

CONFUSING LOWER CASE

b and **d** (and **p** and **q**).

It's very normal for young learners to confuse the above letters. After all, they look so similar. For some children, however, this difficulty persists beyond the first year of schooling and really slows down reading and writing. Instead of waiting to see whether these letters will present a difficulty, why not teach each letter in the first instance by using mnemonics? **Mnemonics are "memory tricks" that link new learning with something a student already knows. Mnemonics work best when they are meaningful to the user.*

First of all, learn about ONE letter only and allow students to explore it thoroughly. When one letter is known well, the other letter's differences will usually be more obvious when presented.

For example, in Pelican Talk's Foundation Scope and Sequence (free online), **d** is introduced on Day One of Week Two and **b** is introduced halfway through the following week.

Over the years I have come across various mnemonics.

The Bat and Ball (for learning about **b**):

First draw the bat (the straight line) then the ball (the circle). This makes a "b" which is the letter at the start of the words "bat" and "ball".

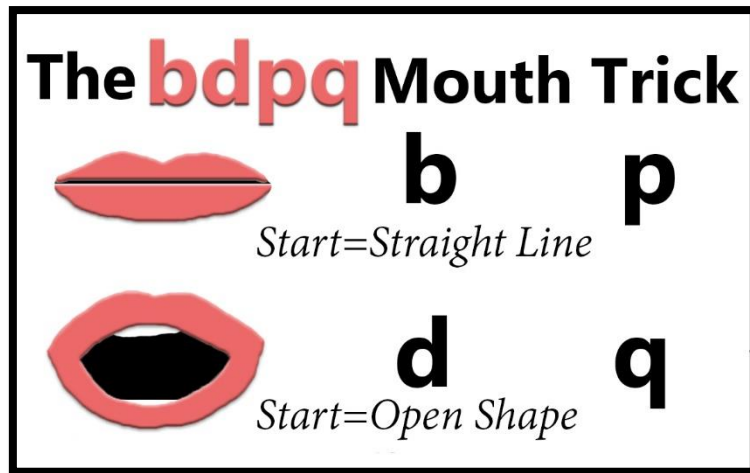
Drum and Drumstick: First draw the drum (the circle) then the drumstick (the straight line). This makes a "d" which is the letter at the start of the word "drum".

Drawback: These mnemonics rely on the student remembering which items come first; the bat and the drum. Some students reverse this; for example, drawing the ball and then the bat. This technique also relies on the student knowing the sound/letter at the start of each of the words. This knowledge is not automatic for all young learners, particularly those who are struggling.

The Bed: Using the word "bed", the letters "b" and "d" are likened to the bedhead and the foot of the bed. The hands can also be shaped to look like the bed and the corresponding letters.

Drawback: This relies on the student knowing the spelling of the word "bed" and the position of each of the letters within the word. The use of the hand cues can be cumbersome for writing tasks.

My favourite mnemonic is over the page...



I prefer this MOUTH TRICK because it uses oral cues (cues you can feel in the mouth) rather than visual cues (and visual processing is often at the root of the problem).

It can be used to differentiate **b** from **d** ... and **p** from **q** (cursive and non-cursive lower case fonts).

Each of these letters is made using a line and a circle.

Get the first part right and the rest should flow.

(Note, however, that *directionality is required*. That is, the child needs to know that after the starting point the rest of the letter is to the right; the direction of writing on a page).

When you introduce the letter name or the sound of each letter, focus on where the lips *start*.

For writing:

d (the name or the sound) : the lips are open - so start by drawing an open circle

p (the name or the sound) : the lips are closed in a line – so start by drawing a line

b (the name or the sound) : the lips are closed in a line – so start by drawing a line

q (the name or the sound) - the lips are open – so start by drawing an open circle

For reading:

If you see the straight line first, start your mouth in the straight line position (lips closed) and make either a **b** or a **p** sound.

Have students explain the MOUTH TRICK. If they “get it” they will be able to explain it. It won’t work for all!

On the Pelican Talk website, you will find a JPEG picture free to download. This can be viewed on an interactive whiteboard or printed off as small cards to go in writing books or as table-top cues.