

## SERIAL ORDER DIFFICULTIES IN READING

*How do we help children who have difficulty with serial order (reading and writing print from left to right?)*

### INTRODUCTION TO SERIAL ORDER CONFUSIONS Maryann McBride, Clemson University

Lots and lots of children, especially young readers, have difficulty with this [serial order]. It's something that's learned, and it's not something they're born with. Later on it's an indication of real trouble, but early on it's a matter of teaching them, they have to learn this. It's a learned skill. Our print works left to right. That's not true of other languages, and it's an arbitrary set of rules, and children don't deal well with arbitrariness. So it's not unusual for kids – lots of kids, not just kids who have difficulty learning to read, but almost all kids have some issues with serial order, which is why it's important for teachers to recognize it and try as best they can in classrooms to draw attention to it without talking about it. You can't talk about it, you can't tell them, "Our language only works left to right." I've seen people try to talk about it, and you might as well be, "waa, waa, waa, waa" talking to a kid, because it doesn't make any sense. You just have to show, this is the way it works, and it will be easier on you if you attend this way.

T: Think about your story and check and make sure it looks right. Read here. (unison) I'm going to drink  
S: the water.

T: You looked at me instead of looking down here. Put your finger in.

S: I'm going to drink the water.

T: Do it one more time. (Puts her finger over all except r in rain.)

S: I'm going to drink the wa-

M: the rr-

S: rain.

M: Oh!

S: I'm going to drink the rain.

T: Yes. See why did I go 'rrr' to help you? Why did I do that? What do you see there?

S: r

T: r! And as soon as I went "rrr", your smart brain said, that's not water, it's –

S: rain.

T: Now look, let's see all the way through if that looks like rain. Rrain. Are you right?

S: Yes

T: Yes. See, you've got to look, OK?

It showed up a little bit, you don't know – it's kind of tricky, like on this page, I know he said airplane because of the picture. Did he say "water" because of the picture and "drink the water" would be something he would be accustomed to saying, or did he say water and then say, "Oh, there's the "r", I'm OK." Because he really had a hard time finding that error. So it's tricky, but that "r" could be what he's checking, because he could check the beginning or the end.

So he definitely has some order issues, and you cannot let – that's why it's hard for children with serial order in classrooms because the teacher can't be on them all the time, because the best and first thing you have to do is prevent them from practicing the errors. That kind of error, so you've got to stay on it.

So all those little things – like I slide my scissor and I touch the first letter and the same thing when I put flash cards down. I show the first letter, then slide the rest of it so they see it. All that is meant to help them with serial order.

We're working to get him to get the serial order under control. See, we talked in the analysis piece that we did about the crosschecking is that one of the reasons that he's not crosschecking is he doesn't know where to look. He doesn't know this is the first letter and he didn't on the concepts about print that we administered for him. He couldn't tell us the first letter of a word. So he doesn't know that's where it is, so we've got to not only get him to cross check but we've got to get them to locate and find it. So we've been working on that.

### **ADDRESSING SERIAL ORDER (Level 3-4) Katie Babb, Springfield Elementary School**

Their eyes are just all over the place in the beginning, so we want to be sure that they're looking from the beginning to the middle to the end. I try in everything that I do to firm that up, because it's so crucial for their reading. They've got to be looking left to right.

S: (reading) Baby Panda is – fraid?

T: Are you right?

S: (nods yes)

T: If it was “fffraid,” what would you see first?

What would you see first?

S: s

T: So are you right? Could this be fraid?

S: nods no

T: So try that again and get it started. Go back. Say the first sound.

S: (reading) Baby Bear – Baby Panda is ssaa –

T: What would make sense? Saaa

S: saaaaaff – SAFE!

T: Is she safe now? Why is she safe?

S: (turns back to previous page)

T: Did Mother Panda keep her safe?

S: (nods yes)

T: So, A, make sure – don't just guess. Get in there and get it started with that first letter, and about your story, what would make sense.

### ADDRESSING SERIAL ORDER (Level 13) Maryann McBride, Clemson University

Now A, before I began working with her, if it was “said Mother Bear,” she could read that “Mother Bear said” just as easily as “said Mother Bear.” The orientation of those kinds of things didn’t matter to her but they do matter, because eventually they affect comprehension, and you just can’t have it. So it’s tricky to work with children with serial order.

You saw how that played out with Ainsley and Sarah, both of whom had some serial order difficulties. Early in the program they did a lot of things like this, but they’ve learned, and you saw it strongly with A, (continue) because not only with serial order do you have trouble with the order of the letters, it’s also the position of the letters, and see, it was on this page – she got down here to “work” and she flipped the letter and thought it was an “m”. Then she shook her head and then she went w- or – k, and made sure she was in order, the same way I made sure by sliding the mask card with C, and the way I also slid the mask card with her to try to keep that they have to learn that order is preserved. Other children can see the part in the middle quickly, they see, “Oh, that’s ‘or’” and they orient. But kids with serial order [problems] have to work from left to right, it keeps the eye moving.

T: Oh, let’s see what he does.

S: He jumped – he jumped at the rr-a – j – oo -joo.

T: What do you see? (waits, then puts in card)

S: duh

T: (shows only “or”)

S: or

T: So he jumped at the –

S: door

T: Oh! Does that make sense?

S: yes

T: He jumped at the door. ..

S: for

T: (puts in card)

S: o -ff

T: the door –

S: off

T: off or of?

S: of

T: Start again, get it all together now

S: He jumped in

T: He jumped at

S: the door fff – nope

T: That’s right, it doesn’t start with that. He jumped at the door (masks) of

S: of

T: that’s of. Come on –

S: of the hens house. And the door fl – flew off.

T: Something tricked you on this page. Where was it?

S: Whoosh?

T: No, you got “whoosh” (waits, then points). Right here.

S: It lifted up its trunk.

T: Yea, it lifted. See look (brings in mask card). What's that part say?

S: Ill (teacher moves card) if – t

T: Say that whole part

S: Lift-ed, lifted

T: See how you looked at it? Now you take the card and show yourself how to look at it.

S: Il-if-t-ed. Lifted.

T: There you go. That's what your eye has to do. Good for you.

## **SERIAL ORDER LETTER CONFUSIONS, Maryann McBride, Clemson University**

M: Listen, I noticed the other day, you had trouble making this letter. Remember how we practiced this d? All right, tell yourself how to make it, around,

S: d – up, down.

T: What letter is that?

S: d

T: d. Do it again.

S: around, up, down.

T: and what letter is that?

S: d

T: d. Want to do it one more time? OK, one more time.

S: around, up, down.

T: And what letter is that?

S: d

T: d. So when you get stuck, you make the letter. If you go around, what letter will it be?

S: d

T: Yes, it's going to be the d. All right.

T: All right, buddy. Find all the d's up there.

S: (sorts the d's together from the b's).

T: Any more d's?

S: No

T: So what letter is that?

S: d

T: d. All right.

You notice I didn't ask him to tell me what the b was. I just asked him to find the ds. Even though – he knows his letters. If you were to put them on flash cards, or when you test him on the letter ID, he knows his letters. But it's when they're in that sea of print that they flip on him a bit. You'll sometimes hear a strange sound from him, and sometimes people think they don't know their letters and sounds, but what it is is that they don't know if it's a b or a d or a p, so they make this sound that's all jumbled. It's usually because of the orientation of the letters, the left to right across the print, the left to right across an individual word are all things dealing with serial order. It's all the way the print looks.