

Confusing b and d

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 explore the letters in the first instance by comparing, contrasting and using mnemonics?*

From my experience, students who continue to struggle with these letters, often have difficulties with directionality of print, letter formation (including reversals of letters like "s") and confusion with left and right.

**Mnemonics are "memory tricks" that link new learning with something a student already knows. Mnemonics work best when they are meaningful to the user.*

Over the years I have come across various mnemonics...

b d b d b d b d

The Bat and Ball: 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: This relies 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.

b d b d b d b d

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.

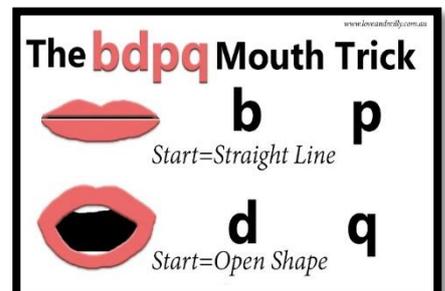
b d b d b d b d

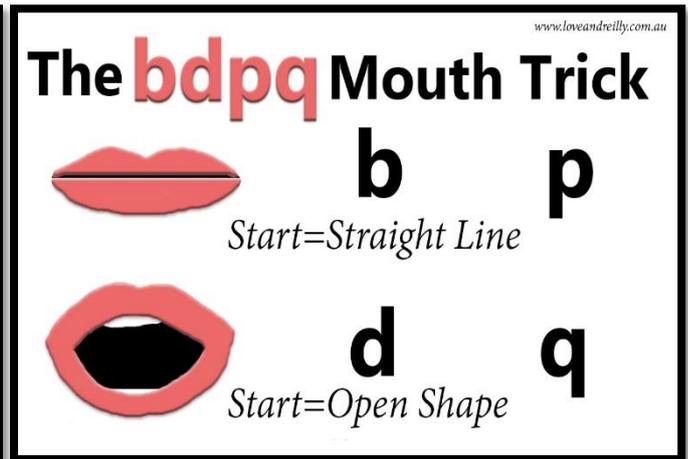
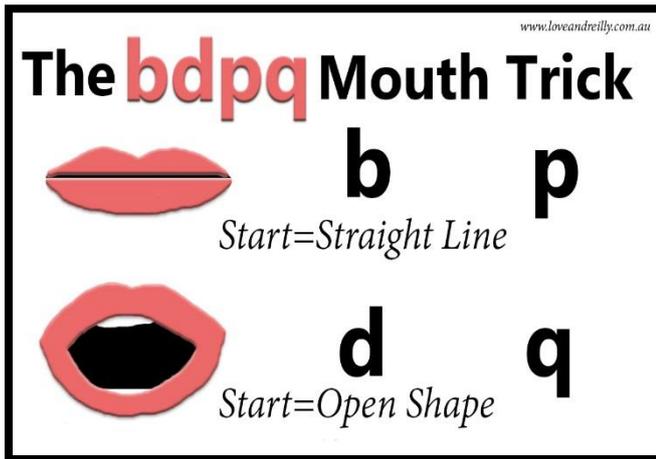
The bdpq Mouth Trick: THIS IS MY FAVOURITE BECAUSE IT USES ORAL CUES RATHER THAN VISUAL CUES (AND VISUAL PROCESSING ARE OFTEN AT THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM). IT TACKLES "p" and "q" as well as "b" and "d".

Say the sounds /b/ and /p/ or the letter names "b" and "p". In each of these, we start by placing our lips together in a straight line. Therefore, to write these letters, we should draw the straight line first (this also works for cursive).

Now say the sounds /d/ and /q/ or the letters "d" or "q". For these, the mouth is open, therefore start by drawing the open shape.

For reading, if you see the straight line first, start your mouth in the straight line position (lips closed).
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TEACHING AND PRACTISING THE MOUTH TRICK

1. Explain and discuss the Mouth Trick by saying the sounds and having the students watch your lips. Have students make the sounds and feel what their lips are doing in the starting position.
2. Next tell the students to again watch where your mouth starts when you say /b/ (or /p/). Gesture to the horizontal straight line of your lips when saying /b/ (or /p/) and say "My lips started in a straight line... so I start by drawing a straight line." Then gesture the straight line (vertical) for writing the letter and go ahead and draw the line. Explain how your lips then pop open and this is like the open shape that comes next (this works better with non-cursive font in reading exercises). Repeat the sound and then write the rest of the letter.
3. Now do the same for the letter "d" and "q". Say "Watch where my mouth starts when I say /d/". Gesture a circular motion at your lips when you say the sound. Now do the circular motion again towards your writing surface and comment; "My mouth starts with a circle, so the letter starts with a circle."
4. To practise writing the letters, say a range of sounds and or letters and have the students use their new Mouth Trick to write the correct letter using correct letter formation.
5. To practise reading the letters, show the letters over the page and have students practise a) saying the names of each letter and then b) saying the sounds for each letter. Remind them to put their lips in a straight line when they first see a straight line. You can use the above pictures as cue cards. (Print, cut up and laminate).
6. If you require a larger image of the Mouth Trick picture, simply send an email to info@loveandreilly.com.au

b b d d b d b b

d b b b d d b d

d b p b p p q

p q p p q p q b

p q p d q p q b d d d

b d d b d p p d q

b d d b p b d d b p d

