



SpeechWise

Phonological Awareness Classroom Strategies

What is Phonological Awareness?

Phonological Awareness is an awareness of the sound structure (phonological structure) of a spoken sentence or word.

It includes hearing rhymes, clapping syllables, identifying first sounds, and blending or segmenting sounds in words. These “**listening skills**” form the foundation for reading, spelling, and clear speech. Try using these simple strategies to support phonological awareness in the classroom...

Tip 1: Use Multisensory learning

Speech is **only heard** and sounds are fast-moving and disappear quickly! This makes speech very difficult for children to analyse.

Use a child's other senses to help them reflect on the structure of sentences/words, e.g.:

- **Gestures** to mark the beginning, middle and end of a word
- **Movements** e.g. clapping and **visual cues** e.g. a row of drums to mark syllables
- Articulatory cues, such as the **feel and the sight of mouth movements** to help children to identify sounds e.g. “the sound is made with your mouth wide open”



Tip 2: Tune in to Listening

Children need to hear and attend to sounds before they can link them to letters.

- Play “**listening walks**” – what sounds can you hear around school?
- **Guess the sound** games: animal noises, instruments, environmental sounds.
- **Hide and seek with sound** – children close their eyes and listen for the location of the sound.





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Tip 3: Play with Rhymes

Rhyming builds sound awareness and memory for word patterns

- Read nursery rhymes and rhyming stories – leave off the last word for children to fill in.
- Play “Does it rhyme?” with picture cards cat–hat vs. dog–pen.
- Create silly rhymes with names or classroom objects.



Tip 4: Clap, tap and move to syllables

Breaking words into beats helps children notice word parts.

- Clap, stomp, or drum the beats in names or topic words.
- Make a “syllable train” – children stand in line for each beat in a word.
- Syllable jigsaws – cut words into syllable pieces and rebuild them together (make your own or see Twinkl),
- Write words on paper, then “chop” them into syllables before putting them back together (no spaces between syllables to show they belong to the same word).



Tip 5: Words in Sentences – Make it Visual!

Help children understand that sentences are made up of separate words.

- Write a sentence and chop it up into its words, then reconstruct it, with clear finger spaces, so the child can clearly see the different words.
- Use post-it notes, ask the child to speak their sentence, then make a sentence of post-its, one for each word in the sentence.
- Say a sentence. Ask the child to build a tower by adding one block for each spoken word. Talk about how tall/short the tower is (liken this to how long/short the sentence is).





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Tip 6: Teach Useful Concepts

Concept words help children reflect on the structure of words. These need to be taught explicitly.

- First/last: practise in daily routines (who's first in the line?) or with toys in a race.
- Long/short: compare word length by clapping or counting syllables.
- Same/different: useful for identifying rhyming and non-rhyming words.
- Reinforce these ideas through play and visual supports.

Tip 7: Spot the first sound

- Play "I spy" using sounds (e.g., "I spy something beginning with /s/").
- Group pictures or objects by starting sound.
- Use mirrors to look at how mouths move for different sounds.

Tip 8: Blend and segment orally

Practise putting sounds together and pulling them apart.

- Use sound buttons, blocks, or steps for each sound.
- Blend orally: "Can you guess my word? /c/-/a/-/t/."
- Segment for spelling: "What sounds can you hear in dog?"

Want to learn more?

Read the full blog:

"Before Phonics: What Every Teacher Should Know About Phonological Awareness"

