



Develop awareness of the segments of sound in speech and how they link to letters



For students to be able to read and comprehend, they must first develop phonological awareness, the ability to recognize and manipulate the segments of sound in words. To develop this ability, students must be able to identify the following: individual sounds (phonemes) in words; print letters of the alphabet; and corresponding sounds for each letter. The following recommendation focuses on actions teachers can take to support students in developing the ability to effectively decode and encode words.



How to carry out the recommendation

1. Teach students to recognize and manipulate segments of sounds in speech.
2. Teach students letter-sound relations.
3. Use word-building and other activities to link students' knowledge of letter-sound relationships with phonemic awareness.

Potential roadblocks

1. Students often confuse letters and their sounds.
2. Even after focused instruction, students continue to struggle with phonemic awareness.

Reference: Foorman, B., Beyler, N., Borradaile, K., Coyne, M., Denton, C. A., Dimino, J., . . . Wissel, S. (2016). *Foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through 3rd grade* (NCEE 2016-4008). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/21>



How to carry out the recommendation

1. Teach students to recognize and manipulate segments of sound in speech.

To begin teaching students this skill, work with students to break down sentences into individual words. Then help them break down certain individual words, like compound words, into smaller words. Next, work with students to break down words further into syllables and encourage them to practice identifying syllables within familiar words. Finally, teach students to break syllables into even smaller units, such as onsets and rimes. Onsets are the initial consonant in a syllable (i.e., the /f/ in *food*) while the rime is the remaining sound in that syllable (i.e., the /ood/ in *food*). Once students are able to break syllables into onsets and rimes, encourage students to begin manipulating them to build phonemic awareness. A wide variety of activities can help students manipulate individual phonemes, including using Elkonin sound boxes*, sorting pictures, and using the sample activities described below.

Sample Activities for learning onset and rime

Assembling Words

Teacher: What word do you get when you put these two sounds together: /f/ and /ood/?

Students: *Food*.

Teacher: Exactly!

Rhyming

Explain what rhyming means to students before beginning the dialogue.

Teacher: What word rhymes with *bat*?

Students: *Cat*.

Teacher: Yes! Does *hat* rhyme with *bat*?

Students: Yes!

Teacher: Does *bar* rhyme with *bat*?

Students: No.

Teacher: Very good.

* Elkonin sound boxes can be created by providing students with paper squares and instructing students to write in spelling patterns. Each sound gets its own box. Then students are able to create words using the spelling patterns identified by the teacher.

Matching Onsets

Teacher: These are pictures of animals. What type of animal is this? (Show picture of cat.)

Students: A cat.

Teacher: Correct. What sound does *cat* start with?

Students: /c/

Teacher: Correct. What type of animal is this? (Show picture of cow.)

Students: A cow.

Teacher: Correct. Does this type of animal start with the same sound as cat?

Students: Yes.

Teacher: Correct. What is this animal called? (Show picture of dog.)

Students: Dog.

Teacher: Correct. Does *dog* start with the same sound as *cat*?

Students: No.

Teacher: Correct. What sound does *dog* start with?

Students: /d/

Teacher: Very good. What about this animal? (Show picture of crab.)

Students: Crab.

Teacher: Exactly. Does it start with the same letter as *cat*?

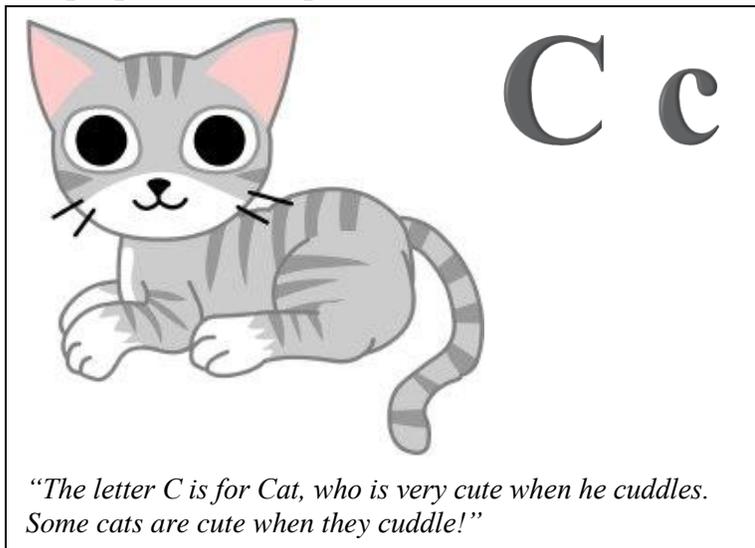
Students: Yes.

Teacher: Great work! *Cat*, *cow*, and *crab* all begin with the /c/ sound. *Dog* does not begin with the /c/ sound.

2. Teach students letter-sound relations.

Once students begin to manipulate phonemes, start working with students on the letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds. Begin by teaching familiar consonant and short vowel sounds that are more common, such as /m/, /p/, /s/, and /a/. After consonants and short vowels, consider teaching students familiar consonant blends. As students progress in their understanding, teach long vowels with a silent /e/, common two-letter vowel pairs (e.g., /ea/ and /ou/), and letters and letter combinations that may correspond to multiple sounds. Introduce each letter or letter combination one at a time. For each letter sound, try sharing a picture with both the upper and lower case of the letter and share a short story that corresponds and incorporates the letter sound throughout to help students remember the sound when they see the letter. Encourage students to repeat the sound after it's shared, and provide meaningful opportunities for students to write the letters (e.g., writing their names or common words with the letter).

Sample picture and alphabet letter



3. Use word-building and other activities to link students' knowledge of letter-sound relationships with phonemic awareness.

Activities, like word-building, help students build their awareness of how each letter contributes to the spelling and pronunciation of a word. By building this skill, students are able to begin spelling and decoding words. For example, provide students with a set of letter tiles and have them manipulate the tiles to create or change words. Model the activity to begin, and work through examples with students. Then encourage the students to work independently. As they progress in their understanding, challenge students with more difficult words, such as words with a silent /e/ or words with two consonants at the beginning or end.

Sample Word-Building

Provide students with the letter tiles *a*, *p*, *t*, *c*, and *n*.

Teacher: Take the *p*, *a*, and *t* tiles and put them together in that order: *p*, *a*, then *t*. Can anyone read this word?

Student: *Pat*.

Teacher: Correct. Now change one letter to make it say *pan*.

Teacher: Now, change a letter to make it say *can*.

Teacher: Now, make it say *cat*.

Teacher: Finally, make it say *pat* again.

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Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Students often confuse letters and their sounds.</i>	A common problem in early grades is students confusing the shapes and sounds of one letter for another (e.g., <i>b</i> and <i>d</i>), known as a letter reversal. To help students overcome this challenge, teach students one letter at a time starting with the letter's shape (e.g., <i>b</i>). Once a student is able to instantly identify the letter, introduce another letter (e.g., <i>d</i>) and continue to reinforce the first letter learned. Finally, shift your teaching focus entirely to the second letter. Finally, introduce the two letters in individual words to ensure students can recognize each letter independently. If issues with letter reversals continue, try using a handwriting program, which can help students focus their hand-eye coordination on the letter shapes. Particularly for older students, continued problems with letter reversals may indicate other reading challenges or disabilities.
<i>Even after focused instruction, students continue to struggle with phonemic awareness.</i>	One potential opportunity to overcome this roadblock is to work with a student one-on-one or in small groups. Early intervention can help overcome this persistent challenge and prevent further reading problems.



For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited at the bottom of the first page of this document.