



## Phonemic Awareness Overview

Phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, both essential to reading instruction, are often confused. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that spoken language is composed of phonemes or speech sounds. Children must be able to blend, segment, and manipulate these sounds. Phonics is the relationship between these speech sounds (phonemes) and letters (graphemes). Both phonemic awareness and phonics should be taught explicitly.

The focus of phonemic awareness is the identification and manipulation of sounds in words. Very often the term “phonological awareness” is used in place of phonemic awareness. They are not the same. Phonological awareness is a broader term that includes phonemic awareness. It includes identifying and manipulating larger parts of spoken language, such as words, syllables, and onsets and rimes.

Phonemic awareness can be developed sequentially through explicit instruction. Blending and segmenting, followed by isolating beginning and ending sounds is a natural progression. Manipulations, such as deletion and substitution are more difficult. Although phonemic awareness focuses on sounds or phonemes, instruction is most effective when children are taught to manipulate phonemes by using letters of the alphabet.

### Blending Activities

- **Phoneme Blending:** Ask children to listen to these word parts: (/s/ /a/ /t/) What is the word? (**sat**) Repeat with other examples.
- **Bubble-Gum Words:** Say a word to a group of children. Have them repeat the word slowly, putting their hands to their mouths and pretending to s-t-r-e-t-c-h bubble gum out in front of them. Repeat.
- **Talking Ghost:** Have each child cut out a picture of a ghost. Say a segmented word, then have the children “hold onto the sounds” as they blend them together aloud. Tell them to speak like ghosts, extending the sounds of words into a slow, drawn-out wail. For example, you say /h/ /ou/ /s/, and they say *hhhoouuussee*. Have the children move their ghosts as they say the sounds. Repeat with other words.

### Segmenting Activities

- **Phoneme Segmentation:** Ask children: How many sounds do you hear in **sat**? (**3**). Ask what sounds they hear in **sat** (/s/ /a/ /t/). Repeat with other examples.

- **Froggy Hop:** Have each child cut out a picture of a frog and attach it to a craft stick. Explain how frogs hop as they move. Have the children use their “frog sticks” as they separate different phonemes of a word, pausing between sounds. For example, children move their frog sticks three hops as they say the segmented word: /s/ /a/ /t/.

### **Isolation Activities**

- **Initial & Final Sounds:** Ask children: What is the first sound you hear in **cat**? What is the last sound you hear in **cat**?
- **Thumbs Up:** Select a target sound. Instruct children to give a “thumbs up” signal each time they hear the target sound at the beginning of a word. Repeat with several words and various target sounds. After practicing with initial sounds, have children signal ending sounds.

### **Deletion & Substitution Activities**

- **Drop Off, Add On:** Using a list of words that have words within them, read one word at a time. Ask children what sound needs to be dropped to uncover the “hidden word”. For example, what sound do you drop to change **cat** to **at**? Vary the activity by having children add letters to given words.
- **Change Your Partner:** Have three children stand in a row. Select a 3-phoneme word and whisper the beginning, middle, and ending sounds to the first, second, and third child. Instruct each child to say his or her sound and ask the class to blend the sounds to say a word. Assign a new sound to another child and have them replace children in the row to form new words.