the old way of writing some sounds – that are in words we still use, the rule letters, and the foreign letters);
- the introduction (the pre-reading work, which is essential for everyone, including tutors);
- the Course sections (the alphabet, the multiple letter teams, the old way of writing some sounds – that are in words we still use, the rule letters, and the foreign letters);
- a comprehensive index that includes lists of the rules and sounds; &
- the Flashcards and Teaching Aids (most students need to use only a few of these, so don't get carried away by perfectionism – because it's a waste of time).

If your students prefer, you could do all the work on your laptop or desktop screen, rather than printing the pages.

Because this Course is available as an ebook, it's available immediately. If you want a printed version, you will need to do the printing yourself. If you are doing this, you might like to bind the pages.

If you bind the ebook, it's recommend that you do this in 2 parts (Part 1, the lessons themselves – including the Foreign letter lessons; Part 2, the Introduction, Index, Flashcards, & Teaching Aids).

An alternative would be to print the pages, and then place them back to back into plastic envelopes inside 2 lever-arch files, dividing them as above).

Most students who have access to a suitable sized screen find learning on the computer perfectly satisfactory. There are some students who find working from paper far better, for a variety of reasons, so suit yourselves. You could do a mixture of the two – e.g. doing the main lessons on a screen, and the comprehension lessons on paper, or doing the teaching part of the lesson on the computer, and doing the reading of the words on paper, for example.

## Who can be helped by this Course?

This Course is designed to be taught to students who are school age and above – not babies. The student needs to be old enough to think about what is being learnt, not just learn by rote.

The Course is suitable for: a pre-schooler who is ready to begin learning to read, an older child who needs major remedial work, a non-native English speaker who can speak some English and wants to learn to read, your retired parent who now has enough time and energy available to learn to read, or even for yourself if you're not a confident and fluent reader.

If your four or five year old will start school in 6-12 months, and the school's record at teaching reading isn't good, then with this Course you can teach your child to become an independent reader at his or her own speed (a page or two a day is often sufficient for little children).

Be aware that if the child's school has a poor reading record, then it's not using a phonics-based course (or isn't using it properly). This means that your child will be taught conflicting ideas about reading, at school – such as “don't sound out words”.

Instead of placing your child at loggerheads with the teacher, just explain that that is how they learn to read at school, but this is how we learn to read at home.

Older students can often cope with several pages a day. No matter what the student's age, it's best to stop the day's work while they feel they'd like to do a bit more.

You don't need to push or stress – being able to read real words usually provides sufficient motivation to keep students of all ages working through the Course. And rushing through the Course might not leave sufficient time for that student's brain to process what is being taught.

No matter who your student is, if you're wanting rapid progress without gaps in knowledge, then consider this Course.

## Keep in mind with this Course

The things to keep in mind with this Course are:

- students have to start at the beginning, the very beginning;
- you need to follow the instructions; skipping steps will not build a firm foundation; &
- I speak Australian English, so you might need to change a few sounds into your type of English.

## How the Course is Set Out

This Course is set out step-by-step. It includes all the essential pre-reading work. Don't be tempted to skip this, no matter how old your student is, and no matter how much pre-reading stuff he or she has already done. This work is essential to success in this Course.

This Course is cumulative, so that later work builds on earlier work. That means that every student needs to do every step, unless otherwise mentioned in the Course (e.g. there is a section teaching the Alphabet letters in order, and the lowercase and uppercase letters; if your student already knows this work, you are advised to skip this work.

The Course teaches all the essentials; no time is spent messing about with games and other time-wasting activities. There are teaching aids available; it's a good idea to only use the ones your student needs – otherwise you're just wasting time.

The work is all set out. You don't have to invent any work. If students complete a lesson quickly, no additional work is given to them; instead, they go straight on to the next lesson.

Small amounts of reading work are included in the Course, but don't spend time on other reading, because once students know the letter/sound combinations – they will be able to read anything they want, so the goal is to get through the Course as quickly as possible.

## Older Students

Older students, such as teenagers, can progress very rapidly indeed. They could do half an hour or an hour a day. It depends totally on how much time you have, how rapidly they want to progress, and how easily their brain incorporates the new information.

Students who have tried to learn to read in the past can be carrying a lot of emotional baggage. Be patient with them. It's only when they can see that the Course only asks them to sound out and blend using sounds and letters they **have already been taught**, that their confidence will increase.

The problem with students of this age is keeping up with them and keeping them on course, as once they learn some of the work they want to yield to the temptation of reading words which require knowledge they have not yet been taught – doing this leads to failure and loss of confidence.

If students want to do extra-curricular reading, give them single words to read (such as those found in junk mail), make sure that **you** choose the words they read, and that the words you choose comply with the information they have already been taught. Only allow a little of this, as the best use of time is working through the Course.

If these students remain steady, and stick to following the Course to the end, they make amazing students. This is because once they realize that the reason they failed to learn to read in the past was not because they were stupid, but because the course or method used was deficient, they are unstoppable and insatiable. You'll have trouble keeping up with them, so read ahead so you feel confident.

## Warning

Once students get to a certain stage of this Course (which is different for each student, but is usually around the end of the "Rule" section or early in the Foreign section), they will be able to read far more than you expect. So make sure that as soon as you start tutoring, you put safely away anything your student **SHOULD NOT READ**.

## What this Course covers

This Course includes all the sounds, and the letters representing them:

- the Alphabet Sounds;
- the Multiple Letter Sounds (e.g. sh & th);
- the Old Code (e.g. kn & oa);
- the Rule Sounds (e.g. ck & dge); &
- the Foreign Sounds (e.g. eau & ph)

These classifications of sound/letter combinations cover well over 95% of words commonly used in English.

## How long does it take to finish the Course?

This question is difficult to answer, because the answer depends on a number of factors, such as: how regularly you study, how much work you cover in a session, and how closely attention is paid to doing the work during a lesson.

Here are my recommendations:

- work regularly. Five or six days a week is ideal. Every second day would be the minimum I'd recommend;
- do sufficient work in each session to help the students feel they have made progress;
- put in about the same amount of time each session, so students know learning to read won't take over their lives. For very young students, a good goal is about 1 page a day (about 15 minutes). For teenaged and older students you might like to aim for one 60 minute session a day or break it into two 30 minute sessions (two pages in the morning, and two in the evening);

- don't overload students to the degree that they have difficulty remembering what was covered. If they can remember at least 80% of the work, you're on the right track. Don't aim for perfection, it's just a waste of time;
- don't slow the students down unnecessarily. If they'd like to do one more page, and you both have the time and energy to do it, go ahead!

There are about 200 lesson pages in this Course. Young students who complete a page a day for 5 days a week, complete the Course in a school year. Older students who complete 4 pages a day for 5 days a week, complete the Course in about one 10-week school term.

It's not unusual for students to start off slowly, and then speed up as they gain skill and confidence. So the speed you start off with is not an indication of the speed you will be making as you progress further through the Course.

## How Do I Begin?

The easiest way to start is to go to my website, and access the free [How Do I Start Teaching Phonics At Home?](#) ebook.

If you look through it, you will quickly see whether the Course will suit you and your students. If you think it will suit, download it; it covers the How to teach material, and the first part of the Course. If you do that work with your student, you will know whether it suits both of you.

If it does suit both of you, the Course is available through the site.

If my Course doesn't suit you or your student, you will have learnt much more about what you need to look for in a learn-to-read course, and will have learnt other useful information about teaching and learning reading.

## Course: These Courses – What’s Different?

In some ways, my Courses are a bit unusual. This section explains how my Courses are different, and why I've written them this way.

### One skill is taught at a time

The first skill taught in the Reading Course, is Reading Single Words. I've stuck to concentrating on single words, rather than jumping straight into reading sentences, because concentrating on single words has meant that students learn the basics more rapidly.

The very first version of the Course, over 20 years ago, did a lot more reading of sentences right from the start. But when I compared the results of students who read sentences early, and those who read single words while they automated the sound/letter combinations – the single word students became independent readers in half the time!

In addition to reading individual words, students concentrate on automating their knowledge of the sound/letter combinations - so they can look at a letter and automatically say the sound it represents. At its most fundamental level, this is what reading is about.

By the end of the Reading Course, students know about 160 of the most common sound/letter combinations. At that stage, they should be fluent readers of single words.

The second skill taught in the course is Reading Phrases and Sentences. This skill is taught in the Comprehension Lessons. As students learn this skill, their parent or tutor teaches them about the full stops/periods, commas and quotation marks, etc., that they come across in the work.

## Students read real words and real prose

In my Courses, students learn to read real words, and then real prose - rather than 'The rat sat on the mat' type material. If students have to read sentences when they're still learning the basic sound/letter combinations, they're restricted to reading stilted, artificial materials. Small children will tolerate this for a while, but it puts many older people off reading.

There are 3 options when teaching reading:

- 1) Let students read what they're able to sound out, which is very stilted and boring;
- 2) Delay reading until students know many sound/letter combinations, then let them read real stuff; or
- 3) Give students interesting material they can't sound out, and expect them to guess - which is usually what happens in school!

I chose the second option.

## The hardest thing to understand

The thing parents and tutors find most difficult to understand (and I had terrible trouble understanding it, too, when I was training) is that the focus should **NOT** be on teaching the reading of words to the stage where the student can say the WORD automatically.

Students will get to that stage eventually, but don't take the shortcut of teaching Sight Words.



## A detour - No Sight Words!!!

It's important that students are automating the right thing: You're wanting students to automate the sound/letter combinations, not whole words.

Look at it this way: Most adults have a vocabulary of at least 20,000 words. To become an independent reader, a fully-trained phonics student needs to learn sounding out and blending, and about 300 items - the sounds, letters, capital letters, multiple letter teams (e.g. th), the rules, and the punctuation signs.

Once students know the sound/letter combinations for *i*, *n* and *t*, they can read: *in*, *inn*, *it*, *tin*, *nit* and *tint*.

If you teach letter *d*, students can read: *did*, *din*, *dint* and *dit*. Add letter *s*, and they can read: *its*, *sit*, *tints* and *stint*.

Add letter *l* and they can read: *stilts*, *lid*, *till*, *lit*, *lilt*, *sill*, *tilt*, *tilts*, *list*, *lists*, *slit*, *slits*, *still*, *stilt*, *stilts* and *ill*.

So by that stage, the students have learnt just **6** sound/letter combinations (*i*, *n*, *t*, *d*, *s*, and *l*) - and can read 30 words. And to be able to read 20,000+ words, a Phonics-trained student only has to learn 300 items.

In order to read the 30 words listed above, a Whole Word-trained student would have had to learn **30** words. And to read 20,000 words, a Whole Word-trained student would have to learn 20,000 words - which would take years.

I leave you to work out whether Whole Word or Phonics is easier to learn.

## Back to - The hardest thing to understand

Instead of focusing on automating the reading of whole words, my Courses focus on linking the sound students say, to the letter they see. When students have automated this skill, they begin to read the letters off the page.

Students can get to the stage where they sound out so fluently that it sounds as though they're saying the word automatically - but they're not. They're paying attention to every letter and sounding each letter out so quickly and easily that they read each word smoothly.

It takes quite a lot of work for most people to get to this stage. So be patient.

Ideally, I like students to have reached this level by the end of the *Reading Course*. Most students will manage this.

If you have a student who is still sounding out when they finish the Course, practice the sound/letter combinations several times daily, and let the student re-read words and short sentences or poetry to become more fluent.

Fluency is crucial to being able to read at a speed that is fast enough for students to remember the beginning of the sentence by the time they get to the end! And it's essential for them to retain the meaning of the beginning of a paragraph by the time they get to the end.

I have come across a few people (who probably would have been labelled dyslexic - and unable to learn to read) who sounded out each word before saying it. And worked their way through sentences this way. But they still understood the meaning of what they were reading.

Perhaps there was a bit of a disconnect between the piece of the brain that linked the letter to the memorised sound . They couldn't link the letter and the sound silently, so they had to say the sounds aloud individually in order to access the word and its meaning.

But these problems didn't stop them going on to university - they just didn't read in public. And they tended to read everything two or three times, but so does my extremely clever lawyer.

Once students get to the stage of reading single words more or less fluently, the brain recognises the word that's just been spoken - and automatically supplies the meaning.

To make sure your student is comprehending what he or she is reading, for a very BRIEF moment, two or three times a day, ask your student to use an **easy** word, in a sentence they make up for themselves.

I say BRIEF because there are students who will take the opportunity to take up a lot of time - often to avoid doing the hard work of learning to read. Requiring students to re-use a **few** easy words means they will pay more attention to the meaning of what they read. This will help with Reading Comprehension.

## The fourth skill - Reading Comprehension

Once students move on to reading phrases and sentences, it becomes even more important to check that they understand what they're reading. Sometimes, you won't need to ask, because they'll find something funny, or disagree with what they've read - and say so.

I recommend students who are beginning to read fluently read easy children's poetry, especially the repetitive poems, which may be tedious for you, but the repetition helps develop reading fluency.

There are additional advantages of teaching fluency through reading poetry:

- Poems are easy to memorise, so many students like to re-read them *ad nauseam*. But, again, be patient. Fluency is only gained by practice, practice, and more practice.

- And it's a lot more entertaining for the student to read children's poetry (or jokes) over and over again, than it is to read prose repeatedly. (If they like, they can read aloud in an exaggerated manner - which is funny, and encourages clear diction and expressive reading, which you will be wanting in time.);
- The rhythm of poetry encourages students to learn to read faster, so they don't 'miss a beat';
- Reading poetry automates the reading of common 'weird words' such as *you* and *could*. Students find it much easier to learn these words in 'predictive text' (text where they know the word that will appear), rather than having to learn the words by rote out of context; and
- Poems help students enlarge their vocabulary. This is a huge issue when learning to read, as written material is often much more formal and structured than spoken material.

## Material in these Courses is marked

One problem with English is that we spell a number of **sounds** in more than one way. For example: the first sound in the word **up**, is written in different ways in the following words: **away**, **mother**, **touch**, and **must**.

And some **letters** represent several different sounds e.g. letter o represents different sounds in the words: **Todd**, **go**, **to**, and **mother**.

In order to avoid confusing students, I mark letters so students can tell which sound is being represented. As sensible as this sounds, it can cause a couple of problems.

The first problem is that I speak Australian English. This means that there will be some words I pronounce one way, and you pronounce another. If your student is working from a printed page, you can just change the marking; you will find that very easy to do. Or, you could let your students entertain themselves by speaking 'Strine' (slang for the Australian accent).

The second problem is that material 'in the real world' is not marked. I encourage students to complete the Course as rapidly as they can, and then to start reading single words (e.g. in junk mail), and move on to longer material as soon as they are able.

If possible, let students mark words they read, so that they can re-read the material (once or twice) with confidence. This will help with fluency.

## Guessing

A problem that many of you will be struggling with is that your students guess! Having someone randomly guess is maddening, I know. But try to keep in mind that most students have been told that guessing is how you read! Just tell them that guessing isn't how you read at all! In fact, guessing is the one thing that is definitely NOT reading.

While some teachers won't say outright that they want the students to guess, they say things like, "Don't sound the word out! Just look at it and say it!" or "Think what word would make sense here, and just say it!" If that isn't encouraging students to guess, I don't know what is. And guessing is students' interpretation of the instruction, too.

And, you know what? Most students don't even mind sounding out once they realise there is a real link between what they see on the page, and the sound they have to say. This is because it's easier to learn to read using Phonics than guessing. And sounding out is nowhere near as stressful as having to invent stuff by guessing.

So, yes. My Courses are different. They are designed to solve the following problems:

- having to learn too many different skills at once;
- information overload for tutor and student;
- guessing instead of reading;
- endless memory work that is difficult to remember, because it doesn't make sense;
- insufficient practice (ie. not being able to say the correct sound at least 80% of the time); &
- things not making sense. I must admit that some of my explanations about the history of a word annoy linguists, but they are sufficient to help students remember why we pronounce or spell a weird word the way we do. And that's what's important.

## Rote Learning

A number of people object outright to rote learning; this is a mistake. In many fields of learning, it's necessary, to spend some learning time on rote learning – even if this is purely to ensure effective use of teaching time.

But for some types of information, rote learning is the BEST way to learn. This is so for the very basics of sound/letter learning, because rote learning makes it possible to learn the essential information in minutes.

With rote learning sound/letter combinations can be learnt to “mastery” level (80% accuracy), in a few minutes. This means that students rapidly learn that:

- s represents /s/\*;
- t represents /t/;
- i represents /i/' and
- n represents /n/,

so they can sound out, blend, and read the words: *its*, *sit*, *tints*, and *stint* within days of beginning to learn to read. And it only gets better from there, because they learn at least one new sound/letter combination in each lesson.

\*A letter between slash marks means the sound of the letter e.g. /d/ is the first sound in the word *dog*.

The only alternatives to rote learning are: the “discovery” method (where students must work out for themselves which sound is represented by which letter), or the Whole Word method (where the same word is read repeatedly in slightly different sentences until it's recognized by sight).

## Conclusion

Now that you've learnt more about the Teach Reading at Home Course, have a look at the other free ebooks, such as the How Do I Start Teaching Phonics at Home? ebook, at:

[www.teachreadingathome.com](http://www.teachreadingathome.com)