

Developing Phonemic and Phonological Awareness Skills

Students need to be “tuned in” to the speech sounds of spoken English – this is critical for their reading and spelling development. Phonological awareness is a broad term referring to the ability to identify and work with smaller parts of spoken language. Phonemic awareness refers more specifically to the skills required to ‘tune in’ to individual speech sounds (phonemes) in words. Phonological awareness includes:

- Understanding that sentences are made of words (e.g. the sentence, ‘The dog is running’ has 4 words).
- Blending syllables to form words (e.g. ‘gi - raffe’ = ‘giraffe’) and breaking words into syllables (e.g. ‘computer’ = ‘com - pu - ter’).
- Identifying and producing rhyming words.
- Blending sounds to make words (e.g. /sh...ee...p/ = ‘sheep’).
- Segmenting words into individual sounds (e.g. ‘flight’ = /f...l...igh...t/).
- Manipulating sounds in words, by omitting, adding or swapping them (e.g. ‘lost’ without the /s/ is ‘lot’).

These skills can be developed through classroom phonological awareness games, more structured individualised or small group activities, and informal phonological awareness games that can be played at home or in the car. Phonological awareness activities should always involve oral activities, not just written letters. However, the relationship between sounds and letters should be made explicit from the time a student starts school. The literacy-learner needs to understand that the sounds they are making when they speak relate directly to the letter(s) they use when they are writing.

Some Useful Resources to Assist With the Development of Phonological Awareness Skills

- Playing cards with pictures of common objects, transport, animals etc. are available from DSF Literacy & Clinical Services (*Language Development Cards and Rhyming Activity Cards*). These can be used for a variety of phonological awareness, oral language, and phonics games that can focus on different skills. Common card games (e.g., Snap, Memory, Go Fish) can be adapted for use with the playing cards. For example, you could play Snap focusing on syllables - “jumper” and “hammock” make a pair of matching picture cards because they both have two syllables.
- Another useful resource is the *Hear Myself Sound Phone*. This is a fun plastic phone for children that allows them to hear themselves talk, tune into the sounds they say, and explore letter sounds, phoneme blending, and sound manipulation.
- *Webber Phonological Awareness Photo Cards*. Each set of cards focuses on a phonological awareness skill.
- The following books provide information and activities to develop phonological and phonemic awareness skills across a range of ages:
 - > *A Sound Way (2nd Ed.)*, by E. Love & S. Reilly (an interactive whiteboard CD-ROM is also available).
 - > *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children*. By M. Adams, B. Foorman, I. Lundberg & T. Beeler.
 - > *Sounds in Action: Phonological Awareness*. By Yvette Zgonc.
 - > *Assessing and Teaching Phonological Knowledge* by John Munro.
 - > *Sound Linkage (2nd Ed.)* – An integrated programme for overcoming Reading Difficulties by Peter Hatcher.

