

# Helping Your Beginning Reader at Home: Workshops for Parents

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## Session 1—Letter/Sound Relationships

*The most important first step to reading is knowing the sound made by each letter. In this session, parents will learn how to teach and reinforce the relationships between what letters look like and what sounds they make, then discuss how to apply this knowledge to reading and writing new words.*

### **CONCEPT OF PRINT**

Concept of print is the ability to recognize that:

- Print moves from left to right
- The spaces in a line of text indicate boundaries between words
- Words carry meaning

To check if your child understands concepts of print, show him or her a book.

- Can your child show you the front and back of the book?
- Can your child identify a letter? A word?
- Does your child know which direction to read in?
- Point to a period at the end of a sentence and ask your child why it is there. Can he/she tell you that it means you should stop or pause reading?
- Can your child accurately point to the words as you read?

If you realize your child does not yet understand the concepts of print, that's OK! Just be sure to point these things out when you read to him or her, and he/she will pick up on them soon enough.

The last item on the list is especially important for beginning readers: *Can your child point to the words as you read?* This is called the Concept of Word. If your child cannot yet correctly point to the words as you read, please keep working on this. Point to the words together, then, over time, encourage him or her to point alone.

Teachers often use nursery rhymes, which children can memorize easily, to figure out whether a child has the concept of word.

- This is a short video of a child who does not yet understand the concept (she gets off track while pointing to the words): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALBwloeFXTg>
- This video shows a child who does understand the concept (he gets off track, but realizes it and corrects himself): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgD-ThYQWb4>

## **ALPHABETIC PRINCIPLE**

*Phonemes*: The smallest sounds into which speech can be broken

*Graphemes*: The letters or groups of letters that are used to represent phonemes in written language

Beginning readers need to understand that the letters they see represent the sounds they *say* and *hear*.

It is important to find out which letters and sounds your child already knows. To do so, print **Handout 1.01**, the **Letter Name/Sound Identification Assessment**. [[Handout 1.01](#)]

- **Section A.1 (Uppercase Letter Names)**: Ask your child to say the *name* of each letter as you point to it. Keep track of any letters he/she misses on your scoring sheet.
- **Section A.2 (Lowercase Letter Names)**: In the same way, ask your child to say the name of each letter. Some letters are repeated because they can be written different ways (“a” or “ɑ,” for example).
- **Section A.3 (Letter-Sounds)**: This time, ask your child to tell you the *sound* each letter makes (not the name). Some letters have more than one sound.
  - For vowels, you want them to say the “short” vowel sound (for example, /a/ as in “at”). If they say the “long” vowel sound first (like you would hear in “ate”), ask if they know another sound.
  - Do the same thing with “c” (if they give you a “soft” sound, as in “cent”) and “g” (if they give you a “soft” sound, as in “giraffe”).

Giving this brief assessment helps you narrow down the letter names and sounds your child needs to work on the most. Give it again every month or so until you see that your child has no problem identifying all the letter names and sounds.

In addition to recognizing the names and sounds of letters, your child also needs to know how to write them. Try asking your child to write letters on paper using colorful markers or pencils, or have them use a dry-erase board and markers. Children also love making letters from Legos or Play-Dough!

## **MAGNETIC LETTERS**

Keep a set of magnetic letters on the fridge or with a cookie sheet. You can play little games with them, even while you’re preparing dinner or taking care of younger children. Ask your child questions related to both the *sound* and the *name* of the letters, like:

- *Can you find the “h”?*
- *Can you find the letter that begins with /b/ like “banana”?*
- *Can you find the letters in your name?*
- *Can you find the letter that comes after “e”?*
- *What sound do you hear at the end of “cat”? Can you find the letter that makes that sound?*

The whole set can be overwhelming for brand-new readers, so start with fewer letters.

If you don't have magnetic letters, you can use other things with letters on them, like Scrabble tiles, stickers, and blocks.

## **PHONEMIC AWARENESS**

It is very important that beginning readers can hear the separate sounds (phonemes) in words. ***Practicing this skill is one of the best things you can do for your child's reading development.***

*Phoneme Segmentation* is being able to separate a word into its individual sounds. For example, a reader understands that the word "mat" is made up of three sounds:

/m/ + /a/ + /t/

Use the **Elkonin boxes** printed on **Handout 1.02** to help your child learn to hear and identify the different sounds in words. [[Handout 1.02](#)] Start with the side with two boxes. Say aloud a simple, one-syllable word like *mat*, *can*, *dog*, *him*, and *not*. Ask your child to push one penny (or other token) into the first box for the first part of the word, /c/. Then, ask him or her to push the other penny into the second box, for /am/.

Once your child can separate the two sounds consistently, start using three boxes—one for each of the three sounds.

*Phoneme Blending* is being able to take the separate sounds and blend them into a word. For example, a reader understands that the three sounds /f/ + /i/ + /n/ make up the word "fin."

Practice phoneme blending orally. Ask your child to "guess" what word you're thinking of, using simple one-syllable words, like with segmenting. Start with two word parts, like /h/ and /ot/-the child should guess the word "hot."

## **CARD GAMES**

You can use many different types of cards to play these "guess what I'm thinking" games. Be creative—mostly any cards with pictures will do. I like to use sets you can find at the Dollar Tree. Complete directions for using different types of cards can be found in **Handout 1.03, Phonemic Awareness Card Games**. [[Handout 1.03](#)] Briefly, here is what to do:

1. Lay out three cards. In this example, let's say they feature animals—a fox, a goat, and a dog.
2. Say, "I'm thinking of an animal that begins with the /d/ sound." Your child will hand you the dog picture. Say, "You're right!"
3. Replace the dog picture with another animal—perhaps a snake. Repeat the sentence with either the /s/ (for *snake*), /f/ (for *fox*), or /g/ (for *goat*) sound.
4. Keep replacing and guessing until you run out of cards.

There are many ways to play this type of game:

- You can reverse roles and let your child let you guess what he/she is thinking.
- Instead of the beginning sound, you can give them the ending sound of the word you are thinking of.
- Or, instead of using *sounds*, give your child the *name* of the beginning letter.
- As your child learns to recognize letters and sounds more automatically, add more pictures to increase the challenge.

## **ABC BOOKS**

Reading alphabet books together is a fun and simple way to reinforce your child’s knowledge of letter names and sounds. Some of my favorites are:

- *LMNO Peas* by Keith Baker
- *The Alphabet City* by Stephen T. Johnson
- *G is for Goat* by Patricia Polacco
- *The Sleepy Little Alphabet: A Bedtime Story from Alphabet Town* by Judy Sierra
- *Dr. Seuss’s ABC* by Dr. Seuss
- *Museum ABC* by the Metropolitan Museum of Art
- *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault

Creating your own alphabet book with your child can be even more beneficial, because children love rereading books they wrote themselves!

Focus on one letter at a time, starting with A. Write an A on the center of a piece of copy paper. Draw simple pictures of objects or people whose names start with A. (Stick figures are fine! You can use stickers, too.) Add the names of all the people in your child’s daily life.

You can hang the pages on the wall until you finish all 26 pages. That gives your child an easy visual reference (and reminds both of you to keep working on it!). When all the pages are finished, staple them together into a book. If possible, slide them into plastic sleeves and place into a three-ring binder to make it “fancier.” Have your child read the book to anyone who will listen!

## **ABC BINGO**

**Handout 1.04** contains an **ABC Bingo** game with eight Bingo cards (four with uppercase letters and four with lowercase). [[Handout 1.04](#)] The last two pages are small cards to print and cut apart (cardstock works best if you have it). Shuffle those cards and use them to “call” the game. You can either:

- Say the *name* of the letter (“F”)
- Say the *sound* the letter makes (/f/)
- Say a *word* that begins with the letter (“fish”)

## **ABC MEMORY**

The **ABC Memory** game can be found in **Handout 1.05**. [[Handout 1.05](#)] Print the game on colored cardstock (if possible). Cut up each of the squares containing uppercase and lowercase letters. Cut them apart, mix them up, and place facedown on a table. Take turns drawing two cards, trying to match the upper- and lowercase pairs (“E” and “e,” for example). If a player makes a match, he or she gets an extra turn.

Start with five or six letter pairs, then work your way up to using the whole set at once!

## **PICTURE and WORD SORTS**

Many teachers use picture sorts and word sorts to teach spelling and beginning reading. The child is given a set of words or pictures at the beginning of the week. The child cuts them apart, then practices sorting and writing them in various ways throughout the week, usually gluing them into a notebook on Fridays. As the parent, I don’t necessarily recommend that you introduce this practice as it can be pretty time-consuming and may take away from the other short, “game” activities I’ve recommended already. But, *if your child’s teacher assigns this work*, please ensure your child completes it, as it can be very beneficial for helping your child recognized patterns within words and relationships among words and sounds.

If your child is not doing word and/or picture sorts with his or her teacher and you want to give it a try, many resources are available online.

## **RHYMING BOOKS**

Finally, rhyming books and songs are great for helping children separate the sounds in words. For example, if they know that “moo” and “boo” rhyme, they will be able to understand that it’s the beginning sound (/m/ and /b/) that makes the two words different. Some of my favorite rhyming books include:

- *Hop on Pop* by Dr. Seuss
- *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss
- *The Llama, Llama* books by Anne Dewdney
- *Rhyming Dust Bunnies* by Jan Thomas
- *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?* by Bill Martin, Jr.

## **GOOGLE DRIVES LINK**

Handouts can be found at the following link: [Helping Your Beginning Reader Workshop Handouts](#)