

## Section 2, Chapter 11

# Is Professor AVKO Right?



## A Challenge to Educational Researchers at Every Level Foreword

When this paper was first written, twenty-five copies of it were sent to some of the leading educators in the United States. With it was a simple request for a response. To respond required only checking one of four boxes, writing a few appropriate comments, then putting it inside a stamped self-addressed envelope that we provided.

A month later we had not received a single response from any of these top people in the field of reading. A second set was sent out to the same people, this time with a checklist that they could simply mark and return in another stamped self-addressed envelope. Among the choices was: "Somehow it got lost. Please send me another copy." One educator did that. Another was sent to him that same day his reply came. Not another answer came from him or anyone else. Now, five years have gone by.

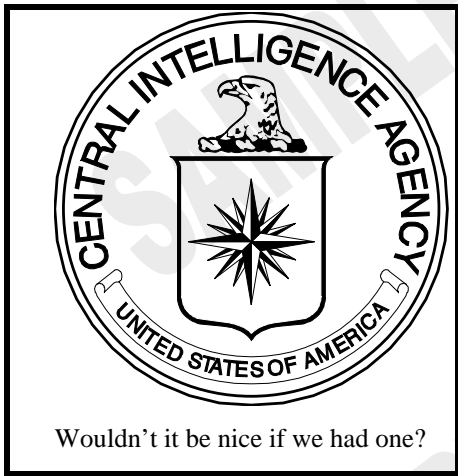
We invite everybody to try the experiment that is in this challenge. We invite you to see for yourself if Professor AVKO is right. If you agree, just maybe, you might help us spread the word that the current rate of illiteracy in the United States does not have to continue. If we follow AVKO's simple concepts we can drastically reduce the rate of illiteracy.

And by the way, the **greatest** of all **discoveries** have been **simple**. Fire. The wheel. The alphabet. The printing press. Asepsis (Doctors, wash your hands!). This simple medical discovery has saved more lives than any other medical discovery. But when Dr. Semmelweiss, who made the simple discovery, tried to convince his colleagues in the medical profession that the death rate from puerperal fever did not have to be 13.10%, his ideas and his statistics were not accepted. To do so, the medical profession would have had to admit that they were needlessly killing women because they were too lazy to wash their hands. It was much easier to lock Semmelweiss up in an insane asylum than to shut him up. And so they did.

I suspect that Professor AVKO's ideas are much like those of Semmelweiss. They are so simple, so filled with common sense, that educators do not want to accept them because to do so, they would have to admit that they have allowed millions of people to remain illiterates, because they didn't bother to teach them what they needed to know in order to learn to read: the phonics of the English language.

The second part of this essay is a verbatim copy of a highly negative review by a college instructor who signed it J.R. J.R. was the resident expert on reading instruction at Mott Community College at the time the original "Is Professor AVKO Right?" was published. I had given a copy of it to a friend of mine, Dr. Fred Duprai, who is a dentist at the Mott Community Health Center. He enjoyed it and passed it on within the health center. Somehow it ended up in J.R.'s hands. Apparently, J.R. felt it merited a lengthy response. This is it. Dr. Duprai never thought that when he put this booklet into the system, that it would eventually go to Mott Community College to the resident expert on reading. He was amazed at the response. I found that it was typical of the educational community. So I included it along with my responses to it. I think you will find it illuminating, if not amusing.

## Is Professor AVKO right?



For years, Professor AVKO has maintained that the cause of our nation's literacy problem is largely iatrogenic. That is, teacher-induced. AVKO claims the underlying cause of illiteracy or dyslexia is a failure of our educational system to teach. His explanation is that it is too easy for educators to shift the blame to parents, economic factors, racial factors, socio-economic factors, cultural factors, underpaid and/or undereducated teachers, lack of discipline, or whatever (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, et.al, 1985). Psychologists have long maintained that projection is common to all of us, educators included. We tend to blame others for our own faults. The **teachers of teachers** are not immune to passing the buck. These college instructors blame the elementary teachers for not practicing what is taught to them in their college education classes (Kerr, D.H., 1983). They will not accept the responsibility for neglecting the teaching of one crucial area of educational curriculum. That is, phonics is **not being taught in any American university** at the present time! Mentioned in textbooks, yes. Taught, no. It is this area that this **challenge** is all about.

*AVKO once offered \$1,000.00 to any college instructor whose students can pass the phonics test that AVKO tutors are required to pass in order to receive AVKO tutor certification. We now assume that any college instructor using this text will be able to get his students to pass the test because it is in this book.*

Professor AVKO maintains that no matter how much money is thrown at education (witness the *60 Minutes* segment on the Kansas City, Missouri school system), no matter how many computers are purchased for schools or for students, no matter how highly paid our teachers become, no matter how small our classrooms become, we will not greatly reduce the number of functional illiterates in our society. He accepts the definition of functional illiteracy as identified as Level 2 in the most comprehensive literacy survey conducted to date, *Adult Literacy in America*. This book is the result of the National Adult Literacy Survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics under authorization of the U.S. Department of Education (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, Kolstad, 1993).

Headstart is a start, but only a start. No matter what reading system is used, no matter how small the classes, no matter how well paid and well educated the teachers, no matter how many computers are in the classroom, no matter how slick and glossy the books being used in those first three grades, **a large segment will start slipping further and further behind as they progress through the grades.** No matter if we finally throw out the drug dealers, take back our neighborhoods and our neighborhood schools, and restore old-fashioned discipline, the results will essentially be the same. **Unacceptable.**

Why doesn't the system work? Because there is a serious flaw in the underlying assumption held by those who have decision making ability regarding curriculum, whether in the colleges of education or in the public school systems.

The faulty assumption is:

- In grades 1-3 students learn to read.
- From grade 4 up students read to learn.

Simple Words have a base of one syllable, e.g.:

stand  
understand  
misunderstand  
misunderstanding  
misunderstandings

What really happens is that in grades 1-3 students are just beginning to learn how to read. They are only being *exposed* to words that, for the most part, follow what we call simple spelling patterns (McCabe, 1992). These words may contain many letters. For example, the word *misunderstandings* contains 17 letters and five syllables. Yet, it has a *base* of only *one* syllable, *stand*. All of the word parts can be found in other words used in the curriculum of grades 1-3. *Mis-* is a common prefix. *Under* is both a common word and a common prefix. And *-ing* is a common suffix as well as the *-s*. You can take

that word *misunderstandings* and match it with any word in column B on page 38 and you will find that nearly everyone who can read at all will be able to read that word *misunderstandings*, but may not be able to read a much shorter word such as *precious* in column B. Whole word advocates have a difficult time explaining that phenomenon. Their typical explanation for a “big” word like *elephant* being easier is that it is a concrete noun and has a high frequency of occurrence. However, the word *misunderstandings* does not ever occur in books, charts, magazines, or even on bulletin boards or chalkboards in grades 1-3. The word *precious*, by all concepts normally associated with readability, should be easier to learn to read and to spell than the word *misunderstandings*. But it isn't, obviously.

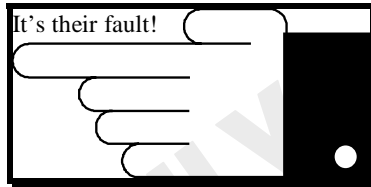
### Tentative conclusions:

Students in grades 1-3 learn little story telling words such as: *See Spot, Dick, and Jane come running and hopping down the bunny trail to our house.* But they have **not** learned to read well enough to **read to learn**. Students from the fourth grade up are expected to correctly apply what they have learned from reading little story telling words to reading “big” subject matter related words that have patterns within them that do not regularly occur in the reading materials used in the first three grades. In the next sentence a sampling of these subject matter related words are italicized.

For *democracy to function* in a *multi-cultural society*, it's absolutely *crucial* that *concepts* such as *justice* and *social consciousness* are taught.

Not only are these words long but these words contain abstract concepts that need to be taught. And, each one of them contain at least one phonic element **not taught** and rarely encountered in early children's story telling literature. Teachers in grades four on up should be taught to recognize specific reading problems and to teach the reading, spelling, and the meaning/s of those words that contain these special phonic patterns.

But don't blame the teachers. Even if they wanted to take courses in phonics, there is **not a single course** in phonics and/or the **patterns of English spelling** taught in any major university within their schools of education! Surfing and wine-tasting, maybe. Phonics, no!



Teachers in grades four through college must not be allowed to continue to blame teachers in the first three grades for not doing a good enough job teaching the youngsters to read.

**Learning-to-read is an ongoing dynamic process.**

It's not static. Although a fourth grade teacher would never expect a fourth grade student to be able to handle a college text, they do expect a fourth grade student to handle a fourth grade text with only third grade reading ability!

On the following page is a test that anyone can use to validate Professor AVKO's arguments. Most researchers design a test, administer it, and report the results and make their conclusions based on correlations that show statistical significance as opposed to practical significance. The fault many critics find with educational studies is that replication is difficult and often inconclusive when attempted (Rowntree, 1981). Professor AVKO has the unmitigated audacity to challenge the educational system to come up with results that don't almost perfectly match his.

The Survey Test was given to over 1,000 adults (mostly teachers). 53.85% had **perfect** scores. 32.69% missed only 1. 9.61% missed two. Only 3.84% missed more than two! Both the mode and the median was 100% correct. Only the mean was less.

Mark the <b>easier</b> word to read, spell, teach, learn, (your choice) with a check mark.				
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
<input type="checkbox"/> painter	<input type="checkbox"/> precious	<input type="checkbox"/> chronic	<input type="checkbox"/> annoyed	<input type="checkbox"/> mechanized
<input type="checkbox"/> partial	<input type="checkbox"/> pretends	<input type="checkbox"/> chimney	<input type="checkbox"/> antique	<input type="checkbox"/> meaningful
6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
<input type="checkbox"/> mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/> unions	<input type="checkbox"/> petite	<input type="checkbox"/> completed	<input type="checkbox"/> spotted
<input type="checkbox"/> missions	<input type="checkbox"/> unsafe	<input type="checkbox"/> petted	<input type="checkbox"/> confusion	<input type="checkbox"/> special

Skeptics are encouraged to substitute words for those chosen by Professor AVKO. All he asks is that in any computer generated list of words chosen at random:

- The same initial consonant blends or digraphs are used.
- That the total number of letters in the easier words is exactly the same as the total number of letters in the harder words.
- That in each pair of words one contains only patterns commonly encountered in grades 1-3 (the easier).

● and the other contains at least one pattern rarely encountered in those crucial first three grades. For example, in the pair *meaningful* and *mechanized*, *meaningful* has 100% simple commonly encountered parts, i.e., /m/ ea /n/ ing /ful/. However the word *mechanized* has two patterns rarely encountered. First the **ch** in *mechanized* is not pronounced /ch/ as in **ch**op, **ch**icken, and **ch**urch. Rather, it is pronounced /k/ as in **ch**aos, **ch**o, anar**ch**y, and **Ch**ristian. The letters **an** in *mechanized* are not pronounced to rhyme with *Dan* and *fan* even though they are in the words *mechanic* and *mechanical*! The words containing patterns such as these usually occur in the curriculum **after** the third grade.

Do you know where you can find a complete listing of all these power patterns found in “big” words not taught in the first three grades? Answer: they can be found in *The Patterns of English Spelling* (McCabe, 1992). You should be able to find a copy of it in your local library, but you won’t. In fact, 99.9% of all colleges and university libraries do not have a copy of this book. The U.S. Department of Education does NOT have a copy of this book! No State Department of Education has a copy of this book! At present only a few teachers, usually teachers of dyslexics and the learning disabled possess a copy of this book. The Center for the Study of Reading does not have a copy of this book. Nor does the Institute for Research on Teaching! But the Orton Dyslexia Society, The Disabled Reader Group of the International Reading Association, The Reading Reform Foundation, The Center for Family Literacy, and the Texas Reading Institute do!

Analysis of the Survey Test							
Column A				Column B			
<b>Simple</b> Words				<b>Power</b> Words			
Base of One Syllable (Easier)				Base of More Than One Syllable			
	Number of letters	Number of syllables	Level of Frequency <sup>23</sup>		Number of letters	Number of syllables	Level of Frequency
painter	7	2	49.1	partial	7	2	49.7
pretends	8	2	39.1	precious	8	2	53.2
chimney	7	2	50.0	chronic	7	2	47.0
annoyed	7	2	48.6	antique	7	2	45.8
meaningful	10	3	49.9	mechanized	10	3	41.7
unsafe	6	2	46.0	unions	6	2	52.8
mistakes	8	2	52.7	missions	8	2	47.0
petted	6	2	41.4	petite	6	2	35.2
completed	9	3	55.4	confusion	9	3	53.1
spotted	7	2	51.9	special	7	2	65.0
Averages	7.5	2.2	48.4	Averages	7.5	2.2	49.1

Note the words opposite each other have the same beginning letters, e.g., pa- in painter and pa- in partial. Notice that they have exactly the same number of letters and the same number of syllables. The only significant difference between the words in column A and column B is that the words in column B contain patterns that are not taught in the first three grades or that are not generally learned through exposure no matter what system of teaching reading is employed. That is why the words in column B are more difficult—not because they are less frequently encountered!

<sup>23</sup> Frequency Level is based on the Standard Frequency Index in *The Educators Word Frequency Guide*, by Susan Zeno, Stephen Ivens, Robert Millard, and Raj Duvvuri, TASA, Inc: Brewster, NY., 1995.

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## George Bernard Shaw was wrong.

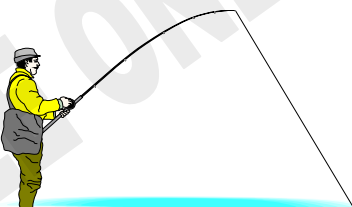
He claimed, tongue in cheek, that the word *fish* could be spelled *ghoti*

**gh** = /f/ as in enough. **o** = /i/ in women. **ti**=/sh/ as in nation.

But in English there is not one single word in which the letters *gh* are used to start a word having the /f/ sound. Nor is there a single word ending with the /sh/ sound spelled *ti*. However, the sound “fish” is always spelled “fici” in words whose base has more than one syllable.

uh fish ul	<b>official</b>
ben uh fish ul	benef <b>icial</b>
ee fish unt	<b>efficient</b>
suh fish unt	suff <b>icient</b>

In “A **fisherman** is **fishing**” the base is **fish** which has only one syllable.



Yet, the patterns that make the words in column B on the page before this more difficult are highly regular. For example, the pattern **ci-** is almost always pronounced /sh/ as in *rac**ial***, *spe**cial***, *so**cial***, *spa**ci**ous*, *suspi**ci**ous*, etc. Somehow good readers learn to respond to them. Dyslexics have a miserable time with them.

Good readers who are horrible spellers will often substitute **sh** for the **ci** pattern and spell the words *ra**sh**ul*, *spe**sh**ul*, *so**sh**ul* and *spa**sh**us*.

If Professor AVKO’s theories are wrong, then it follows logically that people who can read will, half the time, pick a column B word as the easier word. Certainly, total non-readers (such as those whose native written language is not a Roman alphabetic language) will average 50% when quizzed. But readers, whether dyslexic or not, will invariably pick the word in Column B as the more difficult word. And they don’t know why. All they know is that somehow the word *prec**ious*** is a tougher word than *pret**ends*** even though *prec**ious*** occurs more frequently in print than the word *pret**ends***.

**Prediction:** The obvious is true: Words whose phonic components are either systematically taught in the first three grades or whose phonic components are in words commonly presented for learning in the first three grades will be chosen as the easier word. Words whose phonic components are not taught and rarely, if ever, occur in words commonly presented for learning in the first three grades will inevitably be chosen as the more difficult.

**Significance:** If the vast majority of students are to become good readers and not just the “elite” who can read the word elite, educators should find a way to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to learn the words that contain the phonic components that are neither taught systematically nor occur in words presented for learning in the first three grades.

**Note:** The consensus among the reading experts selected by the NIE for its report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, was that the teaching of simple phonics should be completed by the end of grade 2 (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, et.al., 1985)! From there on in, instruction in phonics is not indicated! Professor AVKO disagrees. He does agree that idealistically the teaching of “simple” phonics should be completed by the end of grade two. Professor AVKO wouldn’t mind if the completion of the teaching of “simple” phonics

were to be completed by the end of grade three. However, AVKO contends that mastery of “simple” phonics is not enough for the majority of learners. The phonics of words whose base has more than one syllable should be taught systematically starting at least as early as grade four.

**Tests:** On this page are two simple pencil and paper test that can be administered to as many individuals at the same time as a researcher desires. Please notice that the second test is a control version of the first test. If a researcher wants to verify that the number of letters and specific letters has nothing to do with the difficulty, but rather the patterns, the control version totally eliminates the patterns while retaining the identical letters. The letters are the same. However, the consonants in each word are put first and deliberately placed in such a fashion that pronunciation cannot take place. The vowels are placed at the end of the word. Again, if there are multiple vowels, care was taken to order them in such a way as to make any reasonable pronunciation difficult. Previously we supplied cards to enable different methods of giving the test individually. Now, they are available only upon request.

The **Survey** Test given to over 1,000 adults (Mostly teachers). Nearly everybody had a perfect score! The lowest score recorded was by a featured speaker at a reading conference! The median and the mode was 100% correct. Only the mean was lower.

Mark the easier word to read, spell, teach, learn, (your choice) with a check mark.

- |                                  |                                   |                                  |                                    |                                     |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1.                               | 2.                                | 3.                               | 4.                                 | 5.                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> painter | <input type="checkbox"/> precious | <input type="checkbox"/> chronic | <input type="checkbox"/> annoyed   | <input type="checkbox"/> mechanized |
| <input type="checkbox"/> partial | <input type="checkbox"/> pretends | <input type="checkbox"/> chimney | <input type="checkbox"/> antique   | <input type="checkbox"/> meaningful |
| 6.                               | 7.                                | 8.                               | 9.                                 | 10.                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> unions  | <input type="checkbox"/> mistakes | <input type="checkbox"/> petite  | <input type="checkbox"/> completed | <input type="checkbox"/> spotted    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> unsafe  | <input type="checkbox"/> missions | <input type="checkbox"/> petted  | <input type="checkbox"/> confusion | <input type="checkbox"/> special    |

The **Control** Survey Test given to over 1,000 adults (Mostly teachers). Nobody had a perfect score! On this test the mean, median and the mode was where it is supposed be—around 50

Mark the easier word to read, spell, teach, learn, (your choice) with a check mark.

- |                                  |                                   |                                  |                                    |                                     |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1.                               | 2.                                | 3.                               | 4.                                 | 5.                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pnrtiae | <input type="checkbox"/> pcrseiuo | <input type="checkbox"/> hccrnoi | <input type="checkbox"/> nnydoea   | <input type="checkbox"/> mhcnzdeiae |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ptrlaai | <input type="checkbox"/> prdtnsee | <input type="checkbox"/> hcmnyei | <input type="checkbox"/> ntqueia   | <input type="checkbox"/> mlngfeaiu  |
| 6.                               | 7.                                | 8.                               | 9.                                 | 10.                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> nnsuio  | <input type="checkbox"/> msstkiae | <input type="checkbox"/> pttiee  | <input type="checkbox"/> cmptldoee | <input type="checkbox"/> psttdoe    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> nsfaeu  | <input type="checkbox"/> msssnio  | <input type="checkbox"/> pttdee  | <input type="checkbox"/> cnfsnouio | <input type="checkbox"/> lspceia    |

## Section 2, Chapter 12

### J.R.'s<sup>24</sup> Rebuttal

I've read your *pamphlet* and I've also used one of Mr. McCabe's books, so I'm rather well *acquainted* with his *opinions* and *methods*.\*

As with most *multi-part arguments*, I agree\*\* with some of the *statements* Mr. McCabe makes and I disagree with others. Let me be *specific*. His first *premise* is that *phonics instruction* is not taught in *American universities* to *education majors*. I *personally* know that this is not true, for I taught reading *methods* at both Oakland *University* and the *University of Michigan-Flint* for many years. Although the class title was something like "Reading in the *Elementary* schools," it *included phonics instruction*. The *title* doesn't *include "comprehension"* either, but *obviously* that is *implied*. As an aside, there was one *professor* at one of the above *universities*, who taught nothing but *phonics*. *Students* were bored and the *university* was pleased when she *retired*. After all, it does not take sixteen weeks of three hour classes to teach *adults phonics*. They *basically* know most of it.

Most *universities* teach the three *methods of instruction: phonics*, sight, and the whole *language approach*. *Phonics* is used for words that can be sounded out, such as cat or coat. Sight words *include* those which do not follow *phonetic principles* such as "said" or "one." *Researchers* differ on how much of our *language* is *phonetically\*\*\* standard* from 50% through 75%. Nevertheless, there are *numerous* words which are not

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<sup>24</sup>J.R. was the resident expert on reading instruction at Mott Community College at the time the original "Is Professor AVKO Right?" was published. I had given a copy to a friend of mine, Dr. Fred Duprai, who is a dentist at the Mott Community Health Center. He enjoyed it, and passed it on within the health center. Somehow it ended up in J.R.'s hands. Apparently, J.R. felt it merited a lengthy response which was in the official form of an interoffice memo to Dr. Duprai. This is it.

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## A Rebuttal to J.R.'s Rebuttal

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\*⇐As will become obvious, JR is neither *well acquainted* with my *opinions* nor my *methods*. JR does not have even one of the over 40 books listed in AVKO's current catalog. J.R. has only *one* book of mine. I gave it to J.R. over ten years ago. It is out of print now.

\*\*⇐Notice that JR never quotes one single statement that I made in the pamphlet with which she agrees. The vast majority of J.R.'s responses have nothing to do with "Professor AVKO's challenge." Nearly all of J.R.'s statements concerning phonics indicate clearly to me that J.R.'s personal knowledge of the phonics of the English language is terribly deficient. *And that is not meant to be a personal criticism or personal attack upon J.R.'s intelligence. J.R. probably knows as much and probably more about phonics than 90% of all college education instructors. And therein lies the problem!*

I have taken the liberty of putting into *bold italics* J.R.'s words which have a foreign derivation. These are the words JR feels are phonically irregular. They aren't. These are the words JR says good teachers teach before lessons. They don't. Most teachers would assume that their students can read all the words in J.R.'s memo except possibly: *imbedded, atypical, auditory, perception, Orton-Gillingham, correlates, fetal, and panacea*.

\*\*\*⇐There is a vast difference between *phonetics* and *phonics*. JR knows the difference. However, JR does not know the phonics of the power words in our language. But JR is not alone. My personal estimate is that at the present time a minimum of 95% of college instructors cannot demonstrate mastery of the power phonics of the English language by scoring a minimum of 90% on a test that AVKO tutors who lack teacher certification will score 100% on.



## J.R.'s Rebuttal

*phonetically regular* and must therefore be *memorized*, or *recognized* by sight. The third *method*, the whole *language approach*, is very *popular* today. The *proponents* of that *theory* use trade books (*regular* books that anyone can buy at any bookstore) and teach the children to use the story and *phonics* to *figure* out new words--in other words, the *strategy* most *adults* use when noting an unknown word in a *sentence*. They read the whole *sentence*, *deleting* the unknown word, and then guess what that word must be, and mean, by *noting* the letters (*phonics*) and *inferred* meaning in the *sentence*. An *example*: "The *angel* played a lovely tune on the *lyre*." "*Lyre*\* does not follow *standard phonetic* rules. However, almost any child, even *dyslexics*, know the sounds of "l" and "r." Therefore, they know those two sounds will likely be in the word, plus they also know from *context* that the *lyre* is probably some sort of *musical instrument*. Now, any good teacher goes through any *lesson* to find words that are new and not *phonetically standard* and teaches\*\* those words to the *students*, of whatever age, *before* they read the *lesson*.

Therefore, to sum up, there are *necessarily* at least three common *methods* to teach reading. *Phonics* is a method of *decoding* unknown words. *Memorizing*, or teaching students to *recognize* a word by sight, is *necessary* for words which are not *phonetically regular*. The whole *language method* is used to *figure* out unknown words, meanings, and *pronunciations*, using *phonics* when those words are *imbedded* in a *sentence* and the reader is seeking the *message*, the *information*, or the story.

It is my *opinion* that Mr. McCabe *believes* that *phonics* is not taught, or that it is not taught *exclusively*, and it is not taught long enough. Let me be clear that I cannot speak for every school or every teacher. As you know, when a teacher is in a classroom, few outside that classroom know what *transpires* there, but *generally*,

## Rebuttal to J.R.'s Rebuttal

\*⇐The word *lyre* does follow standard rules of power *phonics*.

\*\*⇐That the *phonics* of little story telling words is either taught directly or acquired by most students indirectly is not disputed. It is the phonics of the power words of our language that isn't taught in the first three grades but is assumed to be known by teachers from the fourth grade up through college. I would love to see an average third grade student read JR's memo. Guess what words that student would miss!

## J.R.'s Rebuttal

I **believe**, as Mr. McCabe, that most children **receive** fairly **extensive phonics** training in the first two grades. Most children have learned as much **phonics** as they will ever need after two years.

However, some children have not yet learned those sounds, and those are generally the children who have great **difficulty** with letter-sound **relationships**. Most **dyslexics** have **deficiencies**\* in letter-sound **relationships** for their **entire** lives. They are very poor **adult** spellers. I know; I taught a spelling class at Mott **College** for many years. It was in that class that I used Mr. McCabe's book. I found it very helpful, but even then many of those **adults** who freely **elected** the class, paid nearly \$150.00 to take the class, and **collected** only non-**transferable credits**---failed to "hear"\*\*\* those **phonics** sounds as most of the rest of us hear them. They **struggled** hard with those sounds, just as they have all of their lives, beginning in **kindergarten**. I can **attest** that there are **individuals** who cannot **differentiate** one **vowel** sound from another, and that is where most poor readers and writers fail. In **addition**, those same people are **inflexible** about **phonetic** rules. They have great **difficulty accepting** the "sh" sound of "t" in nation. In my class, they railed against changes in the **phonics system**. They wanted the **system** to be **standard** and **constant** even when I told them that the **problem**\*\*\* with **English** is that it has **incorporated numerous foreign** words (**bouquet, intrigue**) and newly coined **expressions** (faxed, snafu). Many of those **additions** do not follow **phonics** rules. Even Mr. McCabe's book notes **several atypical** words which have only one or two like-**examples**. I not only taught early reading methods classes, but I also taught **content area** reading courses for **college students** who **intended** to teach **middle school** and high school **content** courses. There was great **emphasis** in that **university** course to teach unknown **vocabulary** to students before reading their **textbooks**,

## Rebuttal to J.R.'s Rebuttal

\*⇐True. Most dyslexics have deficiencies in letter-sound relationships. However, I have yet to meet a dyslexic who could not be taught to read and spell proficiently.

\*\*⇐Re: failing to "**hear**" I can attest that the guru of phonics instruction, Dr. Patrick Groff, admits that he cannot distinguish the difference between the names, Dawn and Don. I personally am dyslexic and cannot distinguish many individual sounds. I can also demonstrate that 99% of all college reading teachers can fail a simple hearing test of a very specific consonant blend when placed in the context of a nonce word.. Perfect hearing is not necessary for understanding and recognition of phonic **patterns**.

\*\*\*⇐ "The problem with English" is not *in* the English language but rather in the failure to teach *all* the phonics of our language which includes hundreds of thousands of words whose derivation is not Anglo-Saxon but they surely are English and no longer foreign. Please note that the "sh" sound in nation is not represented by just the letter t, but by the "ti" digraph. The letters *ti* are pronounced "sh" and the letters "on" are pronounced "un" in the ending *-tion* which is always pronounced "shun."

## J.R.'s Rebuttal

and therefore, one needs to **examine** Mr. McCabe's **thesis**\* that **illiteracy** would be **eliminated** if only we taught **phonics**.

**Phonics** is taught\*\* in the early grades. Most children who do not learn it then are **identified** as poor readers and are **generally referred** to **remedial** reading classes where more **phonics** is taught. Those with **auditory perception** problems will still find **phonics impossible** and it is those **students** who are **generally labeled dyslexic** and get even more **intense, structure phonics** of the **Orton-Gillingham variety**. My point is that most of those **students eventually** learn to read,\*\* but they do not read well, usually hate to read, and therefore do as little reading as **possible**.

I **realize** that it seems that reading has **recently** become a larger **problem** than it was **previously**. I'm not sure that **perception** is **accurate**. In the past, **students** who did poorly in school left. Now, however, we have great **campaigns** to keep them in school. In the past, reading wasn't **crucial**.\* One could be an **auto mechanic** without reading **script**, but only **diagrams**. That is no longer true.

**Mechanics** must pass a written **exam** and deal with **computers** which do not **recognize** misspellings. In the past, one could work in the **factory**. Now the **local factories require literacy**, math and **mechanical** timed tests in **addition** to team **problem solving, individual interviews** and **physical examinations**. In other words, our **present society requires** far more **literacy** skills than ever before so that the people who have low **literacy** skills seem more **numerous**. At the same time the **nation** has **increasing poverty**, which **correlates** highly with **illiteracy**. There are more **substance abusers** which is **manifested** in babies with **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome**. Their main **characteristic** is low **intelligence**.

## Rebuttal to J.R.'s Rebuttal

\*↔ Sorry, JR. That is NOT my **thesis**. I am not Johnny one-note.

\*\*↔ The methods and materials generally used to **teach phonics** generally fail because these methods and materials are either boring or basically incorrect! Just because a phonics workbook is used in a class doesn't mean that phonics is being learned! Those with auditory perception problems can learn to discriminate sounds if **properly** taught.

\*\*\*↔ Most of **those students** do NOT eventually become readers capable of reading J.R.'s memo. However, if they are taught the power phonics of English and the essential academic vocabulary, even dyslexics can read J.R.'s memo.

\*↔ This is the "party line" of Roger Farr and the International Reading Association of which I also am a member. I also agree to the accuracy of the statements but disagree with using this as a defense against not trying harder to solve the illiteracy problem.

## J.R.'s Rebuttal

The **state** and **federal governments** are cutting funds for Head Start and **remedial reading** classes which **foster language** and **phonics development**. Our state is pushing charter schools which may hire **un-certified** teachers and where the **curriculum** can be whatever the owners want.<sup>25</sup>

I think **literacy** will not **prosper** more in the near **future**. And so, I agree with Mr. McCabe that **phonics instruction** is **crucial**, but I do not **believe** it is the whole **answer, the panacea**.<sup>\*</sup> As a firm **believer** and **practitioner** of **phonics instruction** for 37 years, I **believe** the **problem** is far more complex.

## Rebuttal to J.R.'s Rebuttal

\*⇐At no time have I ever written or said that phonics instruction is “the whole answer, **the panacea**.” It is, however the *sine qua non* of literacy. Just as listening comprehension cannot take place over the telephone if the connection is bad, reading comprehension cannot take place if decoding skills are not automatic, well above the 90% commonly given as the instructional level for students.

⇐JR, like nearly every college instructor I have ever met, is a victim of the Semmelweiss syndrome. All the expert medical opinion in 1843 denounced Semmelweiss as being simplistic and that the medical problems behind puerperal fever were **far more complex** than just washing your hands. Uh, huh. Sure. But today's medical opinion vindicates Dr. Semmelweiss and credits him with saving more lives with his simple concept of cleanliness (asepsis) than any other medical discovery. Let's take care of the horse before we start building bigger and better carts via whole language.

DM aka Professor AVKO

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<sup>25</sup>J.R. seems to be proving my point that “it is too easy for educators to shift the blame to parents, economic factors, racial factors, socio-economic factors, cultural factors, underpaid and/or undereducated teachers, lack of discipline, or whatever.

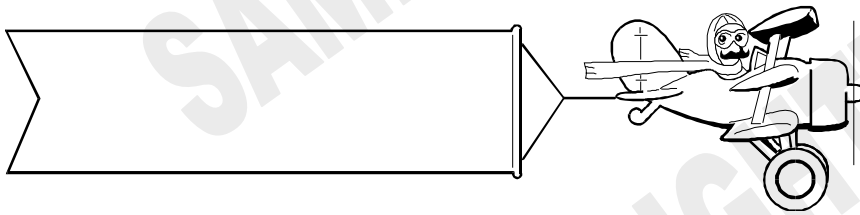
## Section 2, Chapter 13

# How To Scientifically Construct Your Own Test of Professor AVKO's theories

The logical first step is to list the different patterns of English spelling and then check them against those patterns that are in your curriculum. Sounds easy enough. Except, where are you going to find either list? It only took me a little over 20 years to make my list of patterns and to categorize them and cross index them so that I can look up any word in the index and find the page or pages that contain all the words that share the same pattern. This reference tool I named *The Patterns of English Spelling*. It contains almost 1,000 pages. It is in a 3 inch 3 ring binder to make it easy for teachers to remove individual pages for copying purposes. It is available from the AVKO Foundation.

A school's spelling or reading curriculum might contain lists of initial consonants, consonant blends, digraphs, short vowels, and long vowels as if these lists contained all the patterns. They don't. For example, let's take the word, *word*. The vowel *o* is neither a short nor long *o*. Rather, it sounds the same as the *-ur* sound in *fur*. The onset *w* is consistent, but the "rime" is not *ord* as in *ford*, *cord*, *lord*, etc. But there is a pattern, the *wor-* pattern which is the only way we spell the sound "wur" except in the word *were*. A few examples are: *work*, *worth*, *world*, and *worm*. The sound "or" is spelled "ar"! The words *war*, *ward*, *warp*, and *wart* do not rhyme with *car*, *card*, *carp*, and *cart*!

Sorry, but you will have to use *The Patterns of English Spelling* to locate the patterns that need to be taught in order to check your school's spelling or reading curriculum. What can I say? I'm prejudiced. I'm the author.



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