

How to Use this Programme

For this programme to be most effective it should be worked on at least three times each week with each session lasting between 15 to 20 minutes.

It is possible for a student to complete some of the exercises alone, possibly as homework. However, all sheets do need to be checked by an adult preferably when the student is present so they can read through what they have done.

At the beginning of each of the 6 main sections of this programme help notes are given to explain to the student and adult what they will be doing, what sounds they will be working on and strategies and ideas to be aware of. It is strongly recommended that each of these help notes is carefully read before the relevant section is attempted.

This programme is aimed at improving both spelling and reading skills by giving structure and some degree of certainty to the user.

There are various basic concepts behind this programme which are referred to and used throughout. These concepts need to be understood before a student can begin working through the programme. They are:

- **Spelling:** Spelling is about sound. The letters we use simply reflect the sound we want to make. In the past, spelling has been all about letters and rules. For those people who find spelling difficult this old approach has already failed.
- **Onset:** All words have an Onset, that being, letters which come before the initial vowel sound. Some words have a no letter Onset e.g. and, each, initial, octagon and umbrella. No word has more than three letters as an Onset. In a word such as psychology the "y" becomes a vowel. Onsets are taught in this programme.
- **Beats:** All beats or syllables of a word must contain a vowel sound. This programme teaches 19 vowel sounds. To write using the beats the word **gaining** becomes **gain-ing** or **gai-ning** depending on preference. The word is basically split up by sound, it is important therefore that the student speaks as clearly as possible. The only rules for breaking words into beats are:
 1. Each beat must contain a vowel sound.
 2. Each beat must be readable.
 3. An Onset cannot be a complete beat on its own as it does not have a vowel section.
- **Vowel sounds:** All vowel sounds must begin with a vowel letter, but may contain up to 4 letters. They are referred to as:
 - ❑ **Singles**- one letter making one vowel sound e.g. pat, bug, and trip.
 - ❑ **Doubles**- two letters making one vowel sound e.g. team, boat, and spoon.
 - ❑ **Triples**- three letters making one vowel sound e.g. light, core, and fair.
 - ❑ **Blocks**- four letters making one vowel sound e.g. sleigh, through, and bough.
 - ❑ **Gap vowels** - two letters making one vowel sound but with another letter between them e.g. make, note, and cube.

For most poor spellers and readers problems exist with vowel sounds, consonant sounds are generally much easier to learn and are more consistent. The vowel letter "a" can on its own make various sounds e.g. **ant**, **table**, **want**, **bath** and **tuna**, whereas the consonant letter "b" makes only one sound e.g. **big**.

The Catchall Sound "Short er"

The catchall sound is referred to throughout this programme. It is a sound that the vowel letters can sometimes make either individually or in combinations. The sound is best described as a very short er.

Sometimes this vowel sound is used simply because a speaker is not clear in his/her pronunciation e.g. because, happily, capable and defend. Usually this sound is debatable with one speaker using the catchall sound and another using a more specific/accurate vowel sound.

Often this vowel sound comes at the end of words e.g. manor, better, pillar and ladder, here it is more accurately used.

This **short er** is different from the vowel sound **er** as in the cue word **her** e.g. burn, word, fern and bird. This sound is longer and more easily identified.

When a word containing a catchall sound is found it should be pointed out to the student and some explanation given. It might be that the student has identified the sound correctly and that it is a catchall sound, or it might be that their pronunciation of the word in question could be made more accurately. It is really up to the adult and student to decide how best to resolve the situation.

The final card of the cue cards can be used to help decide which letter or letters may be making the catchall sound.

This programme thus assumes that the student using it knows the basic letter sounds, especially those of the consonants, if they do not they must be taught first.

Work then focuses on the vowel sounds and attempts to teach the common spellings of each sound. This programme also assumes that the student is motivated enough to attempt to use the skills it teaches in situations other than when simply using the programme itself.

The first exercises in this programme involve identifying the Onset of given words, please read the section titled **Onsets how to find them and how to use them**, before attempting this section.

Sections 2, 3, 5 and 6 are the main parts of the programme and work in the same way as each other. Each vowel sound is targeted individually with 5 different worksheets, however, there are 4 vowel sounds for which there are only 4 worksheets. This is because these sounds are simple to spell and do not have unusual spellings associated with them.

Sections 2, 3, 5 and 6 work like this:

- **Sheet 1** consists a column of 14 words (given words) each of which has the same vowel sound made in the most common ways. This list of words has the letters making the relevant vowel sound (the vowel section) underlined.
- The next column asks for the cue word, that is the word that leads the student to a particular vowel sound. The cue word is found at the top of the page and is also the word at the top of the vowel cue fan. This word should be written as clearly and consistently as possible.
- The third column asks for the spelling choice. With the cue word **rain**, the spelling choices will be **ai**, **a-e** or **ay**.
- Column four asks 'What is it?' This means is the spelling choice a single, double, triple, block or gap vowel.

- The final column asks 'How many beats?' That means how many beats or syllables in the given word. Every beat is a vowel sound, so in a word such as gaining there are two. Note that words which end in **ed** do cause some difficulty because of the different ways that this combination of letters can be pronounced e.g. potted, walked and banned. A general rule is that if a word has an **ed** ending that **ed** must be counted as a beat even if it is not always clearly heard as such.
- **Sheet 2** is completed in the same way as sheet 1, only the vowel sections are not underlined in the given words.
- **Sheet 3** consists of nonsense words and show whether the student has mastered the skill or not. It is completed in the same way as the other two sheets except for the last column. This time the given word is rewritten using the beats e.g. **gaining** becomes **gain-ing** or **gai-ning** depending on preference. The only rules for breaking words into beats are:
 - ❑ Each beat must contain a vowel sound.
 - ❑ Each beat must be readable.
 - ❑ An Onset cannot be a complete beat on its own as it does not have a vowel section.
- **Sheet 4** is completed in the same way as sheets 1 and 2, however this sheet concentrates on the more unusual ways of making the vowel sound. With the cue word **RAIN** the spelling choices are now **ea, a, ey, eigh** and **ei**. Please note that this sheet is missing from 4 vowel sounds as they do not have any unusual spellings.
- **Sheet 5** is where the student gets to use the knowledge they have gained. This sheet consists of a short extract containing many words, which share the targeted vowel sound; most of the words will already have been practised on sheets 1,2 and 4. Note that each Sheet 5 gets progressively more difficult and may well contain words from vowel sounds practised previously. To work through the Sheet 5 the student needs to:
 1. Read through the text aloud and carefully.
 2. Read through again and highlight any word, which contains the targeted vowel sound.
 3. Rewrite the highlighted words using the beats.
- This part of the programme allows the student to practise handwriting, reading and spelling and gives them structure to guide them in the future. The system is flexible so that a student could practise working on a given sound by using a paragraph from a fiction book as if it was Sheet 5.

Examples of how to complete Sheets 1 to 5 are given at the end of the programme and can be referred to at any time to help clear up any problem areas.