

**Donald Potter's Notes from Mr. Ed Miller's February 3, 1999**  
**Complaint to The Federal Trade Commission**  
**Concerning Grolier's Advertisements for the Dr. Seuss Beginner Books**

Prepared by Donald L. Potter, Odessa, TX  
December 23, 2005

**Get these 8 books for \$1.99**

*It's the  
Cat in the Hat's 40th Birthday!*

*You're invited to join in the fun! The fun of reading that is, with Beginner Books by Dr. Seuss & His Friends. Kids love the colorful illustrations, the humorous rhymes, the comical characters – like Dr. Seuss's Cat in the Hat, Al Perkins' Digging-est Dog, and the Berenstains' Bears, too.*

*Some children, often under three, will attempt to "read" the books by themselves – making up their own stories to fit the pictures they see.*

*The Beginner Books are specially written to help encourage your child to learn to read – and develop a lifelong love of reading.*

Subject: Complaint

The Grolier advertisements are false and misleading for many right-brained, inventive, artistic students that have the inherited, genetic ability to learn to identify words non-phonetically. Fifty percent of students have from a slight to an amazing ability to learn the non-phonetic reading. We have documented that students can be experts at non-phonetic word identification and successfully read many preschool and controlled vocabulary books up to the fourth grade level with a very poor ability to sound out words. Teachers and parents that only hear students read from these controlled vocabulary books are often not aware of the basic problem until they happen to hear the student attempt to read a simple article from the newspaper or *Reader's Digest*. This may never happen at the students' school!

Phonetic decoding and non-phonetic word identification are mutually exclusive. This means that the first learned system will block attempts to learn a second system. This is especially true when the student's first system is automatic and practiced over a long period of time.

Phonetic decoding requires the student to look at the word from a definite starting place – the left side of the word. The viewing then proceeds from left to right with the brain being cognizant of the letters and their interactions (phonics).

In non-phonetic, holistic viewing there is not a starting place, there is not a direction, and viewing is instantaneous and complete without a starting place or direction. This type of viewing has been described as the way we view cats and dogs, distinguish between them with intrinsic knowledge that is in our heads, but knowledge that is very difficult to put into words. Tapes help put the knowledge into the students mind.

The young dyslexic learning disabled student is attempting an almost impossible task of viewing words phonetically and non-phonetically holistically at the same time. Now the big question - where did the student learn the non-phonetic holistic viewing and why is he attempting to change to phonetic viewing?

The books, tapes, and dictionary included in the *Beginner Books Reading Program* are “specially written” to encourage students to develop an automatic non-phonetic reading ability that blocks the proper phonetic decoding of print and causes a reading disability, dyslexia and the disorganization of human behavior.

There is a consensus among investigators that many even most dyslexic students are right brained, inventive, artistic, average or above in intelligence, and have special spatial viewing abilities. It is not that the falsely advertised controlled vocabulary books caused the dyslexic to have any of the above named characteristics but, the specially written controlled vocabulary books were designed to facilitate the learning of a “sight” vocabulary by a non-phonetic method. Young students that become dyslexic are fascinated by these books that capitalize on their genetic inherited abilities. The Edward Miller research has found that students who automatize this non-phonetic viewing method are blocked from the proper phonetic decoding of print hence dyslexic. Availability of instructional materials becomes important. The first learned automatic system of decoding blocks the learning of a second automatic system.

In chapter two we will explain how we measure the dyslexic condition. We have found that early interventions are most successful and that the difficulty of intervention is proportional to the number of words missed on the phonetic portion of the *Miller Word Identification Assessment*.

Letting students play with specially written controlled vocabulary books is like letting students play with loaded guns.

## The Miller Word Identification Assessment (MWIA)

The MWIA measures:

1. The student's speed and accuracy identifying 260 (50 words for the *MWIA Level 1* from *Green Eggs & Ham* and 210 words for the *MWIA Level 2* from *The Cat in the Hat*) of the most commonly known sight words. Mr. Miller called these "Holistic words" because students are taught to recognize the as wholes apart from the phonetic values of the letters.
2. The student's speed and accuracy identifying 260 (50 words for the *MWIA Level 1* from the first 14 exercises in Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read and what you can do about it* and 210 words for the *MWIA Level 2* from the first 39 exercises in the same book.) easy phonetically regular words that are suitable for teaching the phonetic nature of our language. Mr. Miller called these words "Phonetic" because they are not generally taught as sight words. None of these words are in the Dolch List.
3. The student's ability to call words by conscious effort.

The measurements help us to better define reading learning disability, dyslexic, and the disorganization of human behavior.

## *The Dyslexic Brain*

### Basic Constructs Identified and Measured

By Mr. Edward Miller

We have measured three constructs of the dyslexic brain:

- I. Dyslexia is the unusual inability to correctly call easy phonetically regular words from word list. We note on our assessment the easy phonetically regular words the student calls incorrectly. The student is then asked to spell the missed words and again attempt to call the words correctly. This spelling requires that the student look at the words from left to right phonetically. Most dyslexic students are from 80% to 100% accurate on this task. This indicates that the student indeed has two modes of viewing the words, a comparatively fast inaccurate mode and a slower more accurate mode. With great effort many students first call words wrong and then correct without coaching. Under these conditions, the student's mind is evidently receiving two conflicting stimuli.
- II. For a student to be considered dyslexic, by this definition he must be able to call selected commonly known "sight words" more accurately and faster than would be considered possible based upon his measured inability to call phonetically regular words. The student must call these "sight words" at an automatic rate of speed. Sight words for each individual student are the words that he learned without phonetic knowledge. The look-say, whole language, controlled vocabulary book way of teaching encourages students to use cues about meaning (semantic cues), cues about structure of a particular text passage (syntactic cues), pictorial cues when they're available, and to bring all previous experience to bear enabling the student to identify words without phonetic knowledge. Yes, there really are two ways of identifying words. The **non-phonetic** word identification leads to the dyslexic brain. The **phonetic** leads to the dyslexic free brain.
- III. The dyslexic brain must have the inherited genetic ability to learn non-phonetic reading.

**There are many characteristics of dyslexic students:**

- **they often call letters b, d, p, and q incorrectly,**
- **they are often poor spellers, and**
- **they most often hate to read.**

**But these are not the basic constructs of dyslexia that can be measured. How can we measure the three constructs stated above?**

I. Dyslexia is the unusual inability to correctly call easy phonetically regular words from a word list.

To measure construct one, we have selected 260 words from the first 39 Exercises of Rudolf Flesch’s phonetic words in his 1955 bestseller, *Why Johnny Can’t Read and what you can do about it*. These words are one syllable, phonetically regular words that are suitable for teaching the phonetic structure of our language. The following table gives the phonetic decoding ability at a large private school in Concord, NC.

% of Mistakes when calling from a Phonetic Word List

Grade Level	# of students	A (0-2%)	B (3.10%)	C (11-60%)	D*
First	68	27	14	27	6
Second	58	27	21	10	0
Third	43	22	19	2	0
Fourth	56	31	19	6	1
Fifth	37	28	8	1	0
Total	262	135	81	46	7

\*D is the number of students counted in column B&C that did not do significantly better in the holistic by sight word list.

Note that 135 of the 262 students missed from 0-2% of the words. These students are on the right track and simply need to continue working in a good reading program. Of the 262 students, 81 miss-called from 2-10% of the words. This level of mistakes resulted in a slower and less accurate reading of a simple newspaper article. Of the 262 students, 46 miss-called from 10-60% of the words. Note the wide range of disability in this group. We have thus measured the most basic construct of the dyslexic brain, and we have a remediation program that works with ease for group B (2-10%) and with more concerted effort for group C (10 - 60%). We must be cognizant of the difference between dyslexic students. The fact that remediation programs that are based upon this definition work strengthens the definition.

II. For a student to be considered dyslexic, he must be able to call selected commonly known “sight words” more accurately and faster than would be considered possible based upon his measured inability to call phonetically regular words. The student must call these “sight words” at an automatic rate of speed.

Whole word advocates believe it is possible to teach a student to read by seeing the word in whole or in context. Phonetic rules are considered a waste of time to whole word advocates. Beginning in the 1930s, supporters of whole word (sight word) reading published the famous “Dick and Jane” books for use in the public schools. In 1957 the Houghton Mifflin Company published the first sight word reader designed for preschoolers. This book was developed using a limited vocabulary of only 210 sight words. The result was Dr. Seuss’ *The Cat in the Hat*. The Educational Book Club edition was published by Houghton, Mifflin Company, Boston and the trade edition was published simultaneously in New York by Random House, Inc. About four years later the book *Green Eggs and Ham* was also published with a limited “sight word” vocabulary of only fifty words. The vocabulary of these two books constitutes the 260 most commonly known sight words in the English language. These books are considered pre-school books. Our effort has been to ascertain the student first learned method of looking at words.



If you attempted to complete ten problems in the same pattern as the problem above, you would experience dyslexic confusion and mental punishment. Why? Because you have learned a mathematical system which has become your automatic method for deciphering numerical equations. In the case above, you were aware of what was happening to you. Pity the poor first grader that is attempting to read a phonetic system (English) by using a non-phonetic system. What if we didn't show the base 10 problem above but gave the base 12 example and insisted that you discover how to work in this new math?

### **Consider the following basic assumptions**

1. The English language system is basically phonetic.
2. Recognizing words "holistically by sight" is recognizing words by a non-phonetic system.
3. Recognizing words "holistically by sight" and phonetically are mutually exclusive.
4. The first learned base 10 number system makes efforts to work in the base 12 number system confusing, inaccurate, and slow.
5. Dyslexic students first over learn a basic vocabulary of sight words. This initial system of word identification makes phonetic decoding confusing, inaccurate, and slow for the student.

### **Dyslexia Definition**

Reading requires access to and use of the phonetic code. Not only that it requires a definite strategy by the child in his analysis of written text: it isn't simply that the task requires phonetic decoding – it is also that the child must be "committed" (or his brain must be committed) to this phonetic strategy. The dyslexic student's brain is committed to a "holistic by sight" strategy of word identification (Construct II). The "holistic by sight" strategy is contradictory to – and mutually exclusive of the required phonetic strategy of word identification and causes the conflict disorder that we call dyslexia.

## THE DISORGANIZATION OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

The major experimental work relative to the disorganization of human behavior was conducted by two Russian psychologists Dr. Pavlov and Dr. Aleksandr R. Luria. In the preface to his book, Dr. Luria wrote:

The researches described here are the results of the experimental psychological investigations carried on at the State Institute of Experimental Psychology, Moscow, during the period of 1923-1930. The chief problems of the author were an objective and materialistic description of the mechanisms lying at the basis of the disorganization of human behavior and an experimental approach to the laws of its regulation. ..To accomplish this it was necessary to create artificially affects and models of experimental neuroses which made possible an analysis of the laws lying at the basis of the disintegration of behavior.

In Chapter One, Luria writes:

Pavlov obtained very definite affective “breaks,” an acute disorganization of behavior, each time that the conditioned reflexes collided, when the animal was unable to react to two mutually exclusive tendencies, or was incapable of adequately responding to any imperative problem.

Students that learn to read controlled vocabulary books fast and accurately without discovering the phonetic nature of the English language develop a conditioned reflex. That is the student sees the printed word and identifies the word. This non-phonetic identification of words is possible by using strategies of association, expectation, rhyming, configurational, and possibly by techniques not fully understood by adults. About one half of the students have this ability to learn and enjoy this non-phonetic reading. Enjoy that is until they discover, with or without the help of teachers and parents, the alphabetic principle and the phonetic nature of our language. Phonetic and look-and-say, whole word non-phonetic word identification are mutually exclusive tendencies and the student if incapable of adequately responding to the two stimuli. This is the basic condition for the disorganization of human behavior.

The alphabetic system is in harmony with the spoken language because it is based on it. But the ideographic look-say system is in opposite to the spoken language because it is an entirely separate system of graphic symbols with no direct relation to any specific spoken language. Arabic numbers are a perfect example of such a system, because they can be read in any language. But numbers, when spelled out alphabetically in a particular language, can only be read in that language. In look-say, the written word is treated as a picture that can be interpreted by the reader in any way he or she wishes. As Prof. Goodman has said, it doesn't matter if the child reads the written word “horse” or “pony” — or, for that matter, “hundred” as “thousand” — for he's getting the meaning! I tried to explain to a four year old the word “KETTLE”. She said it looks like a “TEA-POT” to me.

When using the *Miller Word Identification Assessment*, we have two ways of analyzing the student's different strategies of word identification. First, we mark the miscalled words and give the student a chance to make a second effort. The student then applies phonetic knowledge by conscious effort and correctly calls the words more than one half of the time. The second method is to mark the miscalled word as the student goes through the assessment. We then have the student spell the miscalled words. This requires that he look at the word from left to right phonetically. Many dyslexic students are more than 90% accurate on this task. Pity the poor student that looks at the word POT and spells it TOP.

The same procedure for measuring dyslexia can be used to measure the extent to which the student is suffering from the disorganization of human behavior. If we had a scientific way to measure the students' hatred for reading this might more accurately reflect the students suffering.

Can a student have a reading problem that we cannot measure with the MWIA? Can a student be dyslexic and the condition not measure on the MWIA? Can the student suffer from the disorganization of human behavior and it not show on the MWIA? The answer to all three questions is yes, but we have identified the basic constructs that operate more than 90% of the time. The first giant step to solving our tremendous reading problem is to identify the basic cause of the problem adequately responding to any imperative problem.

## **Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter**

December 23, 2005

The material for this paper were taken from Mr. Edward Miller's Complaint to the Federal Trade Commission (2/3/99) concerning what Mr. Miller considered false and misleading advertising by the Grolier publishing company concerning the *Beginner Books* by Dr. Seuss & His Friends.

I have given well over 100 of Mr. Miller's *Miller Word Identification Assessments*. The information gleaned from the assessments enables me to diagnose student's word processing strategies and to plan effective remediation. These Notes are published in the sincere hope that they will help concerned parents and reading professionals to consider the potential dangers of teaching a sight-vocabulary previous to introducing young children to the alphabetic principle through a strong phonics-first program.

Mr. Miller has developed a *Sight Word Eliminator* that can help students to eradicate their ineffective holistic-by-sight strategy of identifying words and replace it with an effective phonetic decoding strategy. I have made one small SWE available on the Education Page of my website [www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net). Mr. Miller also uses the 72 Phonics Exercises in Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read and what you can do about it*. I have personally used Flesch's exercises with both beginning and remedial students. The results have been absolutely amazing in every case.

It is of particular interest to note that the Phonetic words on the *Miller Word Identification Assessment* for the MWIA Level 1 were taken from the first 14 exercises in Rudolf Flesch's 1955 *Why Johnny Can't Read and what you can do about it*, and the Phonics words for the *MWIA Level 2* were taken from the first 39 exercises in Flesch's book. The words that enable us to determine if a student has whole-word dyslexia (holistic reflex) are the same words that enable us to help students overcome their whole-word dyslexia!

On March 11, 2003, I spoke to Mr. Miller on the phone about his assessment and remedial work. He had sent me a box of his Sight Word Eliminators, which I have used with one student. I could not use them in the public school setting because of the religious nature of some of the chapters. The book was, *America's Dates with Destiny* by Pat Robertson. During the conversation, Mr. Miller said little about his SWE (Sight Word Eliminator), but he did spend some time with me explaining how he used Rudolf Flesch's exercises to cure artificially induced whole-word dyslexia. It was at that time that I carefully studied Dr. Flesch's book and analyzed his phonics facts and instructional sequence. I have a "Flesch Audio" page with the facts I gleaned from a careful linguistic and pedagogical analysis of his method. There is a detailed set of audio files explaining how to teach Flesch's method, explaining every exercise.

**Update March 2, 2012:** I have corrected a couple typos. When I first published these notes I had given around 100 of the *Miller Word Identification Assessments*. I have given over 350 more since then. I would not even consider tutoring a student without the invaluable data from this assessment to help me plan the remediation and measuring the improvement as the remediation proceeds.

Another very powerful tool, that is somewhat similar to Flesch's 72 Exercises, is a little *Blend Phonics Reader: The Standard Edition* that I wrote to accompany Hazel Loring's 1980 *Reading Made Easy With Blend Phonics for First Grade*. It is available from the "Blend Phonics" page on my website [www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net) or [www.blendphonics.org](http://www.blendphonics.org). I have seen severe cases of word guessing cured in as little as five or six hours. Other remedial reading teachers have used the *Reader* with similar success. It can be downloaded for from my *Blend Phonics Nationwide Educational Reform* website: [www.blendphonics.org](http://www.blendphonics.org).

**Update March 5, 2015:** I am sure I have now given over 500 of Mr. Miller's MWIA assessments. The information concerning the students' mode of identifying words is a tremendous help in determining the kind of tutoring (intervention) that will enable them to improve their reading. The *Blend Phonics* program mentioned in my March 2, 2012 Update is now available in paperback from Amazon. The *Blend Phonics Reader: Standard Edition* is still available for free, but it is, also, included in the paperback edition of *Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics, plus Blend Phonics Fluency Drills*.



I am saddened to report that Mr. Edward Ray Miller of South Windy Gap Road, Wilkesboro, NC passed away on June 4, 2009. He was born on June 21, 1928 and passed away at the age of 80. Mr. Miller retired from the Broward County, FL school system, where he was a teacher, administrator, and did developmental research in the field of dyslexia for 32 years.