

Appendix H

Phonics and Reading Skills

Before students can learn to read, they must grasp the concept that a language is made up of sounds that can be manipulated. This is called “phonemic awareness.” Phonics is the process of attaching sounds (or “phonemes”) to the letter or letters (“graphemes”) that represent those sounds. For example, if the student knows how to attach the /h/ /a/ /t/ sounds to the corresponding letters, the student will be able to pronounce the printed word *bat*. Students can develop phonemic awareness and learn phonics skills through direct instruction and practice. Part 1 provides suggested activities to help students develop an understanding of the sounds in the English language. Part 2 provides suggested activities to help students connect sounds with letters.

Part 1: Recognizing and Manipulating Sounds

1. Identifying sounds. It is important for students to identify the sounds in spoken English words. Say words very slowly and ask students to listen for each sound—at the beginning, middle, and end of the word. Emphasize a specific sound that you want students to focus on, such as /t/ in *bat*. Point out familiar words to students that have the same phonic element: *bat, cat, fat, mat, pat, rat, sat*. As students master this skill, extend the activity by asking students to identify the similarities in words. For example, what do the words *pen, pat,* and *pig* have in common? [*they all start with the /p/ sound*]

2. Recognizing sounds in words. Words contain different sounds. Some words have the same number of letters and sounds (e.g., *bat* has three letters and three sounds). Others such as *knob* and *bike* have the same number of sounds, but a different number of letters. Give students practice hearing the sounds in the English language by having them clap every time they hear a sound in a word. Have students create lists or personal dictionaries of words that contain one, two, three, or more sounds.

3. Manipulating sounds in words. One sound can mean the difference between *it* and *bit*. It is important for students to know that sounds can be manipulated to create new words. Give students practice with this concept by giving them directions such as: Take the /b/ away from *bat* and tell me the new word. [*at*] Take the /h/ away from *hand* and tell me the new word. [*and*] Change the /t/ in *tag* to an /r/ and tell me the new word. [*rag*]

4. Creating rhyming sounds and alliteration. Through rhymes and the use of alliteration students demonstrate the ability to hear relationships among words of similar sounds. Make poetry a part of every day. Read poems, play games (e.g., I’m thinking of a word that rhymes with ...), or create rhymes about everyday activities (e.g., Let’s take a look at this pretty book.) Also encourage students to create their own poetry and to identify and use alliteration.

5. Blending sounds. Phonemic blending allows students to put sounds together to create smoothly formed oral words. Begin with small blending units in words students are learning. For example, in the *IDEA Picture Dictionary 2*, point to pictures of words such as *brown*, *dress*, and *sheep*. Ask students to sound out each word. Then ask them to attack more challenging words such as *splendid*. Begin with the first two letters (/sp/) and continue adding letters (one at a time) until students sound out the entire word.

Part 2: Connecting Sounds and Letters

1. Recognize which letters (or letter combinations) represent which sounds. Students need to know which letters (or letter combinations) represent particular sounds. For example, they must recognize that /t/ is the same sound at the beginning of the words *tap* and *tame*. They also must recognize the *ough* represents different sounds in *though* and *tough*. It is important for students to identify the sounds in spoken English words. Phonics adds the visual dimension to the sounds developed in phonemic awareness. Having developed phonemic awareness, the next step is for students to recognize words in their written form. Have students look up words in the *IDEA Picture Dictionary 2* that begin with the same letter. As they are looking at the written words, pronounce those words. Use word walls of words that have similar written elements, but different pronunciations. Create opportunities that give students continued exposure to and practice with words that you have presented orally.

2. Blend the individual sounds in the correct sequence to create words. Students must understand how to blend individual sounds to create words. For example, a student must be able to pronounce the individual sounds /f/-/i/-/s/-/h/ and then blend those individual sounds to make the word *fish*. To provide practice, have students look up other words in the “FP” section of the *IDEA Picture Dictionary 2*. Also point out similar familiar words (e.g., *dish*) to build blending skills. Students must be able to produce sounds in the order the letters appear.

3. Match phoneme combinations with real words. While phonics is critical to word attack skills, comprehension is the ultimate objective of reading. Students may attach the correct sounds to the letters in a word (e.g., *cove*), but if they have no understanding of what a cove is, the reading act is not complete. Use the *IDEA Picture Dictionary 2* to point out the pictures of words. Seeing the word and picture emphasizes the connection between objects and printed words. Also use multi-sensory stimuli to be sure that students connect the words to ideas.