

From: office@amicuslaw.com
Subject: If you can read this... thank a teacher! - March Literacy Month
Date: Tue, March 2, 2010 10:10 am
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Our speaker for today, March 2, 2010 is Carla McDaniel, Chair of the District Literacy Task Force. For your enjoyment I offer the enclosed brain tease I found on the internet.

"In September 2003, the following paragraph thundered its way around the Internet:

Aoccdnig to rscheearch at Cmabrigde uinervtisy, it deosn't mtttaer waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoetnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteres are at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a tatol mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae we do not raed ervey lteter by itslef but the wrod as a wlohe.

Like everyone else, I remain amazed at how easy it is to read this paragraph. It certainly is a testament to the flexibility of the human mind. But the paragraph's main points—that we use only the first and last letters of a word when reading and that we read by recognizing whole words—are actually false. Here's why.

For one thing, the letter transformations in the paragraph are not random. If the letters are moved any further from their original location, the words become much more difficult to read, as we can see in the following phrase:

Anidroccg to rcraeseh at Cgdirbmae utisreviny

As for recognizing words by their shapes, the letter transformations in misspelled words usually alter the pattern of ascending and descending letters and thus their shapes. If anything, the scrambled paragraph suggests that word shapes are not important, because we can still readily recognize the transformed words despite changes in their shapes. In fact, the consensus among psychologists who study reading is that we recognize words not by their shapes but by looking at letters within a word in parallel.

A literate adult reads at such a fast pace that it may seem as if the misspelled words have no effect. It only takes a couple of hundred milliseconds to recognize a correctly spelled word, so a 10 percent or even a 100 percent increase in recognition time would hardly be noticeable. But research by Keith Rayner and his colleagues at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, has demonstrated that people do read about 12 percent slower with the kinds of misspellings in the scrambled paragraph.

Sadly, the scrambled paragraph has now entered the realm of urban myth and continues to circulate online. Should anyone send it your way in the future, you can confidently reply that its conclusions are just as scrambled as the text."

Sincerely,

Keith
