



Zimbabwe  
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

# LITERACY



## IGATE Module 1

Single letter sounds and  
first steps in writing



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Revised Module 1 (MoPSE)



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# Foundational literacy

## Module 1: Single letter sounds and first steps in writing

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## About these modules

This is the first of six Teacher Professional Development (TPD) modules for all teachers working with learners whose attainment in literacy is below their Grade or Form level. The modules are also appropriate for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) – particularly during school placements or practicum.

**Module 1:** Single letters sounds and first steps in writing

**Module 2:** The sounds of letter pairs/threes and ‘tricky spellings’

**Module 3:** Assessment and more on reading/writing words

**Module 4:** From longer words to short sentences

**Module 5:** Comprehension of short texts

**Module 6:** Working with longer texts / Review

The modules were collaboratively developed for the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) by The Open University, World Vision, and CARE international. The modules have been tried and tested in hundreds of primary and secondary schools across Zimbabwe, strengthening the teaching of foundation skills and improving learning outcomes. Our thanks to everyone who contributed – especially teachers, school heads, and schools’ inspectors.

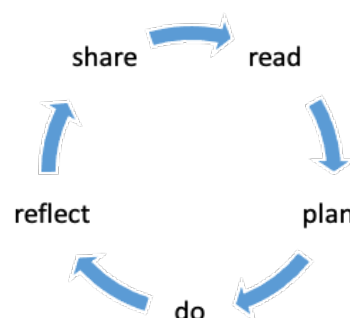
MOPSE’s highest priority is to empower ALL learners through strong foundations in literacy and numeracy. Whatever their Grade or Form, all learners need strong foundations in literacy and numeracy to succeed in other learning areas.

Learners must *learn to read and use number* so they can *read and use number to learn*.

## Using the modules

Teachers will benefit most by using the modules within reflective-practice cycles in their schools, as shown below.

<b>Read</b>	an activity.
<b>Plan</b>	how you will use the activity.
<b>Do</b>	the activity with your learners.
<b>Reflect</b>	what did learners learn from doing the activity?
	➤ What worked well?
	➤ What would you change next time?
<b>Share</b>	your experiences with your colleagues.



The modules can be used by

- individual teachers.
- pairs or groups of teachers.
- whole schools.
- cluster meetings or district workshops.

The modules provide classroom activities and guidance for effective use.

## Learner attainment

We describe learners who can do an activity confidently and successfully as 'higher attaining' and learners who cannot do an activity well as 'lower attaining'.

No one knows what a learner will be able to do given the chance. Every learner has the potential for growth. Teachers have often been surprised when they found that a learner who was 'higher attaining' for one activity was then 'lower attaining' for another—and vice versa. So we don't label learners with words like 'fast' or 'slow'.

A learner may have different levels of attainment in different learning areas, or in different aspects of one learning area. That's why assessment is a big part of the activities. It is important to find out, as often as possible, what learners know and can or can't do. Then they can be given activities at a level that will help them progress.

## Working in groups

Learning takes place as a result of **doing** an activity, **thinking** about it, and **understanding** the ideas it contains.

In order to make sure that all learners are **doing**, many activities are designed so learners work together in pairs or small groups for most of the lesson. Pairs, or groups of four to six learners work best because everyone can take part. The activity will usually need to be demonstrated by the teacher first.

There are several ways in which learners can be put into groups. Teachers should choose the one which works best for the activity and their learners.

1. Learners choose themselves. Sometimes this can result in friends working (or not working!) together, while other learners are left out.
2. Learners at a similar level of attainment work together. This can work well, as learners are working at their preferred pace, but learners who need help have to find it from outside the group.
3. Learners at mixed levels of attainment work together. This type of grouping has the advantage that higher-attaining learners can help lower-attaining ones. This gives lower attaining learners personal and prompt support, and higher-attaining learners a chance to talk about what they have learnt which helps to deepen their understanding.

# Module 1: Single letter sounds and first steps in writing

## Introduction: What is phonics and why is it important?

Words are made of sounds. There are more than 40 sounds in English. Each sound can be represented by one letter or by a combination of letters. For example, the word 'teacher' is made of four sounds: **t - ea - ch - er**. The word 'phonics' is made of six sounds: **ph - o - n - i - c - s**.

Some other common combinations of letters that make one sound are:

<b>th</b>	<b>sh</b>	<b>ng</b>	<b>ar</b>	<b>ai</b>
<b>ee</b>	<b>oo</b>	<b>oa</b>	<b>air</b>	<b>igh</b>

Think of a word that includes each letter combination. Some possible answers are given at the end of this module.

Phonics teaches learners how letters represent the sounds in words, and how to blend those sounds together to make words. Research has found that children learn to read and write more successfully when phonics is part of the teaching programme.

In some languages, each sound only has one letter or combination of letters that represent it. In English, the same sounds can be spelled in more than one way. For example, the underlined letters in these words all have the same sound:

**I'm      my      tie      high**

For young learners, this can be very confusing. Phonics also helps learners to understand alternative spellings for sounds.

Much phonics teaching is based on games and other fun activities that children enjoy. This is very important. Teaching methods which children find uninteresting, repetitive or difficult to understand are much less effective for learning.

## Letter sound pronunciation guide

When you teach letter sounds, it is very important to teach just the basic sound of the letter or combination of letters without any extra sounds. For example, *s* should be only the sound of the letter: ‘sss’ not ‘ess’, ‘suh’, ‘ser’, etc. The letter combination *ch* should be only that sound, not ‘chuh’, ‘cher’ etc.

Try saying these sounds without any extra sounds.

**b          e          f          m          t**  
**sh      ng      aw      ur      oo** (as in *book*)

## A phonics puzzle for teachers

Try this puzzle yourself. (DO NOT use it with your learners.) How many separate sounds does each word have? Divide the word into sounds and write the number of sounds. Then say the sounds without adding any extra sounds.

The answers are at the end of the module.

pen	p - e - n (3)	shopping	sh - o - pp - i - ng (5)
hand		chicken	
see		draw	
stairs		phone	
easy		difficult	
bookshelf		raining	
midnight		happiness	

## Phonics audio files

The Literacy Modules 1 and 2 are accompanied by seven short audio files which aim to help you teach successfully with phonics.

All six Literacy modules are accompanied by *A Supplementary Guide to Teaching Literacy with Phonics*. This is a collection of classroom activities based on audio files.

# Foundational literacy

## Unit 1: Single letter sounds

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### Key words

early literacy, phonics, letter sounds, assessment



## Unit 1 Introduction

This unit shows some ways to teach the sounds of single letters.

In an ideal world, by the time learners have completed a year or two of school, they know the sounds of all the letters of the alphabet and be able to combine them to form words. However, many learners of this age and older may not yet have these skills. Teachers with a new class need to find out what their learners can and cannot do, and adapt their teaching programme to match.

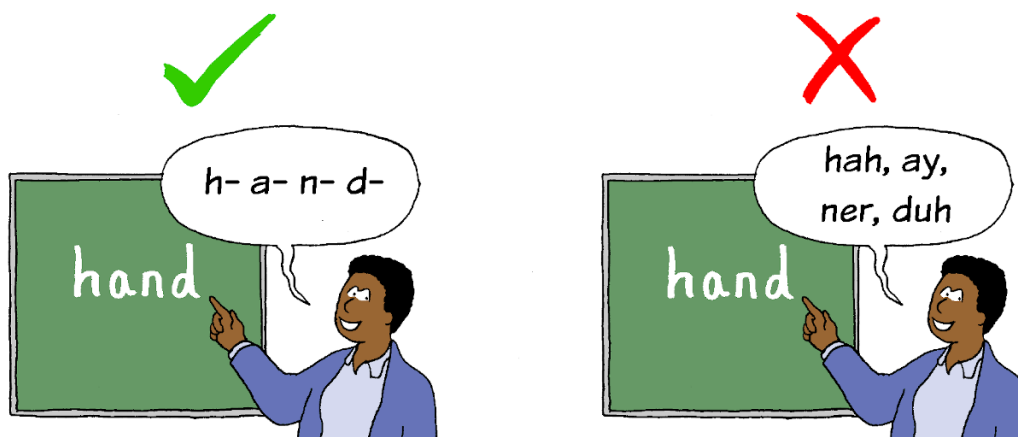
It may be that only a few of your learners need the activities in this unit. If that is the case, please look at these activities as ways to help those learners who still lack the most basic literacy skills.

### Discussion points

- Are you sure that all the learners in your class know the sounds of all the letters in the alphabet? Have you ever checked?
- What problems can learners have when they fall behind the rest of the class?
- What can you do to find out which learners do not yet know all the letter sounds?
- What can you do to help learners who do not yet know all the letter sounds?

### Saying the sounds of letters

The activities in this unit are based on saying the sounds of individual letters. As said in the Module Introduction, when you teach letter sounds, it is very important to teach just the basic sound of the letter or combination of letters without any extra sounds. For example, *n* should be only the sound of the letter: 'nnn' not 'en', 'nuh' or 'ner'.



This is especially difficult with the sounds of some consonants like *f* and *t*, where the sound comes only from air the mouth, not from the voice.

## Teaching skills practice

Practise saying the sounds of each letter without any other sound added. How easy is it to do this for each letter? If it is available, listen to the recording [sounds\\_of\\_single\\_letters.mp3](#) which demonstrates how to say the sounds.

	easy → difficult		easy → difficult
<b>a</b> (as in <i>cat</i> )	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>n</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
<b>b</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>o</b> (as in <i>dog</i> )	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
<b>c</b> (as in <i>cat</i> )	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>p</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
<b>d</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>qu</b> (as in <i>quick</i> )	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
<b>e</b> (as in <i>egg</i> )	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>r</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
<b>f</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>s</b> (as in <i>sit</i> )	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
<b>g</b> (as in <i>go</i> )	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>t</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
<b>h</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>u</b> (as in <i>up</i> )	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
<b>i</b> (as in <i>big</i> )	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>v</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
<b>j</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>w</b> (as in <i>win</i> )	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
<b>k</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>x</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
<b>l</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>y</b> (as in <i>yes</i> )	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
<b>m</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<b>z</b>	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>

# 1.1: Say letter sounds with actions

## Aim

To help learners to learn the sounds of single letters.

## What the learners will do

They will learn the sounds of letters by matching them with the starting sounds of common words.

## Resources

**Resource A** (page 29) at the end of this module: a list of common words, and actions that can go with them.

If available, **Audio file A** demonstrates how to say the sounds of single letters.

## Activity

1. Write a letter on the board. In this example, *b*. Point to the letter and say the sound three times: *b- b- b-...* (just the sound of the letter – avoid adding ‘uh’ or any other sound). Then say *bird*, and raise and lower your arms as if they were the wings of a bird. Get the class to copy you, and repeat this several times.
2. Repeat with around five more letters, using the actions as described in **Resource A** (page 29). After each one, leave the letter on the board until you have a set. For example:

b e r h u f

3. Wipe the board, and write all six letters again, in different positions. This is so the learners actually read the letters, and don’t just remember the positions. For example:

e f b  
h r u

4. Point to a letter but stay silent. The class must say the sound three times, then say the word and do the action. They may be hesitant at first, but repeat it until they are doing it confidently.
5. If you think it will work with your class, get learners to take it in turns to take over your role, saying the sound and leading the class in doing the

action. Once they have gained confidence in this, they could do this in small groups.

6. In later lessons, teach other groups of around six letters. Also repeat letters from previous lessons.

### Assessment

Later in the lesson or in the next lesson, briefly repeat stage 4 above for each of the letters sounds you covered. Do some learners need more practice with these letter sounds? Does the whole class need more practice with these letter sounds?

### Into practice: Making an alphabet chart for the classroom

Mrs Moyo decided to make an illustrated alphabet chart for the classroom. She took 26 pieces of paper, one for each letter of the alphabet. On each one, write the capital and lower-case ('small') versions of the letter, a simple picture of an object beginning with that letter, and the word for that object. Here is her list of words:

apple	ball	cat	dog
elephant	fish	goat	house
ice cream	jacket	key	lorry
moon	nest	orange	pencil
queen	rain	sun	television
umbrella	van	water	box
yellow	zebra		

Then she put the pieces of paper around the walls of the classroom in alphabetical order. Now her learners see the alphabet chart every day, and it helps them to learn the sounds of letters. It also helps them learn to read the other sounds in the words, and the whole words.



## 1.2: Do the sound and the letter match?

### Aim

To help learners to learn the sounds of single letters.

### What the learners will do

They will read and say the sounds of single letters, both alone and at the start of words.

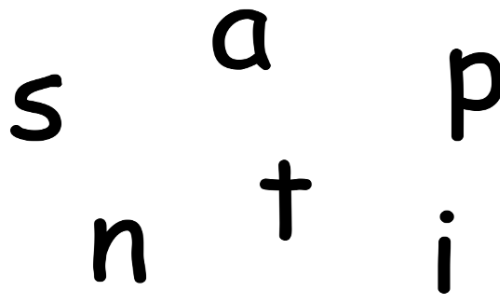
### Resources

**Resource B** (page 30) at the end of this module: a list of common words, and ways to teach their meanings.

If available, **Audio file A** demonstrates how to say the sounds of single letters.

### Activity

1. Write six letters in a jumble on the board. For example:



2. Point at one letter at a time. Say the sound, and get the class to repeat it a few times.
3. Point at one of the letters. Say one of the six sounds which either does or does not match the letter you are pointing at. The class must call 'Yes' or 'No' depending on whether the sound matches the letter. Repeat with the other letters.
4. Point at one letter at a time, but don't say the sound. The class must say it together.
5. Repeat stage 2, but with words beginning or not beginning with the letter you are pointing at. For example, *if* ('Yes' if you are pointing at *i*), *pen* ('Yes' if you are pointing at *p*). Only use words which begin with the short, simple sound of the letter. You can use the words in **Resource A** (page 29) again (with actions) or **Resource B: More words and ways to teach the meanings** (page 30). Demonstrate the meanings of words whenever you can. Remember that the learners may have little experience of English outside school, and even very basic English words may be new to them.

6. Repeat with more letters in the same lesson and/or in later lessons. Here are suggestions for groups of six letters, starting with the letters that are the most common in English.

s a t p i n

m d g o c e

k u r h b f

l j v w y z

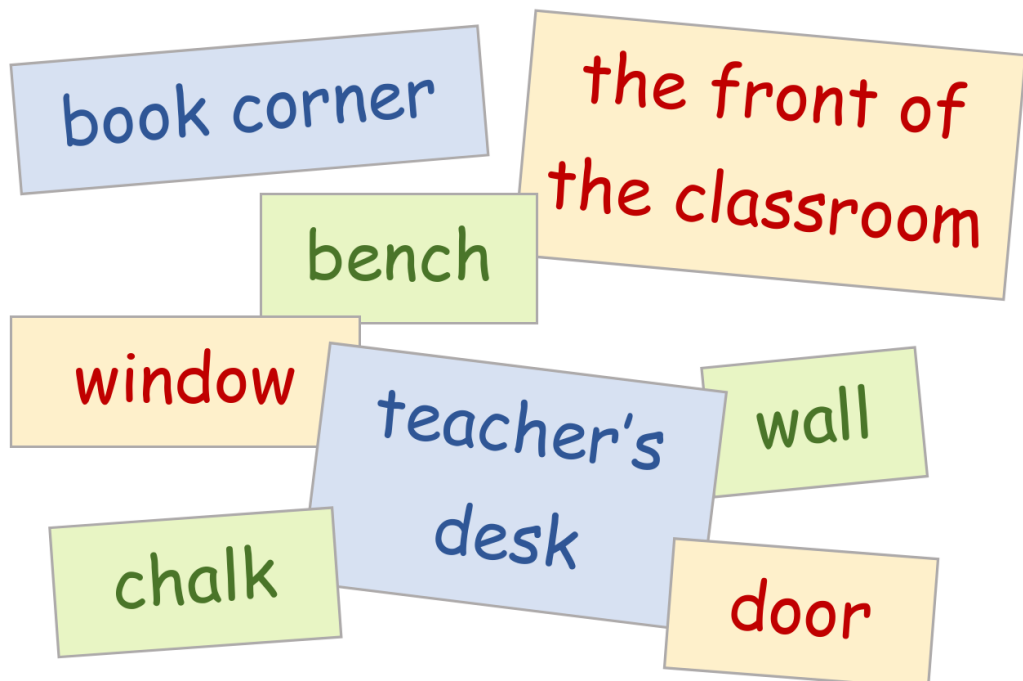
Teach **x** and **qu** separately. See **Resources A** and **B** for suggestions (pages 29 and 30).

### Assessment

Write the six letters from the activity clearly on a piece of paper. Ask a randomly chosen group of six learners to join you in the corner of the classroom. Choose a learner, point at a letter and ask the learner to say the sound. Repeat with the other letters and learners. Then repeat the process with another six learners. This will help to know whether the learners have really learned these letters sounds. if not, it tells you that the class needs to do more more on them.

### Into practice: Placing signs around the classroom

Mrs Moyo knows that her learners don't see a lot of written English when they are outside school. To help them develop their reading skills, she writes the words for things in the classroom on pieces of paper or cardboard and puts them up around the classroom. Her learners see these signs every day. It helps them to learn letter sounds, and to learn the words for those things. Mrs Moyo adds new signs regularly. Here are just a few of the signs she has made so far.



## 1.3: Group work and pair work

### Aim

To help learners to learn the sounds of single letters.

### What the learners will do

They will read and say the sounds of single letters and words that start with those letters while working together in pairs and small groups.

### Resources

- **Resources A** and **B** the end of this module (pages 29 & 30)
- Make the cards as described and shown below in Stages 2 and 4.
- If available, **Audio file A** demonstrates how to say the sounds of single letters.

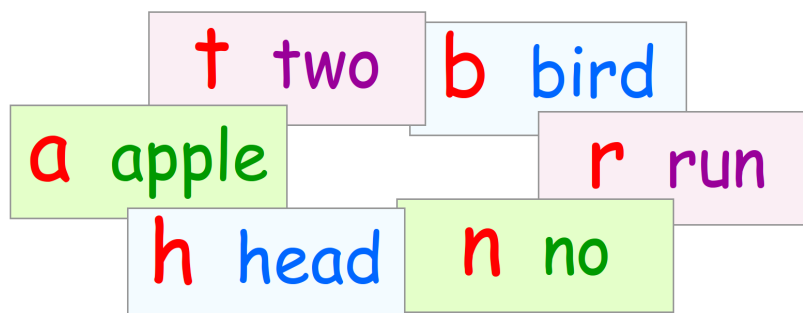
### Activity

In **Activities 1.1** and **1.2**, the teacher leads the class in reading and saying the sounds of letters. Activities that are lead by the teacher are good for introducing something new, but then it is often best if learners work independently in pairs and small groups. Here are just some reasons for using activities with group work and pair work:

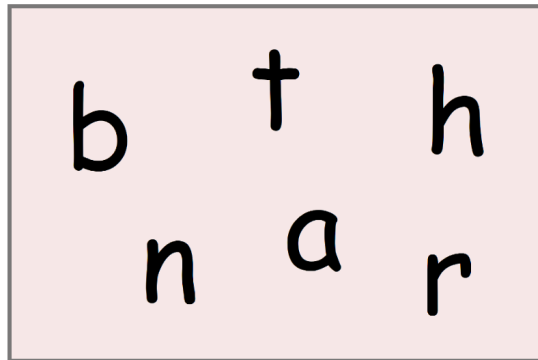
- All the learners are actively involved.
- It can be more fun and motivating for the learners.
- The teacher can visit the pairs/groups, find out more about the learners' progress, and help any learners who are struggling.
- Learners can work at their own speed: learners at lower levels don't get left behind, and learners at higher levels can challenge themselves.

In this activity, the learners do what they did in **Activities 1.1** and **1.2**, but this time in small groups and then in pairs.

1. Repeat **Activity 1.1** with six letters, words beginning with those letters and actions that go with those words. See **Resource A** (page 29) for suitable words.
2. Organise the class into small groups. Give each group six cards, each with a letter from the previous stage and the word that went with the letter. Put the cards spread out on the group's desk, face down.



3. The learners take it in turns to turn over a card. Together, they must read and say the letter sound three times and then the whole word and do the action. Show the class how to do the activity by demonstrating with one group. Visit the groups while they do the activity, and give help to anyone who needs it.
4. Organise the class into pairs. Each pair will need a piece of paper with the six letters in a jumble. Alternatively, write the letters in chalk on each pair's desk.



5. The partners take it in turns to say one of the words from Stage 3 above. The other partner must point to the letter that starts that word. Show the class how to do the activity by demonstrating with one pair. Visit the pairs while they do the activity, and give help to anyone who needs it.

### Assessment

While you visit the learners as they do the activities, think about these things:

- In general, does the activity seem easy or difficult for the class?
- Are some learners doing the activity much more confidently than others? If so, these learners may need more challenging activities. Make a note of these learners' names.
- Are some learners doing the activity much less confidently than others? If so, these learners may need extra help. Make a note of these learners' names.

### Into practice: More things to read on classroom walls

As you read with **Activities 1.1** and **1.2**, Mrs Moyo made an alphabet chart and some signs for her classroom walls. But there is still lots of empty space. She wants to put as much written English as possible on the walls. Anything that is written can help her learners to develop their literacy. Even things that are too difficult for them to read now can make them feel curious, and give them a reason to want to improve their reading skills.

Discuss your ideas for useful things that teachers can put on their classroom walls, and make a list. Some suggestions are given at the end of this module.





I thought all the learners in my class knew the sounds of all the letters of the alphabet. But when I checked, I found that many of the learners were still confused about some of the letter sounds. They needed some activities to help them become more confident with *all* the letter sounds.

# Foundational literacy

## Unit 2: Blending single letter sounds

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### Key words

early literacy, phonics, blending, assessment, teaching resources

### Unit 2 Introduction

This unit will show you activities which teach learners how to blend the sounds of single letters together to make words. The activities use simple words where each letter has one sound. There are no letter combinations like *sh* and *ai*. (Those appear in Module 2.) Here are some examples:

<b>in</b>	<b>hat</b>	<b>leg</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>six</b>
<b>jump</b>	<b>stop</b>	<b>must</b>	<b>spend</b>	<b>print</b>

Try saying these words first as the sounds of the individual letters, and then as whole words.

Combining letter sounds to make words in this way is an important part of learning to read, and the activities in this unit help learners to develop that skill.

## 2.1: Slap your shoulder

### Aim

To help learners to read letter sounds and to blend them together to form words.

### What the learners will do

They will read and say the sounds of single letters, then blend them together to make short words. They do this with a physical action, so it makes the activity more fun and memorable.

### Resources

**Audio file B** demonstrates how to blend sounds of letters together.

### Activity

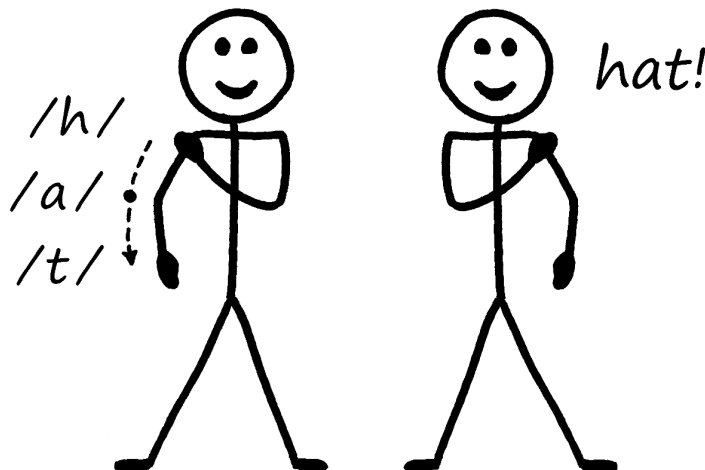
1. Choose a simple word with three letters from the list below. Write it on the board in big, clear letters. In this example, the word is *hat*.
2. Check the learners know the meaning and pronunciation of *hat*. Teach the meaning if necessary. You can do this with a mime or a simple picture on the board.
3. Ask the class to stand up. Point at each letter in the word, and get the learners to say each sound separately. Say the sound of the letter only – don't add 'uh' or another sound after it. Then run your finger along the whole word, and get the class to say the whole word.
4. Lead the learners in saying the three letter sounds separately again, and then the whole word. This time, do the actions shown in the diagram below at the same time.

**h** – (touch your right shoulder)

**a** – (touch your right elbow)

**t** – (touch your right wrist)

**hat!** (clap your hand onto your left shoulder)



Repeat this a few times. Then do it again with some other words.

You can use any three letter word that does not contain a pair of letters which make one sound. For example, *she*, *you*, *the*, *arm* and *see* are not suitable. Here are some suggestions:

hat	pen	box	dog	pig	sun	cat	jug	sad	end
rat	can	bed	lot	red	sit	bag	van	fun	ant
six	map	yes	win	had	kit	nut	leg	zip	and

### Assessment

Write about six of the words that you used in the activity on the board. Point at one word, and ask the class to read and say it together. Judge from how confidently they respond how many of the learners can now read the word. This will help you to decide how much more work they need to do on this.

### Into practice: finding out about the level of a new class

It was the start of the school year and Mr Tembo had a new class. He thought the learners probably knew the sounds of at least some of the letters already, but he was not sure. To check this, he wrote letters on the board, and asked the learners to say the sounds (not the letter names) of the letters. He found that many of them did not know several of the sounds, and only a few of them knew the sounds of the least common letters, such as *j*, *x* and *z*.

He used fun activities like 'Slap your shoulder' to teach letter sounds. After a few weeks, most of Mr Tembo's class knew the sounds of all the letters.



Yes, *most* of them knew the sounds of all the letters. However, there were still a few learners who were unsure of some less common letter sounds, so I gave these learners extra help during and after lessons.

## 2.2: Magic spoon

### Aim

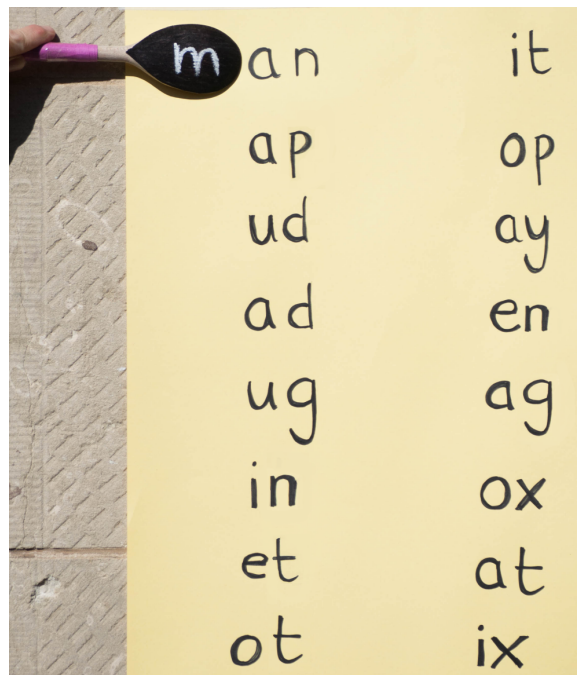
To help learners to blend letters sounds to make short words.

### What the learners will do

They will blend sounds to form words. By working in pairs or small groups, they get lots of practice so they can gain more confidence with this type of activity. The physical element of the activity makes it more fun too.

### Resources

Each group of around six learners will need a list of word endings and a 'moving letter'. In the photo below, the moving letter is written in chalk on a wooden spoon, but you could use many other things, for example chalk on a dark stone or ink on a piece of card / bottle top.



Here are some ideas for suitable word-endings:

<b>ad</b>	<b>ag</b>	<b>an</b>	<b>ap</b>	<b>at</b>	<b>ed</b>	<b>en</b>	<b>et</b>	<b>ig</b>	<b>in</b>
<b>ip</b>	<b>it</b>	<b>ix</b>	<b>og</b>	<b>op</b>	<b>ot</b>	<b>ud</b>	<b>ug</b>	<b>um</b>	<b>un</b>

If available, **Audio file B** demonstrates how to blend the sounds of single letters together to make words.

## Activity

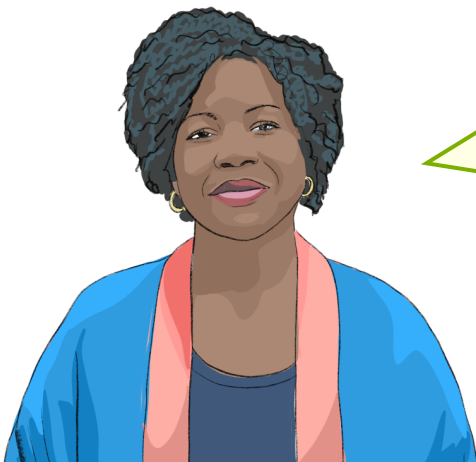
1. Demonstrate the activity for the class. Put one of the sheets of word endings somewhere everybody can see it. With a piece of chalk, write a single letter (for example, *m*, *s*, *p*) on the 'magic spoon' or other object. Ask the class to practise saying the sound of the letter (without any extra sound).
2. Hold the magic spoon against the first word-ending. Get the class to say the word you have made. Move the spoon up and down to form different words. Check they understand the meanings of the words with a mime, a simple picture on the board, a simple clear explanation or - if none of those things is possible - translation into the learners' home language.
3. Organise the class into small groups. Each group has a sheet of word-endings and a movable letter. One member of each group moves the letter up and down, and the whole group says the word, in the way that you showed them. Monitor the groups while they do this, and help if necessary.
4. After a while, another member of the group takes over moving the letter. Repeat until everybody has had a turn in this role.

## Assessment

Visit the groups during the group work stage. Notice which learners can do the activity confidently, and which are struggling. Decide if it will be useful for your class to do this activity again in a future lesson.

## Into practice: Making lessons fun

Mrs Shamu knows that making her lessons fun and enjoyable for her learners helps them to learn better. Whenever possible, she tries to make learning activities feel like a fun game. She smiles and speaks enthusiastically when she introduces the activity, and when she visits the groups while they do the activity. This really help the learners to enjoy the activity, and motivates them to do it as well as they can.



I'm sure that me smiling and making the lesson seem a happy, friendly time makes a big difference to how my learners feel about lessons and coming to school!

## 2.3: Tube spinners

### Aim

To help learners to blend letters sounds to make short words.

### What the learners will do

In pairs, they will use their tube spinners to make different words to read and say.

### Resources

The spinners are made with an inner roll (for example, from a toilet paper roll) with an outer roll made from paper or cardboard with the moving letter or letters. The inner roll can also be covered with paper that has been stuck down (the pink paper in the photo below). Write the word ending on this inner roll. The outer roll (the green paper in the photo) should have the different 'moving' letters written on it vertically. So, for the first example of **Tube 1** given below, you would write at on the inner role and *h, r, c, m, s* (vertically) on the outer roll.



You will need one spinner for each pair of learners, and at least three different versions with different words (see below for ideas). The spinners can take a while to make, but you can keep them and use them in future lessons.

**Audio file B** demonstrates how to blend sounds of single letters.

### Ideas for suitable words

**Tube 1:** hat, rat, cat, mat, sat

**Tube 3:** sit, bit, got, lot, not

**Tube 5:** bag, big, leg, dog, dig

**Tube 7:** and, hand, stand, send, mend

**Tube 2:** mad, sad, bad, had, dad

**Tube 4:** man, pen, sun, can, ten

**Tube 6:** map, lip, step, stop, drop

**Tube 8:** must, lost, best, west, trust.

## Activity

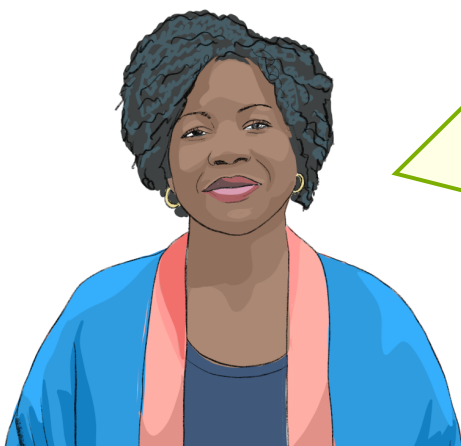
1. Organise the learners into pairs. You may wish to pair learners with the same level of literacy (so they can work at the same speed) or with different levels (so the more confident learner can help the less confident one).
2. Give each pair a spinner. Demonstrate how to use it by turning the outer part to form new words, and say each new word. Say the letter sounds first (without any extra sounds) and then the whole word: *s- a- t- ... sat!* Do this with all the versions of the spinners that you will use. Check the learners understand the meanings of each word with a mime, a simple picture on the board, a simple clear explanation or - if none of those things is possible - translation into the learners' home language.
3. Demonstrate with one learner how to use the spinners in pairs. One partner holds the inside part, the other turns the outer part. When it makes a new word, they say it together.
4. After a while, collect the spinners, and redistribute them. The pairs repeat the activity with their new spinners.
5. Perhaps leave the spinners in the classroom, and encourage learners to use them during breaks etc.

## Assessment

Visit the pairs while they are doing the activity. Make a note of which learners can do the activity confidently, and which are struggling. This will help you to know who needs more challenging activities and who needs extra help.

## Into practice: Finding materials to make resources

Mrs Shamu likes making resources such as tube spinners for her learners, and finds that it really helps them to learn. However, it is often difficult to find the materials she need to make these resources. She has told her friends and family that old cardboard boxes and packets can be very useful to her for this. Now all her friends and family all save their old cardboard and give it to her. Mrs Shamu's tube spinners are made out of old food boxes.



It took some time to make the materials for the 'Magic spoon' and 'Tube spinners' activities, and it wasn't easy to get enough cardboard. I'm glad I did it, though. These activities have been very popular with my learners. I left the materials in the classroom for the learners to use, and I have often seen learners playing with them in the breaks. I've lent them to other teachers too.



# Foundational literacy

## Unit 3: First steps in writing

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### Key words

early literacy, writing, letter formation, handwriting, assessment

### Unit 3 Introduction

This unit will show you activities which help learners to develop their skills in forming the shapes of letters. Of course, learners need to be able to form the shapes of the letters accurately as part of learning to write. They also need to be able to do it quickly and confidently. The activities in this unit can be used to teach learners how to make the letter shapes, and also to increase their writing speed and confidence.

### 3.1: Write letters in the air

#### Aim

To help learners learn to form the shapes of letters.

#### What the learners will do

They will make the shapes of letters in the air with their fingers, first as a whole class and then together in pairs.

#### Resources

**Audio file A** demonstrates how to say the sounds of single letters.

#### Activity

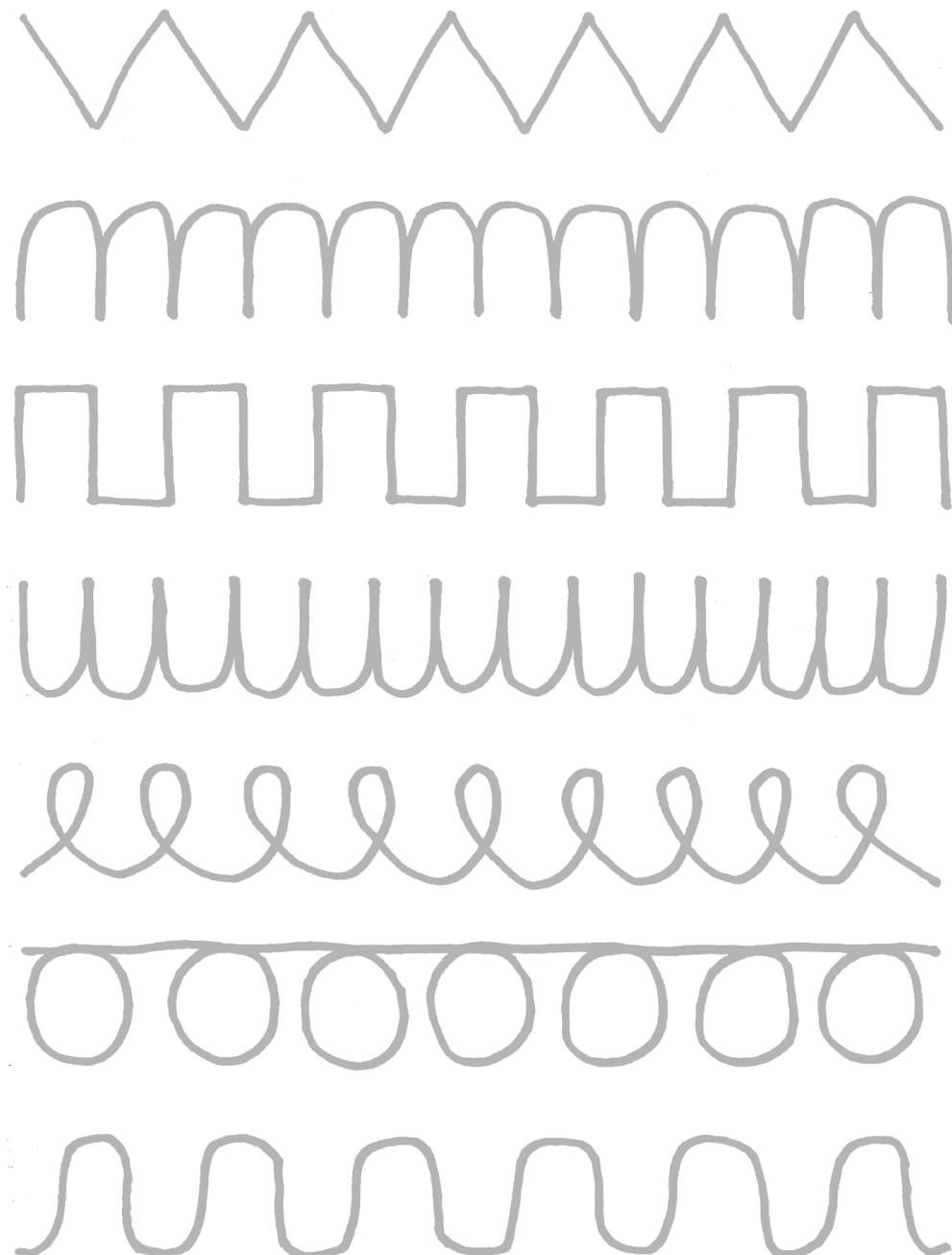
1. Check correct movements for forming each letter in **Resource C** (page 31).
2. Write a large letter *s* on the board. Stand with your back to the class, looking over your shoulder. Make a large gesture using your whole arm to write the letter *s* with your finger. Ask the class: 'What sound does the letter make?' Get the class to say the sound of *s* (just the *sss* sound, without 'uh' or any other extra sound).
3. Get the whole class to stand and write in the air, following your example and making the shape of *s* while saying the sound together. Learners should use the hand that they normally write or draw with. Keep doing this with your back to the class, otherwise from their point of view you will be showing them a mirror image of the letter.
4. Ask learners to suggest a word that has 'sss' as the first sound. Check everybody understands the meaning with a mime, a simple picture on the board, a simple clear explanation or - if none of those things is possible - translation into the learners' home language. Get the class to say the word together, while making the letter shape again.
5. Repeat this process with some other letters. If the class is not yet confident with them, six may be enough in one lesson.
6. Invite a learner to come to the front of the class. Secretly show this learner a letter written on a piece of paper. Ask the learner to write the letter in the air. Make sure they are standing with their back to the class, so that the class sees the letter as it would be written on a page, not a mirror image. The rest of the class must watch and say the sound. Repeat with several different learners. Keep the pace fast and fun.
7. Put learners into pairs to 'write' a letter in the air. Each time, the partner must say the sound of that letter and a word that starts with that sound. Demonstrate with a learner to show the class how to do the activity. Visit the pairs while they do the activity, and give help to anyone who needs it.

## Assessment

This activity can be very useful for assessing your learners' skills in forming letters. You will be able to see clearly who is having problems making the correct letter shapes. Make a note of which learners may need extra help.

### Into practice: checking learners can use a pen or pencil

Mr Tembo noticed that some of his learners were still not confident in using pens and pencils. They needed more practice to develop the muscles in the hands that are used for writing. For these learners, Mr Tembo drew patterns in pencil on pieces of paper, and asked them to trace over the patterns in pen. This helped them to become more confident in using a pen/pencil. As the learners became more confident, Mr Tembo made the patterns smaller.



## 3.2 Letter-sound bingo

### Aim

To develop learners' ability to write single letters.

### What the learners will do

They will play a bingo game based on writing letters.

### Resources

**Audio file A** demonstrates how to say the sounds of single letters.

### Activity

1. Write the lower case (small) letters of the alphabet on the board, and get the class to practise saying the sounds of the letters. You could do this by repeating activities from Unit 1 of this module.
2. Leave the letters on the board, but wipe off the *x* and *q*, explaining to the learners that very few words start with those letters.
3. Each learner must choose six letters from the board and write them into a grid of six boxes. For example:

b	c	m
o	t	y

4. Say the sound of a letter (just the sound, without any other sound after it). Any learner with that sound can cross it off. Repeat with more letters in random order. The first learner to cross off all the sounds says 'Bingo!' and is the winner. You may like to carry on the game until there have been several 'winners'. (Note that *c* and *k* can both be crossed off for that sound.)
5. Repeat the game, but this time the learners say the sounds. One learner must say the sound of one of the letters from her/his grid (just the sound, with no other sound added). They and any other learner with that sound can cross it off. Then it is the next learner's turn to say a sound, and so on. The game is quick, so you can repeat it several times.

### Assessment

Walk around the classroom during the activity, and notice if any learners are not yet forming letters confidently and clearly. Make a note of which learners may need extra help.

### Into practice: Adapting activities

Mr Tembo realised that he could adapt this bingo activity to teach other things to his class.

#### *Short-word version*

Instead of using just the sounds of letters, he used whole words beginning with those sounds. He wrote the words on the board with the first letter underlined. He checked the learners understood the meanings of each word with a mime, a simple picture on the board, a simple clear explanation or - if none of those things was possible - translation into the learners' home language. When playing the game, each learner said the word that matched the letter they wanted to cross out.

#### *Capital letters version*

Mr Tembo also used the game based on first names for people (especially learners in the class) and place names the class knew. He used the sounds of the letters, not the name of the letter. For example, he asked,

'Who knows a person's name beginning with *b*-?'

'Who knows a place beginning with *mmm*?'

He wrote these first names and place names on the board, and used them for playing the game as described in the 'short word' version above.

## 3.3 We all write on the board

### Aim

To develop learners' ability to write short, simple words

### What the learners will do

They will write letters and/or whole words in chalk on the chalkboard

### Resources

A chalkboard that the learners can reach, and several pieces of chalk.

**Audio file B** demonstrates how to blend the sound of single letters together to form words.

### Activity

Learners often enjoy writing on the board, as it can seem different from what they're normally allowed to do.

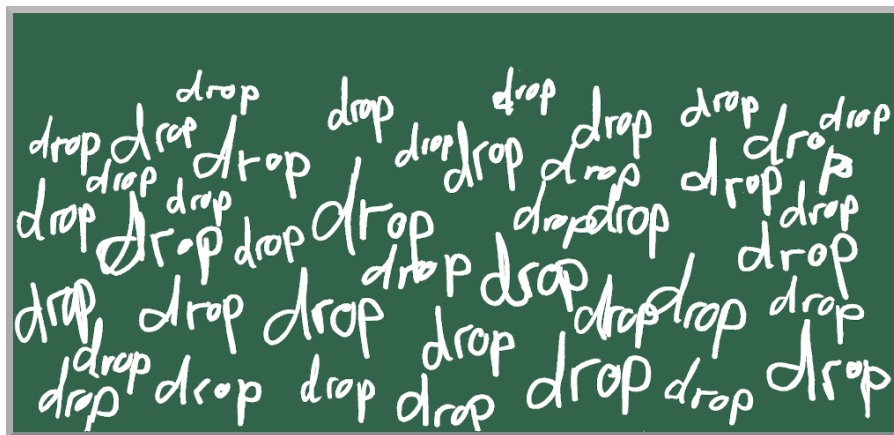
### Short-word version

1. Write a short word on the board that does not contain any combinations of letters that make one sound. See the activities in Unit 2 for suitable words. Here are a few examples:

in	at	can	bed	sun
box	leg	zip	map	get
hand	best	stop	jump	send
must	drop	stand	spend	print

Check the learners know what the word means (for example, if the word is *drop*, act dropping something and say the word). Then write the word clearly at the top of the board. Say the sounds as you do it, and then the word: *d- r- o- p-, drop!* Say just the sound of each letter, without any extra sounds.

2. Invite the learners to come to the board in small groups. Give each learner a piece of chalk. They all copy the word and say *d- r- o- p-, drop!* while they do it. Then get the next group to come to the board. Keep the pace fast and fun.
3. At the end of the activity, if there are (for example) 40 learners in the class, there will be 40 learners' versions of the word on the board.



4. Count to three, then the whole class says the word loudly.
5. Repeat with other short words that the class knows.

### Assessment

This activity can be very useful for assessing your learners' skills in forming letters. You will be able to see clearly who is having problems making the correct letter shapes. Make a note of which learners may need extra help.

## Into practice: Encouraging the correct movements for letter formation

Mr Tembo noticed that some of his learners formed letters in unusual ways, such as writing *d* as first as circle and then adding a line, or starting to write *w* from the right instead of from the left.



This may seem not to matter very much when learners are just writing single letters or short words, but it will cause problems later when they want to write sentences and start doing joined-up writing.

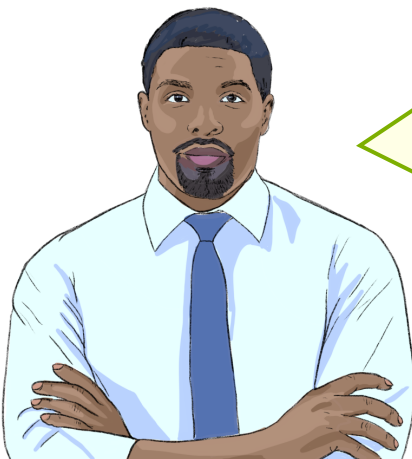
Mr Tembo makes sure he regularly shows his learners the best way to form letters. He visits his learners while they are writing. If he sees a learner forming a letter in an incorrect way, he shows them a better way to do it.

**Resource C** (page 31) shows letter formation patterns.

## End-of-module Reflection

When you have completed this module, and tried out the activities in class, reflect on what you have learnt from it. You can do this by yourself, but if you can, it is better to do so with other teachers in your school or cluster. Perhaps you can meet after school or set up a WhatsApp group to work with teachers who are some distance away.

- Which activities worked best with your learners? Why do you think they worked well?
- What will you do differently as a result of reading this module?
- Why are all these activities about the *sounds* of letters, not the *names* of the letters?
- Choose one activity from this module. Think about how it relates to each part of the Connections diagram on page 1.



At first, I thought the activities in this module would be too easy for my learners. It's true that they were easy for some of the learners, but I found that there were other learners who still did not have these basic skills and knowledge. They needed to do more work with reading and writing letters. I'm really glad I helped these learners/ otherwise, they might have been left behind.

# Resource A: Suggested words and actions for letter sounds

*You can use your own ideas to make a list like this one, using words and actions you think your learners will know.*

*The letters are given in the order of how common they are in English.*

<b>s</b>	<i>sit</i>	<b>Sit</b> down on a chair.
<b>a</b>	<i>apple</i>	Mime eating an <b>apple</b> with a crunching noise.
<b>t</b>	<i>two</i>	Hold <b>two</b> fingers in the air.
<b>p</b>	<i>point</i>	<b>Point</b> at different things with one finger.
<b>i</b>	<i>in</i>	Mime putting a small object <b>in</b> your hand.
<b>n</b>	<i>no</i>	Shake your head to mean ' <b>no</b> '.
<b>m</b>	<i>me</i>	Point to yourself to mean ' <b>me</b> '.
<b>d</b>	<i>drink</i>	Mime <b>drinking</b> a glass of water
<b>g</b>	<i>good</i>	Make the thumbs-up gesture to mean ' <b>good</b> '.
<b>o</b>	<i>on / off</i>	Mime turning a light switch <b>on</b> and <b>off</b> .
<b>c</b>	<i>cat</i>	Say 'meow', like a <b>cat</b> .
<b>k</b>	<i>key</i>	Mime turning a <b>key</b> in a lock.
<b>e</b>	<i>elephant</i>	Mime being an <b>elephant</b> with your arm as the trunk.
<b>u</b>	<i>umbrella</i>	Mime putting up an <b>umbrella</b> in the rain.
<b>r</b>	<i>run</i>	<b>Run</b> on the spot.
<b>h</b>	<i>head</i>	Point to your <b>head</b> .
<b>b</b>	<i>bird</i>	Mime being a <b>bird</b> , flapping your arms as if wings.
<b>f</b>	<i>four</i>	Hold up <b>four</b> fingers.
<b>l</b>	<i>loud</i>	Say 'hello' in a very <b>loud</b> voice.
<b>j</b>	<i>jump</i>	<b>Jump</b> on the spot.
<b>v</b>	<i>van</i>	Mime driving a <b>van</b> – make sure the class know the difference between car, van and lorry.
<b>w</b>	<i>wash</i>	Mime <b>washing</b> your hands and face.
<b>x</b>	<i>six</i>	Show <b>six</b> fingers – make sure the class is clear that it is the last sound (the 'x' sound) that is important
<b>y</b>	<i>yes</i>	Nod your head to mean ' <b>yes</b> '.
<b>z</b>	<i>zebra</i>	With your fingers, draw stripes on your sides, like the stripes a <b>zebra</b> has.
<b>qu</b>	<i>quick</i>	Move your hand through the air very <b>quickly</b> .



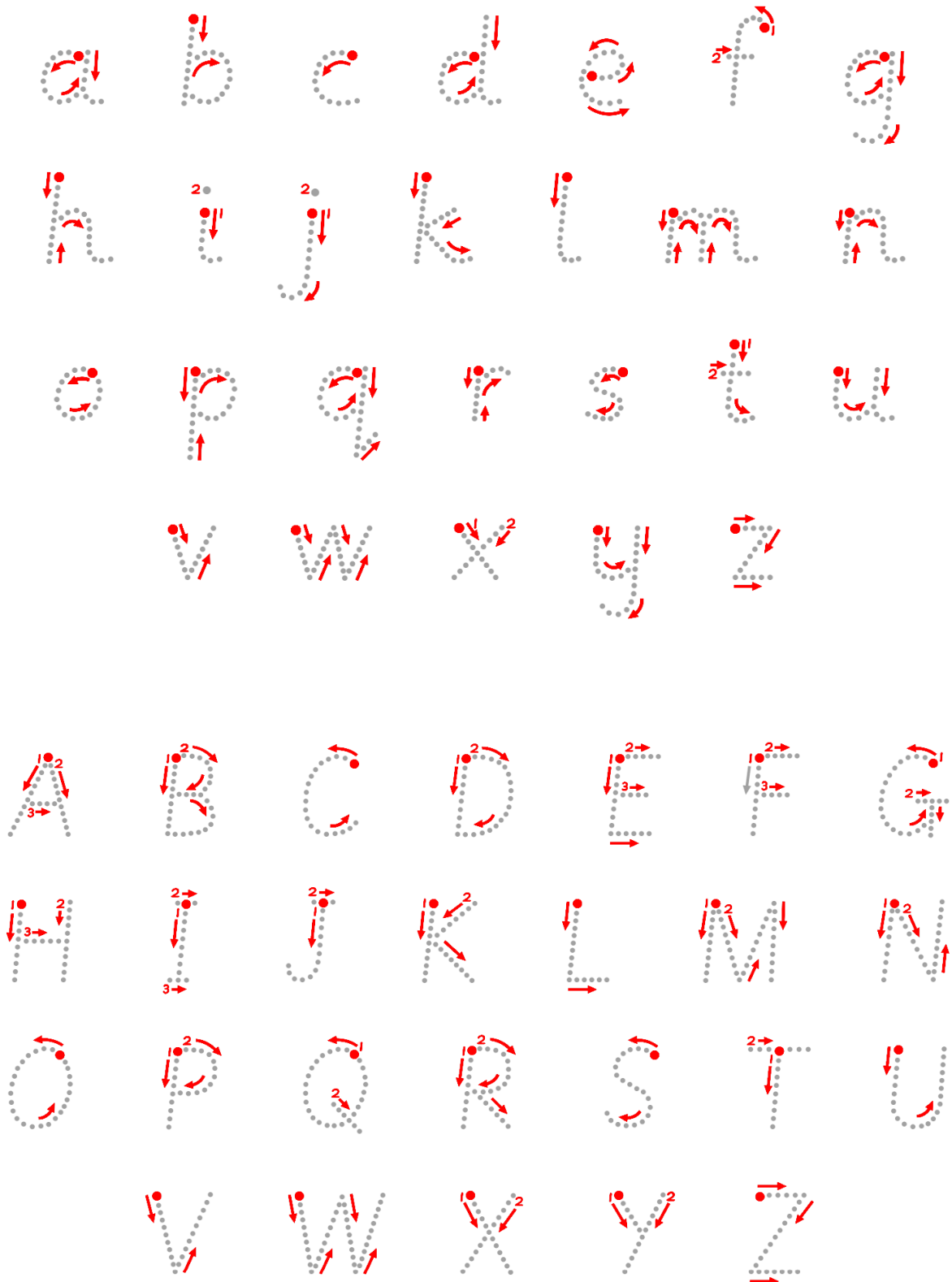
## Resource B: More words and ways to teach the meanings

*These words can be useful for teaching letter sounds. Demonstrate the meanings of words whenever you can, and get the learners to say the words after you. Remember that learners may have little experience of English outside school, and even very basic English words may be new to them.*

<b>s</b>	<i>sing</i>	Sing a few words from a song. Say, 'I am <i>singing</i> .'
<b>a</b>	<i>and</i>	Point to yourself and a learner. Say, 'You <i>and</i> me.'
<b>t</b>	<i>ten</i>	Show ten fingers and say, ' <i>Ten</i> fingers.'
<b>p</b>	<i>pen</i>	Show a <i>pen</i> and say the word.
<b>i</b>	<i>is</i>	Point to a chair. Say, 'This this <i>is</i> a chair.'
<b>n</b>	<i>new</i>	Find something that is obviously new. Say, 'This isn't old. It's <i>new</i> .'
<b>m</b>	<i>my</i>	Point to your pen and to yourself. Say, 'This is <i>my</i> pen.'
<b>d</b>	<i>desk</i>	Point to a <i>desk</i> and say the word.
<b>g</b>	<i>go</i>	Tell a learner with good understanding, ' <i>Go</i> to the door.'
<b>o</b>	<i>on</i>	Put a book on a table. Say, 'The book is <i>on</i> the table.'
<b>c</b>	<i>cup</i>	Draw a picture of a <i>cup</i> on the board and say the word.
<b>k</b>	<i>kick</i>	Mime kicking and say, 'I am <i>kicking</i> .'
<b>e</b>	<i>egg</i>	Draw an <i>egg</i> on the board and say the word.
<b>u</b>	<i>under</i>	Put a pen under a book and say, 'The pen is <i>under</i> the book.'
<b>r</b>	<i>red</i>	Point to something that is red and say 'It's <i>red</i> .'
<b>h</b>	<i>hear</i>	Mime hearing, and say, 'I can <i>hear</i> you. Can you <i>hear</i> me?'
<b>b</b>	<i>bed</i>	Draw a simple picture of a <i>bed</i> on the board and say the word.
<b>f</b>	<i>five</i>	Show five fingers. Say, ' <i>Five</i> fingers.'
<b>l</b>	<i>listen</i>	Mime listening. Say, 'I am <i>listening</i> .'
<b>j</b>	<i>jug</i>	Draw a simple picture of a <i>jug</i> or a <i>jacket</i> on the board and say the word.
<b>v</b>	<i>very</i>	Point to something that is very small. Say, 'It's <i>very</i> small.'
<b>w</b>	<i>we</i>	Point to yourself and the learners. Say ' <i>We</i> are in a classroom'.
<b>x</b>	<i>mix</i>	Mime <i>mixing</i> some food in a bowl, and emphasise the final x sound. Or draw a <i>box</i> on the board, and say the word, and emphasise the final x sound.
<b>y</b>	<i>you</i>	Point to learner. Say ' <i>You</i> are ...' plus the learner's name
<b>z</b>	<i>zip</i>	Find somebody whose clothes have a <i>zip</i> , point to it and say the word.
<b>qu</b>	<i>queen</i>	Draw a simple picture of a <i>queen</i> and say the word.

### Resource C: Ways to form letters

Here are suggested ways of forming letters. There are possible variations for some letters. Please follow your official guidelines on teaching handwriting.



## Module 1 introduction: possible answers

**Example words with letter combinations that make one sound:**

this, path, shop, wash, long, having, arm, car, train, wait, see, green, book, good, zoo, moon (oo has two sounds), goat, soap, hair, stairs, high, night.

## Module 1 introduction: Phonics puzzle for teachers answers

pen	p - e - n (3)	shopping	sh - o - pp - i - ng (5)
hand	h - a - n - d (4)	chicken	ch - i - ck - e - n (5)
see	s - ee (2)	draw	d - r - aw (3)
stairs	s - t - air - s (4)	phone	ph - o - ne (3)
easy	ea - s - y (3)	difficult	d - i - ff - i - c - u - l - t (9)
bookshelf	b - oo - k - sh - e - l - f (7)	raining	r - ai - n - i - ng (5)
midnight	m - i - d - n - igh - t (6)	happiness	h - a - pp - i - n - e - ss (7)

## Unit 1, Activity 1.3: More ideas for things to read on classroom walls

Here are just some of the useful things that teacher can put on their classroom walls:

- new words that the class has learnt recently
- lists of useful words, ideally with pictures
- information for other school subjects
- the words of songs and poems
- suitable pages from newspapers and magazines
- pictures from magazines with words for things in the picture added.



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