

Clearing Up Your Students' Confusion of b and d

It is extremely common to see students confuse the lower case forms of the letters b and d. These are, after all, essentially mirror images. This confusion not only occurs with most dyslexic students, it also develops with many (if not most) beginning readers in kindergarten and first grade. Many students seem to stumble over these particular symbols, even when they process other letters successfully.

In the following pages you will find a simple set of activities taken from the Stevenson Language Skills Program which you can use to resolve your pupils' confusion of b and d. Print out these pages. Display Figure 1 to your class, follow the directives for teaching the letter d and reinforce with the activities listed below the directives. Then proceed to Figure 2, display it, teach the letter b and reinforce it in the same fashion. When you reach Figure 3, you should not only display the illustration, you should photocopy it for your students to work on. You will probably wish to repeat the activity that goes with Figure 3 from time to time over a period of weeks.

How fast students cover this material will depend in large measure on their age and learning style. You may be able to introduce Figure 1, 2 and 3 to some older dyslexic pupils in a single teaching session (although the Figure 3 activity will still bear repeating). Young beginning students, however, will do better with several shorter teaching sessions. Each Figure can be introduced on a different day, and the previous figure can be reviewed before the new one is introduced. (Severely LD students, no matter what their ages, will also fare better if the teaching sessions are spread over several days.)

Conventions

In the suggested teaching dialogues, probable student responses are found in parentheses. In the teaching directives, an underlined letter (e.g., d) refers to the name of the letter (i.e., "dee"). A letter between slash marks (e.g., /d/) refers to the sound of the letter (i.e., the first sound in the word down).

Hints

- Notice that the directives minimize the use of letter names and emphasize letter sounds instead. This strategy is also important. Whenever possible, talk about "the letter that makes the /d/ sound" instead of saying "dee."
- These activities use mnemonic clues (memory aids) to help students remember particular shapes and associate them with particular sounds. It may seem strange to say the clue word "throat" when you are talking about a circle, or "stick" when you are talking about a line, but the clues are important. Try to use them frequently when you teach.

Please Note: If you are using the full set of materials for the Beginning Level of The Stevenson Program, do not use these pages from the web site. Use the same clues and exercises as they appear in the *Beginning Level Teaching Cards* (Cards 8, 25 & 26). Follow those cards in sequence, and use the word lists that appear on the back.

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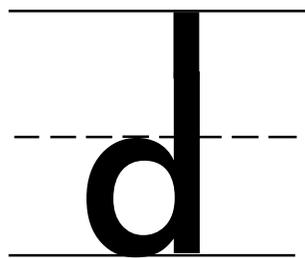
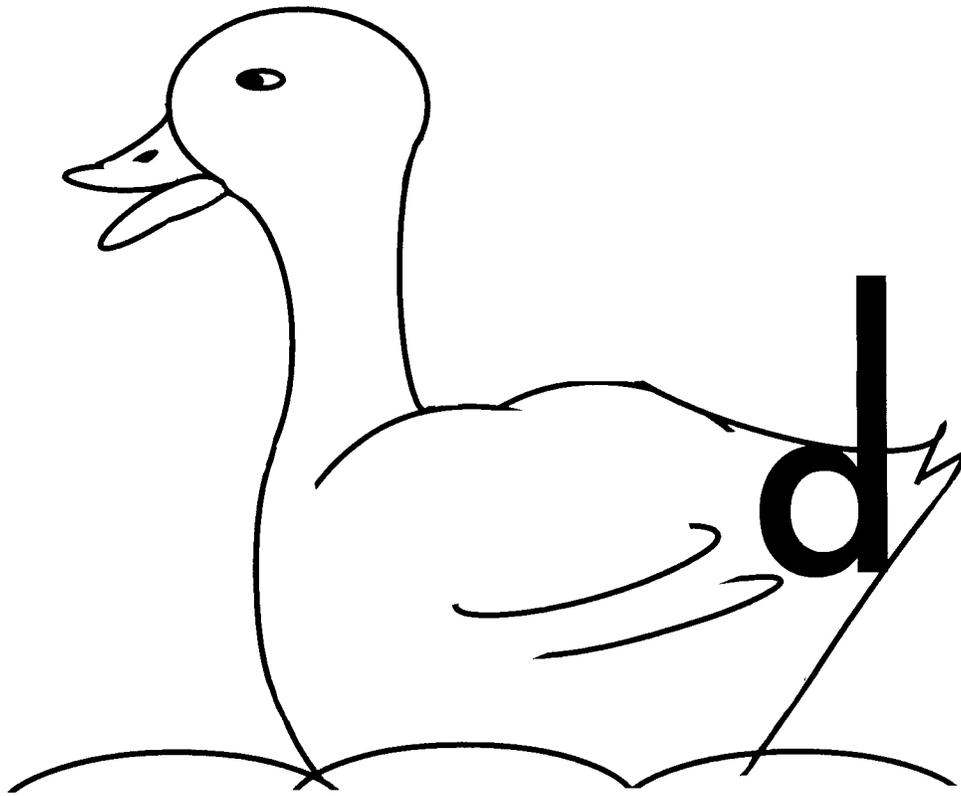


Figure 1

Teaching Figure 1 - The Letter d

Hold up Figure 1. Read or paraphrase:

There is a letter in the tail of this **duck** that makes the sound /d/. If you make this sound loud, you can feel your throat wiggle. Put your hand around the front of your neck and say /**d**/ very loudly. Can you feel your throat wiggle? (yes) This letter [point] is shaped like a circle with a tall stick. Think of the circle that comes first as the hole that goes **d-d-down** your throat. You can feel this letter **d-d-down** in your throat. Put your hand around the front of your throat again and say, “When I say **d-d-duck**, I feel it **d-d-down** in my throat.”

Ask these questions and, if necessary, help students come up with the following responses:

What is this a picture of? (a duck)
What is the first sound you hear in duck? (/d/)
What sound does this letter make? [Point to the d.] (/d/)
What comes first in this letter, the circle or the stick? (circle)
What does the circle make us think of? (The hole that goes **d-d-down** our throat.)

If students answer the second question with the letter name, Dee, correct them by saying, “That’s the letter’s name, I want its sound.” If students confuse the sounds /d/ and /t/, have them make the /t/ sound and point out that /t/ tickles the lips and /d/ wiggles the throat. When you reach letter **b** (Figure 2) you will return to this letter d card to remind students that the circle for the throat comes first for d.

On the board print a word that you know students can read which begins or ends with the letter d. (If your pupils are in the Stevenson Reading Program, use the word toad.) Guide your students as they decode this word. Before your teaching period ends, return to this picture at least once and repeat the questions above, then repeat this exercise as often as necessary on subsequent days.

Additional Activities

- Have students print the letter d. Make sure that they make the circle first by saying, “Be sure you make the hole that goes down your throat first because we feel this letter in our throat.”
- For Phonemic Awareness, dictate the word list below and *before each word* ask the question, “Do you hear /d/ in the word ____?” If students cannot answer correctly with a simple yes or no, change the word order and repeat the procedure *exaggerating the /d/ sound* until they succeed. (To avoid causing students mental fatigue, however, do not repeat this task frequently during a single session.)

Word List: down, run, bad, doctor, swing, corner, paid, door

- For Phonemic Awareness, dictate the word list below and *before each word* ask the question, “Where do you hear /d/ in the word ____ - at the beginning, in the middle or at the end?” (Demonstrate with the first word, if necessary.) If students cannot answer correctly, change the order of the words and repeat the procedure *exaggerating the /d/ sound* until they succeed. (To avoid causing students mental fatigue, however, do not repeat this task frequently during a single teaching session.)

Word List: toad, ladder, dollar, double, head, dot, speeding, load,

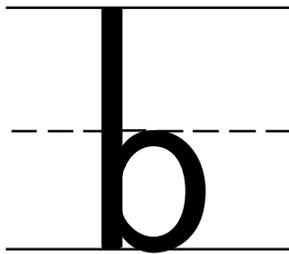
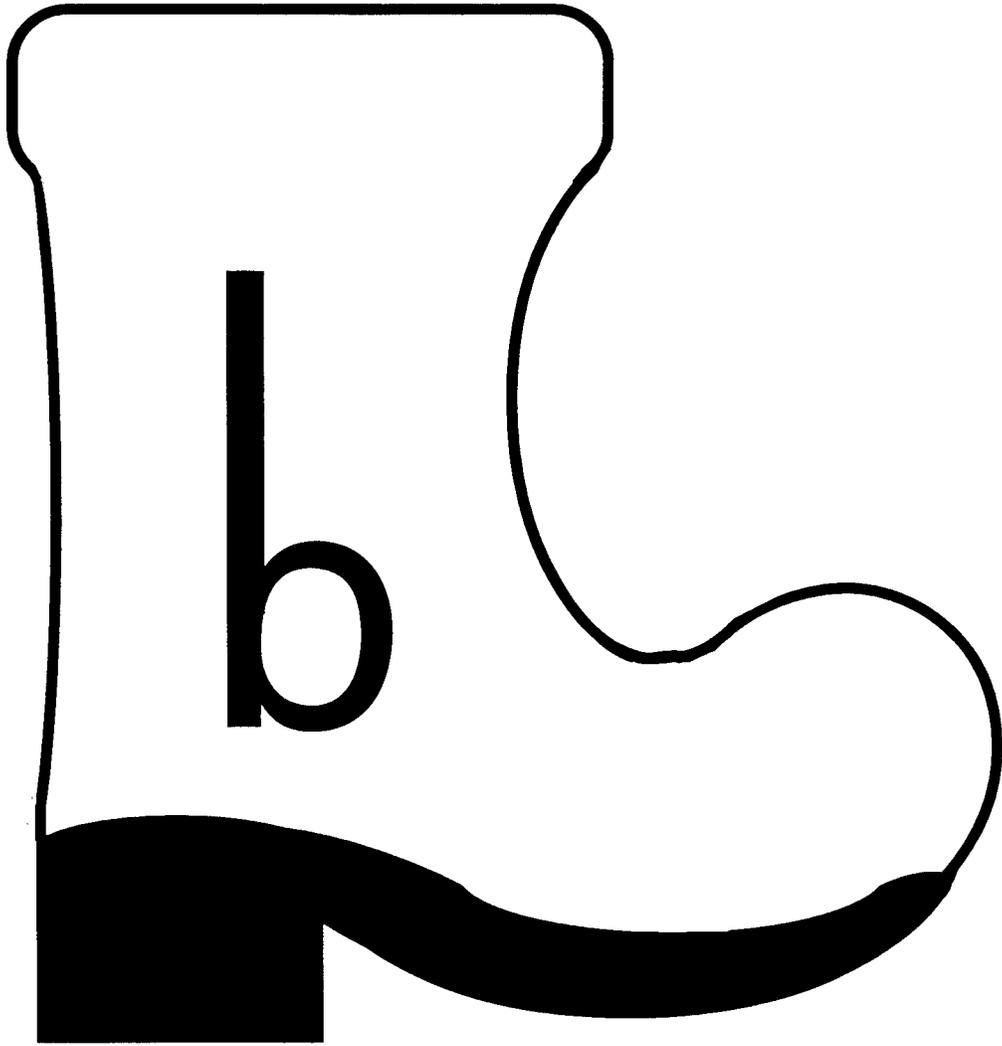


Figure 2

Teaching Figure 2 (The Letter b)

Hold up Figure 2. Read or paraphrase:

This is a picture of a **boot**. Inside the **boot** is a letter that makes the /b/ sound which begins the word **boot**. Can you make the first sound you hear in **boot**? (/b/)

The name of this letter is **bee** like the little insect that makes honey. In fact sometimes a little bee likes to hang out on top of this stick. [Point to the line that comes at the front of the letter below.] We will learn more about the bee later. Right now, I just want you to give me this letter's sound. What sound does this letter make again. (/b/)

Print a few words on the board that begin with b and help your students read them. If you are using the Stevenson Program apply the Seven Special Steps to bead and boat.) Before your teaching period ends, return to this figure at least once and ask the questions below. Repeat this exercise as often as necessary on subsequent days.

What is this a picture of? (a boot)
What is the first sound you hear in the word boot? (/b/)
What sound does this letter make? (/b/)

If students answer the second question with the letter name, Bee, correct them by saying, "That's the letter's name, I want its sound."

Additional Activities

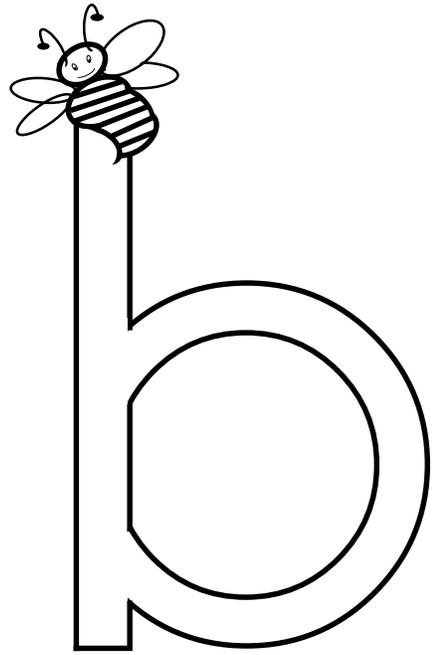
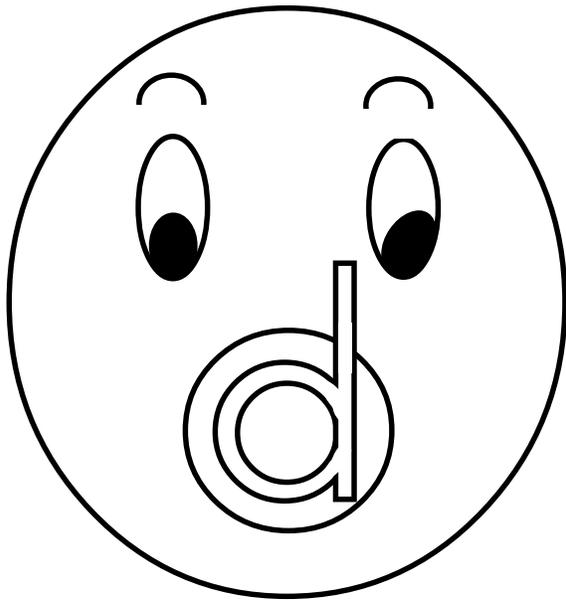
- Have students print the letter b. Tell them they must make the stick first because they will learn about a bee that likes to hang out on the stick.
- For Phonemic Awareness, dictate the word list below and *before each word* ask the question, "Do you hear /b/ in the word ____?" If students cannot answer correctly with a simple yes or no, change the order of the words and repeat the procedure *exaggerating the sound* until they succeed. (To avoid causing students mental fatigue, however, do not repeat this task frequently during a single teaching session.)

Word List: beak, grab, flower, bath, weed, rub, pole, bedtime

- For Phonemic Awareness, dictate the word list below and *before each word* ask the question, "Where do you hear /b/ in the word ____ - at the beginning, in the middle or at the end?" If students cannot answer correctly, change the order of the words and repeat the procedure *exaggerating the sound* until they succeed. (Do not, however, repeat this exercise more than a few times during a single teaching session.)

Word List: beads, rabbit, big, crib, rubbing, truck, bean, tub

- During the school day, students can emphasize /b/ each time they say a word which begins with b. For example, one student could say to another, "Please hand me the **blue book, Bob.**"



d

b

d d b b d b d b d b b

b d b d d b d d b d d

b d d b d d b d b b d

Figure 3

Teaching Figure 3 - Resolving b and d Confusion

Photocopy Figure 3 and distribute the copies to your students. They should have the copies on their desks as you speak. Also, have Figure 1 (the letter d) and Figure 2 (the letter b) available for yourself in case you need to review them. You may wish to have them taped on the board behind you as you work. As you proceed with this teaching activity, do not be surprised if students give you letter names when you request letter sounds. Correct them as usual by simply saying, "That's the letter's name, I want its sound."

Hold up this card and read or paraphrase the following:

What sound does this first letter make? [Point to the d.] (/d/) That's right the /d/ sound is **d-d-down** in the throat. See the picture of this letter **down** in the throat. What sound does this next letter make? [Point to b.] (/b/) That's right. Do you see the **bumble bee** on top of the stick part of this letter? (yes) The words **bumble bee** start with the /b/ sound, so the bee likes to hang out on top of the stick part of the letter b.

Do you see how these two letters look alike? One looks like the other, only backwards. Because these letters look so much alike, they often confuse us. But we are going to play a special game to help you remember which letter makes which sound. Every time you see one of these letters, I want you to stop for a moment and then use your imaginations. If you see the round part of the letter first when you are reading, pretend the circle is your throat. Which sound do you feel **d-d-down** in your throat? (/d/ When you are reading and you see the stick first, pretend there is a bumble bee on top of the stick. What sound begins the words **bumble bee**? (/b/) Now, go through the first row of letters with me and make the right sound. If you see a throat shape first, what sound will you make? (/d/) If you see the stick first with a bee on top, what sound will you make? (/b/)

Students should be able to go through the first line saying /d/, /d/, /b/, /b/, /d/, /b/, /d/, /b/, /d/, /b/, /b/. If you are concerned about particular students, work with them one-to-one or in small groups. Let pupils move at their own pace, and stress accuracy, not speed. (Do not insist on pure sounds. Pupils may add a schwa sound and say /buh/ or /duh/. For this exercise, students should only be concerned about choosing the correct one out of the two sounds.)

For the second line, students should draw their own bees on the stick part of b before making the sounds. (Do not be concerned about how well the bee is drawn.) Check the papers to make sure pupils have chosen the correct lines for the bee before they start to sound out the letters. For the third line, students should try to make the correct sound without any bees on the sticks.

Once you have finished, print several words that begin or end with b and d on the board and ask your students to read them. Remind them of the b and d clues as necessary. (In the Stevenson Program apply the Seven Special Reading Steps to: bead, load, dear, feed, beet, deal, paid, bait, lead, deer, boat, bean.)

Repeat this activity regularly. Create your own b and d sequence, so pupils are not reliant on this card. Some students may need to practice this exercise occasionally for months. Perform the activity frequently for brief periods of time rather than for a long period of time once in a while.

When students are successful with this decoding activity, create similar encoding exercises. For example, dictate /b/, /d/, /d/, /b/, /d/, /b/, /b/, /d/ and ask students to print the correct letter for each sound (i.e., b, d, d, b, d, b, b, d). If students have difficulty with the encoding exercise, ask them to say the sound to themselves out loud and see if they can feel it in their throats. Many students will need to return to the "throat-first", "stick-first" clues from time to time before they automate this skill.