StepsWeb Literacy Course

Stage 1 Course Notes

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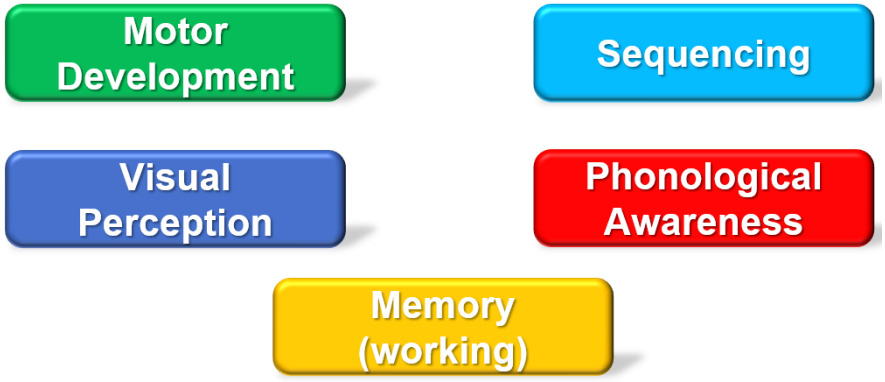
Background Theory

The Big Five

Dyslexic learners often exhibit difficulties (or signs of a residual difficulty) in each of these areas, which is why we often refer to them as **'The Big Five'**. However, many other learners, including those in the 'slow learner' category have similar weaknesses.

Therefore, any approach which addresses these difficulties is relevant to both dyslexics and other learners with processing weaknesses.



Memory Quote: Non-impaired readers only need 4-10 exposures to a word. Dyslexic learners may need 500 – 1300. *Bateman, B (1991)*

Three phases of literacy development

Logographic Phase
Basic sight vocabulary – high frequency words, or words with special significance
Words recognised holistically – from overall shape, not decoded
Similar looking words confused
No understanding of sound/letter correspondence

Alphabetic Phase
Recognition of sound/letter correspondence
Decoding and encoding take place
Phonic knowledge used
Learner can spell simple, regular words
Errors are phonetic (coff/cough)
Lack of sophisticated knowledge of word structure
Reading slow and laboured – limited fluency. Decoding main strategy

Orthographic Phase
Rapid whole word recognition – holistic
Words become sight vocabulary
Understands sophisticated spelling patterns
Reading fluency achieved – recognises words holistically

Frith (1985)

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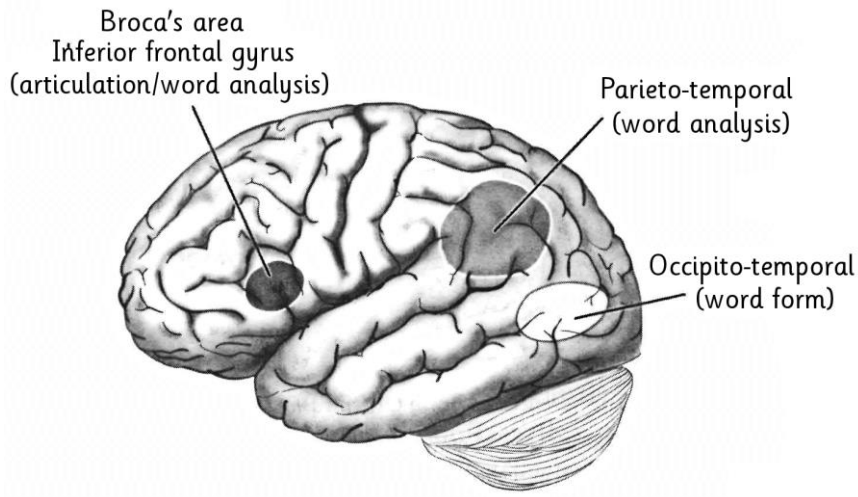
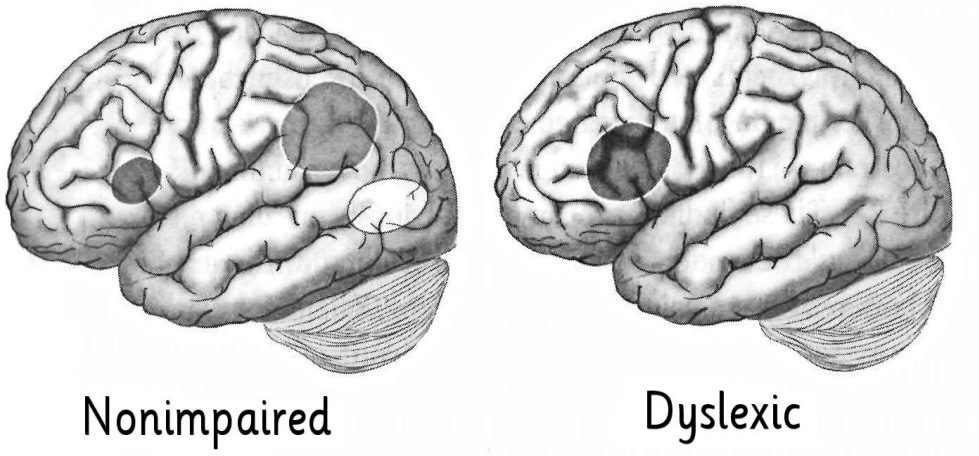
Neurological processes in reading

Non-impaired Reader (normal reader)



Impaired Reader (Dyslexic or similar)



Illustrations from 'Overcoming Dyslexia' by Sally Shaywitz

Dyslexic learners have an impaired occipito-temporal (word form area).

They therefore over-rely on the wrong areas, particularly Broca's area.

Broca's area therefore develops as instruction progresses:

- Wrong strategies being employed
- Wrong areas being developed

Consequence: Reading fluency never develops correctly!

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Teaching Implications

Teachers need to:

- Practise and develop word analysis strategies.
- Provide the right activities/practice to transfer the word into the occipito-temporal

In other words: Make the word into sight vocabulary

How?

There are a number of activities which will help. Some of the most effective are below:

- Speed reading exercise (in StepsWeb workbooks)
- Sight vocabulary games (Stargame is particularly effective)
- Word Flash activity
- Targeted reading practice – geared towards developing reading fluency, not decoding ability!

What is targeted reading practice?

The targeted reading practice referred to here is reading practice which is specifically designed to develop instant visual recognition, sight vocabulary and reading fluency (rather than to develop decoding skills).

There are a number of possible activities:

- Reading at slightly below the current level of the learner's ability, i.e. at a level where most of the words are within the learner's existing sight vocabulary and he/she has to do very limited decoding. *Caution: by definition, this can be boring and demotivating because it is below the learner's intellectual level. This type of reading should therefore be limited to a very small amount. The teacher can explain to the learner that they are going to do a very small amount of this kind of reading practice just to develop speed and confidence.*

- Shared or supported reading. There are several ways of doing this, but generally shared reading involves reading a text together, with emphasis on reading for expression and meaning. The teacher may read the text to the learner first, with the learner following the text. Then the learner has a go.

- Prepared reading. The teacher can enter the relevant key vocabulary or difficult words into Steps so that the learner can become familiar with them before reading the book or passage. In this way, the learner is not required to decode and can concentrate on the meaning.

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The StepsWeb Literacy Course

Key Points

- Highly specialist approach which can be used by non-specialists
- Caters for all learners aged 6 – adult
- Suitable for individual or small-group use as well as whole-school
- Highly effective (see Case Studies)
- Develops processing/perceptual skills, memory and cognitive efficiency, as well as the language/literacy aspects
- Strong emphasis on language development, including vocabulary, comprehension & verbal reasoning
- Suitable for ESOL learners
- Log in on any device, from any location, including home
- Workbooks available for remedial learners

Notes

The StepsWeb Course is not intended to cover every aspect of the literacy curriculum. It is important to include plenty of extra reading practice, free writing activities and oral activities. Learners with severe difficulties would also benefit from additional word family work, which can be provided by StepsWeb, or supplementary manuals. However, care should be taken not to overload learners.

If a learner is following the StepsWeb Course, he or she should not also have class spelling lists. By definition, a standard class spelling list is likely to be too difficult for a remedial learner anyway. In addition, following effectively two different progressions will overload learners (particularly those who were struggling anyway).

Note: Remedial learners need to be using the workbooks, as well as the online/software activities. Learners with higher needs will benefit from the hands-on game activities as well.

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Course Components

Steps provides a three-strand approach consisting of:

- **StepsWeb and/or Steps Network**
- **Workbook courses (StepsWeb A – F and 1 - 6)**
- **Hands-on game/activity materials (Schools Resource Pack)**

If used for whole-school activities, learners do not need the workbook materials (although some schools choose to use the workbooks for entire classes). However, remedial learners definitely need the workbooks and ideally the hands-on activities. The Steps software programme can also be used to reinforce other teaching materials/courses.

Research shows that, for learners with remedial needs, learning gained only by computer is not transferred. These learners need all aspects.

The lower the level of literacy, the more important it is to include the hands-on game/activity materials. In the beginning stages, most of the 'active' teaching can and should be done using these materials. The computer and workbook activities are intended to reinforce the teaching.

Every learner who is using the workbook courses needs his/her own workbook. Workbooks are not photocopiable! There are also hundreds of printable worksheets from Steps and StepsWeb.

Workbook Resources

The remedial literacy courses are based on individual learner workbooks. There are currently two levels.

Note: SA = Spelling Age RA = Reading Age.

Workbooks A - F		**Workbooks 1 - 6**	
Below SA 7:6		SA 7:0 to SA 11:0 +	
Workbook A	< SA 6:0	Workbook 1	SA 7:6 – 8:0
Workbook B	SA 6:0 – 7:0	Workbook 2	SA 8:0 – 9:0
Workbook C	SA 6:0 – 7:0	Workbook 3	SA 9:0 – 10:0
Workbook D	SA 6:6 – 7:6	Workbook 4	SA 10:0 +
Workbook E	SA 6:6 – 7:6	Workbook 5	SA 10:0 +
Workbook F	SA 6:6 – 7:6	Workbook 6	SA 10:0 +

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In practice, you are likely to find that there is some overlap between Workbooks D – F and the higher level Workbook 1. This is intentional. Most learners in this category will benefit from re-capping common phonic patterns. Also, theskills required at the Workbooks 1 – 6 Level are more advanced and include proof-reading and dictation.

Supporting Materials

A variety of game and activity materials are available. The **Schools Resource Pack** contains extensive game and activity materials, including a set of 6 wipe-clean gameboards which provide additional variety. This set of materials is designed to support any literacy teaching approach or materials.

Additional teaching resources and materials can be printed from the Support Site.

What resources are available to help me to learn how to use the courses?

There is a Teacher Manual, which covers both levels (A – F and 1 – 6). This will show you how to teach each aspect of the courses.

There is a Teaching Guide for Workbooks A – F and another for 1 – 6. These give practical teaching guidance, the answers and dictation sentences. They are intended to provide handy reference during lessons.

StepsWeb has a **Support Site**, which has tutorials, videos, free teaching resources and reference information.

Choosing the right starting point

We recommend using the Spelling Age, rather than the Reading Age, to place a learner on the right level. This is because many dyslexic-type learners read at a much higher level than they spell – mainly because they use the context to help. In these cases, the spelling age is a better indicator of what the learner actually understands about text.

You can choose the starting point in several ways:

- Do a written spelling test and manually place the learner at the right level
- Use the Spelling Test (Schonell) on Steps (software version)
- Use the Placement Test on StepsWeb

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The Spelling Test on Steps and Placement Test will automatically put the learner onto the right level. This can be adjusted by the teacher if necessary.

The above levels are meant as guidelines only. There will be some discretion needed if a learner is borderline. If the teacher feels that this learner is an able learner who will make quite quick progress, he/she is likely to put the learner on the recommended level. If, on the other hand, the learner is likely to make slow progress or has major confidence issues, it may be more appropriate to start the learner one level lower. If in doubt, it is always better to start a little too low but progress quickly and easily, than to start too high and to struggle. Consolidation at lower levels is always valuable, particularly with learners who have processing difficulties.

You can also use the Reading Age to determine whether to go up or down for borderline learners. See the following examples:

Learner with SA 7:6 and RA 8:2 Start with Workbook 1

Learner with SA 7:6 and RA 6:5 Start with Workbook D

Difference between Spelling Test (Steps software) and Placement Test (StepsWeb)

Spelling Test (Steps)	Placement Test (StepsWeb)
Gives spelling age Suitable for re-test to evaluate progress Printable	Analyses learner's knowledge of spelling patterns Doesn't give spelling age Not suitable for re-test Printable

Note: For learners with lower literacy levels, the Placement Test is generally an accurate placement. However, with higher-level learners, there is a possibility that they may be placed too low because the Placement Test identifies some gaps in their knowledge. A teacher may choose to manually adjust the learner's position and fill the gaps in another way.

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Teaching Principles

Detailed teaching notes for the workbook courses are contained in the Teacher Manuals. The Steps Manual covers using the software. However, there are a few key points which are worth a special mention:

- Learners can be taught in a small-group situation (2-6, depending on needs), but *must* be allowed to progress at their own individual rate. To do this, it is essential that there is a computer, laptop or device available for each learner.

  The teacher can be working 1:1 with one learner while others are working at an appropriate level individually on computers or doing individual written work. Don't teach the whole group together (although you can play games together if their literacy levels are similar). Teach individually, but in a group setting.

- One of the biggest problems with this category of learner is the amount of reinforcement which is required. This varies hugely from learner to learner. Keep going back and re-checking previous work and, if necessary, re-teaching it. Don't leave gaps!

Summary of Key Principles

- ❖ Remedial learners taught individually within group setting
- ❖ Each learner progresses at their own rate
- ❖ Continual re-checking, reinforcement – circular progression
- ❖ Remedial learners need the 'transfer' of doing written work as well as the computer activities
- ❖ Each learner needs his/her own workbook and a computer/laptop/device to work on
- ❖ **Steps does not replace teaching! It is intended to reinforce good teaching.**

Do

- ❖ Keep checking retention – circular progression!
- ❖ Provide enough 'teaching time' for each learner
- ❖ Use the computer activities as teaching tools – ensure learners know what they're expected to do for each activity
- ❖ Monitor computer activities/results

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Don't

- Expect the computer to replace a teacher
- Expect learners with moderate – severe needs to progress with only computer activities
- Expect a teacher/teacher aide to work with too big a group
- Expect a remedial literacy learner to cope with class spellings as well
- Water down the programme!

Consider

- Showing parents how to reinforce at home (Assigned Work feature)
- Arranging for the learner to do some of the computer reinforcement in class time, if possible
- Setting homework activities over the summer holidays for high-need learners. These learners need continuity and can fall back dramatically over the long holiday breaks. Even one wordlist per week can stop this. There are suggested wordlists for every level on the Support Site.

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Guidelines for teaching time per week

It is not realistic to expect a learner with moderate – severe learning needs to make progress with less than a minimum of 1 full hour of *active* 1:1 teaching per week. This needs to be reinforced with a minimum of 1 full hour of computer reinforcement per week, plus hands-on game-type activities, which can be in a group.

This can be achieved in various ways, but it is extremely difficult to include all the teaching elements in a session which is too short. See the following recommendations:

No of learners	Minimum session length	Total teaching time per learner	Recommended sessions per week
Individual learner	30 minutes	1 hour teaching + 1 hour computer + 30 minutes games	5 x 30 mins OR 4 x 40 mins OR 3 x 50 mins
Two learners	40 minutes	1 hour teaching + 1 hour computer + 30 minutes games	4 x 40 mins OR 3 x 50 mins
Three learners	50 minutes	1 hour teaching + 2 hours computer + 30 minutes game	5 x 50 mins OR 4 x 60 mins

Remember that one of the main things which goes wrong in the school system is that teachers underestimate quite how much remediation some of these children need. It makes more sense to 'front load' remediation and get them up to standard relatively quickly, than to 'trickle-feed' throughout their primary school years.

Notes:

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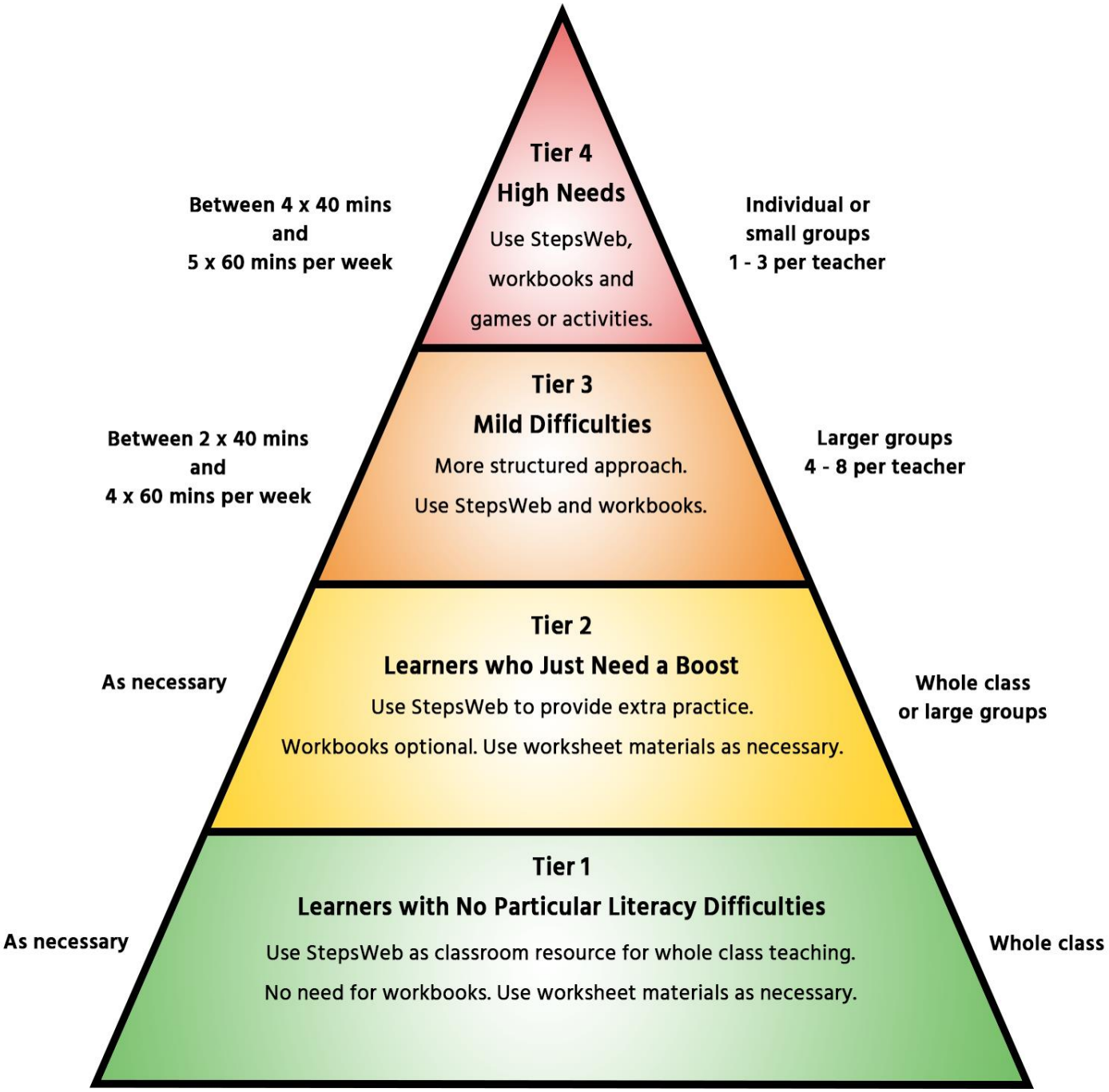
Steps – the Four-Tier Model



StepsWeb.com

The times given are based on achieving progress as quickly as possible. It is certainly possible to manage with less time, but many learners will not make such satisfactory progress.

If time with a teacher/teacher aide is limited, consider providing extra reinforcement in class or at home. Work can be set on StepsWeb using the Assigned Work function.

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Sample Teaching Plans

Two learners. Three 50-minute sessions per week

- Teacher-led activity

Session 1		
Mins	**Learner 1**	**Learner 2**
10-15	Word Race	Computer – Steps
10	Steps – practice own list	Work with teacher
10	Rhyme Game, followed by initial, final and medial sound activity	
10	Work with teacher	Computer - Steps
5-10	Memory game/activity	

Session 2		
Mins	**Learner 1**	**Learner 2**
10-15	Computer - Steps	Word Race
10	Work with teacher	Steps – practice own list
10	Phonics or language game	
10	Work with teacher	Computer - Steps
5-10	Perceptual game/activity	

Session 3		
Mins	**Learner 1**	**Learner 2**
10-15	Computer - Steps	Work with teacher
10	Work with teacher	Computer - Steps
10	Phonics or language game	
10	Group or individual work with teacher	
5-10	Perceptual game/activity	

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Three learners. Four 60-minute sessions per week

- Teacher-led activity

Session 1			
Mins	**Learner 1**	**Learner 2**	**Learner 3**
10-15	Word Race	Computer – Steps	Computer – Steps
5-10	Steps/workbook activity	Work with teacher	Steps/workbook activity
10	Rhyme Game, followed by initial, final and medial sound activity		
10-15	Steps/workbook activity	Steps/workbook activity	Work with teacher
5-10	Memory game/activity (if time permits)		

Session 2			
Mins	**Learner 1**	**Learner 2**	**Learner 3**
10-15	Computer – Steps	Word Race	Computer – Steps
5-10	Steps/workbook	Steps/workbook	Work with teacher
10	Vowel Ladder Game (sample game) followed by short memory activity		
10-15	Work with teacher	Steps/workbook	Steps/workbook
5-10	Memory game/activity (if time permits)		

Session 3			
Mins	**Learner 1**	**Learner 2**	**Learner 3**
10-15	Computer – Steps	Computer - Steps	Word Race
5-10	Work with teacher	Steps/workbook	Steps/workbook
10	Listening Skills activity, e.g. listening to story or passage, then discussing and answering questions – whole group activity.		
10-15	Steps/workbook activity	Work with teacher	Steps/workbook activity
5-10	Vocabulary/language game (if time permits)		

Session 4			
Mins	**Learner 1**	**Learner 2**	**Learner 3**
10	Work with teacher	Computer – Steps	Computer – Steps
10	Steps/workbook	Work with teacher	Steps/workbook
20	Language activity or game		
10	Steps/workbook activity	Steps/workbook activity	Work with teacher
10	Visual perception game/activity (if time permits)		

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Organisational requirements

Quiet room with no distractions

Teaching table in centre – ideally round or oval (better for games)

Computer for each learner

Headphones for each learner – ideally 'earmuff' type

Plug-in microphone for recording new words – not often used

Easy access to printer is ideal – can print off worksheets/homework

Note: Seat the teacher so they can just glance up from the learner they are working with and monitor what the learners on computers are doing!

Additional resources

Essential for maximum effectiveness: Selection of hands-on game materials, including Schools Resource Pack and Stargame resources

Very beneficial: Range of additional hands-on games. Screening tests. Info and suggestions are available on the Support Site.

How to get started

Resourcing

- Steps software licence or StepsWeb logins.
- Teacher Manual plus Teaching Guide for each level of the course. – consider the Combined Starter Pack, which also includes one of each workbook, which most schools keep as a 'reference' pack.
- Schools Resource Pack (if working with learners with reading/spelling ages of below 10 years).

Process

- Test each remedial learner using the Schonell spelling test on Steps, the Placement Test or your preferred spelling test.
- Use the spelling age (and background knowledge of the learner) to establish starting point. Ring us for guidance if necessary.
- Order workbooks for each remedial learner.

General

- Start with small groups until you have established a good routine and are familiar with the materials. Ideally, maximum of two moderate-high need learners at a time. Maximum of four learners with mild needs.

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3,3,3 Method

This is a highly effective method for teaching and then reinforcing individual words. It can be used for high frequency words, irregular words or words of particular significance to that learner.

To teach the words, you will just need a supply of rough paper (one clear side) and a pencil/pen. Then you will need the Word Race pages in the back of each workbook.

The process below is intended to be used only once per week (regardless of how many times you actually work with each learner).

Use the 'Individual Word List' sheets at the back of each workbook to record words which need to be taught. Ideally, these should come from the learner's own work. Go through his school books and list those words he is currently struggling with. Then identify no more than 1-5 words per week to teach, using this method.

- Ask the learner to have a go at the word, writing it on a piece of rough paper. Encourage him to be aware of the sounds and try to work it out.

- Write the correct version by his version clearly and in fairly large letters (always lower case). Using colour can sometimes help. Be careful to praise all the correct letters and point out when his attempt is phonically logical, even if it wasn't correct – it shows he is developing the right skills.

- Discuss what he finds the 'difficult bit' of the word. If possible, find a mnemonic to help him remember that bit.

- Now cover up his version and only look at yours. The reason for this and for writing the word in lower case letters is that you are building a visual memory of the word and you want it to be the right one!

  Concentrating on the correct version is the first step to building a visual memory of that word.

- Get the learner to spell the word out loud while looking at the letters – pointing if necessary. Do this until he has done it correctly **three times**.

  Spelling the word out loud builds an auditory memory for the spelling. There is also an element of kinaesthetic memory (memory for movement), because there is movement involved in articulating the sounds. He is, of course, also still looking at the word, which reinforces visual memory.

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- Cover the word and ask him to spell it to you again, this time without looking. If there is any problem, go back a stage and look at the word. Do not go on until he has spelled the word correctly three times without looking.

  He is still building auditory and kinaesthetic memories for the word. Although he cannot see it, he is having to visualize the word, which is still reinforcing visual memory.

- Let him look at the word again. Ask him to visualize the word in his mind. You can ask him to 'take a picture with your mind'. Then get him to close his eyes and see if he can still see it. It doesn't matter too much if he can or not (although this skill can be developed). It's the process that's the most important thing.

  This aspect is crucial in reinforcing visual memory, but also helps to develop the skill of visualization, which is usually very weak in learners with literacy difficulties. This skill can be developed separately as well.

- Cover the word again and ask him to write it, saying the letters out loud as he does it. Do this until he has done it **three times** correctly. If necessary, go back to previous steps and repeat them.

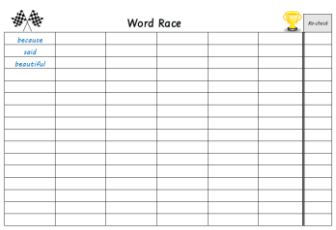
  This final stage reinforces all three aspects of memory. Kinaesthetic memory is strengthened by practicing the movement involved in writing the word, as well as by saying the letters.

Word Race

The **WORD RACE** sheet is an extremely effective method for providing reinforcement for the irregular/high-frequency words taught by the 3, 3, 3 Method.

- When the word has been taught using the above method, the learner writes it into the first column of the Word Race sheet. He should be able to write it independently, with no copying, by this stage. If not, re-teach it!

- Any other words taught at the same time should be entered into the left-hand column in the same way.



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Next session

The next time you work with the learner, you will test all the words on the 'Word Race' sheet without him having seen them first.

If the word is written correctly (on rough paper), it can be entered into the next column along.

The learner only writes words he got correct first time into the next column. If he didn't get a word right first time, just go through 3,3,3 again.

These words don't need to be re-tested any more.

Once the word reaches the final column of the page, it is **'at the finishing line'** – and should now have been learned! You don't need to test that word regularly any more, although it is a good idea to go back occasionally and just check previous words. You will always find one or two that have been forgotten.

Just go through the whole process (including 3, 3, 3) again and enter it into 'Word Race' again. That's quite natural. Some words stick better than others.

Principles

- Only do this process once per week per learner.
- Teach a maximum of 5 words each week (probably only 2-4 words for most learners).
- **The learner must spell the word out loud *every* time it's written.**
- The learner writes the words into Word Race – you don't need the practice!
- Always cover the word first, before the learner writes it. Copying is never allowed!

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Summary of 3,3,3 Process

Week 1

- Teach 3-4 words using 3,3,3 method
- Learner writes those words into first column (always spelling them out loud)

Week 2

- Test previous words (Column 1)
- Write words into column 2 of Word Race (if correct first time)
- Go through 3,3,3 again with words not correct first time (don't enter into column 2)
- Teach 3-4 new words using 3,3,3
- Write new words into first column (spelling out loud!)

Week 3

- Test all previous words
- Write correct words into next column of Word Race
- Re-teach any words not correct first time
- Teach 3-4 new words using 3,3,3
- Write new words into first column

Once the first page of Word Race is completed, it's a good idea to go back and re-test a few words at a time, just to check longer-term retention. That's what the final column is for. If there is any hesitation (or error), just re-teach that word using 3,3,3 and re-enter it into Word Race.

Don't forget – the learner spells the words out loud every time he write

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Whole-class Options

Steps can also be used as general curriculum support, for ESOL, for Māori/Pasifika learners or as a structured literacy scheme in its own right.

Literacy course option

Every learner in the school can be logged into Steps or StepsWeb, working at his or her own level, at his/her own pace. The teacher can choose to use any of the following:

- Courses option
- High Frequency words
- Commonly Mis-spelled words
- Customized course

These options provide a logical, structured progression, although the Courses Option is the most comprehensive because it incorporates high frequency words, spelling patterns, word families, common words (days, months, etc) and key grammar points.

There are lots of advantages to using the Courses option. All learners in the class/school are tested and placed on the right level of the Courses. All learners do the computer/online activities, reinforced where necessary by printable worksheets from Steps/StepsWeb itself. Only those learners in the remedial category need to be on the workbooks as well.

The advantages of this are:

- Each learner works at the correct level and pace
- Steps automatically analyses the learners' errors and provides individualized revision activities
- Steps provides printable worksheets which can be used for homework/written classwork
- Steps provides the teacher with a summary sheet each week, month or term, which gives the level and accuracy rating for each pupil in that class
- Full pupil records are provided for each learner

Curriculum Support option

The class teacher can use Steps to teach subject or topic vocabulary, including words, sentences and definitions. Advantages are:

- Steps can provide extra reinforcement for those who need it
- The teacher can use Steps to generate subject/topic worksheets
- The teacher can 'pre-teach' topic or subject vocabulary