



**How  
to**

**Solve**

# **Letter Reversals**

 ALL ABOUT *Reading*

 ALL ABOUT *Spelling*

# How to Solve Letter Reversals

Hi, my name is Marie Rippel and I’m the author of the *All About® Reading* and *All About® Spelling* programs. Thanks for downloading my free e-book on how to solve letter reversals!

Many young children struggle with letter reversals (also called *letter confusion*). The most frequently confused pairs of letters are *b* and *d*, *p* and *q*, *p* and *d*, and *n* and *u*. The letter confusion can exist in handwriting, in reading, or both. When students have persistent reversals, reading becomes a struggle and it can be difficult for them to spell and express themselves in writing.

Fortunately, you can solve problems with letter reversals. In this e-book, I’ll share techniques and methods that will explain how to prevent letter reversals before they begin, as well as what to do if your child is already reversing letters.

As you read through this e-book, feel free to jot down any questions you may have. You can email us at [support@allaboutlearningpress.com](mailto:support@allaboutlearningpress.com) or call us at 715-477-1976. No question is too big or too small! We’re here to help.

I hope this e-book provides helpful information as you discover the benefits of the Orton-Gillingham approach.

Make learning a joy!

Marie Rippel

Marie Rippel  
Founder, All About® Learning Press, Inc.



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# 1 What Is Normal?



Most of the letters of the alphabet have unique shapes, so no matter which way you turn them, they can't be confused with any others. For example, the letter *m* looks quite different from the letter *x*, and *f* is not likely to be confused with *z*.

There are, however, a few notorious troublemakers—particularly *b* and *d*, the letters that children most often have trouble with. It is easy to see where the confusion comes from: just flip the *b* and it becomes a *d*. The beginning reader or dyslexic child may not realize that the direction of the letter matters, or he may not be able to remember which letter is which.

Letters and numbers that can be flipped include:

bd pq pd nu 69

If your child is between the ages of three and seven and is just starting to read, making occasional reversal errors when reading or writing is perfectly normal. It does not mean that your child has dyslexia or a reading disability. Make a gentle correction and move on.

But if your child is eight years or older, has had prior reading instruction, and is making frequent letter reversal errors, it is important to take action to solve the reversal problems.



## Could It Be Dyslexia?

If your child is over eight years old, you might suspect dyslexia. Follow the link below for our screening checklist designed to help you determine if your child has the signs of dyslexia.

<http://bit.ly/Dyslexia-Checklist>

# 2 Preventing and Resolving

**As parents and teachers,** we have two jobs to do regarding reversals:

1. Try to prevent confusion.
2. Where confusion exists, resolve it.

Let's take a closer look at each of these jobs.

**Job #1: Try to prevent letter confusion before it begins.**

When your child is learning to print, be sure to teach correct letter formation. This is critical to prevent confusion.



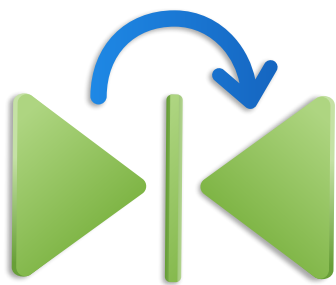
When forming the letter *b*, start with the stick first, followed by the circle. To write the letter *d*, do just the opposite: start with the circle first, followed by the stick.

**Have your child use lined paper** so it is clear where the circle is in relation to the stick. Also be sure your student does not lift the pencil from the paper when writing any of the confusable letters.



## Teaching Separately

The *All About*® *Reading* program is carefully structured to minimize the likelihood of letter reversals. We teach the sounds of potentially confusing letters like *b* and *d* in separate lessons. The child's task is simplified because he only has to make one new visual discrimination at a time.



## **Job #2: If your child already reverses letters, resolve the confusion.**

If you are working with older learners, it may be too late to prevent confusion. Maybe they've had a few false starts in reading and have already confused these troublemakers. Maybe they encounter the letter *b* and misinterpret it as the letter *d*. Or maybe they read the word *bad* as *dab*, or *fad* as *fab*. You can give a gentle correction, pull out the corresponding Phonogram Cards, and re-teach the letters separately, but your student may *still* mix them up.

**In the remainder of this e-book, we'll cover four effective methods to clear up tough reversal problems:**

**Method 1:** Use tactile surfaces

**Method 2:** Use air writing

**Method 3:** Use analogies

**Method 4:** Draw attention to mouth shape

You may only need to use one of these methods, but for more persistent letter reversers, you may need to use all four methods.

This e-book includes demonstrations for correcting *b* and *d* reversals (the most common letter reversals), but the same concepts can be applied to any letter or number.

Please note that it's important to concentrate on just one letter per session. Wait until that letter is completely mastered before teaching another letter.

# 3 Method 1: Tactile Surfaces



**Our first method for correcting letter reversals is to use tactile surfaces.** Have a variety of textured surfaces for your child to choose from. Possibilities include flannel fabric, corrugated cardboard, very fine sandpaper, furry

fabric, or leather. Ask him which surface reminds him of the letter *b*, and then cut a large lowercase *b* out of the chosen tactile surface.



Using the pointer finger of his dominant hand, have your child trace the letter *b* on the textured surface. Be sure that he starts and ends in the correct place. Practice until he can easily write the letter *b*.

**When your child is ready to move on to a new letter, choose a different textured surface.** If fine sandpaper was used for the letter *b*, perhaps furry fabric can be used for the letter *d*.



## Free Download!

Our free Tactile Letter Cards download is the perfect way for your child to “feel” the alphabet! Use colored sand, glitter, pipe cleaners, rice, dried mung beans, or fabric to create unique textures. Grab your download by following the link below.

<http://bit.ly/Tactile-Cards>



# 4 Method 2: Air Writing

The second method we use for correcting reversals is air writing.

Air writing is simple: using the dominant hand, the child raises his arm and writes a letter in the air as he says the sound of the letter. The whole arm should be involved. Have the child use his pointer finger like a pen to write the letter in the air.



Here, Jimmy demonstrates how to use air writing to form the letter *b*. Notice that his entire arm is involved in order to activate large muscles. He is pretending that his pointer finger is a pen. While he forms the letter *b*, he is saying the sound of the letter, /b/.

**Brain research shows that two ideas practiced at the same time can permanently bond the ideas together.** In this case, the large movements of the arm combined with saying the sound of the letter will help link these two concepts together in your child's brain. Additionally, this multisensory activity takes advantage of the fact that the muscles in the shoulder and in the jaw have muscle memory, and this makes it easier for your child to recall the shape and sound of the letter.



**Free  
Download!**

Salt trays are another great way to help correct reversals. Our free printable includes recipes for yummy scented trays as well as alphabet cards with corresponding graphics. Try a different scent or color for each problem letter! Download it by following the link below.

<http://bit.ly/Salt-Trays>

# 5 Method 3: Analogies

**Our third method for preventing letter confusion involves the use of analogies.** Explain that the letter *b* is made up of two shapes: a bat and a ball. Using the tactile surface, demonstrate how you write the bat part of the letter first, followed by the ball.

As you write the letter *b*, say “bat-ball-/b/,” like this:



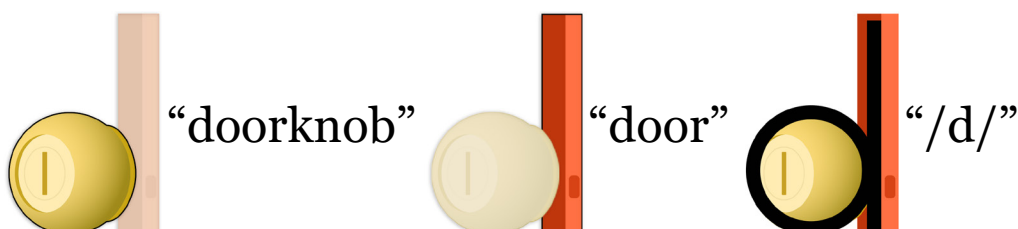
To further clarify which side of the letter the straight line is on, tell your student, “First you grab the bat, then you hit the ball.”

Have your student practice this motion and chant many times over a two-minute time period. Repeat the exercise several times a day.

Show your student that when you read from left to right, you encounter the bat part of the letter first. If he is ever unsure of the sound this letter makes when he sees it, he should think to himself, “bat-ball-/b/.” This will help him recall the sound of the letter *b*.

**To teach the letter *d*, you can use the analogy of a doorknob and a door.**

The doorknob represents the circle part of the letter and the door represents the straight line, like this:



## Free Posters!

Please see pages 12 and 13 of this e-book for printable pages with these analogies to help with *b-d* letter reversals. Simply print pages 12 and 13 (landscape orientation) and display the full-page graphics in a convenient location.

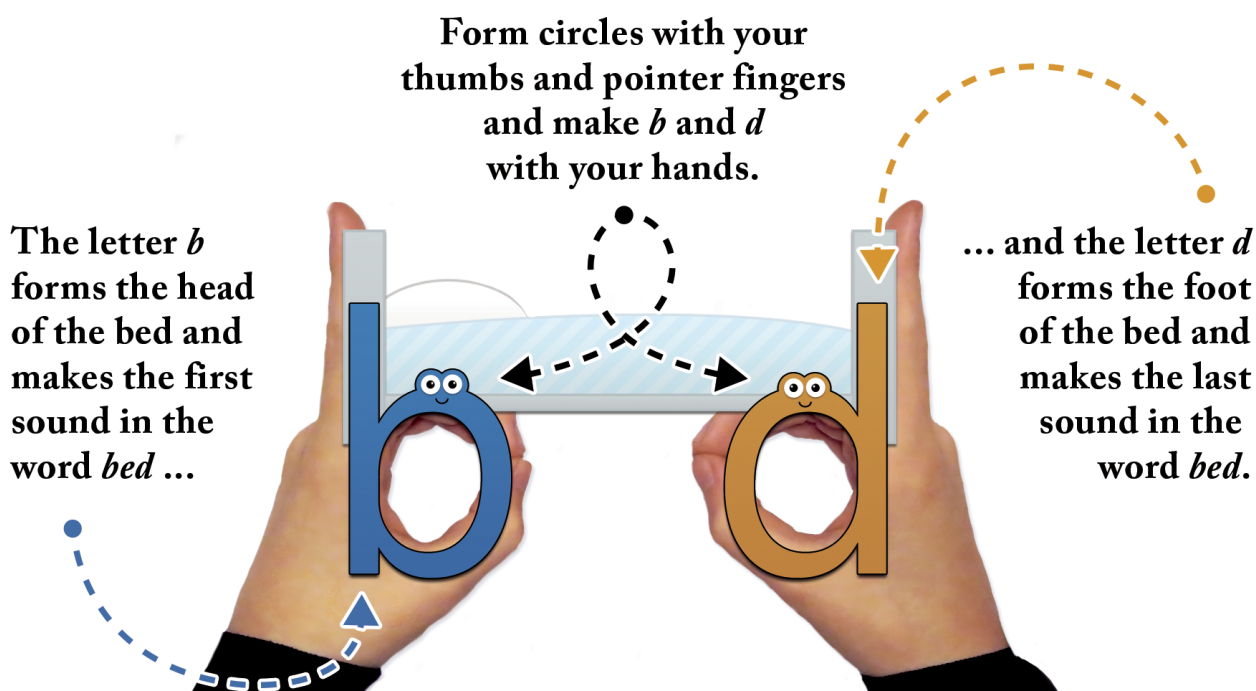


To clarify which side of the letter the straight line is on, tell your student, “First you grab the doorknob, then you open the door.”

Again, practice the motion and chant many times over a two-minute period. Repeat the exercise several times a day.

**Show your student that when you read from left to right, you encounter the doorknob part of the letter first.** If he is ever unsure of the sound this letter makes when he sees it, he should think to himself, “doorknob-door-/d/.” He will now be able to recall the sound of the letter *d*.

**A bed is another common analogy to help with *b* and *d* reversals.** However, keep in mind that this analogy may not help all children. For some kids the analogy may require too much thought, which can keep it from becoming automatic.



# 6 Method 4: Mouth Shapes



Our fourth method involves drawing attention to the shape our mouths make when forming specific letters.

For example, when we say /b/, our lips come together in a straight line. Point out that the straight line comes first when you write the letter *b*.



When we say /d/, our lips are open. Coincidentally, the circle comes first when you write the letter *d*.



## Additional Tips

If your child misreads a *b* as a *d*, refer back to the tactile surface activity and air writing that you did together. Point to the misread letter and say, “If you wrote this letter, what would this letter say?”

If your child can’t answer easily, ask him or her to draw the letter *b* using air writing. The sound of the letter (/b/–*bat*) should come more easily this way. Then have your child read the word again.

# 7 What's Next?

By reading this e-book, you've gained a new understanding of four methods you can use to solve letter reversals.

Although some of the principles in this e-book may sound complex, *All About Reading* and *All About Spelling* break them down into easy, bite-sized lessons that are easy for you to teach and easy for your student to learn.

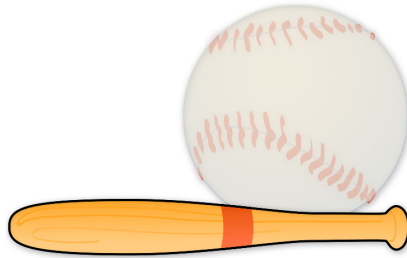
While I originally developed these programs for my own child who had a hard time learning to read and spell, they've gone on to help over 150,000 children master reading and spelling—even those who were previously diagnosed with a learning disorder.



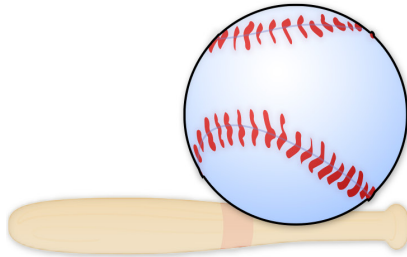
If you have any questions at all, please call us at 715-477-1976, or email us at [support@allaboutlearningpress.com](mailto:support@allaboutlearningpress.com). My staff and I are passionate about helping children read and spell, and we would love to help you help your child.



## Analogy for Teaching Lowercase b



“bat”



“ball”

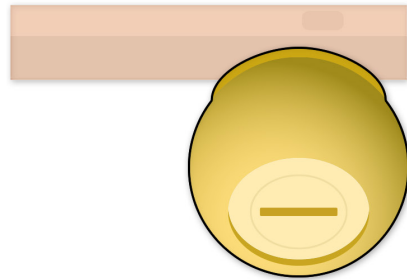


“/b/”

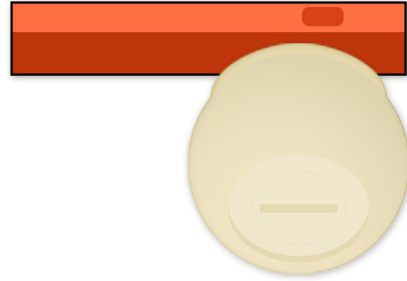
First you grab the **bat**, and then you hit the **ball**.

## Analogy for Teaching Lowercase d

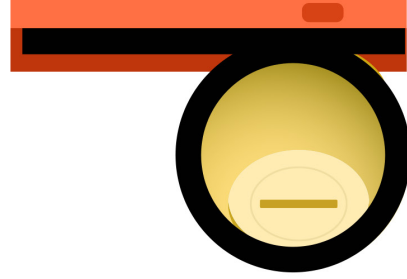
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“doorknob”



“door”



“/d/”

First you grab the **doorknob**, and then you open the **door**.