

— Introduction —

The alphabet is a wondrous invention, perhaps the greatest of all times. This writing system allows one who is fluent in spoken language to quickly become fluent in written language. By representing the speech sounds in spoken words, the alphabet enables the reader to translate printed words into their spoken equivalents. Spoken equivalents can then be recognized in much the same way that speech is recognized.

Using an alphabet is different from understanding and producing speech in at least one important way. This difference concerns how aware one needs to be of the sounds of language. Spoken language does not require a conscious awareness of the speech sounds in words. Speech is produced and understood automatically, with little conscious attention given to speech sounds. An alphabetic language, on the other hand, requires explicit speech sound awareness. Because the alphabet represents speech sounds, the beginning reader must become aware of these sounds in order to understand how the alphabet works.

Awareness of speech sounds is not always easy for young children. There is considerable variability between young children in their speech sound awareness. This variability appears to be a major determinant of how quickly and easily children learn to read an alphabetic language.

Sounds Abound is designed to help young children become aware of the speech sounds in words and how the alphabet represents these sounds.

Overview of *Sounds Abound*

Sounds Abound is divided into five sections:

- *Speech Sound Awareness* is a list of references that offer practice in sound repetition and sound play. These materials can be used with young children or those with very limited phonological awareness as an introduction to the sounds of language.
- *Rhyme* more explicitly draws children's attention to the sounds of rhyming words. Materials in this section require children to make judgments about rhymes and produce rhyming words. Rhyming games and songs are included to help children become aware of rhyme in a fun, interactive way.
- *Beginning and Ending Sounds* draws children's attention to the beginning and ending sounds of words. Activities require children to make judgments about the sounds in words and to produce words with the same beginning sounds. Sound games and songs are also included to help children learn about the sounds in words.

- *Segmenting and Blending* teaches children to segment and blend the sounds in words. Segmentation and blending are introduced first for syllables and then for phonemes.
- *Putting Sounds Together with Words* introduces an abbreviated alphabet to teach children how letters are used to represent the sounds of words.

Pretests and Posttests are included for several of the sections of this book to help determine children's speech sound awareness.

Not all children will need to start at the beginning of this program or complete all of the activities at each level. Some children may only require limited exposure to these materials in order to gain the necessary speech sound awareness to read an alphabetic language. On the other hand, some children will need much repetition of these materials in order to acquire speech sound awareness.

This program is intended to be used as a supplement to more comprehensive reading programs. Although speech sound awareness is the key to understanding the alphabet, there is much more to skilled reading than alphabetic knowledge. Skilled readers can use the alphabet to recognize words, but more importantly, they understand the meaning of what they read. Therefore, reading instruction must also provide children with the skills and opportunities to learn to comprehend what they read.

What is Phonological Awareness?

Speech sound awareness, or phonological awareness, is the conscious awareness of the sounds of language. It is the ability to reflect on the sounds in words separate from the meanings of words. Phonological awareness includes:

- the awareness of the suprasegmental aspects of speech, such as phonological length, voice quality, and intonation.
- the awareness of the segmental properties of speech, such as the appreciation that words may rhyme or begin/end with the same sound segment.
- more analytical knowledge which allows one to divide words into syllables or phonemes and to count, add, or delete these sound segments.

Early in life, young children show little awareness of the sounds in words. Their attention is focused on the meaning of words. The sounds that make up words go unnoticed. However, during the preschool years, most children begin to show interest in the sounds of words. Preschool children may comment on the fact that a word sounds odd, that it rhymes, or that it begins with the same sound as another word. Preschool children also frequently engage in sound play activities in which they create rhyming or alliterative sequences.

The development of phonological awareness appears to be related to both early literacy experiences and cognitive-linguistic development. Research suggests that early experience with nursery rhymes and other literacy materials may foster children's awareness of the sounds of language. For example, researchers have shown that children's knowledge of nursery rhymes at age three is related to their sensitivity to rhyme and phonemes at ages four to six.

In addition to literacy experience, phonological awareness appears to develop with maturation of a specific cognitive-linguistic ability. This emerging ability, which is independent of general intelligence, allows children to more fully reflect on the sounds in words.

How is Spoken Language Related to Reading?

Reading is a language-based activity. Beginning readers can use the language knowledge they have acquired through speaking and listening. This knowledge plays an important role in understanding written language. Children's vocabulary and knowledge of sentence and discourse structures is essential for comprehending what they read.

Comprehension of written materials is the primary goal of most reading, but a major task facing beginning readers is learning how to recognize written words. Beginning readers can use their knowledge of spoken language to help in written word recognition. Semantic and syntactic knowledge can provide the contextual support that may allow children to predict and identify some unfamiliar words.

In an alphabetic language, there's an even richer source of spoken language knowledge that can be used for the purpose of word recognition. An alphabetic language uses a symbol system that represents the sounds of words. By converting a sequence of letters into a spoken form, the reader can recognize unfamiliar written words on the basis of a previously acquired spoken vocabulary.

How is Phonological Awareness Related to Reading?

Beginning readers must gain a conscious awareness of the phonemes in words to learn to use an alphabetic language. This awareness of phonemes generally does not come naturally with spoken language development. In spoken language, speech sounds are produced and understood automatically, below the level of conscious awareness. Most preschool and kindergarten children lack an awareness of the individual phonemes in words. These children do not realize that words can be divided into phonemes. However, many children can divide words into syllables and have an appreciation of the fact that words may rhyme or have similar beginnings and endings.

Developing a conscious awareness of phonemes generally requires some explicit instruction. For most children, this comes in first grade when they learn the alphabet and how it works. Children learn how to divide words into phonemes and represent these phonemes with letters. This sound-symbol correspondence serves as the basis for learning to read an alphabetic language.

Research indicates that how quickly children become proficient in using the alphabet to read is related to their phonological awareness. Studies have consistently found differences in phonological awareness between good and poor readers. Children who enter first grade with some awareness of the sounds of language and who quickly learn that words can be divided into phonemes generally become the better readers in the early grades. On the other hand, children who begin school with a limited appreciation of rhyme and alliteration and who struggle with learning to segment phonemes, may become poor readers.

Research has also shown that differences in phonological awareness can be measured before children begin school and that these differences are predictive of reading success in school. For example, studies have shown that measures of rhyme detection and syllable segmentation in kindergarten are among the best predictors of reading in the early school grades.

Phonological awareness appears to be particularly difficult for children with reading disabilities. These children often have very little awareness of speech sounds and experience great difficulties learning to segment words into phonemes. These problems have led researchers to conclude that deficits in phonological awareness may be a primary cause of many early reading disabilities.

Recent studies have shown that readers who have problems acquiring phonological awareness can benefit from systematic training in phonological awareness. Studies have shown that these children can be taught to become more aware of speech sounds and that this awareness can have a direct effect on their early reading achievement. *Sounds Abound* is an outgrowth of this research. Many of the techniques employed in these training studies have been incorporated into *Sounds Abound*.

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