

# TIPS FOR TEACHERS



1725 East Mountain View Road  
Phoenix, AZ 85020-2345  
www.readskill.com

## PHONEMIC AWARENESS

### SKILL OVERVIEW: Phonemic awareness

---

Phonemes are the sounds of spoken language, and English is comprised of about 41 of them. Before children can learn to read, they must demonstrate phonemic awareness, the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the phonemes in spoken words. Some competencies exhibited by children having phonemic awareness are:

- pronouncing phonemes in isolation (/m/ /r/ /s/);
- blending phonemes to form words (/d/ /o/ /g/ *dog*);
- identifying words that begin with the same sound (*fish, fan, fire* start with /f/); and
- segmenting the first and last sounds of a word (*bat* starts with /b/ and ends with /t/).

Phonemic awareness is the most elemental component of the broader category of phonological awareness. Both deal with spoken language, but phonological awareness entails identifying and manipulating larger parts of spoken language, such as words and syllables. Demonstrations of phonological awareness are:

- recognizing or producing oral rhymes (*boat* rhymes with *coat, the pig is big*);
- identifying or counting syllables (par•ty = 2, el•e•phant = 3);
- identifying graphemic bases, or rimes (*cat, hat, and bat* have the base –at); and
- reading word families by blending initial sounds to bases (–ake: *make, bake, cake, take*).

The importance of phonemic awareness to early reading success has only come to the forefront in the past 15 to 20 years. The NICHD synthesized data from over 100 researchers at 14 sites, and the findings indicated that lack of phonemic awareness is the underlying cause of reading disabilities, including dyslexia. Children who are not conscious of the sound structure of words become poor readers. Of those who struggle with phonemic awareness in their first year of school, 90 percent continue to exhibit reading difficulties four years later, and 75 percent remain reading-disabled in high school.

Most children learn to read regardless of how they are taught, yet an estimated 30 percent lack phonemic awareness. Studies show that nearly all beginning readers can develop phonemic awareness if given intensive systematic instruction.

Research validates the superiority of methodology in which phonemes are taught in isolation and then blended to form words. Analytic approaches, which are commonly used, require students to extract like sounds from words. This task requires a sophisticated level of phonemic awareness, so students lacking this skill cannot compare, contrast, or extract sounds.

Phonemic awareness instruction is crucial for all students lacking in this skill. Early intervention is important since the older students get, the more difficult it is to overcome established habits and reading disabilities. Assessment of students' phonemic awareness skills determines how much instruction is needed and what type of instruction is suitable. Some students may need basic instruction (being taught phonemes in isolation to train them to hear phonemes in spoken words) and others more advanced instruction (segmenting, blending, deleting, adding, or substituting phonemes).

Hands-on, natural approaches are far more effective with young children, so manipulatives are ideal for developing phonemic awareness. Explanations of the Reading Manipulatives products that follow show useful strategies. Additionally, the resource list of English phonemes on the following page should clarify the analytic and synthetic approaches to phoneme instruction.

RESOURCE LIST **ENGLISH PHONEMES**

---

**ANALYTIC APPROACH** Students are given words that contain the phoneme and must extract the similar sound in each word (usually in the initial position).

**SYNTHETIC APPROACH** Phonemes are taught in isolation using sound associations and illustrations. Students then learn to blend phonemes to form words.

**BREATH CONSONANTS**

ANALYTIC	SYNTHETIC
foot, <b>ph</b> one	hissing cat
cat, <b>key</b> , duck	clock pendulum
horn	huffing of a runner
<b>pig</b>	corn popping
sun, city	hissing snake
top	typewriter keys
<b>chair</b> , match	chugging train
<b>shell</b> , wish	prompt to be quiet
<b>thump</b>	
<b>wheel</b>	

**VOICED CONSONANTS**

ANALYTIC	SYNTHETIC
bunny	babbling baby
dog	dripping faucet
goat	gulping of drink
jar	engine of old car
lamp	ringing alarm clock
moon	something tastes good
nest	running motor
rabbit	growling dog
valentine	vibrating sound
watch	whirling lasso
yarn	yo-yo moving on string
zebra	buzzing bee
song	gong
<b>the</b> , with	

**LONG VOWELS**

ANALYTIC	SYNTHETIC
cake, play, rain	article "a"
tree, meat, be	said when scared
hive, fly, sigh	pronoun "I"
rose, snow, boat	said when surprised
use, few	pronoun "you"

**SHORT VOWELS**

ANALYTIC	SYNTHETIC
apple	something tastes bad
egg	asking to repeat
igloo	you don't like a smell
ostrich	as doctor checks throat
umbrella	trying to remember

**VARIANT VOWELS**

ANALYTIC	SYNTHETIC
saw, ball, taught	something's too bad
moon, chew	wailing ghost
book, put	doing push-ups
cow, house	when you get hurt
boy, oil	pogo stick spring
car	howling dog
fork	seal
spur, her, work, fur	growling dog

# READING MANIPULATIVES PRODUCT: Phoneme Songs & Blending



**This amazing explicit phoneme program shows students how reading works.**

Through music, sound association, and wonderful illustrations, children learn 29 phonemes. The first set of songs has the 5 short vowels. Each of the subsequent 6 sets introduces 4 more phonemes.

After each set, color-coordinated phoneme picture cards illustrate how sounds are blended together to form words. The 80 cards have phoneme pictures on one side and an illustration of the word formed by the phonemes on the other. This is an ideal method for teaching phonemic awareness.

Word families are optimal for developing blending skills. The 36 word families, which have a light image of the phoneme illustration behind each letter, form 180 words.

The mini-set is a more affordable, abbreviated version. Phoneme illustrations are printed 4 to a page (4.25" x 5.5"). Product comes with CD, word families, and 12 word cards with pictures.

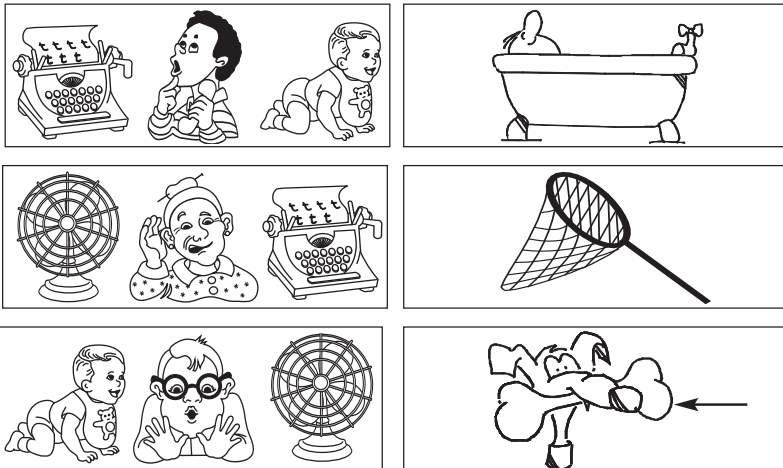
<b>PHONEME SONGS &amp; BLENDING</b>	<b>095</b>	<b>\$140</b>
<b>PHONEME SONGS MINI-SET</b>	<b>098</b>	<b>\$50</b>

**Synthetic approach:** *In this program, phonemes are taught in isolation and then blended to form words. Sounds used in the charts and illustrations are in the resource list on the previous page.*

## PHONEME PICTURE CARDS

SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO



## PHONEME SONGS

I am trying hard to recall    ũ ũ ũ  
 Why it was I made this call.    ũ ũ ũ  
 My memory's so bad that I can bet  
 If it isn't written down, I will forget.    ũ ũ ũ

It's sure hard for Grandma to hear.    ē ē ē  
 She puts her hand up by her ear.    ē ē ē  
 Everyone starts to talk so loud.  
 We sound just like a noisy crowd.    ē ē ē

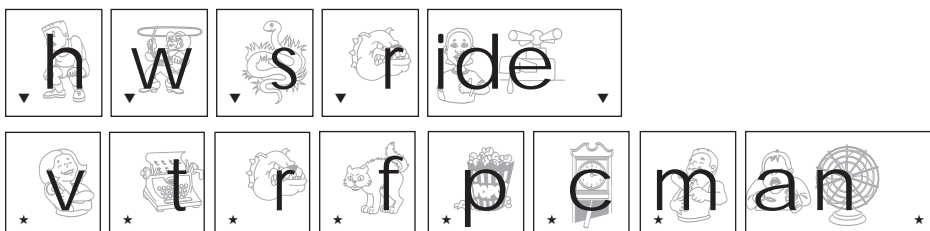
When I'm surprised, I often say    ō ō ō  
 I open my mouth and look this way.    ō ō ō  
 I like surprises that make me glad  
 And not the ones when things are bad.    ō ō ō

The little baby talks this way.    b b b  
 It's the only thing I hear her say.    b b b  
 As she crawls around on the ground,  
 She keeps repeating the very same sound.    b b b

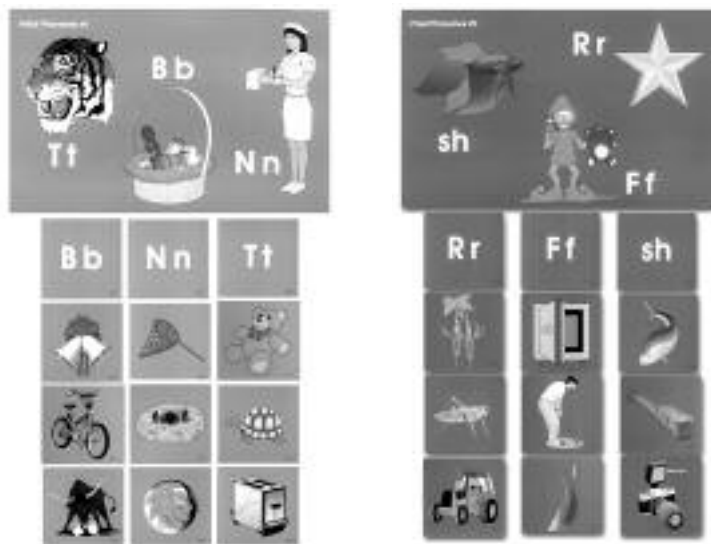
The typewriter's letters are in front of me,    t t t  
 But it takes so long to find each key.    t t t  
 When I push the keys, this sound I hear.  
 And on the paper, the letters appear.    t t t

The whirring fan makes this sound    n n n  
 As the motor spins the blades around.    n n n  
 The fan helps to keep us cool,  
 But I'd prefer a swimming pool.    n n n

## WORD FAMILIES



## READING MANIPULATIVES PRODUCTS: Initial & Final Phoneme Sorts



**Engaging pictures build vocabulary and provide abundant practice identifying and segmenting initial and final phonemes.**

The sets contain 9 pictures for 3 phonemes, 3 letter cards, and an example card. The 8 sets of Initial Phoneme Sorts cover 24 initial sounds (consonants, hard and soft sounds of C and G, digraphs). Six sets of Final Phoneme Sorts target 17 final sounds.

These phoneme segmentation manipulatives are color-coordinated with Phoneme Songs & Blending, our remarkably effective program that uses songs to teach phonemes in isolation. The phonemes are grouped the same and background colors match.

<b>INITIAL PHONEME SORTS</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>\$45</b>
<b>FINAL PHONEME SORTS</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>\$35</b>

*Analytic approach: Initial and final phoneme sorts are phoneme segmentation activities. Students should be able to say phonemes in isolation before being expected to extract them from words. Phonemes in the Phoneme Songs & Blending sets and the Initial and Final Phoneme Sorts are color-coordinated.*

### INSTRUCTION: Phoneme attributes & order

Historically, students have been taught consonants before vowels. However, every word and syllable must contain a vowel, so the Reading Manipulatives Phoneme Songs & Blending program actually begins with the 5 short vowels, which are among the most commonly used English phonemes. It is true that short vowels can be challenging for children to hear and learn, but when they are taught in isolation with memorable auditory associations, students have little trouble with them. Long vowels “say their names” so students generally find them easier to remember and master.

As for consonant phonemes, there are some characteristics to consider when planning instructional programs. The ability to hear phonemes and articulate them in speech are two different skills. Children hear and learn the more challenging speech phonemes, even if they cannot pronounce them properly.

Consonants can be voiced or voiceless (breath). With voiced consonants, the vocal cords vibrate. With unvoiced, they do not. The mouth moves the same way for production of the following pairs of phonemes. The first is voiced and the second is voiceless: d/t; b/p; g/k; v/f; j/ch; z/s, and th (*the*)/th (*thumb*). Teaching students to feel the vibrations in their vocal cords often helps them to distinguish between these phoneme pairs.

Certain consonants have a significantly higher frequency of occurrence. S, t, and r are the most common (with s and r being among the hardest phonemes to articulate). If we look at all phonemes, o, s, t, a, r, and e appear in 50 percent of English words. These, along with n, i, l, u, c, and p, occur in 80 percent of English words. However, since spelling patterns, word length, and word utility are far more important to beginning readers, frequency of occurrence should not be overvalued.

Consonant reliability is more important to consider. Consistent consonant phonemes are: b, d, f, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q (/kw/), r, v, z. Troublesome phonemes are: c sounds like /s/ and g sounds like /j/ when they come before e, i, or y, but c usually makes the /k/ sound; c, w, s, and t when followed by h form digraph phonemes (*chip, when, she, that*); s often sounds like /z/ in final positions (*was, boxes*). These variability issues should not be taught. Students learn these as reading proficiency increases.