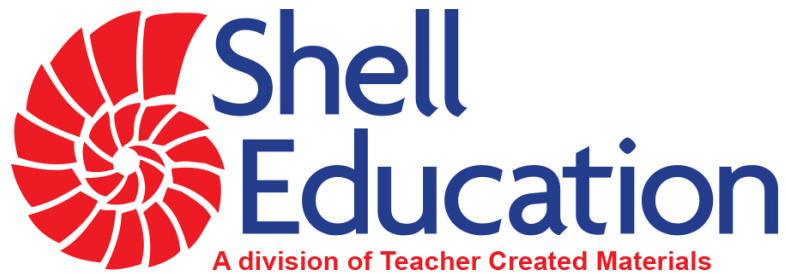


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# Literacy Strategies

for Early  
childhood



Jodene L. Smith

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## SECTION I:

# Word Recognition

The strategies in this section correspond with key competencies identified in *What the Science of Reading Says about Word Recognition* (Jump and Johnson 2023). These research-based instructional strategies will help teachers bridge the gap between the science of literacy instruction and classroom practice.

| Strategy                                | Skills and Understandings Addressed |         |                   |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------|-------------------|
|   | Phonological Awareness              | Phonics | Sight Recognition |
| What Is a Word?                         |                                     |         |                   |
| Working with Words—Compound Words       |                                     |         |                   |
| Silly Willy Rhyming Words               |                                     |         |                   |
| Create New Nursery Rhymes               |                                     |         |                   |
| Feel the Syllables                      |                                     |         |                   |
| Making Sandwiches with Onsets and Rimes |                                     |         |                   |
| Isolating Sounds with Movement          |                                     |         |                   |
| Sound Boxes                             |                                     |         |                   |

| Strategy                       | Skills and Understandings Addressed |         |                   |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------|-------------------|
|                                | Phonological Awareness              | Phonics | Sight Recognition |
| Introducing Letters and Sounds |                                     |         |                   |
| Alphabet Sound Chart           |                                     |         |                   |
| Working with an Alphabet Arc   |                                     |         |                   |
| Alphabet Sorts                 |                                     |         |                   |
| Blending with Cruising Cars    |                                     |         |                   |
| High-Frequency Word Match      |                                     |         |                   |

# The Foundations of Literacy and Word Recognition

Before children even enter a classroom, they begin to build aspects of literacy they will use on the road to becoming lifelong readers. Most children are exposed to language in a variety of ways, including conversations with adults, symbols on street signs, labels on products, keystrokes on tablets or phones, newspaper headlines, story time picture books at the library or at bedtime . . . and the list goes on. Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers continue this exposure in our classrooms. Introducing children to the concept of reading and ensuring they understand that spoken words are represented by symbols prepares them for instruction in word recognition. Providing print-rich environments and safe spaces where children can take risks with language is also critical to their continued growth. A strong foundation in literacy is essential for children to blossom into skilled readers and writers.

Foundational literacy skills include concepts of print (print carries meaning), phonological awareness (manipulating units of oral language), and the alphabetic principle (understanding that letters represent sounds). Explicit instruction in these elements is crucial for learners in prekindergarten and kindergarten.

## Concepts of Print

*Concepts of print*, or print awareness, means children understand that print can be used to deliver different types of information. They begin to understand that store signs carry meaning (*logographics*, e.g., realizing the golden arches represent McDonalds). Children start to understand that words and pictures serve as symbols at a very young age. Research suggests that “by 15 months of age . . . when pictures are labeled, both the word and the picture are taken as symbols for real world entities” (Ganea et al. 2009, 295). When students

As emergent readers gain an understanding of concepts of print, they are ready for instruction in phonological awareness.

have print awareness, they also understand how to hold a book, which way to turn the pages, and, nowadays, which direction to swipe on a tablet or device to go from beginning to end. They also understand that letters are put together to create words and that spaces come between words to form sentences. In a larger sense, they understand that a book can tell a story, a gaming guide explains how to play, and typing words into an internet browser can produce an answer to a question.



For students to gain print awareness, they need to be surrounded by print and to see adults modeling how to use print to gain information. At a grocery store, adults can point out the sign by the apples that shows how much they cost per pound. When teachers share texts, they can point to the title, show where the author's name is, put their finger under each word as they read, and show how to turn pages to go from the front of the book to the back. As emergent readers gain an understanding of concepts of print, they are ready for instruction in phonological awareness.

## Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

*Phonological awareness* is the ability to identify and orally manipulate words and sounds. Research shows that phonological awareness is essential for the development of reading because of the relationship between the spoken word and the written word and that phonological awareness of the sounds of spoken language is required to learn letter-sound correspondence (Ehri et al. 2001; Kilpatrick 2015, 2016; Moats 2020b; Yopp and Yopp 2022). Phonological awareness is understanding that there are breaks in sound between words in a sentence, recognizing syllables within a word, and separating the sounds in a word to determine beginning, medial, and ending sounds. Instruction in phonological awareness should include the manipulation and detection of sounds, from larger parts to smaller parts. Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers can have children identify larger chunks of sound, like words within compound words and syllables, to smaller parts, like onsets and rimes, where the /k/ in *cat* is the onset and /ăt/ is the rime. Children can play with rhyme and alliteration (e.g., *The boat can float in the moat*, or *Annie ate apples at Abigail's*).

Research shows that phonological awareness is essential for the development of reading because of the relationship between the spoken word and the written word.

For readers to move to the word recognition stage, it is crucial for them to gain a strong foundation in phonemic awareness (Adams 2011; Ehri 2014, 2020; Ehri et al. 2001). *Phonemic awareness* is under the umbrella of phonological awareness, and specifically relates to manipulating the individual sounds in a word (see figure on page 5). While there are twenty-six letters in the English language, there are about forty-four phonemes because some sounds are represented by more than one letter, e.g., /sh/. Children can be introduced to phonemic awareness through activities that isolate sounds while showing the letter correspondence (/p/ in *paste*). Teachers can start to connect letters to the sounds they make,



categorize letters and sounds, or remove letters from a word and ask children to identify how the sound of the word changes. Using rhyme and alliteration through chants and songs, orally tapping out syllables in words, manipulating onsets and rimes (*cat, mat, sat, hat*), and identifying and matching initial, medial, and final sounds (Which picture begins with /s/? Which ends in /s/?) are all activities that support phonemic awareness.

## The Alphabetic Principle

Another foundational skill children need to ensure success with literacy is the ability to recognize that in the English language, letters and symbols represent speech sounds. Children learn that letters represent sounds, or, to use academic language, that *graphemes*

Ensuring that early readers have a strong understanding of the alphabetic principle supports building their word recognition skills.

represent *phonemes*. Grasping the alphabetic principle assists with *orthographic mapping* wherein readers use the spelling, pronunciation, and meaning of words to form a mental image that they can quickly retrieve (Ehri 2005a, 2017). In the English language, matching sounds to letters is made more difficult due to the integration of spellings that represent sounds from Old and Middle English along with other languages (e.g., the words *my* [Middle English], *you* [Germanic], *said* [Arabic], *come* [Middle English], and *what* [Old English]). Because of these variations, teachers must be

explicit when teaching some English spellings, being aware of the sound children hear, and calling out inconsistencies in spelling patterns. Ensuring that early readers have a strong understanding of the alphabetic principle supports building their word recognition skills.

## Phases of Word Recognition

It can be helpful to turn to Ehri's (1987; 1992; 2005; 2020) phases of word reading to better understand the development of word recognition skills. Ehri describes four overlapping phases of word reading that students move through as they learn to read (decode) and spell (encode). Each phase is labeled to reflect and describe the type of knowledge applied during it to read and spell words: pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic, and consolidated alphabetic (Ehri 1987; 1992; 1998; 2020). The chart on the next page summarizes readers' skills in each phase.

| Phase of Word Reading   | Skills   |
|-------------------------|--|
| Pre-Alphabetic          | Early readers apply visual, nonalphabetic cues to read words. For example, remembering the “two round eyes” for the oo in <i>look</i> (Ehri 1998), the tail at the end of <i>dog</i> , or the hump in the middle of <i>camel</i> (Gough, Juel, and Roper-Schneider 1983).  |
| Partial Alphabetic      | Learners apply beginning knowledge of letter-sound correspondence to reading words, often focusing on the initial and the final consonants. For example, remembering /s/ and /n/ to read <i>spoon</i> (Ehri 1998). Readers often combine this knowledge with context clues to recognize words. They are often better able to recognize the words in context than in isolation. |
| Full Alphabetic         | Readers have a well-developed knowledge of letter-sound correspondence. They use decoding skills to analyze letter-sound connections within words to read and spell them from memory (Ehri 2020).  |
| Consolidated Alphabetic | Learners consolidate letter patterns into larger patterns that represent syllables and morphemes, have stored these in memory, and can apply them to decode and make connections to multisyllabic words (Ehri 2020).   |

## The Pre-Alphabetic Stage: Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

At the pre-alphabetic stage, both phonological and phonemic awareness rely completely on oral language and the detection of sounds. Phonological awareness is broader than phonemic awareness and includes manipulating units of oral language, for instance, identifying individual words in a sentence, separating syllables in a word, separating the sounds in a word, and determining beginning, medial, and ending sounds in a word.

Phonemic awareness specifically relates to manipulating the sounds in an individual word. The figure on page 24 provides a list of phonemes. Adams (2011, 14) shares six tasks recommended by the NRP (2000) in building phonemic awareness:

1. Phoneme isolation: “Tell me the first sound in the word *paste*.” (/p/)
2. Phoneme identity: “Tell me the sound that is the same in the words *bike*, *boy*, and *bell*.” (/b/)
3. Phoneme categorization: “Which word does not belong: *bus*, *bun*, or *rug*?” (*rug*)
4. Phoneme blending: “What word is /s/ /t/ /ɒ/ /p/?” (*stop*)
5. Phoneme segmentation: “How many sounds are there in *ship*?” (three: /sh/ /ɪ/ /p/)
6. Phoneme deletion: “What word is *smile* without the /s/?” (*mile*)

# Isolating Sounds with Movement

## Objectives

- Demonstrate understanding of sounds (phonemes).
- Isolate phonemes of spoken single-syllable words.

## Background Information

Segmenting words into individual phonemes (or sounds) is an important aspect of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is essential for reading because of the relationship between the spoken word and the written word. The ability to recognize and manipulate sounds in spoken language is required to learn letter-sound correspondence (Ehri et al. 2001; Kilpatrick 2015, 2016; Moats 2020b; Yopp and Yopp 2022). With this strategy, students will physically use their bodies to segment individual sounds (phonemes) in a spoken word. The goal is to strengthen students' ability to isolate initial, medial vowel, and final sounds when given a whole word by the teacher.

## Materials

- list of consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words

## Process

1. Have students stand far enough apart so they will not touch other students as they move their arms around.
2. Use arm movements to help students isolate sounds in various positions in words. Students will move their extended arms in an arch from one side of their bodies, over their heads, to the other side of their bodies. Each position represents a sound in a CVC word.
3. Say a word such as *cat* and ask students to repeat it. Then have students stretch out their arms and use the following motions as the class segments the sounds in the word—/k/ /ă/ /t/. If you are facing students, remember to mirror them as you provide examples
  - Students' arms extended out to the left represents the initial sound in a word.
  - Students' arms extended over their heads represents the medial sound in a word.
  - Students' arms extended out to the right represents the final sound in a word.
4. Have students follow the directions on page 49 to isolate specific sounds in words.

| Initial Sound   | Medial Sound  | Final sound  |
|---|---|--|
| Students punch their fists out to the left as they extend their arms when they say the initial sound in the word. | Students stretch the medial sound in the word as they move their arms over their heads. | Students punch their fists out to the right as they extend their arms when they say the final sound in the word. |

## Differentiation

**During the Lesson:** Start with having students isolate initial sounds and punch their fists to the left (*cat*, /k/). Move to final sounds after students have practiced initial sounds (*cat*, /t/). Medial sounds are usually the most difficult for students to hear. Move to medial sounds once students are secure with initial and final sounds.

**After the Lesson:** Place picture cards of CVC words in a center. Have students work with partners to practice saying the words while using the arm positions.

# Working with an Alphabet Arc

## Objectives

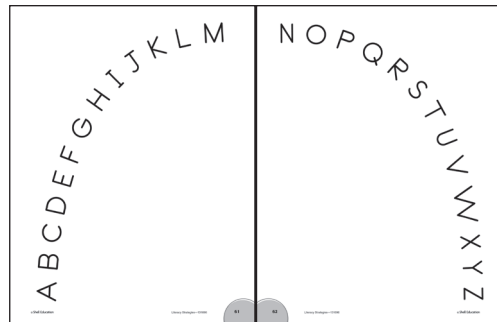
- Recognize and name uppercase and lowercase letters.
- Produce the primary sound for each letter of the alphabet.

## Background Information

Explicit phonics instruction is necessary for students to easily and quickly recognize letter-sound relationships (NRP 2000). This knowledge will help students become efficient, automatic decoders of written text. Students' understanding of the alphabetic principle does not occur in one lesson, but rather develops over time, thus necessitating the need for many opportunities for students to practice. Working with an Alphabet Arc provides students the opportunity to interact with both uppercase and lowercase letters and enables the teacher to scaffold instruction to meet students' varying needs.

## Materials

- *Uppercase Alphabet Arc* (pages 61–62)
- *Lowercase Alphabet Arc* (pages 63–64)
- *Uppercase Letters* (page 65)
- *Lowercase Letters* (page 66)
- *Alphabet Sound Chart* (page 58)



## Process

Prepare an Alphabet Arc mat for each child. Make copies of the two *Uppercase Alphabet Arc* pages. Copy the *Lowercase Alphabet Arc* pages onto the back of the *Uppercase Alphabet Arc* pages. Tape the two pages together to make an arc with the uppercase letters on one side and the lowercase letters on the back. Laminate the arcs for durability and for use with erasable markers. Make copies of *Uppercase Letters* and *Lowercase Letters*. Cut them apart and laminate them. Use the arc mats and letters for the following progression of activities.

- Provide students with the alphabet arc with the lowercase side facing up. Have students sing the alphabet song while pointing to each letter. The intent here is not yet for letter recognition, but for one-to-one correspondence. Practice every day until students have one-to-one correspondence. When students demonstrate good one-to-one correspondence, move on to the next activity.

- Provide students with the lowercase letters. Have students place each letter above the corresponding lowercase letter on the alphabet arc. This creates a second, larger arc outside the mat arc. Have students name the letters. If students do not know the name of a letter, have them find the letter that matches on the alphabet arc and then sing the alphabet song while pointing to each letter on the alphabet arc to find the name of the letter. Begin with the most common letters and letters in children's names, and limit the number of letters students work with initially. Continue to add letters in subsequent days and weeks.
- Have students name the sounds the letters represent. If students do not know a sound, provide them with an *Alphabet Sound Chart* and have them find the corresponding letter and use the key picture to help identify the sound.

Build to rapid automaticity in completing the activities described above. Then begin working on some of the following extensions.

- **Letter Writing:** Name a letter and ask students to move the letter card from outside the arc to the empty space inside the arc. Have students use the letter card as a model and write the letter on the mat using an erasable marker.
- **Uppercase/Lowercase Match:** Alternate which alphabet arc and letters students work with. For example, have students use the *Uppercase Alphabet Arc* and lowercase letters. Work toward automaticity with letter matching.
- **Making Words:** After the letter cards are placed around the arc, say a CVC word. Have students segment the word, take the letter cards from outside the arc, and place them inside the arc to build the word.

## Differentiation

**During the Lesson:** Place your hand over a student's hand to assist them in gaining one-to-one correspondence while singing the alphabet. Sing the alphabet song with students. Slow down when singing the letters *l*, *m*, *n*, *o*, and *p*.

**After the Lesson:** Say CVC words and have students write the words in the center of the arc without moving letter cards. Students can refer to the arc to see what each letter looks like.

## SECTION II:

# Reading Comprehension and Content Knowledge

The strategies in this section correspond with key competencies identified in *What the Science of Reading Says about Reading Comprehension and Content Knowledge* (Jump and Kopp 2023). These research-based instructional strategies will help teachers bridge the gap between the science of literacy instruction and classroom practice.

| Strategy                                       | Skills and Understandings Addressed |            |   |                                      |  |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
|  | Building Content Knowledge          | Vocabulary | Language Structures: Syntax and Semantics | Text Structures and Verbal Reasoning | Literacy Knowledge: Print Concepts for Genre Studies |
| Using Text Sets for Wide and Extensive Reading | ■                                   |            |   |                                      |  |
| Creating Concept Maps                          | ■                                   |            |   |                                      |  |
| What I Know                                    | ■                                   |            |   |                                      |  |
| Shared Experience                              | ■                                   |            |   |                                      |  |
| Explicit Vocabulary Word Instruction           |                                     | ■          |   |                                      |  |
| Incidental Vocabulary Word Instruction         |                                     | ■          |   |                                      |  |
| Shades of Meaning                              |                                     | ■          |   |                                      |  |
| Many Ways to Say It                            |                                     |            | ■   |                                      |  |



| Strategy                           | Skills and Understandings Addressed |            |   |                                      |  |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
|                                    | Building Content Knowledge          | Vocabulary | Language Structures: Syntax and Semantics | Text Structures and Verbal Reasoning | Literacy Knowledge: Print Concepts for Genre Studies |
| Identifying Multiple-Meaning Words |                                     |            |   |                                      |  |
| Picture Inference                  |                                     |            |   |                                      |  |
| Figurative Language Awareness      |                                     |            |   |                                      |  |
| Teaching Concepts of Print         |                                     |            |   |                                      |  |
| Informational Text Genre Study     |                                     |            |   |                                      |  |

# Explicit Vocabulary Word Instruction

## Objectives

- Expand knowledge and use of a wide variety of words.
- With guidance and support from adults, explore word relationships and nuances in word meanings.
- Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts.

## Background Information

Instruction in vocabulary improves reading comprehension (Lehr, Osborn, and Hiebert 2004; NRP 2000). Isabel Beck, Margaret McKeown, and Linda Kucan (2013) describe three tiers of vocabulary that are useful when selecting words to teach (see the chart on page 105). They recommend providing robust instruction in Tier 2 words because these words have high utility and nuanced meanings. Picture books are an excellent source of Tier 2 words. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan suggest six words per week for explicit instruction for young students. Explicit vocabulary instruction should include the following: multiple exposures to the word, definition and context are provided for the word, and students are engaged with the word to help them process it. This strategy provides a routine for explicit word instruction that incorporates those recommendations.

## Materials

- picture book to be read aloud
- illustration, photograph, or realia of the vocabulary words (*optional*)

## Process

1. Preview a text you will read to students and identify five to six Tier 2 vocabulary words (see page 105) that you will introduce to students using explicit instruction.
  - Which words are students unlikely to know the meanings of?
  - Which words are likely to be used often in other contexts?
  - Which words require more explicit instruction due to nuanced meanings or other aspects? For example, students are more likely to require explicit instruction to understand the word *satisfy* than to understand the word *twirl*.

2. Select a word to introduce to students, for example the word *protect*. Introduce the word using the steps below at a quick pace. The whole routine should only take a few minutes. (See pages 106–107 for a detailed example of these steps.)
3. Say the word. Write the word on the board or display it so students can see it.
4. Clap or tap the syllables in the word; then have students clap the syllables with you.
5. Provide context for the word by using it in your own sentence or reading how it is used in a book.
6. Give an accurate, kid-friendly definition for the word. If possible, display an illustration, photograph, realia, or other representation of the word.
7. Discuss if the word sounds similar to another word or if there is an additional meaning for the word.
8. Have students interact with the word; for example, act out the word, create a hand gesture for the word, provide examples and non-examples, and so on. Have students repeat the word.
9. Plan for and provide intentional repeated exposure to the word over the following days.

## Examples of Tiered Vocabulary for a Bugs Unit

| Tier          | Definition   | Examples   |
|---------------|--|--|
| <b>Tier 1</b> | Tier 1 words are heard daily in common communication, not content-specific words. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) identify Tier 1 words as general oral vocabulary words. These are words children will likely learn on their own.       | ant, bee, bug, snail, ladybug, crawl, fly, egg, wing, head                   |
| <b>Tier 2</b> | Tier 2 words are more sophisticated. These words are often synonyms for Tier 1 words but show more nuance. They have high utility across many situations and disciplines. In fact, these words are often called “the language of books.” | flutter, squirm, sting, cycle, section, protect, pair, bright, stage         |
| <b>Tier 3</b> | These domain-specific vocabulary words are specific to a particular topic, subject, or concept. Tier 3 words are often found in bold print and in the glossary in nonfictional texts.  | metamorphosis, chrysalis, larva, antennae, thorax, entomologist, exoskeleton |

## SECTION III:

# Writing

The strategies in this section correspond with three domains of emergent writing that need to be addressed when teaching young children (Puranik and Lonigan 2014). These domains are conceptual knowledge, or young learners' awareness of the purpose and meaning of print; procedural knowledge, skills in the mechanics of writing; and generative knowledge, which refers to the ability to write to convey ideas.

| Strategy                               | Skills and Understandings Addressed |                      |                         |
|--|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
|  | Purpose and Meaning of Print        | Mechanics of Writing | Writing to Convey Ideas |
| Print-Rich Environment                 |                                     |                      |                         |
| Multisensory Letter Formation Practice |                                     |                      |                         |
| Name Writing                           |                                     |                      |                         |
| Morning Message                        |                                     |                      |                         |
| Picture Word Chart                     |                                     |                      |                         |
| Experience, Talk, Write                |                                     |                      |                         |
| Journal Writing                        |                                     |                      |                         |
| Predictable Sentences                  |                                     |                      |                         |
| The Big Three                          |                                     |                      |                         |

# Picture Word Chart

## Objectives

- Expand knowledge and use of a wide variety of words.
- Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts.
- Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to communicate ideas.

## Background Information

This strategy supports oral language skills and vocabulary development that in turn support composing written pieces. It is effective with young learners, both native English speakers and English language learners. The teacher shares a picture that includes familiar items and engages children in identifying the items, labeling them, and discussing and writing about the picture. Through this process students “witness the transformation from oral to written expression” (Calhoun 1999, 25) as they connect an object in the picture with a spoken word, and then with a printed word. This strategy is a shortened version of the Picture Word Inductive Model (Calhoun 1999).

## Materials

- picture with familiar objects or scenes
- sticky notes

## Process

1. Choose a picture that can generate many words related to a current topic of study.
2. Display the picture on chart paper, leaving a border of white space around the picture for labeling objects. Or, if you are using a picture from an item such as a Big Book, you can use sticky notes to label objects in the picture.
3. Share the picture with students. Tell students that you are going to “shake out” all of the words from this picture. Ask, “What do you see?”
4. After a student names an object, label it by drawing a line from the object and writing the word. Spell the word aloud as you write it. When you are finished, have students echo you as you say and spell the word again.
5. Continue the process of identifying and labeling objects in the picture.
6. Review the chart, pointing to each word and reading it aloud together, while tracing the line to the object. Tell the students you will be using the chart again tomorrow.

7. The next day, review the chart by pointing to the words and having students echo read them after you.
8. Ask who has something they would like to say about the picture. Then help children construct sentences about it. Some children may provide a complete sentence. Others may share a word or two; help those children expand their thoughts as needed.
9. Record the sentences, reading each word aloud and having children read the word after you. Continue this process to record several sentences. Then reread all the sentences and have the children echo read them.

## Differentiation

Ask questions such as, “What is happening in this picture? Can you describe the \_\_\_?” This elicits more information and supports students as they describe the picture. The Picture Word Chart can support more in-depth word study when students are ready. Invite students to find ways the words are alike, for example, common beginning letters, rhyming words, and so on. Choose several of the words based on phonetic targets and create a set of vocabulary cards for each student to use for other reading and writing activities.

## Picture Word Chart Example

