

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 378 539

CS 011 958

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 TITLE Learning about the Learning-To-Read Process by Teaching Yourself How To Read and Write Upside Down. AVKO "Great Idea" Reprint Series No. 632.  
 INSTITUTION AVKO Educational Research Foundation, Clio, MI.  
 PUB DATE 76  
 NOTE 7p.; For other documents in this series, see CS 011 943-960.  
 AVAILABLE FROM AVKO Educational Research Foundation, 3084 W. Willard Rd., Clio, MI 48420-7801 (\$1; quantity discounts available).  
 PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Reading Comprehension; Reading Difficulties; \*Reading Instruction; \*Reading Strategies; \*Word Recognition; \*Writing Instruction  
 IDENTIFIERS Reading Fluency

ABSTRACT

Reading teachers and researchers who really want to find out for themselves how difficult it is for students to learn to read and write should teach themselves how to read and write upside down. Being able to read and write upside down will also help teachers working one-on-one with students, since it allows them to sit across the table from the student and watch their facial reactions. Learning to write upside down might be easier using "D'Nealian" (a system of manuscript printing in which cursive becomes merely a linking of letters), but those who do will miss experiencing all the difficulties that left-handed people experience. People who learn to read and write upside down will come to appreciate the role fluency in word recognition has in comprehension. (RS)

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Learn about the  
Learning-to-Read Process  
by Teaching Yourself  
How to Read and Write Upside-Down

by  
Don McCabe

AVKO "Great Idea"  
Reprint Series #632

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## What is AVKO?

AVKO is a non-profit tax-exempt membership organization.

AVKO was founded in 1974.

AVKO is subsidized by donations and grants.

AVKO is open to membership to anyone interested in helping others learn to read and write.

AVKO is run by members from as far away as Hawaii and Quebec.

AVKO's daily operations are handled by volunteers.

AVKO plans to build and operate a model reading research center in a YEAR-AROUND camp setting that would economically and efficiently service the needs of dyslexics of all ages.

AVKO hopes to spread the concept that parent and spouse tutoring in spelling/reading skills can be successfully taught in adult community education classes and that members of a problem reader's support group can greatly assist the efforts of any volunteer tutor working in the literacy movement.

AVKO provides newsletters and economical opportunities to pursue individual research projects and to take part in large scale cooperative research projects that have immediate practical applications.

AVKO is attempting to accomplish these goals primarily through the profits generated by the inservices, workshops and the sale of materials developed for the special needs of students, parents, and adults — but AVKO still needs donations to survive.

**Learn about the  
Learning-to-Read Process  
by  
Teaching Yourself  
How to Read Upside Down**

By Don McCabe

If you are really interested in finding out for yourself how difficult it is for students to learn to read and write, I strongly advise that you begin now to teach yourself how to read and write upside down.

After a year of practicing several hours a day, I can only say that I am in the process of mastering the art of reading upside down and writing upside down. I wish I could say that I started to do this because I wanted to learn more about the reading and writing process, but I can't. I got started simply because I enjoy working face to face with the student that I am tutoring.

I find that I can observe my student's eye movements and facial expressions far better when I am seated across a table from him than when I am seated at the student's side. I also sensed that my students seemed more comfortable with a table between us. At any rate, it was my preference for working across the table that sort of forced me into learning to read upside down.

What I discovered in the process of learning to read and write upside down is that I encountered all the classic textbook symptoms of "dyslexia." I read was for saw, I read *woman* for *women*, I even read *spider* for *rapids* and I just couldn't read the word *shoe* at all. I sat and I sat. I knew all the letters. I sounded out *sh* as /sh/ but all I could come up with was "*show*" which rhymed with "*toe*." or "*SHOW ee*" a nonsense word that rhymed with *Chloe*. Here I am, a grown man, knowing all the letters s-h-o-e and not being able to read the word *shoe* until in absolute frustration I turned the book right side up. From that point on, I always was able to read the word *shoe*. But, I'll never forget the feeling of embarrassment when I couldn't even figure it out in context! That particular feeling has occurred many times since then. Many words that I take for granted as "easy" — words, such as *easy*,

Please don't turn this book rightside up. Read it first upside down by starting at the bottom of this page and reading right to left, bottom to top. Then, and only then, read it normally. You should notice the vast difference in comprehension! You will then appreciate the role fluency in word recognition has in comprehension.

*precious, special, institutional, etc.*, I couldn't even sound out or figure out using context clues. Learning to read this way is still a humbling experience. One thing, for sure, that I learned is: to read fluently takes practice, practice and more practice so that you don't read "She rat on" for *Sheraton*. And, heaven only knows what Freud would make out of my first rendition of reading *therapist* ("therapist") when I read that phrase upside down.

Because I always like my students to see what I'm writing as I am writing, the only way I could do that and still sit across the table from my students was to learn to write upside down. So, I blithely bounced into printing upside down using the "easy" stick ball routine.

Sure enough, I created real problems for myself. I wrote b's for d's, p's for q's and g's.

If my only interest had been in becoming proficient at writing upside down, I should have started with D'Nealian®, which my good friend Don Thurber developed and ultimately sold to Scott-Foresman. In case you're not acquainted with this system, it is basically a system of manuscript printing in which almost all the letters are constructed so that cursive becomes merely a linking of the letters, a natural easy-to-learn extension of the printing process. And perhaps the best part of the system is that there are distinct kinesthetic differences between letters not just a visual location of a stick and a ball. But, I didn't practice what I have always preached. Instead, I learned to print upside down the stick-ball way and for a while I thought I would never correctly write a 2 or a 5. Then, when I switched to writing cursive upside down, I had to start learning all over again.

Even though it is much easier to learn to print upside down using D'Nealian® and ultimately to write cursive this way, I plead with you not to forgo the truly masochistic pleasure of learning for yourself the problems that the stick-ball method of printing creates. If you're right-handed, you'll learn what a left-hander experiences — how messy it is writing when your hand keeps covering up what you're writing.

If you really want to understand the problems of learning to write (or print) what you should do is to use your opposite hand, left if you're right-handed and right if you're left-handed and learn to write upside down at the same time. I know that it isn't easy. I have done it, and I now am far more sympathetic with the struggles of youngsters to master writing.

In any case, I do believe that before any researchers are allowed to publish their theories on how reading and writing should be taught, that they demonstrate that they have taught themselves how to read and write upside down as well as they can read and write right side up—or almost as well. I think that all who do, will discover as I did, that there are different types of words, such as the "SIMPLE," the "FANCY," the "INSANE," the "TRICKY" and the "SCRUNCHED UP," and that learning these involve different processes of the computer brain.

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