

Beginning to Read is Child's Play

Developmentally Appropriate Reading Instruction For Beginning and Struggling Readers

Recommended Sequence of Beginning Reading Skills

- 1. Beginning Sound Isolation** The child must be able to isolate and say the beginning sound of a spoken word. For example, he must be able to tell you that the word TABLE starts with the sound /t/—not because he has *memorized* it, but because he himself is aware of the beginning sounds of words and can isolate and say them. He learns this important phonemic awareness skill by listening to his teachers and parents *model* it again and again through oral games. The ability to isolate the beginning sound of a word is the *point of readiness* for learning the alphabet letter-sounds.

Note: A letter enclosed by this symbol (/ /) indicates a phonetic sound, not a letter name. /d/ represents the sound made by the letter “D” in DOG.

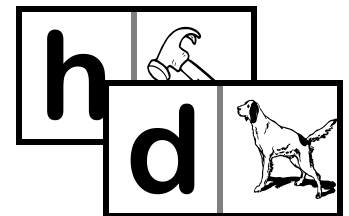
/t/...is the first sound in →



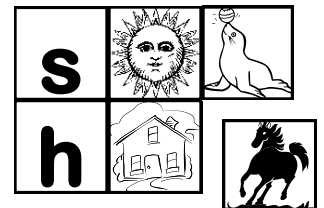
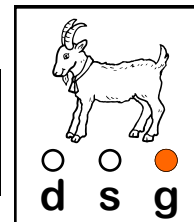
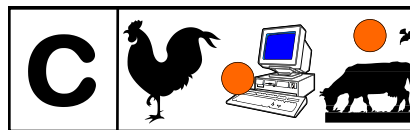
- 2. Introduction to the Alphabetic Principle** Show the child how to use his beginning sound isolation skill to identify an alphabet letter by its *sound* when the letter is associated with an object or picture. Because the child now understands the alphabetic principle—that letters and speech sounds map onto each other—he will be able to learn the alphabet. We teach the alphabetic principle before we teach the alphabet so that the child can use his phonemic awareness to *understand, identify, learn* and *remember* letter-sounds.



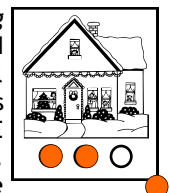
- 3. Letter Mastery** Through games and activities that produce meaningful repetition, the child must master a specific sequence of letters. He learns them by sound, not by name. (Names will come later.) The alphabet set is divided into clusters, arranged so as not to create confusion between similar looking or sounding letters. The child masters one cluster at a time—in sequence—until all 26 letters are learned. Introduction to word reading or decoding does not begin until the child has achieved a significant level of mastery of the entire alphabet. Mastery implies accuracy and speed of letter naming (by sound). Recommended clusters: [1] a, g, h, m, s [2] c, d, l, o, t [3] f, i, p, r, u [4] e, j, k, n, w [5] b, v, y, z, qu, x. Teach lower case first, upper case later.



We want the child to become a great letter reader. Struggling readers are almost never fluent and confident in letter recognition.

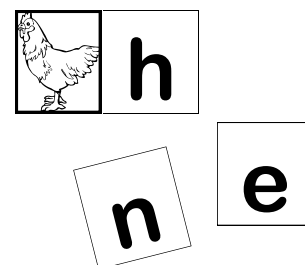


- 4. Blending and Segmenting Level I (3 Sounds)** The student must be able to listen to 3 sounds spoken to him by an adult (e.g. /c/... /a/.../t/) and *blend* those sounds into a word he knows (CAT). By playing *The Blending Game*, the child is hearing the teacher or parent (or older child) *segment* spoken words into sounds again and again. Eventually the child himself is able to segment these words (containing 2 or 3 sounds) into individual sounds. This phonemic awareness skill of *segmentation* is the most important beginning reading skill. Words used in teaching blending and segmenting do not have to have 3 letters, just 3 sounds. For example: HOUSE has 5 letters, but only 3 sounds. **More words with 3 sounds:** rake, church, corn, fish, book, mouse, girl, goat, cake, moose, fork, moon, etc. **Note:** you can begin this activity anytime. You do not have to wait until the child has learned his letter-sounds.



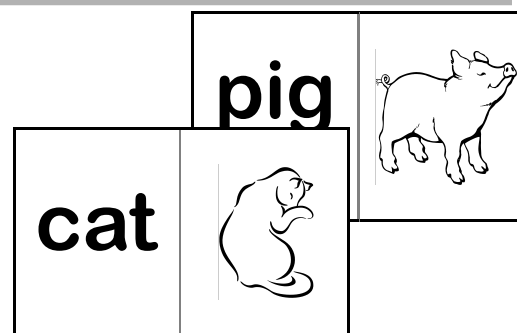
Note: Only when a child has achieved letter mastery and can segment spoken words is he ready to begin reading or writing short-vowel words.

5. **3-Letter Short Vowel Word Building (Introduction to Reading Part I)** The child learns to build simple 3-letter short vowel words (like *dog*, *map*, *sun*, etc.) First he *segments* the word into sounds and then—as he speaks the 3 sounds—places the letters one at a time in proper sequence to form the printed word. This is a perfect introduction to reading because encoding 3-letter short vowel words is the best way for a beginning reader to learn how to decode 3-letter short vowel words. Don't think of this as spelling, though. It is word building and it is meant to show how printed and spoken words map onto each. This is the understanding of the alphabetic principle at the *word* level. Sets of *Word Pockets*—each containing a picture and three moveable letter cards—allow the non-writing child to have repeated success building words he will soon be ready to read. The older child who has already learned to write can do this same kind of work with a pencil. **Note: we begin with 2- & 3-letter words because that matches the child's level of segmentation.**

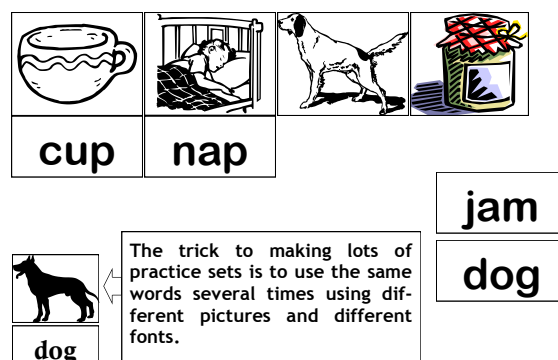


6. **3-Letter Word Cards (Introduction to Reading Part II)** The first reading material should connect a picture with a short vowel word to allow the child to “map” the 3 sounds of a spoken word—which he gets from *segmenting* the picture—onto the printed 3-letter word. The child thus learns about left-to-right decoding and word identification. Once the child is familiar with the set, he can learn to turn the card, decode the word and then flip it back to see if he got it right. This first independent “reading” is always successful and will give the child confidence as he moves forward into more challenging reading levels.

Note: You may now introduce **Blending and Segmenting Level II (4 Sounds)**.

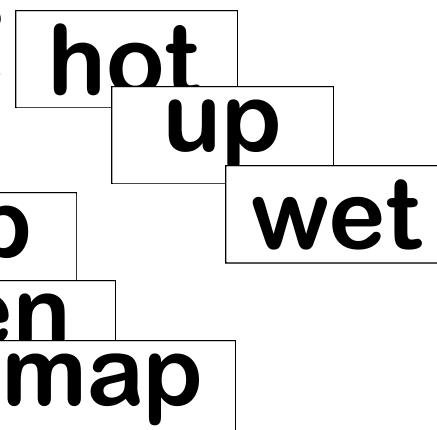


7. **3-Letter Short Vowel Word Pictures & Labels** More than anything else, the beginning reader needs lots of practice decoding words that match his ability level. With short vowel pictures and labels the child may still refer to the picture for phonemic clues as to which label to choose. But with practice he will soon reach a more mature level of decoding where he simply takes a label, decodes it and places it beneath the correct picture. Ideally the learning environment will provide 20 or 30 sets of pictures and labels that the child can move through to become a confident decoder at this beginning level of reading.



8. **3-Letter Short Vowel Word Labels without Pictures** The sounding out and blending of letters into words eventually becomes so automatic that decoding word labels without pictures is the next logical step. Again, it's important to provide sufficient practice so that the child builds a rock-solid foundation for more challenging levels of reading.

- a. **3-Letter Short Vowel Word Labels** Many of these words the child has already encountered from the sets of pictures and labels. They will be familiar to him and result in easy success. Some are too abstract to allow for pictures and will pose a true challenge of his decoding skill.



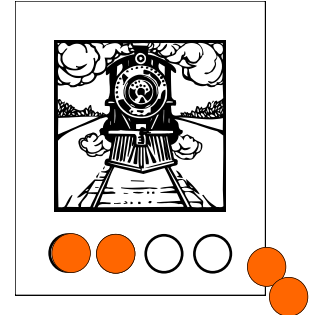
- b. **3-Letter Short Vowel Environment Labels** Some word cards can be environment labels to be read by the child and placed next to the indicated objects. Given a choice to choose this lesson freely, most children will repeat it again and again. What great decoding practice! And something else wonderful may occur. The child may begin to simply recognize the word without sounding it out. This eventually happens when a child has enough repeated, successful encounters with that word.

- c. **3-Letter Short Vowel Action Word Labels** The child reads the word label and performs the action. This can be done on his own, or he can invite a friend to “guess” what he’s reading on the card. Given the choice to choose this lesson freely, most children will repeat it again and again. And what about the effect it will have on the other children? They’ll be motivated to advance in their reading levels so they too can play this game one day. “*I want to do what Mark is doing.*”

hop
beg

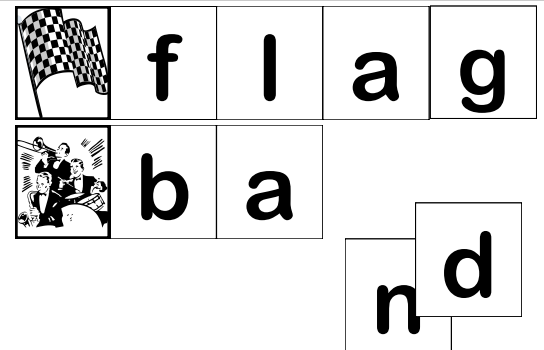
sit

9. **Blending and Segmenting Level II—4 Sounds** The student must be able to blend 4 sounds (/f/.../l/.../a/.../g/) into a known word (FLAG). More importantly the child must be able to segment words that have four sounds, like *train*, *clown*, and *plug*. (Notice that the words in Level II have 4 sounds, not necessarily 4 letters.) This level of blending and segmentation is achieved—as was the first level—by playing *The Blending Game*. In this game the child is blending sounds that the teacher or parent is speaking. Thus the entire time he is blending, the child is hearing the adult *model* segmentation. This is how the child learns to do it. **More words with 4 sounds:** *clown*, *truck*, *slide*, *snail*, *sleep bread*, *books*, *snake*, *clock*, *fruit*, *band*, *glass*, *stove*, *crown*, etc. When 4 sounds are mastered, segmentation training can continue with words that have 5, 6 and more sounds, like *plant*, *twist*, and *clamp*.



Note: The beginning reader must demonstrate fluency in decoding 3-letter short vowel words before being given 4-letter short vowel words, like *frog*, *flag*, and *sand*. And he must achieve mastery of Level II Blending and (especially) Segmenting (4 Sounds)

10. **4-Letter Short Vowel Word Building Encoding** 4-letter short vowel words (like *flag*, *club*, *sand*, etc.) is the best way for a beginning reader to learn to *decode* 4-letter short vowel words. Sets of *Word Pockets* should contain a picture and four moveable letter cards to allow the non-writing child to successfully build the words he will soon be expected to decode. The older child who has learned to write can do this same kind of work with a pencil. **Warning:** before a child is given 4-Letter short vowel words to encode or decode, he must be able to blend and segment 4 sounds. In other words, a child’s phonemic awareness level must match the decoding level we’re asking him to perform.



11. **4-Letter Short Vowel Word Cards** To become familiar with this new level of decoding, it’s best to provide the child with a material that connects a picture and a word. This way he can use his *phonemic segmentation* to map the sounds of the spoken word onto the printed word. There’s nothing new here, except that the words he will be decoding are longer and thus slightly more difficult. If the child is young or is a struggling reader, this step from 3-letter words to 4-letter words can be a big one. If the child is not sufficiently prepared to tackle this new category of short vowel words, he may experience difficulty and frustration. This is to be avoided at all costs.



12. **4-Letter Short Vowel Pictures & Labels** We need to allow the child to achieve mastery of 4-letter short vowel word reading. Some children need less time at this reading way-station before moving on. But many need to settle in and read lots of 4-letter words in order to gain sufficient mastery here. If we don’t have enough material for children to practice, the tendency on the part of the teacher is to move a child prematurely into the next level. We can’t afford to let children have dropped stitches as they move through the sequence of skills that leads to reading mastery.



tent

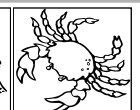
The trick to making lots of sets is to use the same words several times using different pictures and differ-



gift



tent



crab

13. **4-Letter Short Vowel Label without Pictures** We don't want children to always rely on picture clues. The really sharp student can often use pictures to figure out what a word says without really reading it. He then never develops the decoding habit, so crucial for reaching automatic word identification and reading fluency.

- a. **4-Letter Short Vowel Word Labels** Familiar words encountered in previous lessons and some too abstract to allow for a corresponding picture.

glum flat
gift

- b. **4-Letter Short Vowel Environment Labels**


desk
lamp clip

- c. **4-Letter Short Vowel Action Word Labels**

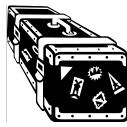

jump
clap bend

14. **5 & 6-Letter and Multi-Syllable Short Vowel Word Reading** The sequence continues with longer and more challenging words. These words still only involve 26 letter-sounds, but they are phonemically more difficult to blend because they take longer to decode. Auditory memory is challenged because the child has to hold onto sounds longer before he must blend them into a word. The following steps prepare the child for sentences and decodable books.




- a. **5 & 6-Letter and Multi-Syllable Short Vowel Word Building**

 u p s t e

- b. **5 & 6-Letter and Multi-Syllable Word Cards** A material that attaches a picture and a word to allow for the mapping of spoken sounds (segmented by the child) onto printed words.

trunk  camel 

- c. **5 & 6-Letter and Multi-Syllable Word Pictures and Labels**

 skunk  cactus  stamp

- d. **5 & 6-Letter and Multi-Syllable Word Labels without Pictures**

clump upset
unpack

- e. **5 & 6-Letter and Multi-Syllable Environment Labels**

cabinet magnet
plants

- f. **5 & 6-Letter and Multi-Syllable Action Word Labels**

twist stomp
juggle

15. **Short Vowel Phrases** The challenge increases by putting two or more words together into a simple phrase. This is a step that is almost never provided beginning readers. Instead we have a tendency to give them a book to read. If a child is fluent right away with this level of decoding, fine! Move on. But many, many beginning readers absolutely need this important step.

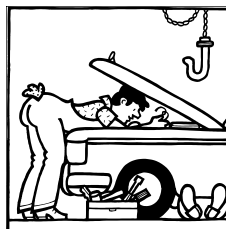


wet twins



lots of gifts

16. **Short Vowel Sentences** Before we move too quickly into books—even decodable ones, let's provide beginning and struggling readers with another in-between step that will give them more mastery and self-confidence. Perception is everything. And a young child who thinks he is being given too much, too fast, will shut down or give up. He can almost always handle slight increases in challenge. In fact, children require increased challenge or they will become bored and not want to continue.



The man can fix it.



Dad gets a trim.

17. **Decodable Books** Now a decodable story book won't be so intimidating.



Tim has a jet. The jet is fast. It is a fast jet.



Dad gets

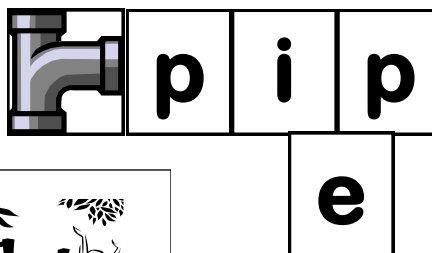
trim.

a

Why not Short Vowel Sentence Building?

18. **Long Vowel Silent E Words** With the addition of a silent e at the end of some words, we can introduce the long vowels and increase—just a notch—the complexity and challenge of a child's beginning reading material.

a. Word Building



b. Word Cards

tire



c. Pictures & Labels

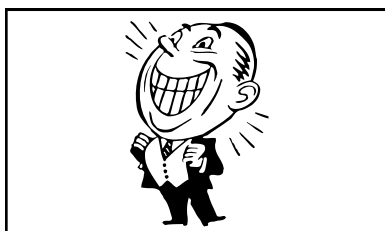


bride



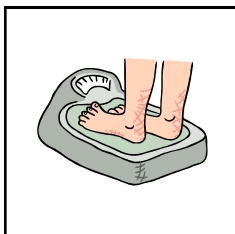
slide

e. Sentences



The man has a big smile.

f. Decodable Books



Tim stands on the scale. Tim is not a big man like his dad.

d. Phrases



a big wave

- 19. Phonograms** The complete English alphabet is not so simple. It's not just 26 letters and 26 sounds. Now there are approximately 65 individual letter and letter combinations (called phonograms) that represent the 45 sounds found in the English language. Many of these have more than 1 sound, e.g. ea (bead, bread, great). The phonograms need to be taught to mastery as well, so that decoding, spelling and comprehension become automatic and fluent. First graders should ideally learn about 45 of these to extend their decoding skills from the simple short-vowel words and sentences they began with. The best way to learn them is in isolation through writing and then by using them to write/spell/encode words they need to learn to read.

a	c	d	f	g	o	s	qu	b	e	h
i	j	k	l	m	n	p	r	t	u	v
w	x	y	z	er	sh	ee	ir	th	ay	ur
ow	ai	ck	oa	or	wh	ea	oy	ou	ar	oo
ch	ed	ng	oi	ti	aw	ew	tch	au	ui	igh
kn	dge	ph	ie	si	ci	gn	wr	ear	eigh h	ey
ei										

- 20. Most Common Words in Written English** The following is a list of the 109 + most common words in the English language. The words are arranged in approximate order of spelling difficulty. These 109 words make up 50% of everything we read in English. If a beginning reader, a struggling reader or a confused reader can spell these words correctly, then they can read these words. In addition, these words contain many of the orthographic (spelling) patterns and morphemic (meaning) patterns that the child will encounter again and again. Reading success must be built on mastery of a sequence of skills and knowledge. Every first grader must know these words (or words from a similar list) to mastery. Their future reading success may depend on it.

1. me	so	not	your	are	big	box	way
2. do	no	not	out	had	mother	belong	get
3. and	now	us	time	over	three	door	home
go	man	am	may	must	land	yes	much (109)
at	ten	good	into	make	cold	low	call
on	bed	little	him	school	hot	soft	long
a	top	ago	today	street	hat	stand	love
it	he	old	look	say	child	yard	then
is	you	bad	did	come	ice	bring	house
she	will	red	like	hand	play	tell	year
can	we	of	six	ring	sea	five	to
see	an	be	boy	live	day	ball	I
run	my	but	book	kill	eat	law	as
the	up	this	buy	late	sit	ask	send
in	last	all	have	let	lot	just	one