

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.

To make instruction more engaging and interesting, involve the student in a series of games to develop and practice phonemic awareness skills. Phonological awareness develops as a child gets older. The skills in these games develop from easier to harder in the following order: segmenting words into syllables; rhyming words; identifying sounds; blending sounds to form words; segmenting words into sounds; and manipulating sounds in words.

- **Syllable games:** Count, clap or stomp out the syllables in words, or use a drum or other rhythm instrument to “beat out” the syllables in words.
 - > Have the student guess a whole word that is broken into syllables. For example, “What word is this: bu...tter...fly”? The answer of course is ‘butterfly’. Use longer words as the student progresses.
- **Rhyming game:** Have the student predict rhyming words in stories. Play rhyming guessing games (e.g. “I am thinking of a word that rhymes with ...”). State a familiar one syllable word and see how many rhyming words the student can come up with. The student’s answers do not necessarily have to be real words and in fact, the student may find it more amusing to think up nonsense rhyming words.
- **Recognising beginning/ending sounds:** Say a series of words and get the student to identify whether the words begin/end with the same sound or alternatively identify the word/s that are different.
 - > Play “I-Spy” using the first sound of a word as the clue and the child then has to find something in the room/car that begins with the given sound (not letter). This game could also be played using rhyming words (e.g., “I spy with my little eye, something that rhymes with ____”).
- **Alliteration game:** Have the student make up alliterative phrases (a string of words that begin with the same sound – e.g. “Peter piper picked a peck of pickled peppers”). These phrases can start off small. State the sound that the phrase should begin with and have the student see how long a phrase they can come up with.
- **Phoneme Blending Bingo:** The teacher orally segments a word. The student blends the sounds to form a whole word and covers the word (represented by a picture) with a token if it is on their board. The game ends when all pictures are covered.
- **Race Car Blending:** The teacher provides a drawing of a race track. The teacher orally segments a word, laying down tokens for each sound. Students drive their toy cars over the tokens blending the sounds together to finally repeat the whole word at the end of the track.
- **Counting Sounds:** Have the student count out the sounds in a word. Use a card with segmented boxes and have the student place counters in each box to represent each individual sound.
- **Segmenting Words:** Get the student to “talk like a robot” by sounding out familiar and unfamiliar words (e.g. ‘b-u-g’, ‘h-or-se’). Start off with simple monosyllabic words and progress to multi-syllabic words and words with adjacent consonants (e.g. ‘s-c-r-a-p’) as the student becomes more confident with this task.
- **Sound Manipulation:** Sammy Sound-Snatcher takes away or swaps sounds in words and students say what is left. For example, ‘farm’ without /f/ is ‘arm’; ‘clap’ without /l/ is ‘cap’; swapping the /b/ in ‘beef’ to /r/ makes ‘reef’.