

TPRI newsletter

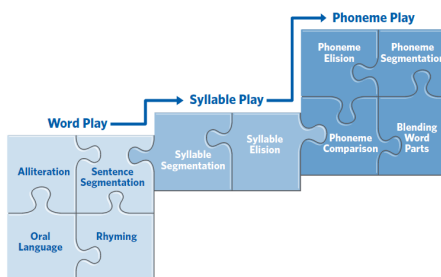
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A Focus on Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness, one of the five key components of early reading instruction, is assessed on the TPRI in kindergarten and first grade. Phonemic awareness focuses on the individual sounds in spoken language; it involves the understanding that words are made up of a combination of speech sounds, and includes the ability to discriminate between and manipulate the sounds (or phonemes) in words. In kindergarten and first grade, phonemic awareness is one of the best predictors of success in learning to read.

Phonemic awareness is the most complex part of the Phonological Awareness Continuum. At its highest level, phonemic awareness involves the ability to add or delete individual phonemes in words, and even substitute one phoneme for another.



Phonological Awareness Continuum

The National Reading Panel, 2000, indicates that teachers need to assess how well students can perform phonemic awareness tasks, and then plan instruction accordingly ([NICHD, 2000, p. 2-43](#)).

Instruction that promotes phonemic awareness includes language games where students manipulate the sounds in words in various ways (for example, by separating, segmenting, blending, deleting or substituting sounds).

Using TPRI PA Data to Guide Instruction

The TPRI development team is often asked how students should perform on portions of the inventory at BOY, MOY and EOY. Below are some suggestions which might help guide you when making decisions about which students may require additional focused or intensive instruction in PA.

In kindergarten, it is not unusual to have students at the beginning of the year score Still Developing (SD) on most or all of the PA tasks. By MOY however, a reasonable goal is for most students to score developed (D) on PA-1, PA-2 and PA-3. Those students who score SD on these tasks may require additional support in order to meet EOY goals. By EOY, an appropriate goal is for most students to score D on PA-1, PA-2, PA-3 and PA-4. Students who leave kindergarten with these skills in place, are more likely to be successful readers.

In grade 1, schools typically want students to begin the year able to score D on PA-1 and PA-2. By MOY, a good target for most students is to score D on PA-1, PA-2 and PA-3. It's even better if students are developed on all PA tasks by MOY, because then teachers can devote more instructional time to other components of reading. By EOY, TPRI hopes that all students score D on all PA tasks. For those students who are not developed on these tasks, it's critical to ensure that they are receiving some type of intervention support in PA.

Over the next few months, the TPRI newsletter will focus on the five key components of early reading instruction. This will be a great opportunity for our readers to learn more about the five components from expert guest authors.



This month's expert is **Dr. Waynel Sexton**, an educator with over 40 years of practical experience, and a respected literacy leader in the state of Texas.

Experts Say ...

"One of the best predictors of how well students will learn to read during their first two years of school is phonemic awareness ... Those with poor phonemic awareness skills at the end of their kindergarten year are more likely to become poor readers than those with well-developed phonemic awareness skills."

Vaughn, S., & Linan-Thompson, S. (2004). *Research-based methods of reading instruction, grades K-3*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, p. 9.

"Children who enter school with phonemic awareness have a very HIGH likelihood of learning to read successfully. Children who lack phonemic awareness have a great deal of difficulty learning to read. Obviously, children who come without phonemic awareness need to develop it! The question is not if but how."

Cunningham, P. M. (1999). *Phonics they use: Words for reading and writing (3rd ed.)*. Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley, p. 69.





How Do We Teach PA Most Effectively?

In this section, Dr. Sexton shares an excerpt from a review conducted by Learning Point Associates™ in 2004 (pp. 8-9). In their review of scientifically based reading research, Learning Point Associates™ noted the following key ideas for teaching phonemic awareness:

“Focus on one or two phonemic awareness skills. Phonemic awareness instruction that focuses on no more than one or two skills at a time is more effective than trying to teach many different phonemic awareness skills at the same time (NICHD, 2000, p. 2-21).

Allocate a reasonable amount of time to phonemic awareness instruction. Studies that produced the strongest results engaged students with phonemic awareness activities between a total of 5 to 18 hours (NICHD, 2000, p. 2-22).

Emphasize segmenting words into phonemes. Teaching young readers to segment words into individual phonemes appears to be as effective in helping them learn to read as instruction in both segmenting and blending (Torgesen, Morgan, & Davis, 1992). While blending is an essential skill for use in decoding, Torgesen, et al. (1992) concluded that emphasis should be placed on segmenting words into phonemes.

Working with small groups of three to four children to teach phonemic awareness may be more effective than one-on-one tutoring. It appears that children learn from observing and listening to the responses of other children and what the teacher says to the other children about their responses. (NICHD, 2000, p. 2-22)

Use letters when teaching about phonemes. According to the work of Blachman, Ball, Black, and Tangel (as cited in NICHD, 2000), instruction in letters should accompany phonemic awareness instruction. Teaching students to use letters to add, delete, or substitute phonemes increases the application of phonemic awareness to reading and writing.

Connect phonemic awareness instruction to reading and writing. Making it clear to students how phonemic awareness is connected to reading and writing increases its impact on reading achievement (Cunningham, 1990). Isolated phonemic awareness training improves reading outcomes, but not to the extent that it would if its application to reading and writing was stressed.

Use manipulatives to help students acquire phonemic awareness. Manipulatives can be effective aids in teaching phonemic awareness. The work of Blachman et al. (as cited in NICHD, 2000) reported this finding: Having students move letters as they pronounced phonemes in given words was a “key activity” in a program of phonemic awareness instruction that produced significant transfer of learning to reading and spelling.

Focus attention on how the mouth changes when pronouncing different phonemes. Focusing attention on the changes that take place in the mouth as words are pronounced is an effective way to identify phonemes. Lindamood & Lindamood’s work (as cited in NICHD, 2000), explains that by helping students notice the position and movement of their lips and tongue, teachers can increase students’ ability to identify, count, and segment phonemes. For example, when the word foot is spoken, the lower lip is held against the teeth as air is forced out to pronounce the phoneme /f/. Then, the mouth forms a circle as the /oo / is pronounced. Finally, the tongue touches the roof of the mouth to make the /t/.

Use spelling to teach phonemes. Asking children to spell words by listening for individual phonemes and identifying the letters that represent those phonemes helps to teach segmenting and improves children’s ability to recognize unfamiliar words (Ehri and Wilce, 1987). It is helpful to encourage children to think about how their mouth changes as they repeat the word they are trying to spell. This helps them segment and identify individual phonemes (NICHD, 2000, p. 2-36).”

Learning Point Associates™. (2004). *A closer look at the five essential components of effective reading instruction: A review of scientifically based reading research for teachers.* Retrieved from www.learningpt.org. October, 2012.



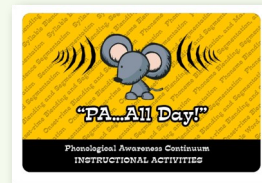
Check it Out!

Check out these **3** helpful resources for teaching PA effectively!



“PA...All Day!” is a flip book that contains instructional activities for each of the steps on the phonological awareness continuum. It provides

instructional routines, lists of words that become incrementally more difficult, and kinesthetic scaffolds for use with blending and segmenting phonemes. To download the print-ready booklet, please click [here](#).



A similar Spanish resource, *Fonología todo el día* is also available. To download the print-ready Spanish booklet, please click [here](#).



Click on the link below to watch a video for an example of highly effective instruction of phonological awareness activities. As you view a Texas

teacher providing small-group instruction to first grade students, notice her pacing, her corrective feedback, and her smooth transitions from one skill to the next and her students’ engagement in every activity. She’s pretty impressive!



[Click here](#) to view the PA video example.

An Instructional Routine for Teaching Phonemic Awareness

In this section, Dr. Sexton describes an instructional routine for teaching phonemic awareness.

An instructional routine that is consistent with and encompasses these key research-based principles for teaching phonemic awareness is called *Move the Sounds*. This activity can be found in the *TPRI Intervention Activity Guide (2010)* and on TPRI.org ([PA-67 Move the Sounds](#)). This activity is also known as Sound Boxes or Elkonin Boxes and teaches students to hear the phonemes in words in sequence, stretch and segment the sounds, and push a chip or marker for each sound in the word into a box.

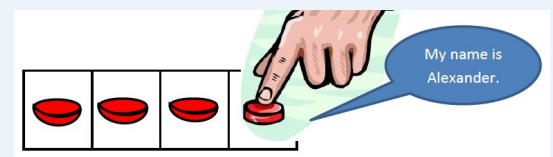
The activity can begin as a phonological awareness activity at the sentence and syllable level, and progress to the phonemic awareness level, and end in phonics/spelling/ writing activities with the use of letters. Once the routine is taught, it can be used across this broad continuum of skills and is, consequently, a highly efficient use of both teacher and student time. This flexibility also facilitates scaffolded learning for students by allowing the teacher to quickly move to an easier or more difficult skill level. The following sequence of activities highlights the incremental increase and/or decrease in difficulty that is possible with this routine.

Phonological Awareness Activities

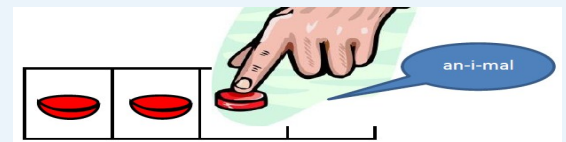
Sentence segmentation and blending

Initially use one syllable words in the sentences: The cat is black. My name is Pam.

Progress to sentences with words of 2 or more syllables: The elephant is gray. My name is Alexander.



Syllable segmentation and blending: in-vi-ta-tion, spa-ghet-ti, an-i-mal



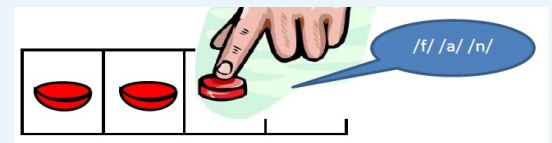
Phonemic Awareness Activities

Level 1: Word segmentation and blending with blank chips (no letters): Simple CV or VC words (2 phonemes)

Initially use words with a continuous initial sound such as /s/, /f/, or /m/: see, am, up

Level 2: Word segmentation and blending with blank chips (no letters): CVC words (3 phonemes)

Initially use words with a continuous initial consonant such as /s/, /f/, or /m/: Sam, fan, mop



Level 3: Word segmentation and blending with blank chips (no letters): Blends (3 or more phonemes)

Initially, provide a box for every detectable phoneme: free = 3 boxes; flag = 4 boxes; blimp = 5 boxes

Phonics/Spelling/Writing Activities

Level 1: Word segmentation and blending with letters printed on the chips: Simple CV or VC words (2 phonemes)

Initially use words with a continuous initial sound such as /s/, /f/, or /m/: see, am, up

Level 2: Word segmentation and blending with letters printed on the chips: CVC words (3 phonemes)

Initially use words with a continuous initial consonant such as /s/, /f/, or /m/: Sam, fan, mop



Level 3: Word segmentation and blending with letters with letters printed on the chips: Blends (3 or more phonemes)

Initially, draw a box for every detectable phoneme: free = 3 boxes; flag = 4 boxes; blimp = 5 boxes

A Final Word on Phonemic Awareness

The mastery of phonemic awareness skills facilitates the understanding that words are made up of individual sounds. Children should quickly begin to associate these sounds with the letters that represent the sounds. This connection of PA with letters is phonics, the topic of our next newsletter. Together, phonemic awareness and phonics instruction provide a sound foundation for using the alphabetic principal to learn to read and spell.



In the November issue, expert **Becky Beegle** from the Children's Learning Institute will share her knowledge about effective phonics instruction in K-2.