

Phonological Awareness Background Knowledge

Phonological awareness (PA) is the ability to recognize and manipulate the spoken parts of sentences and words. It involves a continuum of skills (see table below) that develop over time and that are crucial for reading and spelling success, because they are central to learning to decode and spell printed words. The most sophisticated — and last to develop — is called phonemic awareness. PA is especially important at the earliest stages of reading development — in pre-school, kindergarten, and first grade for typical readers. Explicit teaching of PA in these early years can eliminate future reading problems for many students. However, struggling decoders of any age can work on phonological awareness, especially if they evidence problems in blending or segmenting phonemes.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. This includes blending sounds into words, segmenting words into sounds, and deleting and playing with the sounds in spoken words.

Phonological Awareness Skill by Level			
Level	Skill Name	Definition	Sounds Like...
Word	Sentence Segmentation	given a sentence or phrase, student taps one time for every word in the sentence	"my sentence is 'I like school' how many words" <i>*signal*</i> student response: "three"
	★Blending	given two smaller words, student blends them together to form a compound word	"my words are rain • bow and my new word is" <i>*signal*</i> student response: "rainbow"
	★Segmentation	given a compound word, student breaks the word into two smaller words	"my word is rainbow and my two words are" <i>*signal*</i> student response: "rain • bow"
	Deletion	given a compound word, student deletes one of the smaller words within	"my word is rainbow, take off the bow, what's my new word" <i>*signal*</i> student response: "rain"
Syllable	★Blending	given a word broken into syllables, student blends the word parts together to create the whole word	"the syllables in my word are doc • tor and my word is" <i>*signal*</i> student response: "doctor"
	★Segmentation	given a whole word, student breaks the word into syllables	"my word is doctor and my syllables are" <i>*signal*</i> student response: "doc • tor"
	Deletion	given a whole word, student deletes one of the syllables	"my word is doctor, take of the doc, what's my new word" <i>*signal*</i> student response: "tor"
Onset - Rime	Recognize Rhyme	given a pair of words, student determines whether they rhyme	"my words are dog and log, do they rhyme" student response: "yes"
	Generate Rhyme	given a word, student says a word that rhymes	"my words are dog and log, what is another word that rhymes with these" student response: "fog"
	Categorization	given a set of three or four words, student finds the word that does not rhyme	"my words are dog, log, and sat, which word does not belong" student response: "sat"
	★Blending	given a word broken into onset and rime, student blends the sounds together to create the whole word	"the sound parts in my word are /d/ /og/ and my word is" <i>*signal*</i> student response: "dog"
	★Segmentation	given a word, student breaks the word into onset and rime	"my word is dog and my two sound parts are" <i>*signal*</i> student response: "/d/ /og/"
	Substitution	given a word, student makes a new word by replacing one phoneme for another	"my word is dog, take the /d/ sound & make it a /l/ sound, what's my new word" <i>*signal*</i> student response: "log"

Phonemic Awareness the Path to Decoding and Encoding

English is an alphabetic language in which writing captures the phonemic structures of spoken words and puts them down in print. As a result, English speakers do not write words but map phoneme characters for the sounds in a series and blend them into a word.

Therefore, if students struggle with phonemic awareness, reading an alphabetic language is extremely difficult for them. Phonemic awareness is crucial to students' ability to not only sound out new words, but also to remember the words they read, spell words, and develop important sight words.

Below are the phonemic awareness skills from easiest to hardest. Blending and Segmenting are starred to exemplify the importance of decoding which is blending and encoding (spelling) which is segmenting. Instruction for all students regardless of grade level should encourage at the least this level of mastery.

Phonological Awareness Skill by Level Con't			
Level	Skill Name	Definition	Sounds Like...
Phoneme	Isolation	given a word, student recognizes individual sounds in the word	"my word is dog, what is the last sound" *signal* student response: "/g/"
	Identity	given a word, student selects the word that has a common sound from a set of three or four different words	"my words are dog, corn, and desk, which have the same beginning sound" student response: "dog and desk"
	Categorization	given a set of three or four words, student recognizes the word that has "odd" sound	"my words are dog, mouse, and dig, which does not belong" student response: "mouse"
	★Blending	given a word separated into phonemes, student combines the sounds to form a whole word	"the sounds in my word are /d/o/g/ and my word is" *signal* student response: "dog"
	★Segmentation	given a whole word, student separates the word into individual phonemes and says each sound	"my word is dog and my sounds are" *signal* student response: "/d/o/g/"
	Deletion	given a word, student recognizes the word that remains when a phoneme is removed from that word	"my word is spark, take off the /s/, what's my new word" *signal* student response: "park"
	Addition	given a word, student makes a new word by adding a phoneme	"my word is park, add a /s/ sound to the beginning, what's my new word" *signal* student response: "spark"
	Substitution	given a word, student makes a new word by replacing one phoneme for another	"my word is dog, take the /d/ sound & make it a /l/ sound, what's my new word" *signal* student response: "log"

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