

## Setting up Wordchain in your classroom

Each student will need a username and password, and this username must be unique within the school. But please make sure this is child friendly. We get endless requests to deal with username and password issues and resets, and almost always the offending password is complex. It is frustrating for you and the student alike.

The username might be simply Joey. Or Joey.B if that is taken. Or Joey3.

The password must be at least 6 characters and include at least one a non-letter. We strongly recommend that several students (perhaps all) in the class have the same simple password, especially for younger students and those with very low literacy levels. Room14, #1kids, 9x9=81 all work. Students should be made aware that spaces and lower/upper case matter. If two or more students have the same password, then those who struggle to log in can call on a buddy to help.

If you want to check a student's progress, you will need to log in with their username and password. Keep a list in a secure place. This may need to be accessible to a DP, relief teacher or T/A. A caregiver may need it if the student can log in at home. Use your discretion.

To access a student's progress, log out of your teacher account first.

## Junior or Senior version?

These involve exactly the same activities; the same games, the same words, identical challenges. The only difference is age-appropriate graphics and game format. We suggest the junior version for five-, six- and seven-year-olds, and the senior version for students of eight years and older. This means that if you have a seven-year-old who needs extending while you deal with other students, they should be set at a higher level of the junior version. Equally, a ten-year-old who has barely begun to read should be set at the lowest level of the senior version. This student will be working on the skills they need to develop without being insulted by the babyish look of it all.

To assign this, go to the student group page, click on the blue font of the student's name, and choose senior or junior under recommended settings.

There are several settings here to customise a student's experience. We recommend keeping 'Sound out individual tiles'. 'Repeat the word on correct' is important for orthographic mapping and should only be removed in exceptional circumstances. 'Change it to' and 'Perfect word message' are less important.

## Where to start:

Some students will need to start at the very beginning. This will be far too easy for others. For each student, you should set a starting point. The **free assessment tool** on the Agility with Sound website [www.agilitywithsound.co.nz](http://www.agilitywithsound.co.nz) is quick and easy to administer. It includes downloadable recording forms and videos explaining how to conduct the tests and interpret the results. You should administer both the spelling test and the decoding test. Some kids perform relatively well on one test, but their real area of weakness shows up in the other. The main

games address weaknesses in the spelling test, but the fluent blending challenge deals with weaknesses uncovered in the decoding test. Most students will need an equal focus on both.

Hold onto the results. If you do not use these results to teach and plug gaps, and if you do not give specific feedback, you will be able to repeat the tests down the track for reporting purposes.

We strongly recommend that the **spelling test** is paper-and-pencil based. You will see cross-outs, letters written backwards, letters squeezed in as an afterthought. All this is missed on a device.

This will give you a **rough starting point**. If in doubt, opt for a higher starting option. Challenge matters, both for engagement and learning. As soon as you see that the current level is easy, requires little concentration, move the student on to a point that requires them to think. Thinking builds the missing connections.

We have deleted the option to **repeat a level** once a level is completed, but you can ask students to repeat chains before moving to the next level. This option should be discouraged for most students. You should not let them repeat chains just because it is easy. Wordchain is huge, with ample practice at every stage, and all skills are constantly reinforced. If, for instance, you think that this student still confuses **a** and **u**, you may be tempted to repeat chains in the relevant level. But choosing between **a** and **u** is repeated over and over throughout Wordchain. I have squeezed in additional practice with these sorts of common confusions wherever possible. The great majority of students are much better off moving on.

For us, it was creating a balance between flexibility to meet all student needs and the requirement for some monitoring by the teacher. We hope we have the balance right.

In truly exceptional cases, a student might need more than this. They may need one-to-one adult support with letter tiles before resuming Wordchain. This is rare. If no-one is available to do this, we recommend contacting RTLB. The Agility with Sound letter tiles have the same consonant/ vowel colour coding, the same pairing of letters on one tile, (e.g. sh, ed), and the same font as Wordchain.

### **Fluent blending in Wordchain**

This is important. This challenge will need occasional **input from an adult**. It takes just 60 seconds to see how many words a student can correctly decode in that time.

This should always be a positive experience for the student. If they are upset or flustered by the requirement for speed, don't do it. They will get plenty of learning just listening to how these words are constructed. Some might be happy to read words to you without any sort of timing involved; or feel comfortable logging in at home with Mum rather than under judging eyes of their peers.

Seeing their progress up the chart is empowering. Never mark a regression. If the student seems to have made little progress, repeat the timing, and they will almost certainly be faster on the second attempt.

Ignore the score. There is no benchmark; some students are faster processors than others. It is mostly for the student's self-esteem; allowing them to see their progress in a way that means

something to them. You are just checking that listening to the make-up of words is translating to increasingly rapid and accurate decoding. When this student cannot go faster, stop testing, and resume when the next sheet comes up.

Try asking two students working at the same level to test each other. Then one student chooses a word for their buddy to write down, and both check that it is correct. Then swap roles.

### **How often should students log in?**

A short period daily is much more effective than an equivalent total time once a week. Multiple short times through the day is better still. Make it work for you. There will be some classroom activities that the most challenged students cannot participate in. It may be that logging into Wordchain is a better use of their time. If there is a device at home, set Wordchain for homework; you will be able to check that it has been done. In general, the more regular practice a student gets, the faster they will advance.

### **Explaining Wordchain to students**

The fast button presents the word as in normal speech. The slow button pronounces the word slowly, in easy chunks, but in a way that makes the spelling clear.

Maybe the student used an **a** in cut. Listen to c-ut in the slow button to hear an **u** sound but hear c-**a**-t in the listen button. Listen a couple of times if necessary. The a is incorrect. Fix it up.

The word reason. What is that last vowel sound? Is it reasin? Reasen? The slow button emphasises the o: r -eas -**on**. Listen to it. (We know that most competent spellers use this technique to remember spelling patterns, say reas**On** consciously or unconsciously in their head as they write the word. What happens in your head when you spell library, libry or lib-rary? Students are learning to do this in Wordchain.)

Then, when you think you have made the word correctly but are not moving on, press the slow button again and then the listen button. Make them match!

This video is for your students:

<https://youtu.be/EvKRlgjB-Kchhttps>

### **The colour coding**

Red letters are **vowel sounds**, including r-controlled vowels and, for the New Zealand accent, some l-controlled vowels. **Consonants** are green. If students understand that consonants, the green sounds, are made with lips/tongue/ teeth, and for the red vowels, lips/tongue/ teeth are not involved, that should help them feel the sounds as well as hear and see them. Feeling what happens in the mouth as they speak is a powerful route to hearing the sounds.

### **But what about comprehension?**

Finally, **Comprehendit\*** is based on a large series of decodable books for older students that follows the Wordchain sequence precisely. These are now available digitally, but digital with a twist. As students read, they come to buttons to hear the author speaking to them, guiding them through the thinking to comprehend; an author version of the highly acclaimed ‘think aloud’ technique. A highly scaffolded and structured writing-about your-reading activity follows many but not all books, further enhancing comprehension and developing writing structure and organisation at the same time. 130 titles, with additional printable reading activities for the most challenged students, over 2,500 audio files, 90 + writing assignments. See Comprehendit on the Agility with Sound website for details, samples and trial results. Suitable for students using the senior version of Wordchain only.

\* *Comprehendit* is a Latin verb meaning "he/she/it grasps, seizes, arrests, or understands." Decoding and spelling are not enough. Comprehension and writing need to develop in parallel.