

Pre-phonics

(Also called Phonological Awareness)

Phonological awareness is an important set of skills to develop throughout early childhood and primary school. It is strongly linked to later reading and spelling success.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, move or change sounds, called phonemes, in spoken words. Phonemic awareness is an important basic skill that gets students ready to develop into readers.

Before introducing children to letters of the alphabet, they need to be aware of the sounds that words make. This can be taught through some of the following strategies:

- Listening for the syllables in words, especially names, e.g. *Re-becc-a*. They can tap or clap the syllables while saying the word.
- Listening for words that rhyme, e.g. in Nursery rhymes – Twinkle twinkle little star, how I wonder what you ...
- Listening for sounds at the start/end of words (for **c-at**; **do-g**)
- Putting sounds together to make a word, e.g. What word am I saying? st – o – p
- Alliteration – e.g. Make up silly rhymes such as “Six silly sausages sat on a stove.”

The importance of phonological awareness

The awareness of the sounds that make up words is critical to being able to blend sounds together for later reading and spelling. Note that ‘phonics’ is the association of sounds and letters, which follows phonological awareness.

Educators can introduce these concepts to young children through:

- songs
- rhymes and games
- shared book reading

Note: Phonological awareness activities should be performed without using any written words or letters. It is about the sounds that the words make, not about the letters we use to spell them. The sounds of the alphabet must be taught before introducing letters. A good way to teach initial sounds is through an object or picture collection. Ask the child to say the SOUND the picture/object begins with – “What can you hear at the beginning of ‘cat’ “?

“I spy” is a good game to develop this skill. (I spy with my little eye, something in the room beginning with ... “

Key developmental milestones

Early communicators (birth - 18 months):

- enjoy book reading
- enjoy nursery rhymes and songs

- may attempt to sing or chant rhymes/songs.

Early language users (12 - 36 months):

- Start to hear gaps between words in sentences
- Showing interest in syllables and rhymes.

Language and emergent literacy learners (30 - 60 months):

- Start to break up words into syllables (for example clapping syllables)
- Start to recognise/produce rhymes
- from 36 months: start to recognise words with the same initial sound
- guessing the word being sounded, e.g. c-a-t

