



# THAT READING THING

literacy for teens and adults wherever they are

Linguistic phonics for  
secondary schools & adult literacy

Tricia Millar

An older struggling reader is anyone from 10 to 110 who isn't able to engage in everyday activities which require reading.

They come to lessons with a wide range of:

- educational experiences
- acquired reading skills
- natural ability
- motivation for improving their reading

The following is about what all struggling readers need regardless of what they bring to the learning situation.

Here's a passage from an imaginary high school history text.

'One of the lasting effects of the conflict was the drowpatisation of young people.'

For the purpose of this exercise, pretend 'drowpatisate' is a common word which means 'to lose the right to an education'.



A struggling reader will do one or all of the following things with the unfamiliar multi-syllable word:

1 guess by shape & similar letters

**drowpatisation**

regardless of sense

**dramatisation**

This is the number one strategy employed by older strugglers when reading aloud. Unfortunately, it is used without thought for meaning and results in sentences such as 'They had to get the equipment for the earthquake vitamins.'

## 2 omit

One of the lasting effects of  
the conflict was the  

---

of young people.

When strugglers read silently, they often leave out the unfamiliar words in an effort to get through the text. Omitting the content words equals deleting the meaning of the text. After facing this situation continually, it's easier not to bother with reading at all.

### 3 Look for words within words

pat sat on

**drowpatisation**

There is some sense to this strategy when the reader can isolate the root from the suffix in order to find the meaning of the word. (drowpatisate + ion) Struggling readers, however, take this to mean looking for any word that they've seen before; hence: 'pat sat on'. We now refer to this strategy as 'toxic morphology'. (That Spelling Thing, Tricia Millar, 2018)

Most people pronounce  
the unfamiliar word:

**drow** (to rhyme with cow)

**pat** (rhymes with cat)

**i** (like in pit)

**sa** (say)

**tion**



They arrive at that by bringing  
all 7 of the following things  
to that single word:

# 1 orientation

## **drowpatisation**



An accomplished reader knows to start at the left and move to the right through the word. This isn't something we're born knowing and it's not automatic for a reader who sees words as whole objects. It usually takes only the point of a pencil and 'start here' to get the student oriented.

2 sounds may be:

**segmented** - picked out separately

d r ow p a t i s a tion

**blended** - put together to form a word

**drowpatisation**

Accomplished readers understand words are made up of sounds but we feel as though we read by sight only. Research suggests we always read sound by sound but do it so quickly that we feel as though we are recognising the word.

3 syllables

**drow pa ti sa tion**

Struggling readers don't relate speaking to reading and spelling. They all speak in syllables but usually try to recognise a long word as a whole object. Spelling is attempted by reciting letter names then checking to see it looks approximately correct. This is how remember gets spelled <remember>.

4 a sound can be spelled with 2 or more letters (drowpatisation) That spelling is a grapheme.

**ll** in bell      **ck** in back

**air** in chair      **eigh** in eight

Without understanding this principle, a struggling reader will try to 'sound out' the word 'chair' by saying each letter as a separate sound. 'cuh' 'huh' 'a' 'i' 'ruh'

This 'toxic phonics' is often the result of partial or poor phonics instruction.

5 A grapheme can:

look the same but sound different

drowp**a**tisation

<a>

can    **a**bout    **f**ather    **t**able    sw**a**n    w**a**ter

A struggling reader needs to practice the various pronunciations of letters or groups of letters (graphemes).

How many of these pronunciations do you have? I have 4.

6 A sound (phoneme) can:

sound the same but look different

'ae'

<b>more common</b>		<b>less common</b>
tape	play	weigh break
sail	table	they vein straight

A struggling reader is probably a struggling speller and needs to discover the most common ways to spell the 44 or so sounds of English. (There are many more ways to spell this sound.)

**7** patterns – We all thought:

'**ayshun**' at the end because we know the words:

**nation**

**relation**

**specification**

**population**

But: **ration** - patterns aren't rules

Experienced readers have a wealth of knowledge to draw on and we need to give developing readers the chance to discover the patterns of English through exposure to both controlled and 'real' text.



What That Reading Thing offers  
older struggling readers:

1. The chance to change their minds about reading. They learn that:

- reading involves speech and sounds
- readers use their ears as well as their eyes
- they can approach English as a code which is decoded for reading & encoded for spelling.

## 2. New strategies to replace guessing

The best way to attack an unfamiliar word:

- decode by reading sounds
- say the sounds and listen for a word
- check for meaning in context.

Note: That's not the same as creating meaning from context.

### 3. Confidence

- All learning needs to be both challenging and safe. An honestly earned sense of achievement leads to a willingness to take a risk. Reading is risky for most of our students.
- 'The Deal' is that students don't have to know anything that they haven't learned on the programme. The result is that they know they won't be 'dropped' and always exceed expectations.

## 4. Age-appropriate materials

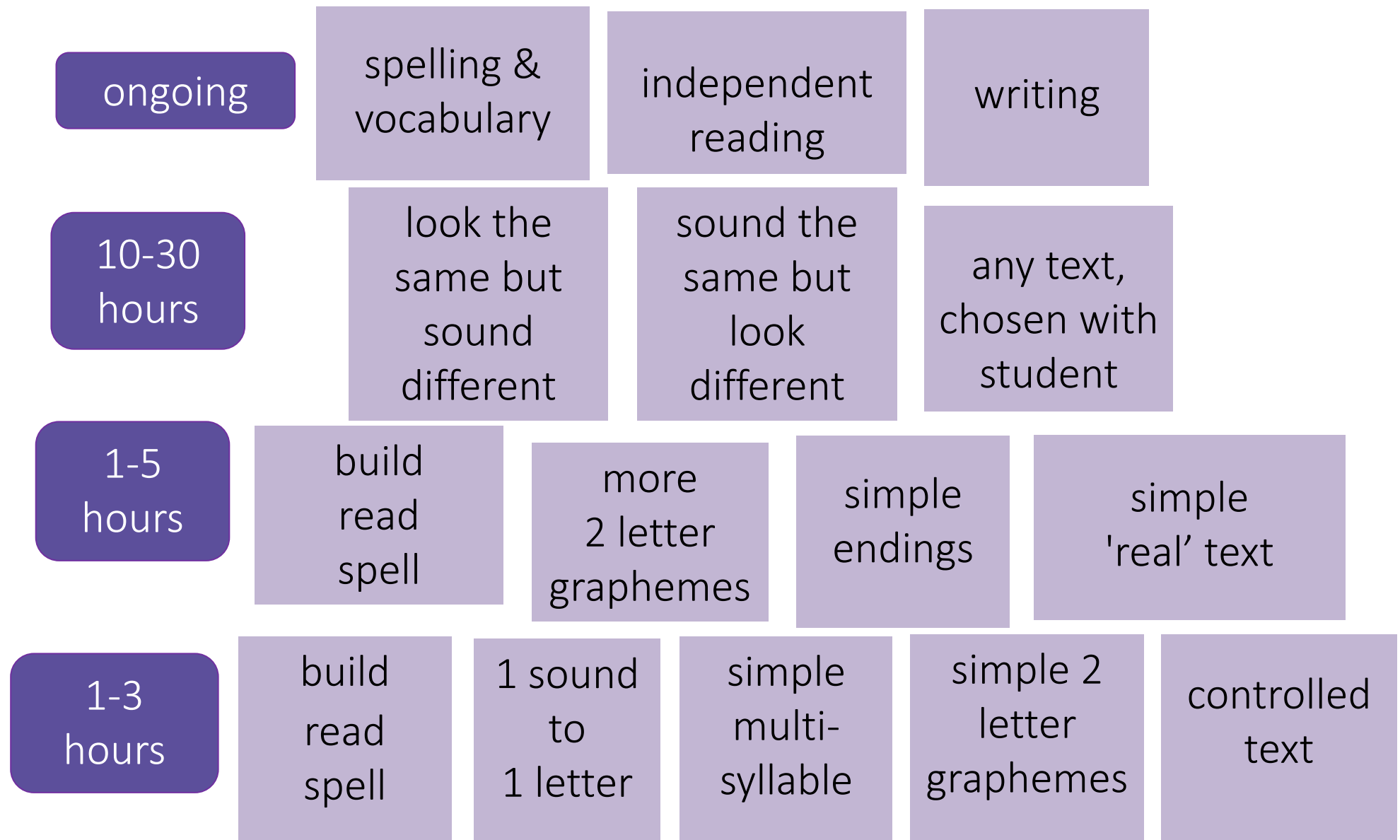
- Nearly all older struggling readers words they 'just know' so we don't have to use 100% decodable text.
- Instead, we start with more natural sentences like, 'Fran was upset. She had to admit she had lost her bag.'
- Multi-syllable words like 'fantastic' are essential from the first lesson.

## 5. Completely learner-centred lessons

TRT lessons:

- are fast-paced with a variety of activities
- help the learner discover the English code in a variety of contexts
- make use of each learner's latent knowledge
- lead to deeper exploration of the written language because TRT is not an end in itself.

## 6. Systematic teaching a bit at a time from the bottom up





# THAT READING THING

literacy for teens and adults wherever they are

[Visit That Reading Thing](#)

[Watch the first topic of the online training](#)

Email: [tmillar@thatreadingthing.com](mailto:tmillar@thatreadingthing.com)

©Tricia Millar If you want to use any part of this presentation,  
please contact the author at the email address above.