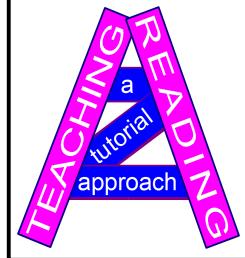


## Unit 1 – Letter Names

### RATIONALE



## THE HOW-TOS, WHYS AND WHEREFORES

Letters are the **fundamental building blocks** of our alphabetic system of writing.

Knowing the *names* of letters is therefore the first step in learning to read. Capital (upper case) letters are much easier to distinguish than small (lower case) letters, so they are taught first. Identifying small letters is presented in Unit 8.

## OBJECTIVE

The student will **name** the capital letters.

## CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

### **Letters are all about lines.**

Two kinds of lines make up capital and small letters – straight lines and curved lines. An A is an A because of the unique configuration of its three straight lines. B, with one straight line and two curved lines, is put together in a completely different way.

**Straight** lines can further be described by their “direction.”

**Vertical** straight lines (**I**) we say go “up and down.” **Horizontal** lines, like the three lines in the letter (**E**) are said to travel “sideways” or “from side to side.”

The capital letter (**L**) has two straight lines – one that goes up and down, and one that goes from side to side.

**Inclined** lines (**V**) “slant.”

### **Curved** lines also come in two varieties.

The letter O is an O because it is a single curved line with no “break” (interruption) in it. The letter C, on the other hand, is made with a single curved line that has an opening – almost as though something might have taken a bite out of it. The letter U is also a curved line with a break, but with U the interruption is at the top, not its side.

Why focus so much attention on lines? Without lines you don't have letters. Without letters you don't have words. And without words you don't have reading.

Explaining in detail the way lines in letters are put together introduces another benefit: it adds what psychologists call a “cognitive” aspect to learning. Cognition brings into play our conscious mental processes – things we can talk about and think about. (Did you think anything as “simple” as a letter name could become this thought-provoking?) Research shows, however, that all this **talk** and thinking about a subject make it *easier* for students to learn and

to remember the lessons we're trying to teach.

Of course students who are subjected to hours and hours of mindless drill might learn to name the letters; if they were shown them and asked to repeat the names over and over again. (And a certain amount of practice and drill will *always* be necessary before a student memorizes all 26 letter names.) But describing in detail the various kinds of lines that make up each letter makes this whole learning process more efficient and much more interesting.

Why is an A an A? Not just because "I said so." But also because the three lines in this letter match our *definition* of what an A is. At the very least, students will understand that each letter has its own distinct pattern of lines; and, initially with your prompting, they will be able to *describe* these patterns.

It is where we begin.

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

**Learning letter names is not a very complicated operation.**

Basically, the student just has to link the written letter with the letter name. Still, we offer *eight* different tools or strategies to help with this relatively simple associative process. Why so many? For one thing, learning is more effective and fun if you have more than one trick up your sleeve – like a magician who can pull more than one rabbit out of a hat. (After all, the first rabbit might just have been luck...)

However there is also the likelihood that your student will prefer one learning method or "modality" over another. Some students learn mostly with sight – they remember best what they see. Others depend more on what they hear. Some with what they themselves say. Still others love to physically manipulate concrete objects. And a few students best master a subject when they can solve puzzles, play games, or "figure out" the answers to perplexing questions.

Confronting a written letter and its letter name in *many* different contexts also builds into our lessons one of the most neglected parts of today's teaching: review. Being told something once or twice **starts** the instructional process, but rarely is this enough to "lock in" the objective so that it can be used whenever and however it is needed. Besides, reading is about people communicating with other people, and the more you and your student talk – whether it's about lines in a letter or what you had for breakfast – the better.

Each of the following eight skill-builders emphasizes one or more of these instructional techniques. Try them all. And always *carefully monitor* students — **especially young children** — when they handle letters or other small objects because of the possible danger of their choking on them.

### **1) AlphaFlashCards™**

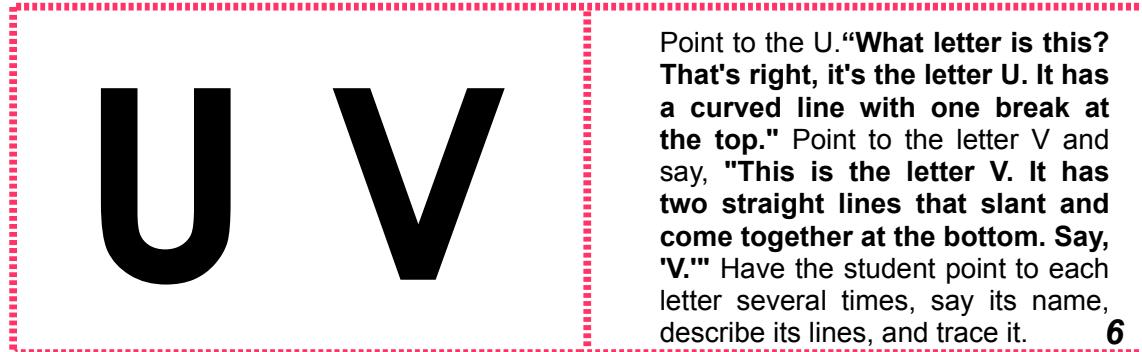
These "old-fashioned" flashcards are presented first, before the other seven techniques, because they help you **immediately** check up on the student's understanding of the basic concepts that are key to mastering this objective. Some, for example, may need help understanding what a "curved" line is. Or what a "slanting" line looks like. These distinctions are easier for you to **show** than they are to describe in words, and you can do it quickly and effectively. Another reason we suggest starting with flashcards is they are **very** easy to use.

One side shows the student which capital letters are being discussed. The student

R  
A  
T  
I  
O  
N  
A  
L  
E

looks at that side. The other side explains what the tutor says and does. You read and follow those directions.

## AlphaFlashCard



Note that the flashcards are NOT presented in alphabetical order. They are presented in order of graphic **complexity**. (Unlike many others, our program tries to follow the time-honored instructional principle that learning should start with the simple and gradually progress to the more complex.)

The simplest letter – a single, straight line – is **I**.

The simplest curved line is **O**.

Then we move on to more complex configurations.

*Capital letters are introduced in this order:*

**I – O – C – U – V – W – M – N – T – F – E – H – L**

**X – Z – A – Y – Q – D – P – R – B – K – G – S – J**

The suggested sequence for presenting new letters is also found in the lower right hand corner of each card. For example, in the card above, the number “6” (which features the letters U and V), indicates that the flashcard is the *sixth* one in the series.

After a letter has been introduced with an AlphaFlashCard, you may use any of the other seven teaching strategies *with that particular letter*. To illustrate: *after* the letters I, O, C, U and V have been introduced with AlphaFlashCards), you could then display the letters with the AlphaLets™ or work with TransAlphaForms™ or use the AlphaBoardLets™ on the AlphaGameBoard.™ The flashcards can be printed four to a page on heavyweight card stock.

### **Specific teaching activities you can do with AlphaFlashCards:**

Each card may be used several different ways. Here are some suggestions:

**A) Read and follow** the “scripts” presented on the tutor’s side of each flashcard. Make sure the student understands how the various lines are described and how they fit together to

make up the letters.

B) Put a flashcard on a table or on the gameboard, with the student side facing up. Ask the student to describe the *individual lines* of one of the displayed letters. Then ask the student to point to and name the letter. Example: You point to the letter O, and then you ask the student, “What kind of lines does this letter have, straight or curved? What letter is this?” Continue in a similar manner with the remaining cards and letters asking the student to describe lines and name the letters.

C) You name one of the displayed letters and then ask the student to **point to it and describe its lines**. Example: You name the letter C and then ask the student, “Please point to the C. What kind of lines does it have?”

## **2) AlphaLets™**

We recommend that these single-letter cards be introduced immediately *after* you've presented a letter with a flashcard. Alphalets are designed to be exhibited on any *vertical* surface – a refrigerator, a door, a bedroom wall, or any surface that hopefully is bound to be seen several times a day.

(At one time we thought of naming these teaching aids “FrigLets” – short for refrigerator letters, but decided against it because we thought FrigLets might be confused with a new chewing gum brand.)

Vertical presentation has the great advantage of keeping the study material more or less constantly in view. So whenever a student happens to glance at a letter, an important learning objective can be reinforced. You might also ask, “What letter is that? How many lines does it have? Which way do they go?” This exercise takes very of your time, and it makes learning to read a part of the normal, everyday routine.

AlphaLets stuck up on a wall or door also facilitate getting **more people** involved in reading instruction. Students can have their own cheerleading squads. A sibling, a favorite relative, a baby sitter, a neighbor, or a casual visitor can be coached to quiz – and **praise** – students for their newfound knowledge.

Or students may take the initiative, proudly showing off, “I know that's the letter I! And that's an O! And that's...” AlphaLets work overtime, 24/7, all at no extra cost.

To prepare the individual AlphaLets letters, separate them one letter at a time, *as they are needed*. (Remember, an AlphaLets individual letter should be presented only *after* that letter has *already* been introduced as an AlphaFlashCard.)

To make letters “stick” to a vertical surface, wrap a piece of tape around your finger and then press the tape against the back of the letter. Go lightly at first, making sure the card and tape can be removed easily, without damaging wallpaper, paint or finish. Above all, however, do **not** let unattended young children play with AlphaLets or any other small pieces of this program because of the possibility of their choking on them.

### **Specific activities you can do with AlphaLets:**

- A) **Post** a letter on a suitable surface and ask the student to name the letter.
- B) **Name** a letter and ask the student to point to it and name it.
- C) **Describe** the lines in a letter and have the student point to it and name it.
- D) **Ask** the student to describe the lines of a letter you point to.
- E) **Make sure** everyone who sees the letters is encouraged to talk about them and to

praise the student for his or her skill in naming them.

## AlphaBoardGame™ and 4) AlphaBoardLets™

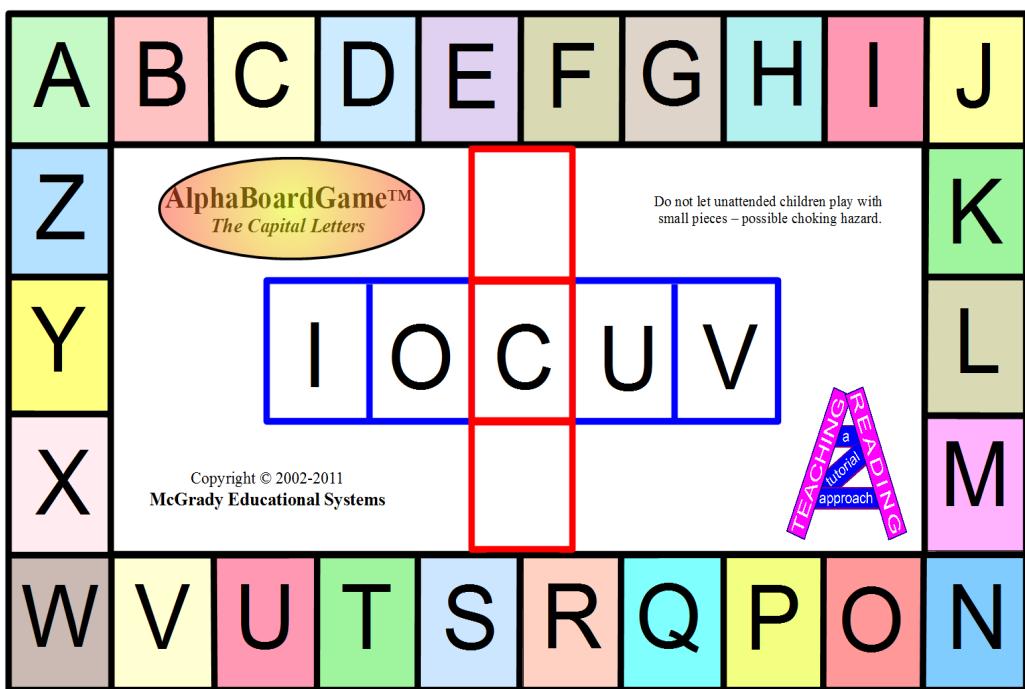
What makes a game a game? Fun? It's the element of competition.

Competition, in turn, can help make ordinary practice sessions (usually BORING) entertaining things to do. But it raises a question: who or what does the student compete against? Ultimately, in all of the games we present here, students compete against themselves. To make the games seem more exciting, however, we create three different kinds of "shadow" opponents.

### **First, the student may compete against the board itself.**

Here's how that works: You will notice that all 26 capital letters are presented, in alphabetical order, around the perimeter of the game board.

To be able to "beat" the board, students have to identify all the letters that previously have been presented on AlphaFlashCards. Assemble these letters, face (letter) side down, and turn them over one at a time. If only I and O have been introduced, students "win" if they can find and then place the I and O AlphaBoardLets next to, or on top of, the I and O on the board. Then ask the student to name the letters and describe their lines.



### **Second, the student may compete against Time.**

A) For this game, you'll need a watch or clock or timer that measures seconds and minutes. Let's assume that on Tuesday it takes your student one minute and four seconds to name 17 letters. Can he or she "beat" that time on Friday? Again, it is clear that the student is actually competing against his or her previous record – not really against the clock. (Time doesn't care who wins – like the Mississippi River, it just keeps rolling along... Or, ticking along. Or whatever it is digital timers do.)

**B)** Another way to play the clock game is to choose an arbitrary time, such as 80 seconds, and then see how many letters the student can name and place on the board in that period. Can he or she name more the following week?

**Third, the student can compete against the tutor.**

Obviously, a real contest – you *against* the student – would not be fair or very educational. Since the teacher's role is not to beat up on students but to help them, you will have to “pull your punches.”

**A)** Assemble all the AlphaBoardLets (that previously have been introduced as AlphaFlashCards) and turn them face down in the middle of the board. You then take turns with the student turning over the letters, one at a time, and naming each one as it comes up. Every time a player names a letter correctly, he or she moves his or her marker ahead one letter of the alphabet. (For markers, you may use coins or any other suitable tokens.) Both of you start at the letter A on the board and then go around clockwise, one space at a time. When all of the letters you are using have been played (there may be fewer than 26) turn the letters over and continue on as before with the game. The first player to reach Z “wins.”

**B)** “*Gotcha!*” At any time, the tutor or the student may make a “mistake.” If the opponent catches the error and says, “**I doubt it,**” and then *correctly* states the letter name, the player who made the mistake must move his or her marker back one letter, and the player who caught the error and correctly names the letter moves ahead one block.

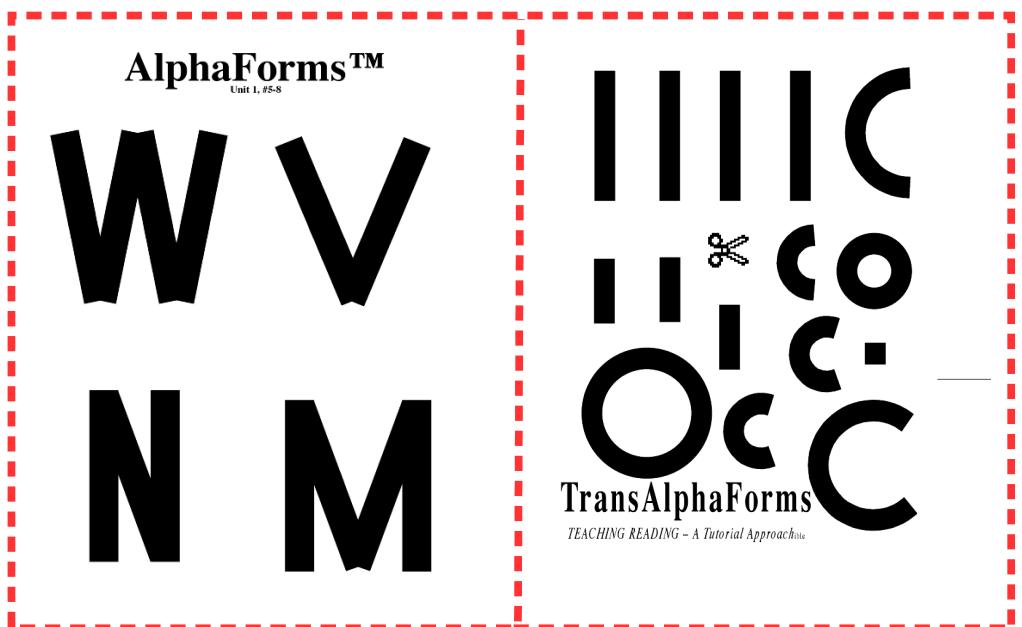
However, if Player A makes a mistake and the error is **not** caught by Opponent B, Player A can say “*Gotcha!*,” then correctly state the letter name and move his or her marker ahead one letter – and the opponent's marker back one space.

By deliberately inserting “mistakes” at appropriate times in the game, tutors can help even the odds between themselves and students. Besides creating a more level playing field, playing “*I doubt it,*” and “*Gotcha!*” also help make sure the student pays attention when the teacher is naming the letters. Ditto for the teacher when the student is naming the letters.

Just remember that the ultimate goal of all our games is to make learning the instructional objectives more fun. It is possible, however, that some students may find the stimulation of playing a game too emotionally challenging. They may become so anxious that they fail to benefit from the lesson at hand. For those students best use less competitive forms of practice.

#### **4) AlphaForms™ and 5) TransAlphaForms™**

These letters and their accompanying transparent graphic shapes add a whole new dimension to your instructional strategies. Now the student will be able to physically *manipulate* concrete objects to *construct* the various letter forms. While this isn't actually “writing” the letters (handwriting skills are not introduced until Unit 8), it does offer those with developing eye-hand coordination abilities an opportunity to produce (and thereby also review) recognizable capital letters.



First, with scissors cut apart the **TransAlphaForms** (the “**TRANS**”-parent line segments). Because the matrix is transparent, you don't have to worry about cutting too closely around each segment – any excess material won't be seen when the pieces are properly positioned.

Then ask the student to place these segments appropriately over the AlphaForms letter shapes so that they “**FORM**” the desired letter. The procedure is like placing the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle.

Any letters that been introduced with AlphaFlashCards, may be used with the AlphaForms exercises. Do **not** let young children play unattended with these small pieces because there is a possible choking hazard. The TransAlphaForms will be used again in Units 7 and 8, so keep them safely stored when you've finished with Unit 1.

### **Specific activities for AlphaForms and TransAlphaForms:**

A) Ask the student to form a letter using the AlphaForms guide and relevant transparent segments, which you have **previously** laid out.

B) Ask the student to select the appropriate segments (from among **all** the line segments) to create a letter that you name. Have the student describe each line segment (straight or curved, slanting, etc.) as he or she puts a letter together.

C) Have the student name, and then trace with a finger, a letter you point to.

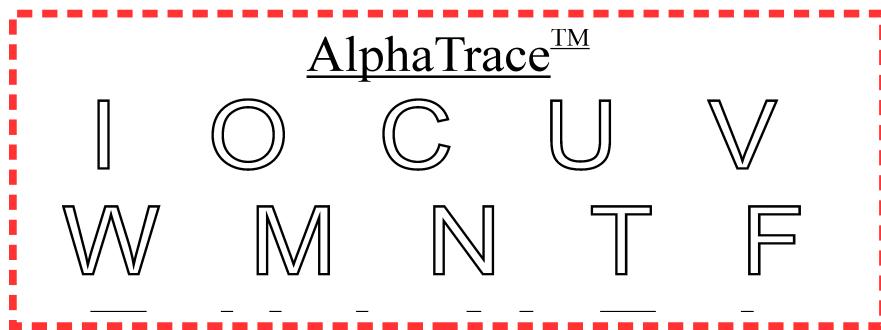
D) Construct a letter you name without using the AlphaForms guide.

## **6) AlphaTrace™**

Tracing is similar to handwriting, and it offers some of the same instructional benefits. The advantage: tracing does not demand the high level of eye-hand coordination required to write the letters from scratch. Students may “trace” with their fingers or a writing instrument. If a clear plastic sheet protector and an erasable pen are used, the student may use the AlphaTrace exercise sheet many times.

Introduce this chart after almost all the letters have been presented (not necessarily mastered, however) as AlphaFlashCards. This exercise emphasizes visual discrimination and

manipulating fingers or writing implements. It is essential that the student name the letter each time he or she traces it.

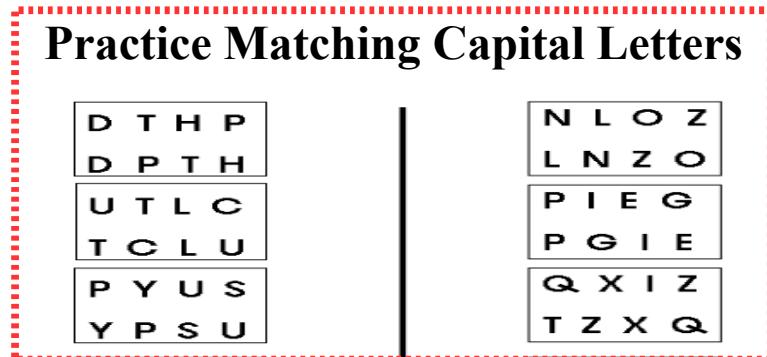


#### Specific activities you can do with AlphaTrace:

- A) Ask the student to name a letter and then trace it with a finger or a writing implement.
- B) Ask the student to describe the lines that make up a letter as it is being traced.
- C) Point to any letter and ask the student to name it.
- D) Ask the student to create letters using any handy objects: sticks, fingers, peanuts, pebbles, etc. Do **not** let unattended young children play small objects because of the possibility of their choking on them.

#### **7) Practice Matching Capital Letters**

This exercise shows several letters grouped together, the way letters are found in written words. Use this practice sheet only after almost all the letters have been introduced.



#### Specific activities for “Practice Matching Capital Letters”:

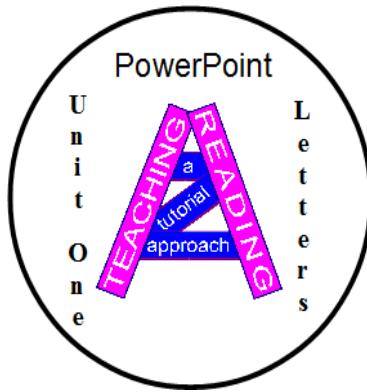
- A) Ask the student to point to one letter and then point to its copy in the same block. Ask the student to name the letter being matched.
- B) If a letter has no copy in a particular block of letters, see if the student can find a copy of the letter in a different group of letters. Have the student draw a line from one letter to its copy. This practice sheet may be used several times if the exercise is placed in its clear plastic protective sheet and the lines are drawn with an erasable marker (“wet-erase” markers work well).
- C) Use a timer and see if the student can complete the matchups and name the letters more quickly after practicing the exercise several times. You could probably think up even *more* than the numerous ways presented here to help your student better remember letter names. For

example, ask the student to name letters that are drawn in snow or sand or made with raisins or carrot sticks. Use string, clay, two-by-fours or pipe cleaners to make “three-dimensional” letters.

Maria Montessori, a pioneer in early elementary education, cut letter shapes out of sand paper, which added a tactile or “touch” dimension to the student’s learning . Always be careful, however, that young children are not allowed to manipulate small items that could cause choking if they were swallowed. Alert, adult supervision is always required .

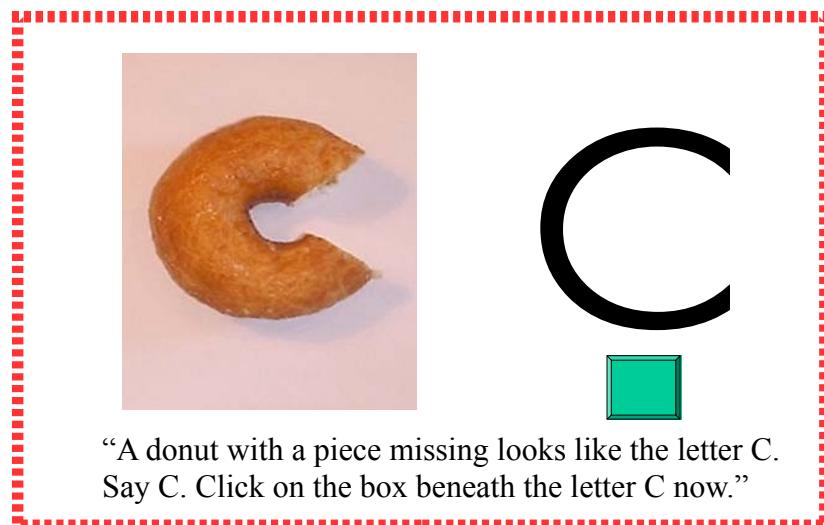
Have fun, try lots of techniques, but remember that learning this first objective is relatively simple: you won’t need an elephant gun to bring it down: a fly swatter will do. Realize, too, that learning the names of letters will be reinforced in our next unit, “LETTER SOUNDS.” Finally, keep in mind the prosaic fact that we have 14 *other* units to get through... At this early stage in our program, success does **not** mean perfection.

## **8) POWERPOINT**



The PowerPoint Presentation containing our interactive computer program is designed to let students practice material over and over and over again until they know it *very* well. And our “virtual” tutor never gets tired or bored. Usually students should work on the computer with material that you have already introduced. It would be possible to present brand new material with the computer, but our program emphasizes the person-to-person aspect of teaching.

Teach your student how the computer mouse makes the pointer go from place to place and how to make it click on a target “box.” Be on hand to help if necessary, especially at the beginning of a practice session. And even if a student got everything “wrong,” never fail to praise him or her after a session is completed.



“A donut with a piece missing looks like the letter C.  
Say C. Click on the box beneath the letter C now.”

## 9) Marking Progress

Before a Pretest or Posttest, ask yourself if you've covered **all** the bases. This “**Marking Progress**” chart makes it easy to tell which strategies you've used with which letter names. Write the letter name on the line **following** the numbered strategy.

### Marking Progress – Unit One

(First 13 capital letters)

*Directions: Write a letter name next to a teaching strategy after you have practiced that strategy and letter with your student.*

**I – O – C – U – V – W – M – N – T – F – E – H – L**

1) [AlphaFlashCards™](#) I   O   C   U   V

2) [AlphaLets™](#)

3) [AlphaBoardGame™](#)

4) [AlphaForms™](#)

5) [TransAlphaForms™](#)

6) [AlphaTrace™](#)

7) [Matching Capital Letters](#)

8) [Interactive Computer](#)

## 10) TESTING PROGRAM

There comes a time to find out if your student is actually learning what you're teaching. Also, is it time to move up to Unit Two – Letter Sounds?

There is no set, predetermined timeline for completing the work in this or any other unit. Move ahead at a pace that feels comfortable, but not one so slow that you and your student fall asleep on the job. The trick is to make *continuous* progress. So after the student has more or less successfully tackled the preceding exercises, administer **Pretest Unit 1 – LETTER NAMES**.

On this test students are asked to underline or point to (whichever is easier) a letter you will name. You mark whether a response is correct or incorrect only on **your “Test Administration Directions” sheet**, not on the “**Student Response Sheet**.” Incorrect responses are checked (**X**) so you will know which letter names will need more practice. The correct responses (marked with a **C**) are noted so that the student does not feel intimidated by your marking only the “wrong” responses. Retain this information because knowing which items were missed will be useful later on when you review the unit.

If a student misses **four** or more letter names on this pretest, we suggest you refrain temporarily from moving on up to Unit 2. Continue to review Unit 1, with emphasis on the missed items. However, sometimes you must *adjust* the criterion level suggested here (three mistakes OK, four not so OK) up or down to fit *your* situation. The real question is, would the

student benefit more from increased study in Unit 1 or more by moving ahead to Unit 2? This is *your* judgment call. After more practice, administer the Unit 1 Posttest when you feel the student may pass it with fewer than four errors.

If the student misses four or more letter names on the *posttest*, try to figure out why the student is making so many mistakes, and then decide whether more review and using different strategies – or moving ahead – would be better for the student. (In either case, you will eventually be reviewing Unit 1 material again.) When the student achieves a satisfactory score on the pretest or posttest, proceed on to Unit 2. No matter how well or poorly the student does, give praise at least for the effort of taking the test.

### Pretest Unit 1 – LETTER NAMES

#### ***Test Administration Directions***

Point to the first block of letters say, “Point to (or underline) the letter **M**.”

Repeat: “**M**. ” Go to the second block and say, “Point to (or underline) the letter **O**. **O**.”

#### ***Student Response Sheet***

F T M P

R O L S

## 11) FINISHING UP

Now you just have to fill in the blanks.

#### ***VITAL STATISTICS***

Date Unit 1 begun: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Pretest 1 administered: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of errors made on the test(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date criterion of four or fewer errors (or other criterion level) was reached: \_\_\_\_\_. Approximate number of hours tutored per week: \_\_\_\_\_ Approximate number of hours student studied by himself or herself: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Unit 1 completed: \_\_\_\_\_. Questions, suggestions, areas to improve. \_\_\_\_\_



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