

Phonological Awareness Activities

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What is Phonological Awareness?

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate the sounds in spoken language—without looking at letters. Research shows it's one of the strongest predictors of reading success. Children who develop strong phonological awareness learn to read more easily and become better spellers.

Important: These activities are about SOUNDS, not letters. Do them orally—no reading or writing required!

Skill Development Progression

Phonological awareness skills develop in a predictable order. Master earlier skills before moving to harder ones.

Ages 3-4

Rhyme Recognition

Identifies when words rhyme

Ages 4

Rhyme Production

Generates rhyming words

Ages 4

Syllable Awareness

Claps/counts syllables

Ages 4-5

First Sound Isolation

Identifies beginning sounds

Ages 4-5

Last Sound Isolation

Identifies ending sounds

Ages 5

Blending

Combines sounds into words

Ages 5-6

Segmenting

Breaks words into sounds

Ages 5-6

Manipulation

Adds, deletes, substitutes sounds

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Rhyme Time

Rhyming Recognition

Beginning 5-10 min

How to Do It:

1. Say two words and ask: "Do these rhyme?" (cat/hat, dog/run)
2. Read rhyming books and pause before the rhyme
3. Play "thumbs up/thumbs down" for rhyming pairs
4. Sing nursery rhymes and emphasize rhyming words
5. Generate silly rhymes with your child's name

Examples:

cat/hat ✓
dog/log ✓
sun/fun ✓
ball/cat x

★ *Rhyming is usually the first phonological skill to develop.*

Rhyming

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Rhyme Production

Rhyming Generation

Beginning 5-10 min

How to Do It:

1. Say a word and ask: "What rhymes with ___?"
2. Accept nonsense words—they still show skill!
3. Play "rhyme chain": take turns adding rhymes
4. Use picture cards and find rhyming pairs
5. Create silly rhyming sentences together

Examples:

What rhymes with "cat"? →
bat, hat, mat, sat, zat

☆ Nonsense words count! "Dat" rhymes with "cat" even though it's not real.

Rhyming

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Syllable Clapping

Syllable Awareness

Beginning 5-10 min

How to Do It:

1. Clap once for each syllable in a word
2. Start with names: "Ma-ry" (2 claps), "Chris-to-pher" (3 claps)
3. Use animal names, food words, and objects
4. March, stomp, or tap the syllables
5. Sort picture cards by number of syllables

Examples:

cat = 1
ti-ger = 2
el-e-phant = 3
al-li-ga-tor = 4

☆ Put your hand under your chin—it drops once per syllable!

Syllables

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First Sound Isolation

Beginning Sound Awareness

Intermediate 10 min

How to Do It:

1. Ask: "What sound does ___ start with?"
2. Emphasize the first sound: "Mmmmoon starts with /m/"
3. Sort objects or pictures by first sound
4. Play "I Spy" with beginning sounds
5. Find things in the room that start with a target sound

Examples:

moon → /m/
sun → /s/
fish → /f/
ball → /b/

☆ Say the sound, not the letter name. "Ball" starts with /b/, not "bee".

Isolation

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Last Sound Isolation

Ending Sound Awareness

Intermediate 10 min

How to Do It:

1. Ask: "What sound does ____ end with?"
2. Stretch the word and emphasize the ending: "cattttt"
3. Play "same ending" games with picture cards
4. Find word pairs that end the same
5. Progress from continuous sounds (/s/, /m/) to stop sounds (/t/, /p/)

Examples:

cat → /t/
bus → /s/
drum → /m/
dog → /g/

☆ *Ending sounds are harder than beginning sounds—be patient!*

Isolation

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Sound Blending

Blending Phonemes

Intermediate 10 min

How to Do It:

1. Say sounds slowly, child blends into a word
2. Start with 2 sounds: "/s/... /un/" = sun
3. Progress to 3 sounds: "/c/... /a/... /t/" = cat
4. Use a puppet who "talks funny" in sounds
5. Play "guess the word" with segmented sounds

Examples:

/m/-/e/ = me
/s/-/i/-/t/ = sit
/f/-/r/-/o/-/g/ = frog

☆ *Start slowly with long pauses, then speed up as skills improve.*

Blending

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Sound Segmenting

Breaking Words into Sounds

Advanced 10-15 min

How to Do It:

1. Say a word and ask child to "stretch it out"
2. Use Elkonin boxes: one box per sound
3. Push a token into each box as you say each sound
4. Start with 2-sound words, then 3, then 4
5. Use mirrors to watch mouth movements

Examples:

go = /g/-/o/ (2)
cat = /c/-/a/-/t/ (3)
stop = /s/-/t/-/o/-/p/ (4)

☆ *This is the hardest skill and directly transfers to spelling!*

Segmenting

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Sound Substitution

Phoneme Manipulation

Advanced 10 min

How to Do It:

1. Say: "Change the /c/ in cat to /b/. What word?"
2. Start with first sound changes
3. Progress to ending sound changes
4. Try middle sound changes last (hardest)
5. Make it playful: "Let's make silly words!"

Examples:

cat → bat (change /c/ to /b/)
cat → cap (change /t/ to /p/)
cat → cut (change /a/ to /u/)

☆ If this is too hard, go back to blending and segmenting practice.

Manipulation

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Sound Addition

Phoneme Manipulation

Advanced 10 min

How to Do It:

1. Ask: "Add /s/ to the beginning of 'top'. What word?"
2. Start with adding sounds to the beginning
3. Progress to adding sounds to the end
4. Use real words that become new real words
5. Accept and celebrate nonsense words too

Examples:

/s/ + top = stop
/s/ + mile = smile
car + /t/ = cart

☆ This skill shows strong phoneme awareness and predicts reading success.

Manipulation

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Sound Deletion

Phoneme Manipulation

Advanced 10 min

How to Do It:

1. Ask: "Say 'stop' without the /s/. What's left?"
2. Start with removing first sounds
3. Progress to removing ending sounds
4. Compound words are a good starting point
5. Use tokens to visualize taking away a sound

Examples:

stop without /s/ = top
cart without /t/ = car
cowboy without cow = boy

☆ Start with compound words before moving to single sounds.

Manipulation

Phonological Awareness Skills Checklist

Beginning Skills

- ☐ Recognizes rhyming words
- ☐ Produces rhyming words
- ☐ Claps syllables in words
- ☐ Identifies first sound in words

Advanced Skills

- ☐ Identifies last sound in words
- ☐ Blends sounds into words
- ☐ Segments words into sounds
- ☐ Manipulates sounds (add/delete/change)

Key Reminders

1. **Sounds, not letters:** Say /b/, not "bee"
2. **Oral activities:** No reading or writing needed
3. **Keep it playful:** Games and songs work best
4. **Follow the sequence:** Master easier skills first

Notes & Observations
