

Phonemic Awareness

The knowledge of how language works is called phonemic awareness. Students need this strong understanding of spoken language before they can understand written language.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to:

- Examine language independent of meaning (hear the sounds that make up words).
- Attend to sounds in the context of a word (see relationships between sounds).
- Manipulate component sounds (alter and rearrange sounds to create new words).

The significance of phonemic awareness is understanding that sounds are manipulative elements of our language. Children need to be able to hear sounds, know their positions, and understand the role they play within a word.

The acquisition of phonemic awareness is sequential.

- **Level 1: Rhythm and Rhyme**

At level one, children develop an ear for language. They hear, identify, and match similar word patterns. They also listen for, detect, and count syllables in a word. The goal is to help children develop stronger auditory discrimination and awareness.

- **Level 2: Parts of a Word**

At level two, children listen for sounds within a word. They discover that speech can be broken down into smaller sound units – words to syllables, syllables to onsets (all the sounds in a word that come before the first vowel) and rimes (the first vowel sound in a word and all the sounds that follow), and onsets and rhymes to phonemes. They experiment with oral synthesis, blending sounds together to form spoken words.

- **Level 3: Sequence of Sounds**

Students in the early stages of phonemic development have difficulty sequencing sounds. At this stage, children direct their attention to specific positions of sounds within a word. This is early training for segmenting sounds independently. Once recognition of beginning, middle, and ending sounds is acquired, children are better able to isolate sounds and hear them separately.

- **Level 4: Separation of Sounds**

By this level, children have acquired a good sense of phonemic awareness and are ready to acoustically divide words into separate sounds or phonemes. Many children struggle with this skill.

- **Level 5: Manipulation of Sounds**

This is the highest level of phonemic awareness. Children manipulate sounds within words, - adding, exchanging, deleting, or transposing phonemes to form new words. Students need to have a solid knowledge of how language works before attempting this level. They should be able to mentally blend sounds, modify words, and segment sounds. The ability to manipulate phonemes strongly correlates with beginning reading acquisition.

You can help your child become a better reader by practicing phonemic awareness activities at home. Some suggestions are:

- ❖ Draw your child's attention to the sounds of language with silly songs and poems. Some favorites are: *Down by the Bay* by Raffi, *If You're Happy and You Know It*, *Nursery Rhymes*, and *Tongue Twisters*.
- ❖ Read and reread stories that play with language. Some examples are: *There's a Wocket in My Pocket* by Dr. Seuss, *Silly Sally* by Audrey Wood, and *More Spaghetti, I Say* by Rita Gelman.
- ❖ Have your child listen to and chant along with stories on tape. Make your own tape of songs and stories for your child to enjoy.
- ❖ Substitute and delete letters from common words to create your own silly sayings. For example, *substitute T for N to change Tommy eats tuna to Nommy eats nuna*. Make up a *Silly Word Day* by speaking in rhyme or changing first letters of words or names.
- ❖ Place magnetic letters on the refrigerator for your child to practice names and sounds, form words and/or create messages.
- ❖ Have your child match letters to objects in the house. For example: place a plastic letter B on a bed, T on a table, etc.
- ❖ Draw your child's attention to letters and words in the environment, such as signs, cereal boxes, toy boxes, menus, etc.
- ❖ Share in the excitement and enthusiasm of reading by reading to your child regularly and encourage them to read to you.

Excerpts from "Phonemic Awareness" by Jo Fitzpatrick