



Prompts

Written English can be confusing for a child who is just learning how to read. In fact, it is almost impossible to write a pair of sentences without having words that are irregular—which means that some letters in these words do not make the same sound as the same letters in other words. Consider the sentence: Who was at the door?

The word WHO is irregular because the letters W and O do not make the sounds they make in most words. The word WAS is irregular because the letter A makes the sound UH, which is not a "regular" sound for A. The word AT is the only "regular" word in the sentence. A and T make the sounds they usually make in words. The word THE in this context is irregular because the letters T and H together make only one sound. That sound is different from the sound T makes in the word AT, or the sound H makes in the word WHO. The word DOOR is irregular because the sound for the letter combination OO is not the sound OO usually makes.

Prompts are special changes in the way words are written. They are like training wheels in that they make it easier for children to learn what is "regular" about words. The prompts in *Funnix* are systematically faded after the child has thoroughly mastered reading the prompted words. Here is how the sentence would look completely prompted in *Funnix*,

Who was at the door?

***Funnix* PRESENTS FOUR TYPES OF PROMPTS**

1. **Prompts that show unique sounds for letter combinations**, for instance: th, ch, sh, wh, er, ir, ur, al, oo. *Funnix* initially underlines these letter combinations so words like THEM, SHOP, CHOP, WHEN, HER, FIRM, SALT, and MOON are regularized, along with hundreds of other words. For more information, see the Sounds Charts (pages 24-26) in the Teacher's Guide.

2. **Prompts for combinations that make a letter-name sound.**

ai ea oa ay ar

In each combination, one letter says its name, and the other letter is silent. The black letter says its name. The blue letter is silent. Any blue letter in a word alerts the child that another letter in the word says its name. This prompt makes the following words (and many more) regular:

paint read boat play farm

3. **Prompts for blue-letter combinations that are separated by other letters in a word:** These words have a silent E at the end of the word. With this prompt, a lot more words are regular, such as:

gave mile rode here

In all these words, the blue letter doesn't make a sound. It also signals that another letter in the word says its name—just like the combinations in which the letters are together.

4. **Prompts that indicate word parts that do not follow any of the rules the child has learned.** This prompt is shown with a squiggly line under the part of the word that is still irregular. A word part with a squiggly underline means that it is different, but the rest of the word can be sounded out the regular way. Here are some examples:

put have was said

- The word PUT has a squiggle under the U. The U in PUT doesn't make the short sound or the long sound.
- The word HAVE has a squiggle under the silent letter. That means the letter that is supposed to say its name does not say its name in this word.
- The word WAS has a squiggle under the A, because A doesn't make either of the regular sounds for A.
- The word SAID has a squiggle under the letters AI because this AI doesn't make the sound the children have learned for the combination AI (for example, SAIL).

Note that Funnix does not teach a lot of the language or verbal rules that are taught in traditional phonics programs. Instead, Funnix introduces simple rules that show what to do, without a lot of explanations. Children don't hear about "long vowel" and "short vowel" sounds. They don't hear rules like: "If the vowel is followed by a single consonant and E, the vowel makes a long-vowel sound." Instead, they learn that if a combination has a blue letter, the black letter in the combination says its name. Done.

REDUCING PROMPT DEPENDENCY

Funnix systematically reduces children's dependency on prompts so children are reading completely unprompted text long before they finish **Funnix**. In other programs, prompts are not used wisely, and children become dependent on them. When those prompts are removed, the children have trouble reading the unprompted words, because that program taught them to become dependent on the prompts.

Funnix deals with this problem by systematically dropping the prompts. This process does not occur all at once but is a process that spans many lessons. Sometimes, the second reading of the story will have unprompted words that were prompted in the first reading. Sometimes, the words that have been presented frequently will appear in a list that has no prompts.

Workbook activities provide another safeguard against dependency on prompts. The Workbook is printed in black and white, providing children with systematic practice of reading unprompted words containing blue-letter combinations.

For one of the regular Workbook activities children trace a sentence and write it below. The sentence children copy in Lesson 38 doesn't prompt. Notice the EA in NEAR. It has neither a blue A, nor an underline. Reading and writing words reduces the children's dependency on the prompts.

The final protection against dependency on prompts is the spelling component. When the children spell words orally, they say the letter names. When they write the words, they write the letters for the sounds. They don't write underlines or blue letters. They are told about the features of the words they'll write. For example, in Lesson 86, children spell words with the combination AR. The narrator says: "The combination that makes the sound R is spelled A-R. All the words you will write have the combination A-R. Word 1 is farm. What word? . . . Spell farm. . . "