

Starting Off Right
with
Phonemic Awareness:

*Fun Activities to Help
Prepare Your Child for Reading*



Introduction

Parents can be key partners in helping their children become successful readers. All of the activities covered in this handout can be used at home with your child. Doing even some of these activities will help to better prepare your child for reading.

What Is Phonemic Awareness?

- The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words
- The knowledge that spoken words can be broken into smaller segments of sounds (phonemes)

How Is It Taught?

At Home

Children who are read to at home, and exposed in particular to rhymes, such as songs and poems, often develop the basis of phonemic awareness. Children who are not read to may not have this advantage. Many phonemic games and activities can easily be practiced by parents and children at home.

At School

Most children need to be taught phonemic awareness and specifically how words can be broken apart into smaller parts and how sounds can be blended into words. Using segmentation, blending, and other activities, phonemic awareness can and should be taught and bolstered in the classroom. To be successful readers, children should learn and have a mastery of seven phonemic skills.

Phonemic Skills

1. Discriminating
2. Counting
3. Rhyming
4. Alliteration
5. Blending
6. Segmenting
7. Manipulating

Discriminating

Skill:

The ability to determine if two words begin or end with the same sound.

Activities:

- **Isolate That Sound.** "What's the first sound in *bat*? What's the first sound in *mouth*?"
- **I Spy!** "I spy something in this room that begins with the /w/ sound (*window*). I spy something in this room that begins with the /p/ sound (*pencil*)."
- **I Am Thinking.** "I am thinking of something that begins with the /m/ sound (*mouth*). I am thinking of something that begins with the /t/ sound (*teeth*)."
Sometimes you may have to give additional clues. For example, "I am thinking of something that begins with the /t/ sound, something you might have to brush in the morning before going to school and at night before going to bed." (*teeth*)

Counting

Skill:

The ability to clap the correct number of words in a sentence, syllables in a two-syllable word (*cowboy*, *carrot*), or sounds in a one-syllable word (*me*, *jump*).

Activities:

- **For a sentence.** Count the number of words in a sentence, clap while saying them, and then count them again. For example, say "Sentences are made up of words. Here is a sentence: *Boys jump*. This sentence has two words. *Boys* [clap one time] and *jump* [clap one time]. *Boys jump* is two words." Now say a few short sentences, two to five words long, and then expand to longer sentences of six to ten words. Then expand to sentences with multisyllabic words. Remember to clap one time for each word and then count the words.
- **For syllables.** Count the number of syllables in a word, clap while saying them, and then count them again. For example, say "Words are made up of parts. Here is a word with one part: *moose* [clap one time while saying the word]. One. Here is a word with two parts: *cowboy* [clap once while saying each syllable]. Two."
- **For sounds.** Count the number of sounds in a one-syllable word. For example, say "Words are made up of sounds. The word *me* has two sounds." Repeat the word and stretch the sounds as in *mmmm eeee*. Lift one finger for each sound, so raise one finger for the /m/ sound, and raise the second finger for the /e/ sound. Then say the number two. Continue with words with two, three, and four sounds.

Rhyming

Skill:

The ability to create word families with rhyming words, e.g., *all, call, fall, ball*.

Activities:

- **Thumbs Up.** Say "Put up your thumb if these two words rhyme." Say *ball* and *call* and look for thumbs up. Say *ball* and *soccer* and look for thumbs down.
- **Rhyming Picture Sort.** Find and sort things in pictures that rhyme. Children's books and magazines are perfect for this.



- **Rhyming Oops! Wrong Rhyme.** Show your hand and say "This is my *sand*. Oops! Wrong rhyme! This is my _____." Your child offers the word *hand*.
- **Rhyming Stand Up!** Create rhyming prompts to complete actions. First, ask your child to say a particular word. Then, provide an action prompt for a word that rhymes with that word (without saying the rhyming word). Your child performs the action and says the rhyming word. For example, you say "Say *pup*." Your child says the word *pup*. Then you say "Now stand _____." Your child stands up and says the word *up*. Another example: "Say *band* (*band*). Now raise your...(hand)." Or, "Say *south* (*south*). Now point to your _____" (*mouth*). Or, "Say *low* (*low*). Now find your (*toe*)." Continue with similar prompts for actions or other parts of the body.
- **I Spy!** Say "I spy something in this room that rhymes with *frog*."

Alliteration

Skill:

The ability to create a list of words where two or more words have the same initial sound.

Activities:

- **Choose two words that begin with the same sound.** Say "Here is a word: ____." Say another word that begins with the same sound. Try to start with words that begin with these continuant sounds: /f/, /j/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /r/, /s/, /v/, or /z/. Examples: *fall* and *football*, *jumbo* and *jet*, *lick* and *lollipop*. The words do not necessarily need to be related in meaning.
- **Creating tongue twisters.** Provide silly sentence-starter prompts that emphasize a beginning sound. Your child says one or more words to end the sentence. For example, say "Sally's silly shoe sank slowly in the ____ (*slime, snow, sap*)."
- **Creating silly sentences.** Write about eight words that begin with the same sound on index cards. Arrange the cards to create silly sentences. Read the silly sentences. Rearrange them and read the new sentence.

Blending

Skill:

The ability to blend adjacent sounds together.

Activities:

- **I Spy!** Say "I spy something in this room that begins with the /r/ sound, then the short /u/ sound, and then the /g/ sound. What is it?" *Rug*.
- **I Am Thinking.** Say "I am thinking of something that begins with the /m/ sound, then the short /a/ sound, and then the /p/ sound. What am I thinking of?" If necessary, repeat the sounds /m/, /a/, and /p/. Stretch the sounds, then slowly blend the sounds together, and then blend the word.
- **Create some sentences with words that need to be blended.** For example, say a sentence, but just say the sounds of one of the words: "The boy reads a /b/ /oo/ /k/." Then ask "What does the boy read?" Answer: A book.

Segmenting

Skill:

The ability to verbally isolate the syllables or sounds in a word.

Activities:

- **First I Heard.** Choose a simple three-sound word. Say "Here is the word *fin*. First I heard /f/, then I heard the short /i/, and then I heard /n/." If necessary, stick out three fingers and point to the first finger when you say the first sound, the second finger when you say the second sound, and the third finger when you say the third sound. Ask your child to say the separate sounds. (Other example words: *lip, men, nap, rod, sun*.) This activity can also be made into a game by providing the individual sounds in order and then asking what the word is.
- **Head, Waist, and Knees.** Stand up facing your child. Choose a simple three-sound word, like *lip*. You and your child should touch your heads and say the /l/ sound, touch your waists and say the /i/ sound, and touch your knees and say the /p/ sound. Repeat with other three-sound words.

Manipulating

Skill:

The ability to change words by deleting, adding, and substituting sounds and syllables.

Activities:

- **To practice deleting sounds.** Say "Say the word *cat*. Now say the word again, but do not say /k/." Answer: *at*. To practice deleting syllables: "Say the word *cowboy*. Now say the word again but do not say *cow*." Answer: *boy*.
- **To practice adding sounds.** "Say the word *cat*. Now say the word again, but add an /s/ sound at the end." Answer: *cats*. To make this more difficult: "Say the word *cat*. Now say the word again, but add an /s/ sound at the beginning." Answer: *scat*. For longer words: "Say the word *rain*. Now say the word again and add *coat*." Answer: *raincoat*.
- **To practice substituting sounds.** "Say the word *hat*. Now change the /h/ sound to the /m/ sound." Answer: *mat*.

Other Recommendations

- **Focus on one specific skill at a time.**
- **Spend twenty minutes a day.** Feel free to break it up, such as five minutes, four times a day.
- **Repetition and practice.** There is no need to fret if your child doesn't get this right away. Phonemic awareness is acquired over time. It may take a lot of examples, repetition, and practice for a child to achieve success.

Breakout Session

Activity Practice

This is a great opportunity to practice some of the activities covered in the workshop. Here are some activities you might want to practice in a small group. For each suggested activity, there is a description of how to do the activity. Each participant can take a turn trying an activity.

While we explain each activity with one or more examples, in this session everyone is encouraged to practice creating their own examples. If you particularly like any of the examples that you or your group create, you might want to write them down to use later.

1. I Am Thinking & I Spy!

Skills:

Discriminating, Rhyming, and Blending

Steps:

Say "I am thinking of something . . ." or "I spy something . . ." and then provides a clue of a word that rhymes, a beginning sound, ending sound, etc. Your child tries to guess the answer.

For example, say "I am thinking of something that begins with the /d/ sound. Can you guess what it is?" Answer: *desk*. Or say "I spy something in this room that starts with the /m/ sound, then the short /a/ sound, and then the /p/ sound. What is the word?" Answer: *map*.

Or say "I spy something that rhymes with *bag*. Can you guess what it is?" Answer: *flag*. If your child answers with a word other than *flag*, offer encouragement and try again. For example, if your child answers with *rag*, say something like "That was a great answer, but I spy something else that rhymes with *bag*. Can you guess what it is?" If your child answers with a word that doesn't rhyme with *bag* or is having difficulty, offer some examples or possible answers: "*Bag, rag, and sag* all rhyme because they all end with the same sounds. I spy something else that rhymes with these words. Do you think it is *frog, flag, or mud*?"

2. Rhyming Stand Up!

Skill:

Rhyming

Steps:

Create rhyming prompts to complete actions. First, ask your child to say a particular word. Then, provide an action prompt for a word that rhymes with that word (without saying the rhyming word). Your child performs the action and says the rhyming word. For example, you say "Say *pup*." Your child says the word *pup*. Then you say "Now stand ____." Your child stands up and says the word *up*. Another example: "Say *band* (*band*). Now raise your ...(*hand*)." Or, "Say *south* (*south*). Now point to your ____" (*mouth*). Or, "Say *low* (*low*). Now find your (*toe*)." Continue with similar prompts for actions or other parts of the body.

3. Rhyming Oops! Wrong Rhyme

Skill:

Rhyming

Steps:

Say a simple sentence that ends with a word that doesn't make sense but rhymes with a word that would make sense. Say "Oops! Wrong rhyme!" Then, ask for the right word. For example: Show your hand and say "This is my *sand*. Oops—wrong rhyme! This is my ____." Your child offers the word *hand*.

Other examples:

Today I walked my *frog*. (Answer: *dog*)

I walked out the floor. (Answer: *door*)

I'm wearing a pair of *ants*. (Answer: *pants*)

4. Tongue Twisters

Skill:

Alliteration

Steps:

Provide silly sentence-starter prompts that emphasize a beginning sound. Your child says one or more words to end the sentence. Examples with possible answers include:

Big band bats bang ____ (*bongos, bananas, beanies*).

Lively little lambs like to lick luscious ____ (*lemons, lollipops*).

Many messy monkeys make muddy ____ (*muddies, messes*).

5. Head, Waist, and Knees

Skill:

Segmenting

Steps:

Stand up facing your child. Choose a simple three-sound word, like *mop*. You and your child touch your heads and say the /m/ sound, then touch your waists and say the /o/ sound, and touch your knees and say the /p/ sound. Repeat with other three-sound words.

6. First I Heard

Skills:

Segmenting and Blending

Steps:

First, think of a simple word with only three or four sounds. Then provide the individual sounds and ask for the word. For example, "First I heard a /d/ sound, then I heard an /ě/ sound, then I heard a /s/ sound, and then I heard a /k/ sound. What is the word?" Answer: *desk*. Alternatively, just provide the sounds with a short break between them: /d/, /ě/, /s/, /k/.

Another form of this game is to say a sentence but just say the sounds of one of the words. For example: "The boy reads a /b/ /oo/ /k/." Then ask "What does the boy read?" Answer: *A book*.

7. Counting

Skill:

Counting

Steps:

Practice clapping the correct number of words in a sentence, syllables in a two-syllable word (*cowboy*, *carrot*), or sounds in a one-syllable word (*me*, *jump*).