

Starting Off Right
with
Phonics:

*Fun Activities to Help
Your Child in Reading*



Introduction

Parents can be key partners in helping their children become successful readers. All of the phonics activities covered in this handout can be used at home with your child. Doing even some of these activities can significantly accelerate your child's reading development.

What Is Phonics?

The instructional method that teaches that there is a predictable relationship between the sounds of the spoken language (phonemes) and the written letters that represent those sounds (graphemes)

Instruction in the connection between the letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds, and how to blend them together to read words

What's the Difference between Phonemic Awareness and Phonics?

Phonemic awareness is an *understanding* of the sounds and patterns in *spoken* language. Children who are phonemically aware can tell that *bat* and *bird* start with the same sound, and that *bat* and *rat* rhyme.

Phonics is instruction in the *relationship* between *letters and their respective sounds*. Children who have been taught to read using phonics instruction know that when they sound out and blend together the written letters "b," "a," and "t," they can read the word *bat*.

Phonics Skills

1. Alphabetic knowledge
2. Alphabetic principle
3. Word recognition
4. Reading decodable text
5. High frequency and irregular words

Alphabetic Knowledge

Skill:

Alphabetic knowledge, also known as alphabet recognition, involves knowing the shapes, names, and sounds of letters, and progresses from letter names to shapes to sounds.

Activities:

Sing the alphabet song. Point to the letters while singing.

Memory game. Write each letter on two plain three-by-five-inch cards (only one letter on each card), so you have two sets of 26 cards. Shuffle all the cards together, and place them face down. The first player turns over one card and says the letter, then turns over a second card and says the letter. If the cards match, the player takes those cards and continues to play. If they don't match, both cards are turned over, and it's the next player's turn.

Tic-Tac-Toe. Play the traditional game, but use other letters instead of "X" and "O."

Alphabetic Principle

Skill:

The alphabetic principle refers to the systematic relationship between letters and sounds. Children who understand that the (sequence of) letters in written words represents the (sequence of) sounds in spoken words and who know letter-sound correspondences can use this knowledge to decode both familiar and unfamiliar regular words.

Activities:

Introducing letter sounds. Start with /s/, /t/, /m/, /p/, /h/, /a/, and /i/. These letter sounds can be used to create many different words. Teach these letters and sounds first.

Memory game. Play the Memory game (see Alphabetic Knowledge), but players say the sound of the letter as well as the letter name. In addition to letters, consider playing with letter combinations and short phonetically decodable words. (It is also a good game for practicing sight words.)

Writing names. Teach your child how to spell his name. Write the name on a piece of paper. Ask your child to trace over the letters, first with a finger and then with a pencil or crayon, and then to copy his name onto another piece of paper. Remind your child to say the letter sounds while tracing or copying.

Alphabet Soup. Cut two-by-two-inch squares from paper or cardboard. Give players squares equal to the number of letters in their name. Players writes the letters in their name, with one letter on each square. Place the letters into a pretend pot of soup and stir the soup. Take turns taking a letter out of the pot. If the letter is in the player's name, the player keeps the letter. If not, he puts the letter back into the pot. Stir again. Play continues until everyone can make their names.

Word Recognition

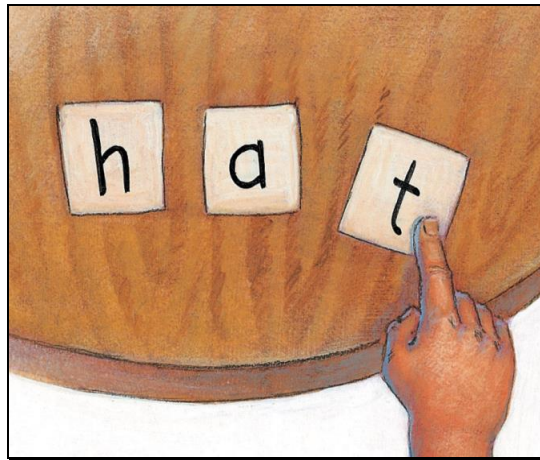
Skill:

Word recognition includes recognizing words in print, being able to point to a single word, being able to sound out words in print, and being able to automatically read some words.

Activities:

Blending. Help your child learn that letters and the sounds of the letters blend together to make words. For example, write the word *sip*. Point to the first letter and make the /s/ sound, point to the second letter and make the short /i/ sound, and point to the third letter and make the /p/ sound. Then blend them together, pointing to the letters that correspond to each sound as you say the word slowly.

Making Words activity. Cut blank paper or cardboard into two-by-two-inch squares. Then write one letter on each square. You can then move these letter cards around to create words. For example, for the word *pet*, create the letter cards for "p," "e," and "t." Then, mix the letters, and ask your child to create the word *pet*. Add some letters, such as "b," "l," "m," "n," and "s," and ask your child to change one letter to make the word *set*.



Three-Sound Word Deck. Cut blank paper or cardboard into two-by-two-inch squares. Write one letter on each square. Make two squares for each letter. Start with "a," "h," "i," "m," "p," "s," and "t." Put one set of the consonants in the first pile, put the vowels in the middle, and put the other set of the consonants at the end (all squares facing up). Your child reads the random word or nonsense word. Then he removes one letter and uses the next letter to read another random word or nonsense word. Alternate removing letters from all the piles.

Reading Decodable Text

Skill:

Decoding is the process of reading, or sounding out, letters or decodable letter patterns in a word to determine its meaning.

Activities:

Read decodable text out loud together. Read books that are comfortable for your child's level, such as phonics readers, like the We Read Phonics series. You might want to start by reading the story together—by reading aloud at the same time or by taking turns. As you and your child read, move your finger under the words.

Provide opportunities for your child to reread multiple times. Have your child read to you while you follow along with your finger under the words. Encourage your child to use both letter clues and picture clues when reading. If there is some difficulty with a word, either help your child to sound it out or wait about five seconds and then say the word. Another great way for your child to practice is by reading the book to a younger sibling, a pet, or even a stuffed animal!

High Frequency and Irregular Words

Skill:

The ability to recognize and read high frequency and irregular words that cannot be read through decoding, such as *from* and *the*. These are often called "sight words."

Activities:

Flash cards. Use flash cards for repetitive practice. Write high frequency and irregular words on flash cards. Use the list of 30 words below or any other similar list. Ask your child to read the words as the cards are flashed.

Alphabetizing the flash cards. Ask your child to put the flash cards in alphabetical order.

Memory game. Play the Memory game (see Alphabetic Knowledge), but use sight words instead of letters on the cards.

Tic-Tac-Toe. Play the traditional game, but use sight words instead of "X" and "O."

Bingo. Write one sight word on each of 5 to 10 cards. Then create some Bingo cards. Start with making a four-by-four or five-by-five grid. Fill the grid randomly with the sight words. Words can be used more than once on the grid. Then, create some colored dots to put over the words. Mix the sight word cards and place them face down. A player turns over a card and reads the word. Players put a dot on the words on their Bingo card if they match. If the word appears more than once on a card, put a dot on each one.

Thirty sight words beginning readers should learn:

the, you, said, his, people, to, they, were, do, know, was, would, are, some, your, of, there, because, as, mother, is, one, what, could, who, two, too, should, put, whose

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 is key. There is no need to fret if your child doesn't get this right away. It may take a lot of examples, repeated attempts, and a lot of practice for a child to achieve success.

Breakout Session

Activity Practice plus Make-and-Take

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 list of materials needed, a summary of how to do the activity, and an indication of whether this might also be an opportunity to make materials that you can use later with your child.

1. Making Words

***Make-and-Take – Save what you make to use later!**

Skill:

Word Recognition

Materials Needed:

Thick paper or cardboard; pencil, crayon, or marker; scissors



Steps:

Cut two-by-two-inch squares from the paper or cardboard, and print a letter on each card. Letters such as "a," "h," "i," "m," "p," "s," and "t" can be used to start. Place the cards in front of your child. Ask your child to move the letters around to make the word *hat*. Ask him to change one letter and make the word *mat*. Continue with all possible combinations. Add letters when ready. You can also use letter combinations on the cards. For example, create a card with the letter combination "ar" on it and see how many words your child can create that end with "ar."

2. Memory Game

***Make-and-Take – Save what you make to use later!**

Skills:

Alphabetic Knowledge, Alphabetic Principle, High Frequency and Irregular Words

Materials Needed:

Blank three-by-five-inch cards; pencil, crayons, or markers



Steps:

Write each letter, one-syllable word, or sight word (see High Frequency and Irregular Words) that you want to practice on two cards. You should now have two sets of cards. Shuffle all the cards together, and place them face down. The first player turns over one card and says the letter or word, then turns over a second card and says the letter or word. If the cards match, the player takes those cards and continues to play. If they don't match, the player turns over both cards, and it's the next player's turn.

Note: These cards can also be used to play Go Fish and other matching games.

3. Bingo

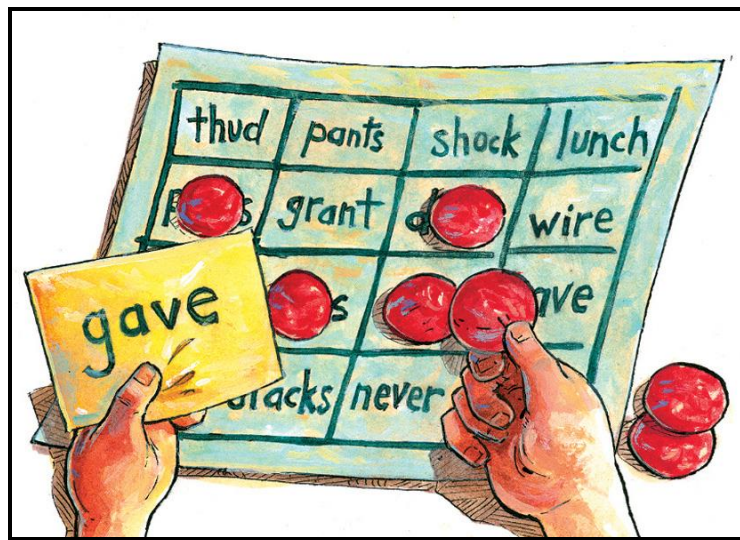
***Make-and-Take – Save what you make to use later!**

Skills:

High Frequency and Irregular Words

Materials Needed:

Three-by-five-inch cards; colored paper or cardboard; pencils, crayons, or markers; ruler, scissors.



Steps:

Write a word on 5 to 10 three-by-five-inch cards. Then create some Bingo cards. Start with making a four-by-four or five-by-five grid. Fill the grid randomly with your sight words. They can be used more than once on the grid. Then create some colored dots to put over the words. Mix the cards and place them face down. A player turns over a card and reads the word. If the word matches a word on his Bingo card, the player puts a dot on it. If the word appears more than once on the Bingo card, he puts a dot on each one. The first player to complete a row across, up, or down wins the game.

Note: Bingo can also be played using letters instead of words to practice the Alphabetic Knowledge skill. Focus on using letters that the child needs practice.

4. Three-Sound Word Deck

***Make-and-Take – Save what you make to use later!**

Skills:

Word Recognition

Materials Needed:

Thick paper or cardboard; pencil, crayon, or marker; scissors

Steps:

Cut blank paper or cardboard into two-by-two-inch squares. Write one letter on each square, making two squares for each letter. Start with "a," "h," "i," "m," "p," "s," and "t." Put one set of the consonants in the first pile, put the vowels in the middle, and put the other set of the consonants at the end (all squares facing up). Your child reads the random word or nonsense word. Then your child removes one letter, and uses the next letter to read another random word or nonsense word. Alternate removing letters from all the piles.

5. Alphabet Soup

Skills:

Alphabetic Principle

Materials Needed:

Thick paper or cardboard; scissors; pencils, crayons, or markers; small "cooking pot" and stirring spoon.

Steps:

Cut two-by-two-inch squares from paper or cardboard. Give players squares equal to the number of letters in their name. Players writes the letters in their name, with one letter on each square. Place the letters into a pretend pot of soup and stir the soup. Take turns taking a letter out of the pot. If the letter is in the player's name, the player keeps the letter. If not, he puts the letter back into the pot. Stir again. Play continues until everyone can make their names.