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Endorsement of Readable English

Learning to read English is an exceptionally difficult task. The written language is only partially phonetic with very few clear and consistent rules. Individual letters can be pronounced in multiple ways depending on the word in which they are found. The consequence is that a speaker who knows the pronunciation of a word will not necessarily know how to spell it and a reader who encounters a novel word can, at best, only guess at its pronunciation.

Given this lamentable state of affairs, ideally, we should develop a completely new phonetic English spelling system and forget the old one. Of course, realistically, such a radical transformation is not going to happen. Many of us assumed the situation was irretrievable and we had no choice but to condemn English readers and writers to their difficult task. I was in that camp until I was introduced to Readable English. It is ingenious. First, each word is spelled in its conventional manner so expert readers have no difficulty reading it. Second, letters that are not pronounced are visible but greyed out and each letter that has multiple pronunciations has a mark above it to indicate the particular pronunciation required for that word. The consequences are that written English becomes entirely phonetic but still allows readers to learn the current, non-phonetic English spelling.

Those familiar with Cognitive Load Theory with its emphasis on reducing working memory load during learning will immediately see the benefits of the system. Preliminary data indicate that learning to read Readable English not only is easier and faster than learning conventional English, as might be expected, but also results in easier and faster learning of conventional English. Based on theory and data, I can recommend Readable English in the strongest possible terms. It has the potential to transform the teaching of English.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J. Sweller'.

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