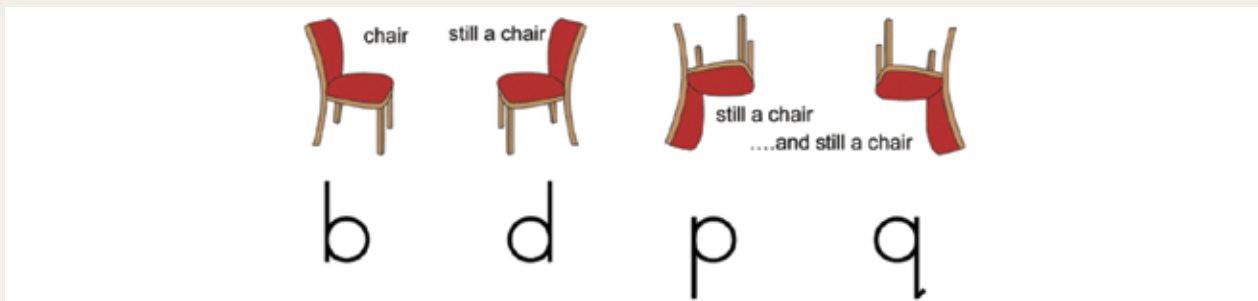


Tip Sheet

Strategies to Address 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 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 starting point, sequence and directionality. However, handwriting should not be taught as an isolated skill, the letter formation being taught should always be put into context. For younger students this can be done orally (e.g. brainstorm words that start with that particular letter) or for older students who have learnt all other letter formations, they can write words that include the letter. Although students enjoy practicing writing letters using different mediums (such as shaving cream, playdough or paint), the emphasis should be on the strokes and learning the correct motor plan.



Students enjoy practising writing letters in multisensory ways, including using

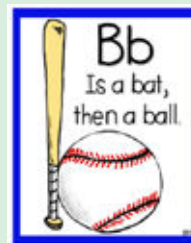
- Coloured textas/pencils
- Whiteboard & markers
- Sand
- Paint in a zip-lock bag
- Shaving cream on a window
- Making and tracing letters with play-doh
- Drawing in the air
- Drawing App on an iPad/Tablet

Tip Sheet

Strategies to Address Letter Reversals (continued)

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 a 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'. Some effective visual cues to assist with this are as follows:



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)
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.