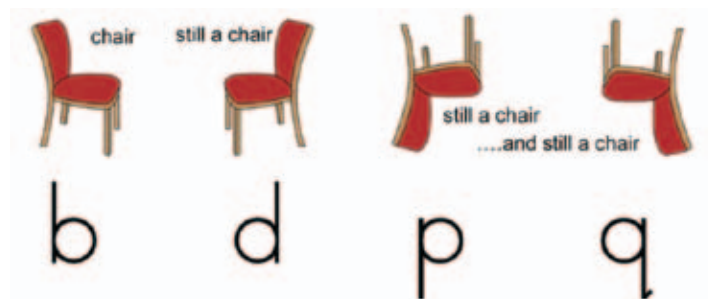


# Letter Reversals

**Most children reverse letters and numbers in the early years of schooling and this is recognised as typical in the development of literacy and numeracy skills. Yet some children (and adults) continue to show this difficulty beyond the developmentally appropriate period (around Year 3).**

Letter reversals are an indicator that there is confusion regarding what the letter should look like and the sound it represents. It is often the case that children who reverse letters do not have a clear understanding of what letters represent and the significance of the shape and orientation of the letter. For example, that the letter 'b' makes the /b/ sound whereas a 'd' is the symbol selected to record the /d/ sound. It is therefore important to improve this phonic knowledge of linking sounds in words to the letters that represent them, in order to decrease the likelihood of letter reversals.



In order to read (decode) and write (encode) it is critical that children understand the English alphabetic code. This is an essential foundation skill and basically means that each letter represents a sound in the English language, and that the orientation or the shape of the letter determines what sound it is related to. While the letters b, d, p and q are all the same shape, the way in which they are written down (their orientation) tells us which sound they represent.

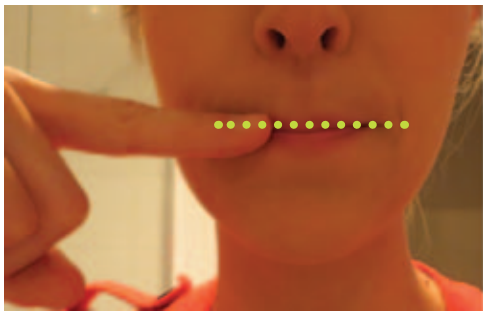
Many students will require supervised, repeated drill practise writing down single sounds to ensure they learn the correct letter formation and sound that matches with each letter/s. It is vital that students establish a visual memory of the distinctive features of each letter and learn how to form the letter with the proper sequence and direction. However, handwriting should not be taught as an isolated skill. When learning their letter-sound relationships, students should be encouraged to say the sound every time they write the letter/s. "The letter name is 'b' and its sound is /b/". Students enjoy practising writing letters in multisensory ways, including using:



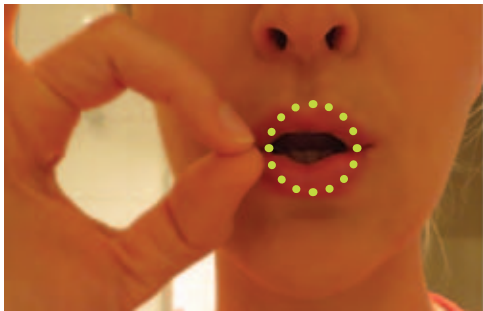
- Coloured textas/pencils
- Whiteboard & markers
- Sand
- Paint in a zip-lock bag
- Shaving cream on a window
- Making and tracing letters with play-doh
- Drawing in the air
- Drawing App on an iPad/Tablet

For students who reverse multiple letters (e.g. b/d, m/w, p/q), help them to discriminate between them by over-teaching one letter before introducing the other. Draw their attention to the ways each letter represents very different sounds. Build on this knowledge at a rate appropriate for each individual student to work towards goal of automatic and accurate recall of letter-sounds when reading and spelling.

One of the most common letter reversal errors is between 'b' and 'd'. An effective way to resolve this confusion is to teach the student to link the written letter to how the mouth forms the speech sound. Unlike strategies like the 'bat and ball' or 'bed' visual, this strategy does not distract the student from the sound or word they are trying to write with unrelated vocabulary.



When we say /b/ our mouth makes a line.  
When we write 'b' we start with a line.



When we say /d/ our mouth makes a circle.  
When we write 'd' we start with a circle.

- Use a mirror to discover how each
- sound is made with the student

Once students have rehearsed the letters they are reversing in isolation, the level of difficulty can be increased to ensure that the student generalises their new skills to their reading and spelling of whole words and sentences.

Difficulty

Writing single letters with correct letter formation (e.g. b, b, b, b)
Writing letters previously reversed in random order e.g. Teacher: "Write the sound that I say: b, b, d, b, d, d, b, d" etc.
Student to read back the sounds written. Some students enjoy being timed to see if they can beat their score the next time!
Reading and spelling single words (real and nonsense words) e.g. bid, deb, dob, bad, dab, bub, dad
Reading and spelling words in sentences e.g. His dad and dog sat on the big bed.