

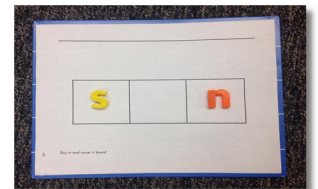
Segmenting and Blending Phonemes



What is it?

Phonemes are the individual sound units in words. **Phonemic awareness** is the ability to identify the individual sounds in words (such as initial and final sounds), break the sounds into segments, blend sounds together, and manipulate phonemes to form different words. It includes an understanding that words are made up of sequences of sounds.

- **Blending** involves pulling together individual sounds or syllables within words. **Oral Blending** means hearing phonemes and being able to merge them together to make a word.
- **Segmenting** involves breaking words down into individual sounds or syllables. **Oral Segmenting** is the act of hearing a whole word and then splitting it up into the phonemes that make it up.



Why is it important?

Phonemic awareness is the area of phonological awareness that is the most predictive of reading and writing success. Children who can segment and blend sounds easily are able to use this knowledge when reading and spelling. Segmenting and blending individual sounds can be difficult at the beginning. Start with segmenting and blending syllables which is more natural and then move to individual sounds.

Considerations (what to think about?)

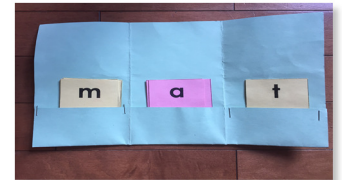
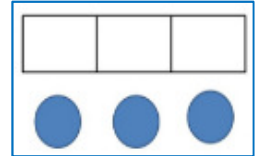
“Classroom literacy activities that provide opportunities for students to be matching, blending, segmenting, manipulating, or isolating beginning or ending sounds in spoken language are all word-play activities that should be included in the kindergarten program” (Trehearne, 2000).

- Be intentional with the purpose and clear with the expectations. “We are going to say this word (hold up a picture of a cat) “CAT” and now we are going to say it very slowly and listen for each sound “C – A – T”. Use fingers to show how many sounds you hear. Be playful – try very slow, medium slow... Now we are going to put the sounds back together – “CAT”. Model segmenting (taking apart) and blending (putting back together) with emphasis and focus on ending sound which is often missed.
- The focus of blending and segmenting is oral but connections to “text” can be made.
- Using a puppet, with a movable mouth is helpful for some learners.
- Go very slowly with this concept, drag sounds with clear breaks, visually move hands or use stretch bands or move cubes apart.



What to do?

- Use picture books and poems with playful alliteration to help children hear a variety of words with the same beginning sound.
- Use student names and their name cards to point out initial and final sounds, segment the syllables, and then blend and segment the sounds.
- Use songs & chants and be playful with segmenting and blending words.
- Explicitly model with items/pictures with two or three phonemes. Examples of 2-phoneme words: pie (p-ie), key (k-ey), toe (t-oe), 3-phoneme words: hat (h-a-t) foot (f-oo-t), or 4 phoneme words: clock (c-l-o-ck).
- Create Elkonin boxes on paper, whiteboards, or magnetic boards by drawing 2 or 3 boxes for letter sounds in words. You can use jewels, beads, cubes etc to visually represent each sound of the word, or use letters to segment & blend sounds in words. Cut up 5 frames work well for this.
- Cut children names into “sounds” (segmented) and then put back (blended).
- Fold the bottom of a horizontal piece of cardstock up to make pockets, then fold into three or four vertical parts. Staple together. Slide letter cards or cut pictures into the three pockets to segment & blend 3 phoneme words.
- Collect various alphabet materials; alphabet tiles, rocks, cards, magnetic letters, linking cube letters, wooden letters etc. to build different words. Children can hold big letters and physically make words together.



Whole group:

- Use “Rich Routines” (see RR document) to build on students’ understanding of segmenting and blending.
- Use the students’ names to explicitly listen for initial/ending sounds – “If your name starts with /p/ please line up.” “If you have a /m/ sound at the end of your name, you may get your lunch.” Prompt children to find items in the room or to think of words that start with the same sound as their name, or their classmates’ names.
- Using their names helps the students blend words they are very familiar with. You may want to do name chants for blending initial sounds of their names, for example:
It begins with a /m/
And ends with /ark/,
Put them together
and they say _____. (Mark)
- Use a “mystery bag” with a familiar item and have students guess the item as you segment the sounds. For example: “In my bag I have a “/c/ /u/ /p/.”
- Present words from familiar stories, songs or classroom topics, then show a tile, magnet, or linking cube as you say each sound. Have the children help blend the sounds together to guess the word. Have them try to find words 2 or 3 or 4 with a partner.

Small Group (10-minutes):

- Using pictures of familiar items, sort by beginning or ending sounds.
- Use the Elkonin boxes and magnetic letters to make familiar words. For example, ask the students to build the word “mat”, by placing the three sounds into the three boxes. Can they change the word to “hat”? Does “hat” sound different at the beginning or the end? Which letter would you change? Continue prompting the children make new words by changing one sound. You could ask them to change it to “ham” by replacing the final sound. Students that can hear initial & final sounds may be nudged to hear medial vowel sounds, like change “hat” to “hot”.
- Connect to words in real reading by looking at a book together. Have some words already covered with a sticky note. When you get to the word, have the students guess what the word might be. Show the first or last letter and have them compare to their word and reevaluate their guesses.

What is the rest of the class doing?

While working with small groups, the remaining students will be engaged in practicing the concepts with purposeful independent activities that they understand the intentions of.

- Practice segmenting using pictures cards, picture books, objects or friends’ names.
- Scavenger hunt the room for words with the same beginning/ending sounds.
Students can collect the words by drawing, writing, or taking photos with an iPad.

Extra Scoop

Some children need multiple opportunities of exposure, or “extra scoops”, in order to grasp concepts. Be responsive by providing them opportunities to slow down, go deeper, or try other ways to play with segmenting and blending sounds. Take time to work one-on-one with these students in meaningful ways, connecting to their interests, favourite songs and stories, and nudging them forward from what they can currently do.

What to look for? (Formative assessment entry points)

- Are students able to consistently orally blend initial sounds with the rest of the word?
- Can they orally blend all sounds in two and three sound words?
- Can students consistently orally segment the beginning sound in a word?
- Are they able to orally segment the ending sound in one-syllable words?
- Do they demonstrate an ability to consistently segment all sounds in two-phoneme words? Three-phoneme words?

What next?

1. If a student is having difficulty wonder: about possible hearing/speech issues, do the concepts make sense, have multiple ways been explained, about developmental readiness and then spend more time, go slow, and provide lots of repetition watching for “ah-ha’s”.

2. If a student is fluent and confident in their understanding of segmenting and blending and the other concepts are also being grasped start recording the sounds (spelling), and continue the challenges to “find more of the same” and being playful with substitutions.

Helpful websites & Resources:

Kindergarten Teacher's Resource Book – by Miriam Trehearne

Reading, Writing, Playing, Learning – by Lori Rog

Building Language Photo Library box

Children's Literature

Key Links Shared Books – by Jill Eggleton

