

# Handout: Teaching Phonics

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Phonics instruction helps students make the connection between the sounds of English and the letters that represent the sounds. This skill is necessary for students to be able to decode the words on a page. Below are the basic steps for teaching a phonics element or principle.

## Steps for Teaching Phonics

1. Identify the letter for the phonics lesson and write the small (lowercase) letter. Begin by teaching students to recognize the small letter because the majority of letters they see will be lowercase. Students repeat the name of the letter.
2. Select words from the lesson that begin with the letter and sound. The number of words you pick should be enough to provide students with several examples but not overwhelm them. Start with three to five words; adjust accordingly. Explain that these words begin with the sound the letter makes, then model the sound. Say the words and have students listen for the sound. Write the words on the board and read them again.
3. Ask students to read the words. Do this two to three times. Always ask students to “read” words, not “say” words, to reinforce the fact that they are reading.
4. Ask students to pick a keyword. Explain that they will use that word to help them remember, model, and produce the sound of the letter. Ask students to model the sound of the letter.
5. Ask students for examples of other words that begin with this sound. Write these words on the board. Ask students to read these words.
6. Give students examples of words that end with the sound and letter. Write these words on the board and read them. Ask students to read the words. Ask students for examples of other words that end in the sound. Write these on the board and ask students to read them.

Once students are comfortable identifying the letter sound at the beginning and end of words, provide examples of words that have the sound and letter in the middle. Write these words on the board and read them. Ask students to read the words. Ask students for examples of other words that have the sound in the middle of the word. Write these on the board and ask students to read them.

7. Review the name, sound, and keyword for the phonics element.
8. Students write the letter, including the capital, keyword, and other words they want to learn.

## Suggestions

- Keywords to use as examples of phonics elements and principles can come from anywhere: a published story, a picture, student generated materials, real world materials, and a student's own vocabulary.
- When teaching consonants, be sure not to confuse individual sounds with blends (/br/ /tr/) and digraphs (/sh/ /th/).
- When teaching vowel sounds, you may find it necessary to focus more on recognizing the letter and sound in the middle of the word. Use short, single syllable words as examples.
- Another approach you may see is to teach multiple phonics elements per lesson, but to focus on learning one example for each element (this is the approach in *Laubach Way to Reading*). Either method is appropriate. The one used above helps students recognize more words in print more quickly, while teaching multiple phonics elements helps students recognize more phonics elements in print more quickly.

## Sequence of Phonics Instruction

In phonics instruction, there is a customary sequence for introducing different elements and principles. It begins with the easier elements and progresses to more difficult elements and principles. Of course, you can adjust this sequence to accommodate students' specific needs or questions.

- Single consonant sounds
- Short vowels
- Long vowels
- Consonant blends and digraphs
- Other common vowel teams
- Additional phonics elements and principles

*Adapted from Tutor 8 and Teaching Adults: A Literacy Resource Handbook*