



EDUCATIONAL DYSLEXIA INSTRUCTION

UNLEASHING BRILLIANCE, ONE MIND AT A TIME

PHONEMIC AWARENESS:

The Foundation of Reading

Understanding the most important
first step in becoming a reader.



Strong beginnings
build **confident**
readers.

WHAT IS PHONEMIC AWARENESS?



Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, think about, and manipulate the individual speech sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. It is an auditory language skill—it involves listening and speaking, not letters or print.

For example, a child with strong phonemic awareness can:



Recognize
that cat and cap
begin with the
same sound.



Identify
the first, middle,
or last sound in
a word.



Blend
sounds together
to make a
word.



Break
a word apart into
its individual
sounds.



Add, delete,
or substitute
sounds to create
new words.



Hear
similarities and
differences in the
sounds of spoken
words.



Phonemic awareness is part of a broader skill called **phonological awareness**, which also includes rhyming, syllables, alliteration, and onset-rime activities.



WHY IS PHONEMIC AWARENESS SO IMPORTANT?



Reading is not a natural process. Our brains are naturally wired to develop spoken language, but reading requires the brain to build entirely new connections between speech sounds (phonemes) and written letters (graphemes).

If a child cannot clearly hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words, learning that letters represent those sounds becomes extremely difficult.



Without strong phonemic awareness, children often struggle to:



Decode unfamiliar words



Spell words phonetically



Recognize words automatically



Read with fluency and confidence



Comprehend what they read



Research consistently identifies phonemic awareness as one of the strongest predictors of future reading success.



AN IMPORTANT PERSPECTIVE

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“If a student cannot perceive contrasts in speech-sound units, and cannot conceptualize the identity, number, and sequence of sounds in syllables and words, he or she has no way to verify the letter-sound compatibility in spelling and reading words.”

— **Patricia Lindamood**

Co-founder of Lindamood-Bell
Learning Processes®

A HELPFUL ANALOGY



Imagine trying to understand someone speaking underwater. You might hear that someone is talking, but the individual sounds are muffled together.

Now imagine being asked to spell every word you hear.

That is similar to what many children with weak phonemic awareness experience. The sounds inside words are difficult to separate, making it challenging to connect those sounds to letters when reading and spelling.



Building strong phonemic awareness gives children the ability to hear and work with sounds—an essential foundation for reading, spelling, and lifelong learning.



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WHAT DOES POOR PHONEMIC AWARENESS LOOK LIKE?



Children with weak phonemic awareness may:

- ✓ Have difficulty hearing individual sounds in words
- ✓ Struggle to blend sounds into words
- ✓ Struggle to break words into individual sounds
- ✓ Confuse similar sounding words
- ✓ Have difficulty learning letter-sound relationships
- ✓ Guess while reading instead of decoding
- ✓ Spell words the way they vaguely sound rather than analyzing each sound



COMMON SPEECH EXAMPLES

- “tookie” instead of “cookie”
- “pus-get-ti” instead of “spaghetti”
- “free” instead of “three”
- “baf” instead of “bath”
- “bafroom” instead of “bathroom”
- “comferble” instead of “comfortable”
- etc.



Speech differences alone do not diagnose dyslexia, but persistent difficulty perceiving and manipulating speech sounds can be an important indicator that further evaluation is appropriate.



PHONEMIC AWARENESS VS. PHONICS



PHONEMIC AWARENESS		PHONICS
Hearing sounds		Connecting sounds to letters
Spoken language		Written language
No print involved		Uses letters and words
Auditory skill		Reading and spelling skill
Develops first		Builds on phonemic awareness

THE GOOD NEWS

Phonemic awareness can be taught! With explicit, systematic instruction, most children make remarkable progress learning to hear, manipulate, and use speech sounds. As these foundational skills improve, reading and spelling become more accurate, more automatic, and much less frustrating.

When children understand how spoken sounds connect to written letters, they develop the confidence to become successful readers.



EVIDENCE-BASED SOURCES



The importance of phonemic awareness in reading acquisition is supported by decades of research. Below are just a few of the many evidence-based sources that inform our teaching and practice.



- **National Reading Panel. (2000).** *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction.* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.



- **Kilpatrick, D. A. (2015).** *Essentials of assessing, preventing, and overcoming reading difficulties* (2nd ed.). Wiley.



- **Ehri, L. C. (2005).** Development of sight word reading and orthographic mapping: A research review. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 9(1), 5–24.



- **International Dyslexia Association. (2024).** *Dyslexia fact sheets.* <https://dyslexiaida.org/fact-sheets>



- **Moats, L. C. (2020).** *Speech to print: Language essentials for teachers* (2nd ed.). Brookes Publishing.



High-quality, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness is one of the most powerful ways we can set children up for a lifetime of reading success. The research is clear—and the impact is life-changing.

