

# Units of Sound v5: What's New?

Margaret Rooms

*This article has been written primarily for people who are already using, or know about, the literacy development programme Units of Sound. If you do not fall into those categories and want to know more fundamental information about the programme please look at [www.unitsofsound.net](http://www.unitsofsound.net)*

## Rationale

When we developed *Units of Sound: Literacy that fits* for use in the home in 2006 we put in a number of features to lessen the memory load of anyone supporting a student on the programme. Inevitably – we then wanted to put them into the main professional programme as well. In essence, this is what we have done, as well as added a few extras.

## What's the same?

Before I start to tell you what's new in the programme, I have learnt that I have to start with telling you what's the same!

All the words in the Reading and Spelling programmes are the same and there are no changes to the pupil books. The *Units of Sound Exercises* are unchanged and so there is no new expenditure required on any of the paper-based materials.

## What's new?

### Student Management – Placement

The placement test has been reorganised so that it is effectively one rather than three. You no longer have to estimate a starting point for a student and then test around that point. Instead, the student is first of all presented with 7 Stage words which skate across all three stages to find the first indication of error.

man neat yawn breath emphasize  
perpendicular opaque

At the first error on the Stage words the test switches to 23 Level words

pet nettle doing batch mole golden  
power thaw oven burst stir fraud foreign  
plunge yield physical determine ceremony  
significant occasion imagine fracture prejudice

At the first error on the Level words the test switches to the Placement words, which are the same as in v4. A student is placed by the first 6 errors made on these words after reading 3 correctly out of 5 – otherwise the test moves back 10 words until a place is found where 3/5 can be achieved.

As always, the teacher remains in control of what programme of work the student follows and can over-ride anything set by the placement process. The new system does mean however that TAs can place a student within a few minutes without trying to estimate a starting point first.

From my discussions with specialist teachers who use UofS, and with TAs and teachers in schools I can see that in schools they worry about the programme placing the students too low – and that specialist teachers worry it will be too high! Neither group needs to worry. Just as a standardised reading test should include confidence limits to acknowledge the limitations of any testing process, so too should placement on UofS be initially viewed as an approximation. Use the checks and balances built into the programme to tell you when adjustments need to be made. Remember also, that you can set the programme for single coverage per page as well as overlap (see Student Management – Options).

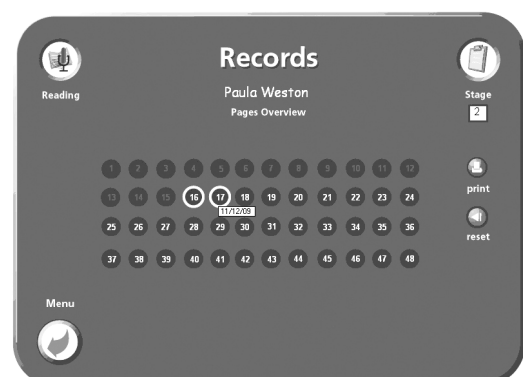
### Screening overview

Because of the new method for placement, the screening overview record has been taken out. This is because the test is no longer linear. This test was always meant purely to be a placement tool and not as a standard measure of reading skills.

### Student Management – scores and records

We have standardised the record keeping for the 4 learning programmes – Reading, Spelling, Memory and Dictation. In Programme Overview, as before a blanked out number means the page has not been set and a white number means it has been set. A white circle around a page number means that the page has been covered. If you hover the mouse over the circle you will get the date the page was accessed and for Spelling, Memory and Dictation – the score. If you right click on the circle you get a record of the actual work producing that score.

Student Management V5.0.1  
Options Help

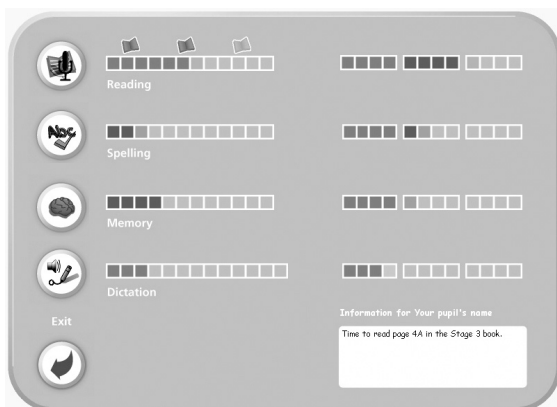


### Access without screening

You can only access the pages of the learning programmes by first placing the student in Student Management using the placement tool. It is intended that students on UofS are placed at a point where they are working comfortably, but not that everyone starts at the beginning which is the default position without placement.

### Programme management screen

When you access the student programme and click on the student name (unchanged) you come to the Programme Management Screen, which has been transferred from *Units of Sound: Literacy that fits*.



This screen gives an overview of the whole programme with filled in squares showing what the student has already covered and the blank squares showing what still needs to be done. The main access to the learning programmes is through this screen via the main icons on the left. If you hover over a 'page done' square, page information, including a score and page number, is revealed in the viewer on the bottom right of the screen.

As for *Units of Sound: Literacy that fits*, the Memory and Dictation programmes are only accessible once the student has reached a high enough point in the Spelling programme.

### Screen tutor

Screen tutor is an audio-visual version of the Help manual which tells the student (or teacher) how to work with the features on any screen. It is designed as a readily-available support for anyone who needs to learn about a new feature or would like a reminder. Screen tutor can be accessed via **Help** on the top menu bar. I suggest a new user on v5 starts by looking at screen tutor on the Programme Management screen to familiarise yourself with this key management tool.

### Moving through the programme

The page numbers are set in a +2 -1 model (once you get past any non-sequential pages at the beginning) to avoid a student who is covering 2 pages in a single lesson having to repeat the same page number. So it

would run as ...7 – 9 – 8 – 10 – 9 – 11 and so on for instance.

In Spelling, Memory and Dictation, a student needs to get a high enough score for the page number to move on to the next one set. The page will stick until a high enough score has been reached to prevent students working at a higher point than their accuracy level. There are 3 messages: 'Excellent – full marks'; 'Well done – you are ready to move on'; and 'I think you need a bit more practice on this – you need a higher score to move on'.

A teacher told me recently that she was unsure of this feature at first but has realised now that it acts as an incentive to students to get full accuracy – because there is a consequence if they don't.

In reading, as in v4, the progression rate is controlled by the teacher carrying out the Check-reading exercise using the pupil books. We have put in a little bit of 'nagware' to remind students they need to check-read when the 'A' pages are reached.

### Go to page

We know that it is sometimes useful to access a specific page, either as a repeat or to demonstrate a feature and so we have put in **Go to Page** on the top menu bar of the Programme Management screen. This takes you to old familiar screen from v4 where you can type in the stage and page number.

### Spelling – view words

The spelling programme has not been designed as a test: all the screens except Check Spelling are for learning something new and practice. To support this practice further we have displayed the words for spelling on the screen automatically so that students can scan the words for patterns and to note anomalies. This occurs on the first access when a student is on the 'overlap' setting.

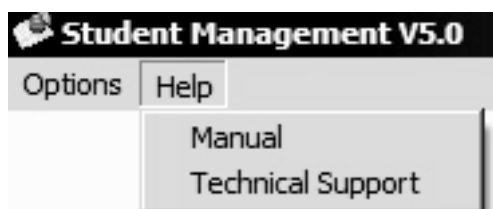
### Memory – 10 exercises

The memory section has been overhauled in line with *Units of Sound: Literacy that fits* so that there is only one access point: screen one is **Speed Reading** and screens 2 and 3 are **Recall Writing**. We have also reduced the number of items from 15 to 10, making it more of a 5-7 minute exercise. This should be easier to fit into a regular one-hour lesson than previously.

We have also added the print function to the final screen, bringing it in line with Spelling and Dictation.

### Student Management – Technical support

When you open the first Student Management log-in screen, if you click on Help on the menu bar there is a direct link to the website to access technical support.



### Good Practice sheets

Any developer will tell you that there is a tension between the amount of information you want to give users about how to use the programme, and the amount they are prepared to read or listen to. So the more you give them, the less likely they are to access it, or benefit from it. (You will note then, that this is quite a short article!)

To address this we have produced 4 pages in pdf known as Good Practice Sheets: one for Reading, one for Spelling, one for Memory and one for Dictation. They are tick sheets covering all the points needed by the student to work through the programme in such a way as to gain maximum benefit from it. They act as reminders to staff of the points they need to cover with students and can be used to identify the time when students are ready to access the programme independently. They are included in the program group and are also downloadable from the website [www.unitsofsound.net](http://www.unitsofsound.net). I saw these being used by TAs with Key Stage 3 students recently and was impressed at how effortlessly they focus both parties on the main issues for getting the maximum benefit from the programme.

### Help!

The Help! manual has been updated to v5 and is included as pdf in the program group and is also downloadable from the Units of Sound website. This contains all the step by step information needed to use the programme effectively. It is in pdf format rather than ready printed so that multiple copies can be made: one for each member of staff using the programme, plus replacements for when you spill coffee on them!

### Moving from v4-v5

#### New install or upgrade?

It is worth spending a little bit of time thinking about how you want to use the programme in the future before automatically clicking on the upgrade option. Upgrade will take your old records with you and this may be just what you want. On the other hand, this may be an opportunity to clear out some of the clutter from your old records and to start afresh. Do you still have records of many students who have left but you haven't deleted the name? Do you have names entered inconsistently so that the alphabetical listing on surname isn't quite as useful as it could be? Do you have students who have been using the programme for some time now and might benefit from a fresh look at placement? If the answer to

any of these questions is 'Yes', then you might be better off leaving the old records behind (put them somewhere safe before uninstalling v4 just in case) and starting with a clean sheet.

This is also a good time to consider changing the licence. Is your current licence restricting you from developing the programme across the whole school? Licences are available for single install, 6 concurrent users, 10, 20, and unlimited. Concurrent use refers to the number of students using the programme *at the same time*.

### Discount prices

There are reduced upgrade prices for customers who purchased the program in 2009, with earlier v4 customers getting a 2/3 discount. All prices and licence options are shown on the Units of Sound website. Please note that it is not possible to put a single user copy onto a LAN – this price is for stand-alone installation only.

### Training

Units of Sound has been through many cycles and whereas it used to be used mainly by specialist teachers, today it is definitely a tool for anyone involved in literacy support. There is a range of training and support packages for schools available from Dyslexia Action. If you are interested in Dyslexia Action providing a hands-on 'v5' training day for you please contact [info@unitsofsound.net](mailto:info@unitsofsound.net)

### Future developments

We are of course already thinking about the next phase of developments, which will probably be about integrating Units of Sound and Literacy that fits, so that home / school use of the programme is seamless. If you have ideas about developments to suit your own working environment, do please let us know.

We are also interested in hearing about success stories, case studies, different models of using the programme and how it is used in different settings. We are already planning to visit a secondary school that has 200 children on the programme, and an MLD school. **Talk to us.**

### Webinars

In Dyslexia Awareness week 09 we gave a Units of Sound webinar (web-based seminar) which proved to be popular and successful. We plan to repeat this exercise in the future so look out for news about dates on the Dyslexia Action and the Units of Sound websites: [www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk) and [www.unitsofsound.net](http://www.unitsofsound.net)

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