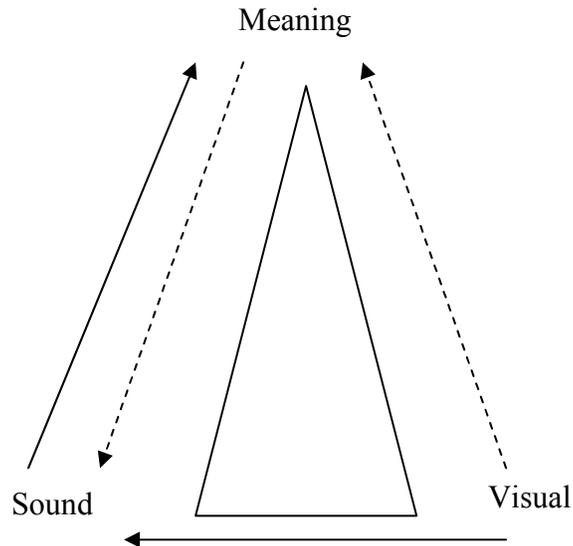


# The Reading Triangle

## Two Perceptual Routes to Meaning



1. **Clockwise** perceptual path: “Sound” approach to teaching reading. The Objective Route: “Visual” to “Sound” to “Meaning.” Two stops to “Meaning.”
2. **Counter clockwise** perceptual path: “Whole-word, sight-word, meaning” approach to teaching reading. The Subjective Route: “Visual” to “Meaning,” sound appearing as an afterthought. One stop to “Meaning.”

Early American Psychologist wrongly concluded that only one stop on such perceptual routes could be performed automatically, but that secondary stops had to be performed consciously. A form of this chart was published by Henry Suzzallo in 1913 in *The Cyclopedia of Education*, Volume 3.

This is a *conflict diagram* because a student trying to read from the “Meaning” and from the “Sound” **at the same time** will experience a conflict.

Note: The path between the “Visual” and “Sound” is shorter, but the path from “Visual” to “Sound” to “Meaning” requires two stops. The “Visual” to “Meaning” path only requires one stop, but students reading “from meaning” can not get to the “sound” until they first get the “Meaning.” To go directly (one stop) from the “Visual” to the “Meaning” always requires an element of **guessing**. Guessing is built into the “Meaning” method of teaching reading. The perceptual routes are established by initial reading instruction: “from the Sounds” or “from the Meaning.” They are difficult to change once established.

The two different approaches lead to two **different** and **opposite** perceptual types: “Objective” readers who read accurately “from the sound” and “Subjective” readers who read inaccurately “from the meaning.”

## Levels of Attention

Requires Conscious Attention:	Level 3: Consciousness of Meaning
Automatic Levels NOT Requiring Conscious Attention	Level 2: <b>Syntax</b> Generating Words  Level 1: Syllables

Note: If conscious attention is focused on Automatic Levels 1 or 2, the result in *speech* can be stammering or stuttering, and in *reading* **divided** and therefore **reduced attention** to “meaning” at level 3. Correspondingly, if conscious attention is focused on the automatic action of *walking*, the result can be altered gait and stumbling.

These pages were composed by Donald L. Potter on January 17, 2003 for publication on the Education page of the [donpotter.net](http://donpotter.net) web site. Phonics programs teaching students to read “Objectively” from the “Sounds” can be found there.

### Further Reading

The “Reading Triangle” is discussed in great depth in Geraldine Rodgers’ *the History of Beginning Reading: From Teaching by ‘Sound’ to Teaching by ‘Meaning’* available from [1stbooks.com](http://1stbooks.com) in paperback or as an inexpensive e-book. The “Triangle” is summarily discussed in an essay published on the [donpotter.net](http://donpotter.net) web site entitled: *The Born-Yesterday World of the Reading “Experts:” A Critique on Recent Research on Reading and the Brain.*

Mr. Potter is planning to publish Henry Suzzallo’s original 1913 article in the near future.

Future comments will show how “The Reading Triangle” relates to the organization of the brain. For now, we will simply note that the Meaning method’s “Visual to Meaning” path activates the pattern seeking, right brain; while the Sound method’s “Visual to Sound to Meaning” path activates the serial, left brain.

## Assessing Perceptual Paths to Reading

The most effective means of determining if a reader is an “Objective Reader” following the two stop “**Clockwise** Perceptual Path,” or a “Subjective Reader” following the single stop “**Counter Clockwise** Perceptual Path” is the *Miller Word Identification Assessment I* developed by Mr. Edward Miller, available as free PDF download on my web site. Subjective readers are said to have a reading disability we prefer to call “whole-word dyslexia.”