

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is typically described as an insight about oral language and the segmentation of sounds that are used in speech communication. Often the term *phonemic awareness* is used interchangeably with the term *phonological awareness*. To be precise, phonemic awareness refers to an understanding about the smallest units of sound that make up the speech stream: phoneme. Phonological awareness encompasses larger units of sounds as well, such as syllables, onsets, and rimes. We use the term phonemic awareness in this document because it is widely used in professional literature.

Phonemic Awareness refers to the students' knowledge of phonemes or sounds in speech. This ability is strongly related to success in reading and spelling acquisition. It is the understanding that words are made up of individual sounds or phonemes and the ability to manipulate these phonemes by segmenting, blending, and/or changing individual phonemes within the words to create new words.

Languages have different phonological characteristics. English Language Learners (ELLs) may encounter specific difficulties related to their home language during the initial learning phases. Awareness of individual speech sounds in one's native language correlates with the awareness of individual speech sounds in a second language.

With appropriate instruction, English Language Learners can make gains in phonemic awareness and decoding skills in English as effectively as native English speakers.

Phonemic awareness involves:

- **Phonemic Deletion** – What word would be left if the /k/ sound was taken away from *cat*?
- **Word-to-Word Matching** – Do *pen* and *pipe* begin with the same sound?
- **Blending** – What word would we have if we put these sounds together: /s/, /a/, /t/?
- **Sound Isolation** – What is the first sound in *rose*?
- **Phoneme Segmentation** – What sounds do you hear in the word *hot*?
- **Phoneme Counting** – How many sounds do you hear in the word *cake*?
- **Missing Phoneme** - What sound do you hear in *meet* that is missing in *eat*?
- **Odd Word Out** – What word starts with a different sound: *bag, nine, beach, and bike*?
- **Sound-To-Word Matching** – Is there a /k/ in *bike*?

Considerations when instructing ELLs include the following:

- Some phonemes may not be present in ELLs' native language and therefore may be difficult to pronounce and distinguish auditorily and place into meaningful context. It is especially important that ELLs receive explicit instruction in these phonemes. Teachers can teach phonemic awareness while also explicitly teaching vocabulary words, their meaning, and their pronunciation to ELLs.
- Research suggests that ELLs respond well to meaningful activities such as language games and word walls when the activities are consistent and focus on particular sounds and letters. Poems and songs, with their rhythm and repetition, are easily memorized and should be used to teach phonemic awareness and print concepts to ELLs.
- Scientific research on phonemic awareness demonstrates that children learn language indirectly in the following three ways:
 1. through conversations, mostly with adults;
 2. listening to adults read to them; and
 3. reading extensively on their own.
- Developing phonemic awareness may pose a challenge for ELLs because their parents and other adults in their lives are often not fluent in English. Therefore, educators *must* provide many opportunities to incorporate the ways that students acquire language. One of the best ways to help children develop language naturally is through the use of children's literature that focuses on some kind of play with the sounds of language.
- Phonemic awareness experiences should help develop positive feeling towards learning a new language. The teacher should avoid drill and rote memorization activities. Engaging the students in playful and fun activities will promote an environment where students will be comfortable playing and taking risks with the language.
- ELLs benefit from social and group settings that encourage interactions because they often learn from one another. According to research, second language learners acquire Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) within the first two years of interacting with the target language and take five to seven years to achieve Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).
- The teacher should allow and be prepared for individual differences. Therefore, the teacher should avoid making rigid judgments about individual children based upon their language proficiency level. ELLs' development of phonemic awareness can differ from that of native speakers because of their varying ability to discriminate discrete sounds of the target language.
- Phonemic awareness activities are not intended to replace ELLs' interactions with meaningful language and print. Therefore, the recommended activities are not intended to replace invaluable reading experiences such as reading aloud and language experience.
- It is important to understand that language acquisition is developed when students use the language naturally in communicative situations. In other words, they learn the language through exposure.

Phonemic Awareness Activities/Strategies

Elkonin Boxes

TIP: Use color tiles instead of the sound boxes. Have students line up color tiles for each sound they hear.

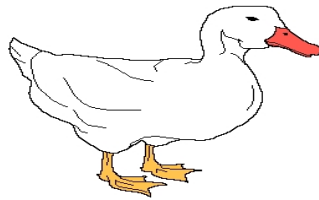
Purpose:

To assist students in the difficult task of segmenting words into sounds

Materials: Objects such as chips, pennies, or buttons for each student; a paper with three connected boxes for each student (the boxes must be large enough to accommodate the objects being used.)

Procedure:

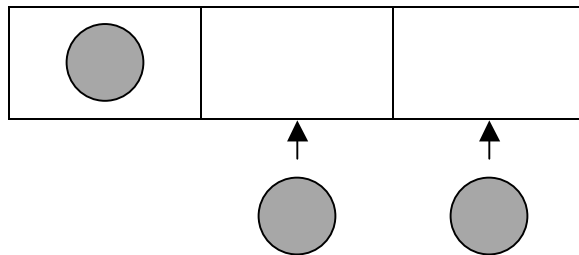
1. The teacher shows students an object or the picture of an object, such as a duck, a bed, a game, a bee, a cup, or a cat.



2. The teacher prepares a diagram with a series of boxes, corresponding to the number of sounds heard in the name of the object. For example, the teacher draws three boxes side by side to represent the three sounds heard in the word *duck*. The teacher can draw the boxes on the chalkboard or on small cards for each child to use. The teacher also prepares markers to place on the boxes.



3. The teacher or student says the word slowly and moves markers onto the boxes as each sound is pronounced.



Elkonin boxes continued...

4. Elkonin boxes can also be used when spelling words. The teacher draws a series of boxes corresponding to the number of sounds heard in the word, and then the child and teacher pronounce the word, pointing to each box or sliding markers onto each box. Then the child writes the letters representing each sound or spelling pattern in the boxes.

g	o	d	u	ck	f	r	o	g
i	s	l	igh	t	h	a	pp	y

Clapping Names

TIP: Have older students use two fingers to tap on the desk.

Purpose:

To introduce students to the nature of syllables by leading them to clap and count the syllables in their own names

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Teacher pronounces the first name of one of the students, syllable by syllable, while clapping it out before inviting the students to say and clap the names. (Teacher models activity using various students' names.)
2. Teacher asks after each name is clapped, "How many syllables do you hear?" Teacher asks each child to clap and count the syllables in his or her own name.
3. Teacher can extend this activity with other words familiar to the students.

Grab the Odd One Out

TIP: Using visuals or realia greatly benefits ELLs.

Purpose:

To help children develop phonemic awareness through a playful “oddity task” activity. This game may focus children’s attention on beginning, ending, or middle sounds in words.

Materials:

One paper bag or box

A list of ten sets of three words (clock, computer, fish)

Objects for the odd word out (If the objects are not available, use picture cards.)

Procedure:

1. Begin by saying that you have a grab bag filled with objects.
2. Tell the children you will be saying three words and that they are to listen carefully for the word that does not fit according to beginning, ending, or middle sounds.
3. Once they know the word, they are to reach into the grab bag and find the object or picture card (odd word out).
4. Then, the student says the word and shows the object or picture card.

Songs for Phonemic Awareness

TIP: ELLs should be familiar with the original tunes.

Purpose:

To provide a useful vehicle for phonemic awareness activities. The familiar melody in the songs provides a comfortable context for children to sing new lyrics that explore sounds. The activities presented here are categorized as follows: sound matching activity, sound isolation activity, sound blending activity, sound addition or substitution activity and segmentation activity. Teachers may easily modify any of the activities by targeting sounds that are meaningful for their students or discovering other ways of drawing their students’ attention to the sounds of their language.

Materials:

Any song, poem, rhyme, chant or story may be used. See attached for examples of phonemic awareness songs.

Procedure:

1. Begin by singing a familiar song.
2. Teachers and children say the phoneme sound not the letter name.
3. The class sings together; then the teacher may call on individual students to volunteer words that begin with the sound to which the teacher wishes to draw attention.

SONGS FOR PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Segmentation: (Sung to “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”)

Listen, listen to my word
Then tell me all the sounds you heard
race (slowly)
/r/ is one sound
/a/ is two
/s/ is the last in *race*
It’s true.

Listen, listen to my word
Then tell me all the sounds you heard
coat (slowly)
/k/ is one sound
/o/ is two
/t/ is the last in *coat*
It’s true.

Listen, listen to my word
Then tell me all the sounds you heard
go (slowly)
/g/ is one sound
/o/ is two
And that is all in *go*
It’s true.

Thanks for listening to my words
And telling me all the sounds
you heard!

Sound Matching: (Sung to “Jimmy Cracked Corn and I Don’t Care”)

say the phoneme sounds, not the letter names

Who has a /d/ word to share with us?
Who has a /d/ word to share with us?
Who has a /d/ word to share with us?
It must start with the /d/ sound!

Dog is the word that starts with /d/
Dog is the word that starts with /d/
Dog is the word that starts with /d/
Dog starts with the /d/ sound.

Sound Addition or Substitution: (Sung to “Someone’s in the Kitchen with Dinah”)

I have a song that we can sing
I have a song that we can sing
I have a song that we can sing
It goes something like this:

Fe-Fi-Fiddly-I-o
Fe-Fi-Fiddly-I-o-o-o-o
Fe-Fi-Fiddly-I-ooooo
Now try it with the /z/ sound!

Ze-Zi-Ziddly-I-o
Ze-Zi-Ziddly-I-o-o-o-o
Ze-Zi-Ziddly-I-ooooo
Now try it with the /br/ sound!

Bre-Bri-Briddly-I-o
Bre-Bri-Briddly-I-o-o-o-o
Bre-Bri-Briddly-I-ooooo
Now try it with the /ch/ sound!

Che-Chi-Chiddly-I-o
Che-Chi-Chiddly-I-o-o-o-o
Che-Chi-Chiddly-I-ooooo
Che-Chi-Chiddly-I-o!

Sound Isolation: (Sung to “Old MacDonald Had a Farm”)
beginning sounds

What’s the sound that starts these words?

Turtle, time, and teeth?

(wait for a response from the children)

/t/ is the sound that starts these words:

Turtle, time, and teeth.

With a /t/, /t/ here, and a /t/, /t/ there,

Here a /t/, there a /t/, everywhere a /t/, /t/.

/t/ is the sound that starts these words:

Turtle, time, and teeth!

You all did great, so clap your hands!

(Clap, clap, clap, clap, clap)

Blending: (Sung to “If You’re Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands”)

If you think you know this word,
shout it out!

If you think you know this word,
shout it out!

If you think you know this word,
Then tell me what you’ve heard,
If you think you know this word,
shout it out!

(Teacher says a segmented word such as /k/-/a/-/t/, and children respond by saying the blended word.)

Sound Isolation: (Sung to “Old MacDonald Had a Farm”)

middle sounds

What’s the sound in the middle of these words?

Leaf and deep and meat?

(wait for a response from the children)

/ee/ is the sound in the middle of these words:

Leaf and deep and meat.

With an /ee/, /ee/ here, and an /ee/, /ee/ there,

Here an /ee/, there an /ee/, everywhere an /ee/, /ee/.

/ee/ is the sound in the middle of these words:

Leaf, and deep and meat!!

You all did great, so clap your hands!

(Clap, clap, clap, clap, clap)

Reading Aloud

TIP: Choose books that encourage “playing with sounds through the use of rhyme, rhythm, and repetition.

Purpose:

To develop phonemic awareness naturally through the use of children’s literature.

Materials: Books that contain alliteration, rhymes, and sound substitution

Procedure:

1. Select books that are appropriate to the phonemic awareness focus that encourages playing with sounds.
2. The teacher reads the book aloud for enjoyment while serving as a language model.
3. Read the book and stop where there is a rhyming word. Ask the child to state which word might fit.
4. Ask the child to say a word that may begin with the same sound as the given word.

SUGGESTED BOOKS TO DEVELOP PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Andrews, S.(1997). *Rattlebone rock*. New York: Harper Collins

Carlstrom, N. (1997). *Raven and river*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Kirk, D. (1994). *Miss Spider's tea party*. New York: Scholastic.

Martin, B. (1997). *The wizard*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace.

Most, B. (1996). *Cock-A-Doodle-Moo!* San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace.

Paulsen, G. (1997). *Worksong*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt.

Pomeroy, D. (1997). *Wildflower ABC*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt

Wellington, M. (1997). *Night house, bright house*. New York: Dutton. Children's Books.

Note: Publishers have sets of books used exclusively to develop phonemic awareness.

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- Gersten, R. & Gevea, E. (2003). Teaching reading to early language learners. *The First Years of School*, 60(7), 44-49.
- The nuts and bolts of oral language. Retrieved on March 9, 2004, from <http://www.readingrockets.org>
- Optiz, M.F. (1998). Children's books to develop phonemic awareness – for you and parents, too! *The Reading Teacher*, 51(6), 526-528.
- Peregoy, S.F., Boyle, O.F. (2001). *Reading, writing, & learning in ESL. A resource book for k-12 teachers*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.
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- Shanker, J.L., Ekwall, E.E. (2003). *Locating and correcting reading difficulties*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Yopp, H.K. (1992). Developing phonemic awareness in young children. *The Reading Teacher*, 45(9), 696-703.