



# Facilitator’s Guide

This guide was produced in partnership with the **National Education Association**



## EPISODE 1

# Letter Names with Reese (Kindergarten)

**Video length:** 15.5 minutes

**Watch the video here:** [ReadingRockets.org/interventions/letter-names-with-reese-kindergarten](http://ReadingRockets.org/interventions/letter-names-with-reese-kindergarten)

## Contents

### Section 1: Purpose of This Guide

Use in Conjunction with the Viewer’s Guide .....	2
Using this Guide for Professional Development .....	2
Using the Answer Keys .....	3

### Section 2: Questions for Guiding the Second Viewing of the Video

Short Session A: Identifying Reese’s Weaknesses .....	4
Short Session B: Learning More About Reese’s Weaknesses .....	4
Short Session C: More Practice with Two Letters that Reese Confuses .....	5

### Section 3: Summarizing Questions .....

### Section 4: Answer Keys

Answer Key for Viewer’s Guide .....	7
Answer Key for Section 2: Questions for Guiding the Second Viewing of the Video.....	8
Answer Key for Section 3: Summarizing Questions .....	15

Watch the whole “Looking at Reading Interventions” series here:  
[ReadingRockets.org/interventions](http://ReadingRockets.org/interventions)



## Section 1: Purpose of this guide

This facilitator's guide for professional development (the Guide) is intended to provide suggestions for reading coaches, principals, team leaders, or other facilitators to use for professional development (PD) sessions.

The Guide is organized to facilitate discussion about the video, not for the facilitator to lecture. PD facilitators may find insight about the videos by reading the Guide before leading PD about the video.

## Use in conjunction with the Viewer's Guide

A separate Viewer's Guide intended for anyone to use during a first viewing of the video. Find it here:

- [Episode 1 Viewer's Guide](#) (printable PDF)
- [Episode 1 Viewer's Guide](#) (fillable PDF)

The Viewer's Guide includes the following:

1. Reese's profile
2. Video overview
3. What to notice while watching the video
4. Questions to consider while watching the video the first time

PD participants should use the Viewer's Guide as they watch the entire video as the initial step in PD, either on their own or in a group.

## Using this guide for professional development

### General guidelines for using the guide

PD should start with all participants watching the entire video and using the Viewer's Guide to guide their watching.

The Guide organizes the video into short clips for the group to view before discussing the clips. The short clips are organized around the following themes:

- A. Identifying Reese's Weaknesses
- B. Learning More About Reese's Weaknesses
- C. More Practice with a Pair of Confusing Letters

Each theme includes one to three short video clips for viewing, and one to five discussion questions for immediate discussion after each clip is viewed.

A PD facilitator may elect to offer several shorter sessions as part of ongoing shorter PD sessions, such as for a Professional Learning Community (PLC), or to have one half-day session to discuss the video.



## Use the guide for a series of shorter PD sessions

1. Ask participants to read the Viewer's Guide before viewing the entire video. As they view the video, participants should answer the questions posed in the Viewer's Guide.
  - Facilitators might want to use the first short session to view the video and discuss the questions.
  - Alternatively, facilitators might ask participants to view the video and answer the questions in the Viewer's Guide before the first session, then discuss the questions during the first session.
2. Before each PD session, select video clips and the discussion questions that will fit into the time frame for the session.
  - Facilitators may want to make a copy of the discussion questions for each participant so they can write notes during the session.
3. During the PD session, show the video clips and discuss each clip, using the questions in the Guide.
4. Consider using one or more questions from Section 3: Summarizing Questions before the session ends.

## Use the guide for a half-day session

**Preparation:** Make copies of the Viewer's Guide and the questions in Section 2 for each participant.

**Consider an agenda as follows:**

1. View the entire video.
  - Read the Viewer's Guide.
  - Answer questions in the Viewer's Guide while viewing the video.
  - Discuss the answers to the questions and other questions participants may have.
2. View short clips and ask discussion questions for each section listed in Section 2.
3. Discuss the questions from Section 3: Summarizing Questions before the session ends.

## Using the answer keys

Answer keys provide facilitators with suggestions for answers to each question in the Viewer's Guide and this Guide. Of course, you can adapt the answers to address the needs of participants in your session.



## Section 2: Questions for guiding the second viewing of the video

**Note about time stamps:** The location for the part of the video related to the question is in parentheses. The start and stop times are shown as minutes:seconds. For example, the first question starts at 30 seconds and ends at 2 minutes, 17 seconds. The total time for each clip is also shown in minutes and seconds.

### Short session A: identifying Reese's weaknesses

#### 2.1 Reese Sings the Alphabet Song (0:30 – 2:17) 1:47 total time

1. Why is letter naming so important?
2. Why is knowing the alphabet song important?
3. Why might it be a problem that Reese wants to sing the alphabet song fast?

#### 2.2 Reese Sings the Alphabet Song Touching the Letters (2:18 – 5:43) 3:25 total time

4. What was revealed by asking Reese to touch the letters as he sang the song?
5. Reese demonstrates difficulty with touching and singing the names of the letters 'L-M-N-O-P'. What does Ms. Farrell have Reese do before she asks him to sing the alphabet song again?
6. Why is touching the letters while naming them so important?

#### 2.3 Teaching Letter Names Before You Teach Letter Sounds (5:44 – 7:06) 1:22 total time

7. What is an advantage of teaching letter names before teaching letter sounds?
8. What purpose does the alphabet song serve when students are learning letter names?

#### 2.4 Reese Starts Working with the Letter 'V' (7:07 – 8:41) 1:34 total time

9. What did Ms. Farrell do to help Reese distinguish the letter 'V'?
10. How did Ms. Farrell guide Reese to providing the correct letter name when Reese said 'Y' for the letter 'V' a second time?
11. Why do you think Ms. Farrell gave Reese a 'choice' question when she asked about the letter 'V': "Is this an 'A' or a 'V'?"



## Short session B: learning more about and working to fix Reese's weaknesses

### 2.5 Reese Continues to Practice the Letter 'V' (8:42 – 10:02) 1:20 total time

12. What is different about the way Ms. Farrell uses flashcards to practice the letter 'V' than the traditional way flashcards are used to practice letter names?
13. How does Ms. Farrell have Reese practice naming the letter 'V'?
14. Ms. Farrell says that she has Reese practice naming the letter 'V' because she suspects that he has a hard time recalling the letter name. Does Reese have difficulty naming the letter 'V'?

### 2.6 Reese Learns How to Tell 'Y' and 'V' Apart (10:03 – 11:54) 1:51 total time

15. What difficulty does Ms. Farrell discover when she adds 'Y' to the practice?
16. How does Ms. Farrell help Reese distinguish the letter 'Y' from the letter 'V'?
17. What are some other pairs of letters (other than b-d\*) that students confuse?  
\* Fixing b-d confusion is addressed in the Episode 4 video with Aiko.
18. Can you think of anchors that students could use to practice distinguishing them?

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## Short session C: more practice with a pair of confusing letters

### 2.7 Reese Practices 'Y' and 'V' (11:55 – 15:44) 3:49 total time

19. Why is it important for Reese to first practice by saying the anchor for each letter before he names it?
20. What else besides describing the differentiating feature must Reese do as he practices?
21. How did Ms. Farrell know that she had stopped the scaffolding of pointing to and describing the differentiating feature too quickly?
22. How many times do you think Ms. Farrell should practice naming the letters with Reese with the scaffolding before she tries having him name the letters without the scaffolding? Why?
23. How would you know when to stop practicing 'V' and 'Y' with Reese?



## Section 3: Summarizing questions

1. Do you have any students who might benefit from the strategies Reese learns?
2. What did you learn?
3. How do you plan to use what you learned in your instruction?
4. How can you use what you learned with a small group?



## Section 4: Answer keys

### Answer key for Viewer's Guide

1. What do we learn about Reese when he sings the alphabet song the first time?

He pronounces "l-m-n-o-p" as a word and he has trouble with the pronunciation of "double u."

2. How does Ms. Farrell help Reese sort out his difficulty with "l-m-n-o-p"?

She has Reese practice singing the letter names slowly as he touches each letter. She also makes sure he is looking at the letter he is touching.

3. Reese has learned the version of the alphabet song that includes the word 'and' after the letter 'Y'. What does Ms. Farrell have Reese do to avoid confusion with the word 'and' as he is pointing to letters while singing the names?

She has Reese pull his pointing hand to his chest as he sings 'and.'

4. What is Ms. Farrell's explanation for teaching letter names before teaching letter sounds?

The letter names are the "category" because the letter 'a' is always called 'a' no matter its shape or the sound it spells. The letter 'a' can be 'italic a', 'manuscript a', 'primer a', etc., but it is always called 'a'. Likewise, the letter 'a' can spell the sounds /ă/ as in *cat*, /ā/ as in *major*, /ə/ (schwa) as in *about*, /ō/ as in *swap*, etc., but the letter name is always 'a'. In addition, most letter names have their common letter sound embedded in their names, so once students know the letter name it is easy to learn the sound.

5. Why is Reese having confusion with the letters 'Y' and 'V'?

The shapes are similar.



## Answer key for Section 2: questions for guiding the second viewing of the video

### Short session A: identifying Reese's weaknesses

#### 2.1 Reese Sings the Alphabet Song (0:30 – 2:17) 1:47 total time

##### 1. Why is letter naming so important?

In order to be good readers, we need to recognize letters immediately and without effort. Many studies show that letter naming is one of the strongest predictors of reading success in first grade.

When teaching spelling, teachers and students will use the letter names to talk about the shapes that represent the sounds heard in the spoken word. An example of when letter names are particularly useful is that when teaching the digraph 'sh', the teacher will explain that the letters 's' and 'h' spell the sound /sh/. Another example is explaining that one letter such as 'g' or 'c' can spell two sounds, or that any vowel can spell a short sound and a long sound (required in kindergarten according to many state standards).

Many letters can spell more than one sound. Most letter names have clues to the most common sound the letter spells. The letter names 'b', 'd', 'j', 'k', 'p', 't', 'v', and 'z' begin with the most common sound for the letter. The letter names 'f', 'l', 'm', 'n', 's', and 'x' end with the most common letter sound for the letter.

##### 2. Why is knowing the alphabet song important?

Singing the alphabet song is the easiest way to get the letter names into a student's long-term memory. When the letter names are stored securely, it is easier to attach them to the shapes — connecting the known to the unknown.

##### 3. Why might it be a problem that Reese wants to sing the alphabet song fast?

When Reese sings fast, he can easily slur the letter names. In addition, it is almost impossible to touch and look at each letter while singing its name if the student sings fast. It is looking at the letter while saying its name that helps Reese cement the connection of the letter shape and its name in his long-term memory.

#### 2.2 Reese Sings the Alphabet Song Touching the Letters (2:18 – 5:43) 3:25 total time

##### 4. What was revealed by asking Reese to touch the letters as he sang the song?

We learned that Reese knows the song and that he likes to be quick. He knows most of the letter names but has some confusion about 'L-M-N-O-P' and he has trouble saying the name of 'W'.



5. **Reese demonstrates difficulty with touching and singing the names of the letters 'L-M-N-O-P'. What does Ms. Farrell have Reese do before she asks him to sing the alphabet song again?**

Ms. Farrell works with Reese to get him to touch and say the names of the letters in the 'L-M-N-O-P' row without singing. When she sees that he has difficulty touching and saying the names of the letters, she points to O and asks Reese to name it, then she points to the N and asks for the name. The video cuts out Ms. Farrell asking him to name the rest of the letters in the row, out of order. Touching and naming the letters out of order makes the student focus on each letter separately. Then he is more able to coordinate touching and saying the letters in order.

6. **Why is touching the letters while naming them so important?**

Touching letters and looking at them while saying the letter name activates the hand-mind connection. It encourages students to look at the letter shape as they sing the name. This facilitates linking the name and the shape and storing the link in long term memory.

### 2.3 Teaching Letter Names Before You Teach Letter Sounds (5:44 – 7:06) 1:22 total time

7. **What is an advantage of teaching letter names before teaching letter sounds?**

Most letters have the most common sound that they spell embedded in their name. This makes knowing the letter names a base for learning the letter sounds for most letters.

- Most common consonant sounds represented in the beginning of letter names: b, d, j, k, p, t, v, z
- Most common consonant sounds represented at the end of letter names: f, l, m, n, s, x
- Most common consonant sounds that are not in the letter name: c, g, h, q, r, w, y

Students who know letter names and have difficulty learning letter sounds most often have difficulty learning consonant sounds that are not in the letter name. They mix up 'y' and 'w' because the letter 'y' starts with the sound for the letter 'w'.

If students already have the letter names secured in their long-term memory, it is usually easy to teach the letter sounds for the letters that have the sound embedded in their name. Then we can take extra care and more time with the sounds that are potentially confusing, often giving a motion to help students learn the sound.

8. **What purpose does the alphabet song serve when students are learning letter names?**

Letter names and letter shapes are abstract; they have no meaning. Singing the letter song, even before students recognize the letters, secures in their long term memory the name of the letter that is eventually going to be matched to the shape.



## 2.4 Reese Starts Working with the Letter 'V' (7:07 – 8:41) 1:34 total time

### 9. What did Ms. Farrell do to help Reese distinguish the letter 'V'?

Ms. Farrell drew Reese's attention to the most notable feature — the letter's shape, the point at the bottom.

### 10. How did Ms. Farrell guide Reese to providing the correct letter name when Reese said 'Y' for the letter 'V' a second time?

Ms. Farrell offered him choice: "Is this an 'A' or 'V'?"

### 11. Why do you think Ms. Farrell gave Reese a 'choice' question when she asked about the letter 'V': "Is this an 'A' or a 'V'?"

Choice questions are a scaffold that make it easier for the student to select the correct answer than if the student has to come up with the answer without aid. Choice questions also narrow the options for a correct answer. In this case, Ms. Farrell was trying to give Reese a choice that did not include the letter 'Y'.

In this case the scaffold didn't work because Reese answered "Y" even though it wasn't one of the choices she gave. Notice that Ms. Farrell immediately pivots to explicitly teaching Reese a way to identify the difference between 'V' and 'Y'.

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## Short session B: learning more about and working to fix Reese's weaknesses

## 2.5 Reese Continues to Practice the Letter 'V' (8:42 – 10:02) 1:20 total time

### 12. What is different about the way Ms. Farrell uses flashcards to practice the letter 'V' than the traditional way flashcards are used to practice letter names?

Traditionally, teachers use a deck of flashcards with many or all of the letters students are struggling with, or the deck includes all the letters in the alphabet.

Ms. Farrell usually concentrates on teaching one letter at a time if the student has difficulty remembering the letter name (or sound). But if, like Reese, the student is confusing two letters, she teaches two letters at a time by giving the student a way to differentiate the two letters.

Ms. Farrell's flashcard deck is different because half the flashcards in the deck have letters students already know, and the other half of the flashcards have either the one letter the student is learning or the two letters the student confuses. The student has to contrast the letter(s) being learned with known letters and gets multiple exposures to that letter during the practice. This also allows the student to concentrate on learning just one or two letters at a time. The student learns the letter(s) faster than if you're trying to teach many difficult letters at the same time.



**13. How does Ms. Farrell have Reese practice naming the letter 'V'?**

Ms. Farrell reviews the letter 'V' with Reese by calling attention to the distinguishing feature: "a point at the bottom." Then she has Reese practice naming several 'V's mixed with other letters Reese already knows, so he has to pay attention and contrast 'V' with other letters.

**14. Ms. Farrell says that she has Reese practice naming the letter 'V' because she suspects that he has a hard time recalling the letter name. Does Reese have difficulty naming the letter 'V'?**

No. Reese names the letter 'V' correctly every time when he is only practicing 'V'. He only misnames 'V' later when he is practicing both 'Y' and 'V'.

**2.6 Reese Learns How to Tell 'Y' and 'V' Apart (10:03 – 11:54) 1:51 total time**

**15. What difficulty does Ms. Farrell discover when she adds 'Y' to the practice?**

Although Reese does not have difficulty naming the letter 'V' when he is only practicing 'V' with other known letters, a difficulty does arise when the letter 'Y' is added to the practice. Reese always names 'V' as 'Y'.

**16. How does Ms. Farrell help Reese distinguish the letter 'Y' from the letter 'V'?**

Ms. Farrell calls his attention to a distinguishing feature of 'Y' – 'Y' has a line at the bottom. Then she teaches Reese a contrast to the distinguishing feature for 'V' – 'V' has a point at the bottom. Then she has Reese verbalize this difference for both letters. Finally, Ms. Farrell has Reese put it all together by touching the letter, verbalizing the contrasting feature, and saying the letter name. Notice that she has to remind him to touch the letter to include the 'hand to mind' stimulus.

**17. What are some other pairs of letters (other than b-d\*) that students confuse?**

\* Fixing b-d confusion is addressed in the Episode 4 video with Aiko.

m-n, p-q, h-n, w-m, p-b, f-t, n-u, v-w, w-y, g-j, i-j

**18. Can you think of anchors that students could use to practice distinguishing them?**

Participants can brainstorm possible anchors, such as 'f has a curve at the top' and 't has a straight line', or 'm has two humps' and 'n has one hump'.



## Short session C: more practice with a pair of confusing letters

### 2.7 Reese Practices 'Y' and 'V' (11:55 – 15:44) 3:49 total time

**19. Why is it important for Reese to first practice by saying the anchor for each letter before he names it?**

Practicing with saying the anchors helps Reese stay focused on a distinguishing feature of the shape and helps him cement the name and shape connection into his long-term memory.

**20. What else besides describing the differentiating feature must Reese do as he practices?**

Reese has to look at and touch the letter. If he does not look at the shape while saying the anchor and name, he is not building the mental imprint of the shape and name connection that he needs. Touching the letter encourages looking at the letter and activates the 'hand to mind' stimulus.

**21. How did Ms. Farrell know that she had stopped the scaffolding of pointing to and describing the differentiating feature too quickly?**

Reese couldn't name 'V' and 'Y' correctly when she asked him not to touch the letter and say the differentiating feature.

**22. How many times do you think Ms. Farrell should practice naming the letters with Reese with the scaffolding before she tries having him name the letters without the scaffolding? Why?**

Reese needs to continue to practice using the anchors contrasting the two letters until he has mastered (can accurately name them every time) naming them using the anchors. It is likely that Reese will need to name the letters using the scaffold at least 5 more times without any mistakes before trying to name the letters without scaffolds.

Reese may need an interim step to automatize letter recognition for 'V' and 'Y'. The interim step would be for Reese to touch the point on the 'V' or the line on the 'Y' and think (but not say) "V has a point" or "Y has a line" and name the letter.

**23. How would you know when to stop practicing 'V' and 'Y' with Reese?**

Reese can stop practicing when he can name 'V' and 'Y' correctly in a mix of other letters with automaticity (being able to immediately name the letters correctly without the scaffold and without any apparent conscious effort).



## Answer key for Section 3: summarizing questions

### 1. Do you have any students who might benefit from the strategy Reese learns?

Thoughts for teachers to consider:

- What student behaviors do they observe that might be clues to difficulty with letter names?
- Do teachers have any data from assessments that might indicate a student's difficulty with letter names?
- How will teachers go about teaching the missing letter names for students they identify?
- Could this same instruction and practice work for teaching missing or confusing letter sounds?

### 2. What did you learn?

Use this question to have participants reflect on and consolidate their learning by expressing it aloud.

### 3. How do you plan to use what you learned in your instruction?

Use this question to have participants develop and express specific action plans for teaching their students: Who? What? When? How will you measure student progress?

### 4. How can you use what you learned with a small group?

Teaching the strategies for learning letter names is easy in small groups with 2–5 students who are similar in their instructional needs, even if the students don't know or are confusing different letter names.

The deck of cards for each student has the letters that student is practicing, providing targeted practice for each student's particular difficulty.

The first step is for the teacher to assess each student to determine which letters the student knows and which they need help with. Recording this by circling the known letters on a separate grid of the alphabet for each student is helpful.

When armed with the assessment information, the teacher can create separate flashcard decks for each student that include the letter being learned or the two confusing letters.

It is important that each student practice from his/her individualized flashcard deck to practice with, as opposed to all students practicing chorally.



Step 1. I DO — The teacher demonstrates how to use the strategy (I Do) for the group.

Step 2. WE DO — The teacher and all the students use the strategy for one or two letters.

Step 3. YOU DO — The teacher prepares a set of cards or a practice page with the letter or two letters each student needs to practice mixed with already mastered letters. The teacher has one student at a time practice naming the letters on his/her set of cards or practice page using the anchors. As students become more proficient using the strategy, the teacher moves to having students name the letters without saying the anchors.

**Notes for YOU DO:**

1. The students who are not naming letters can silently watch the letter-namer. When the namer finishes, the teacher can call on the watchers to show a 'thumbs-up' if they think the namer was 100% accurate or a 'helping hand' (a raised hand with palm facing out) if the namer needs help. They do not say anything aloud. The teacher then tells the namer how many were correct and then guides namer in fixing any errors.
2. Another way to keep the other students engaged is to let them practice printing letters, arranging letters in alphabetical order with manipulatives, working on a tablet activity, or participating in some other quiet individual activity.