

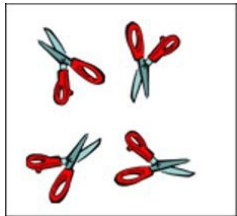
## When a child confuses letters like b and d and words like was and saw, does it mean they may be dyslexic?

Question 21 from *Helping Your Child Become a Reader*  
(Scanlon, Anderson, Barnes, Morse, & Yurkewecz-Stellato, 2024<sup>1</sup>)

No, such confusions are common at early points in development and are not an indication that children may be dyslexic. These errors happen because some letters look a lot like other letters (for example, *b*, *d*, *p*, and *q*) and some words look a lot like other words (for example, *was/saw*, *on/no*, *from/for*). It takes children a while to remember which is which and to remember that the direction that letters face and the sequence in which letters in words appear matters.



Part of the problem with remembering is that, until children start learning about print, just about everything they see is called by the same name no matter which direction it faces. For example, scissors are called scissors, no matter how they are oriented. This, of course, is not how letters and words work. Rotating the letter *b* can make the letter *d*, *p*, and *q* – depending on how it is turned. So, as children learn to read, they need to learn to pay attention to the direction of print.



As children have more experience with reading and writing, these kinds of confusions usually become much less frequent and generally disappear altogether. Caregivers can help children to get past this normal phase by providing gentle correction (for example, “That’s a b.”) when errors occur.

Note that the most frequently confused letters are the lowercase versions of the letters B and D. This likely happens because they look so much alike and probably also because their names rhyme [bee, dee]. Because children tend not to confuse the uppercase versions of these letters, it can be useful to provide them with a B/D chart (see the example to the left). When children are unsure about whether a letter encountered in print is a *b* or a *d*, and when they can’t decide how to write a *b* or a *d*, they can simply refer to the chart. It is useful to portray referencing the chart as a privilege rather than a requirement (“you get to” versus “you need to”).



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<sup>1</sup> The complete 23 question booklet can be accessed at: [eltep.org/isa-parent-booklet](http://eltep.org/isa-parent-booklet)  
All individual questions and the complete booklet can be shared for non-commercial purposes.