

Focus Letters, Contractions, and Words: Individualizing Instruction

In *BOP-K*, Lessons 20–28 include a series of activities for teaching “focus letters,” pairs of similar letters (or contractions) that may be confusing for children. This article explains how you can individualize focus letter instruction to include any combination of letters or contractions with which your student is having difficulty.

The terms “reversals” and “confusers” are sometimes used to label characters that are mirror images of each other or very similar in configuration. However, when talking to children, it is preferable to describe these characters as shapes that are “a lot like each other, but not quite the same.” The focus should be on helping the child discriminate the differences between them until recognition becomes automatic.

Guidelines:

- Encourage the child to take ownership of their learning. Together, make a braille list of the letter pairs (or letter-contraction pairs like y and and) that are confusing for them, and allow them to pick the first pair to work on. Once they master this pair, have them place a tactile marker next to that pair on the list, or create a separate tactile or electronic chart where they can document their progress.
- When brailleing worksheets, use the following format:
 - two spaces between letters, contractions, and words on a line
 - two blank lines between each line of letters, contractions, or words (triple spaced) so the lines can be cut apart into strips
- Always have the student read each row or strip of letters, contractions, or words silently before reading them aloud. Encourage them to examine the characters carefully. Explain to them that no self-corrections are allowed when they read the rows to you.
- Provide no feedback until the child has finished reading all the rows or strips. Then ask them to reread any rows or strips where there was an error.
- Keep the strips for each focus pair in separate envelopes or zipper bags for easy retrieval and review.

- If the child misses a previously mastered focus letter or contraction in any other reading, review the mnemonic and strips for that letter or contraction as soon as possible.

Introducing a Pair of Focus Letters or Contractions

The following activities allow the child to discriminate between the two new characters in multiple ways.

SKILL The child will	Example: <u>d/do</u> & <u>f/from</u>	Instructional Notes
<p>identify one or two salient characteristic(s) of each letter/contraction/alphabetic wordsign that help(s) to discriminate between them by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using an APH Swing Cell or two Pop-a-Cells, • using hardcopy braille with the characters side by side, • creating a mnemonic, and/or • writing the characters and noting the fingering for each. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>d</u> has two dots on the right; <u>f</u> has one dot on the right • <u>d</u> looks like a <u>door</u> that is open when I track across it (The two dots on the right are the wall.) • I use two fingers on my right hand to write <u>d</u>, so <u>d</u> has two dots on the right. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the child's lead in identifying a characteristic to discriminate between the two characters. • Prompt the child to notice and describe the characteristic frequently when working with the characters in these exercises and in their other braille reading and writing. Ask, "How did you know that was the letter <u>d</u>?" The goal is for the child to refrain from guessing and overlearn the characteristic until recognition becomes automatic.

Day by Day Activity Suggestions

The activities below match the sequence used for Focus Letters and Words in Lessons 20–28. Adapt activities based on individual needs and rate of progress.

Day	SKILL The child will	Example: <u>d/do</u> & <u>f/from</u>	Instructional Notes
1	identify one letter/contraction that is different in a group of four by carefully noting the salient characteristic(s) of the characters. (Worksheet)	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>d d f d</p> <p>d f d d</p> <p>f d d d</p> <p>d d f d</p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use four lines, triple spaced. • Have the child examine all the characters in a line silently before reading the line aloud. • Repeat the activity, asking the child to read the alphabetic wordsigns instead of the letters (if applicable).
2	identify one letter/contraction that is different in a group of four by noticing the salient characteristic(s) of the character(s). (Strips)	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p>d d d f</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p>d f d d</p> </div> <p style="text-align: center;">etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut apart the lines of letters from the Day 1 worksheet, mix up the strips, cut off the top right corner of each for orientation, and ask the child to read the letters. • Then ask the child to read the alphabetic wordsigns (if applicable).
3	read the focus letters/contractions appearing multiple times in a line without and with additional characters. (Worksheet, then strips)	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>d d f d f f d f d</p> <p>f d f f d d f d d</p> <p>d b f r d f g d t</p> <p>p f f c d y d f l</p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use four lines, triple spaced. • Include only the focus letters in the first two lines. Mix the focus letters with additional letters that the child has already mastered in the last two lines. • Cut the lines apart into strips and cut off the top right corner of each for more practice.

Day	SKILL The child will	Example: <u>d/do</u> & <u>f/from</u>	Instructional Notes
4	read CVC words starting with the focus letters on a worksheet. To begin, include three of the same word and one different. (Worksheet, then strips)	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;"> <p>dog dog <u>fog</u> dog dig <u>fig</u> dig dig <u>fell</u> dell dell dell dill dill dill <u>fill</u></p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use four lines, triple spaced. • Cut the lines apart into strips and cut off the top right corner of each for more practice. • Create cards with words beginning with <u>f</u> or <u>d</u> for sorting and matching activities.

Maintaining Character Recognition through Daily Practice

Continue to have the child engage in short, daily practice sessions with the new focus letters or contractions and those previously introduced.

SKILL The child will	Example: <u>d/do</u> & <u>f/from</u>	Instructional Notes
read and write introduced focus letters, alphabetic wordsigns, and/or contractions in isolation and mixed up with other characters.	Read/Write: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>d</u> <u>f</u> <u>g</u> <u>d</u> <u>d</u> <u>a</u> <u>f</u> <u>y</u> <u>d</u> • <u>from</u> <u>do</u> <u>do</u> <u>from</u> <u>do</u> 	
read and write sentences using the focus letters/contractions and related alphabetic wordsigns.	Read/Write: I do not like the dog from my friend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use words with the focus letters/contractions, as well as their related alphabetic wordsigns. • Encourage the child to think of and write their own sentences with the focus letters, contractions, and/or alphabetic wordsigns.