

Phonemic Awareness Activities – by Sally Shaywitz

Phonemic awareness is the ability to identify and manipulate phonemes, the individual consonant or vowel sounds. Dyslexia is a disorder or disruption in the phonologic module of the brain, resulting in the inability to hear and manipulate phonemes. Research shows that dyslexic students who receive intervention in explicit, systematic phonics can overcome dyslexic tendencies and can become skilled readers.

The following activities will help you assess and strengthen a student's phonemic awareness.

(Note: Letters within slash marks are to be pronounced as the letter sounds, not as the letter name.)

PHONEME IDENTIFICATION

Sound isolation of initial and final phonemes is another important aspect of phonemic awareness.

Begin with isolating initial phonemes. For example, say, "What sound do you hear at the beginning of the following words?"

vet bed man fish dad cup

Continue by asking students which word *begins* with a *different* sound in each of the following word groups.

big, band, boy, ripe

ten, ton, frog, test

rich, sing, red, right

snake, sun, sand, ring

If the students do well, isolate the final phoneme. For example, you could say, "The final sound is the last sound you hear. What is the final sound in the following words?"

vet

bed

man

fish

dad

cup

Continue by asking students which word *ends* with a *different* sound in each of the following word groups.

dog, frog, dig, wish

hat, rat, find, mat

car, desk, star, far

will, fill, bill, still, wet

If helpful, you can also isolate phonemes, using vowel sounds in the middle of words. Ask students whether the sounds in the middle of words are the same or different. Examples: *bed/bad, dog/dig, cup/cap*.

Phoneme count:

Ask students how many sounds they hear in the following words.

rat

dig

jump

stop

plane

If students have difficulty with this activity, give them a coin, a poker chip, or some other object to represent each sound. Place the items in a row across their desks, and have the students pull down one object for each sound they hear. In the word *plane*, there are four sounds: /p/ /l/ /a/ /n/. Even though the word is spelled with five letters, there are only four sounds.

Deleting phonemes:

This is a more difficult skill. Ask students what sound they hear in *seat* but not in *eat*. (Answer: /s/.) Continue comparing with the following pairs of words. (Letters used within slash marks represent sounds.)

In *wink* but not in *ink*? /w/

In *fit* but not in *it*? /f/

In *bill* but not in *ill*? /b/

SYLLABLE IDENTIFICATION

To fully develop phonemic awareness, it is essential to understand how many syllables are in a word. Knowledge of syllables will help students separate words into smaller pieces. Syllables are the largest units of sound that make up a word and are relatively simple for native speakers to identify and manipulate.

The number of working (sounded) vowels in a word will determine the number of syllables.

Some words are short and have only one syllable.

Examples: *horn, sit, car, phone*

Other words are longer and are comprised of more than one syllable.

Examples: *stu-dent, sen-tence, up-per-case,*
e-mer-gen-cy

Identifying syllables:

1. Ask students to clap syllables, using the names of class members.

Examples: *An-tho-ny*, *Al-bert*, *Steph-an-ie*, etc.

2. Pronounce a word, syllable by syllable (e.g., *tel-e-phone*), and ask a student to repeat the full word at regular speed (*telephone*). Contrast the syllable-by-syllable pronunciation with how words are spoken in daily speech. Example words:

chair	e-lec-tri-ci-ty	sub-ject
drum	he-li-cop-ter	per-son-al-i-ty
let-ter	re-spon-si-bil-i-ty	ap-ple

Deleting syllables:

The word is *cowboy*. Take off the word *cow*. Now what is the word? (boy)

butterfly – take off *fly* (butter)
lipstick – take off *stick* (lip)
sunshine – take off *shine* (sun)
railroad – take off *road* (rail)
pancake – take off *pan* (cake)
raincoat – take off *rain* (coat)

RHYME

Sensitivity to rhyme implies an awareness that words can be broken down into smaller segments of sound and that different words may share a sound

in common; it is a very early indicator of getting ready to read. Students who demonstrate reading difficulties may show insensitivity to rhyme.

Explain how words that rhyme have final word parts with the same sounds. Examples: *goat, coat*.

To increase awareness, engage the students in the following activities:

1. Show a picture (*ball, hat, cane, etc.*), and ask the students to give a word that rhymes with the word the picture represents (e.g., *wall, sat, rain*).

2. Read several rhyme phrases aloud, emphasizing the word in bold. Stop when coming to the rhyming word and allow students to fill in the word. Possible answers are in parentheses after each phrase below.

- A cat sits on a _____. (*mat*)
- A pig wearing a _____. (*wig*)
- An owl drying off with a _____. (*towel*)
- Smell the rose with your _____. (*nose*)
- A guy who is swatting a _____. (*fly*)
- Write the numbers one to ten with a pencil or a _____. (*pen*)
- Look at the floor, then walk out the _____. (*door*)

3. Read any rhyming story or a familiar rhyme. Stop when coming to the rhyming word, and allow students to fill in the word.

WORDS WITHIN SENTENCES

Dictate the following sentences. Have students tap with their pencils the number of individual words they hear.

- May I please have a cookie? (six taps)
 - The weather was windy and rainy. (six taps)
 - When will you come pick me up? (seven taps)
 - The children went to the lake to swim. (eight taps)
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