

Phonemic Awareness

Highlights

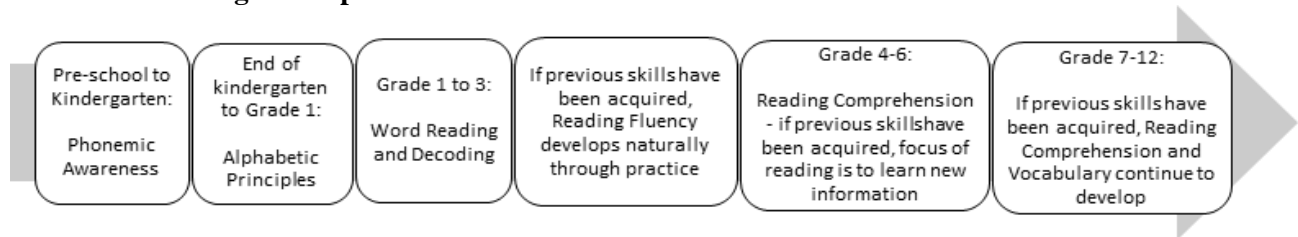
What is this reading skill? Phonemic Awareness is the ability to identify and manipulate sounds

When should this skill be developed? Pre-school to kindergarten

Why is this skill important for reading? This pre-reading skill is necessary for developing future reading skills such as letter-sound association, decoding, fluency, and comprehension

How can you practice this skill with your child? Explicit instruction and practice of identifying sounds and combining them into words

How Does Reading Develop?



Reading develops in a step-by-step fashion. It begins with Phonemic Awareness, which is the understanding and manipulation of the sounds of the English language (for example, knowing that “dog” has three sounds: ‘d’, ‘o’, ‘g’). The next stage of reading development is Alphabetic Principles (knowing what sound(s) each letter makes). Once a child has a good understanding of sounds and letters, they start to decode unfamiliar words (Decoding refers to the ability to sound out words or non-words) and then recognize familiar words (Word Reading). Reading Fluency is the ability to read passages quickly and accurately, and Reading Comprehension is the ability to understand and remember what has been read. Vocabulary develops naturally as children are exposed to language, and while they are being read to, but can also be explicitly taught if students are falling behind. With the exception of Vocabulary, development of each skill is dependent on the child’s prior skills; for example, a child who does not have a strong understanding of Alphabetic Principles will struggle to decode until earlier skills have fully developed.

Phonemic Awareness Overview

Phonemic Awareness is the key pre-reading skill that children need to develop before they can learn to read. By the end of kindergarten, children should be able to differentiate the sounds of the English language and identify or manipulate them. This includes, for example, identifying first and last sounds or adding and removing sounds from common words. Can your child:

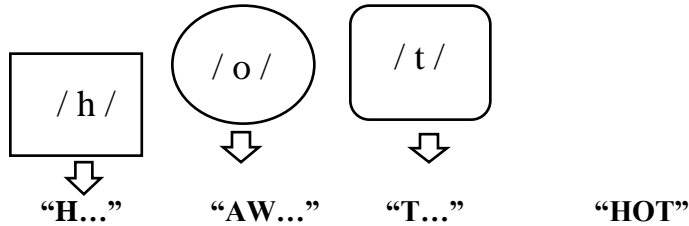
- Identify** the first sound in words? (e.g., what is the first sound in “rat”?)
- Recognize **common sounds** in different words? (e.g., tell me the sound that is the same in boy, bike, bat?)
- turn one word into another by **changing** one phoneme? (e.g., rat into hat)

Weaknesses in phonemic awareness may lead to difficulties in developing more advanced reading skills such as letter-sound association, decoding, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. Without a solid foundation of these pre-reading skills, children may encounter frustrating challenges when they try to make connections between letters and sounds and decode unfamiliar words.

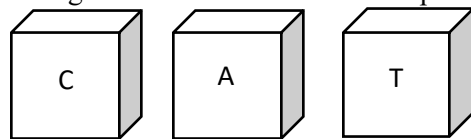
Core Instructional Principles:

Children with weaknesses in Phonemic Awareness often struggle to learn their letter sounds and to combine them into words. Consistent practice in these tasks will be crucial in their reading development. The following activities will help your child develop phonemic awareness:

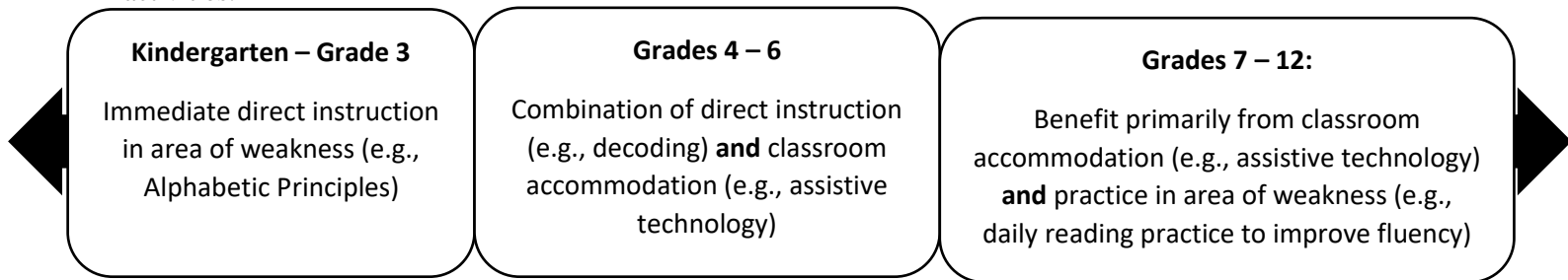
1. **Push That Sound (K-G1):** a multi-sensory approach to instruction in phoneme identification and manipulation. This activity will help beginning readers make letter-sound associations and combine sounds to form words. The focus with this task is on combining the sounds, not reading the letters.
 - a. Students are provided with shapes that represent first, middle, and last sounds
 - b. Students should push down the squares one at a time, saying the sound out loud
 - c. When all sounds have been pushed, students should say the whole word



2. **Trash or Treasure (G1-3):** a multi-sensory task for instructing students to sound out CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) real and made-up words. This activity will help early readers practice basic decoding skills as well as spelling and writing.
 - a. Using 3 dice (2 consonants, 1 vowel), students form CVC combinations (make sure the vowel is in the middle)
 - b. Students sound them out, and then determine if they are real or made-up words
 - c. After dice are scrambled or removed, students attempt to write down the word based on how it sounded, categorizing it as “trash” if it is a made-up word and “treasure” if it is a real word



Intervention Timeline: Younger students (K-3) are often able to make significant gains in areas of weakness if direct instruction is provided. As students get older, it becomes more difficult to learn key skills, so a combination of instruction and classroom accommodations is important. As students transition to middle and high school, accommodations become essential. However, accommodations are a **supplement** to remediation, not a replacement. Accommodations are used to bypass word-level reading issues; they will not “fix” the problem or make students better at reading, but additional supports will allow them to be more **independent** in reading activities.



Classroom Accommodations:

- Assistive Technology: text-to-speech software
- Instruction: Peer or adult can read text out loud as a model; materials presented electronically

External Resources for Parents, Teachers, and Schools

- “Phonological and Phonemic Awareness” at www.readingrockets.org
- “Phonological and Phonemic Awareness: Activities for Your [Pre-K / Kindergartener / 1st Grader]” at www.readingrockets.org
- “Florida Center for Reading Research [Pre-K / K-1]” at <https://fcrr.org>

