

# CORE SKILL: COMMUNICATE

## Phonological Awareness



### What You Need to Know

Phonological awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate different units of sound within spoken language. Phonological awareness is a necessary development for learning to read and is one of the strongest predictors of reading success. Phonological awareness tasks can be difficult because they require young children to take what is most intuitive – which is thinking about what words *mean* – and focus instead on something more abstract – which is the way words *sound*. Phonological awareness is a slowly developing skill that continues to develop through the elementary school years. Explicit instruction paired with fun activities that continue to reinforce the sound patterns of language are important ways to build young children’s phonological awareness which is a fundamental skill to target in young children’s literacy development.

### Things to Consider

Phonological awareness is not a ‘natural’ skill – like speaking. In fact, research shows that many aspects of phonological awareness are undeveloped within adults who are illiterate or within cultures that are not literacy-based. Phonological awareness evolves as a function of children’s exposure to and interaction with print.

### Development of Phonological Awareness

Between 36 and 48 months, children may:	Between 48 and 60 months, children may:
Show rote imitation and enjoyment of rhyme and alliteration.	Demonstrate rhyme recognition.
With support, distinguish when two words rhyme and when two words begin with the same sound.	Recognize phonemic changes in words.
	Be able to count syllables and understand sounds in spoken words.

### Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of vocabulary:

- ◆ Select books that will expose children to rhymes, alliteration, and rhythmic text. Read these books often, and explicitly discuss (3-5 times) the sound features within the book.
- ◆ Play music with obvious rhyme, repeat phrases, or alliterative elements as part of the daily routine.
- ◆ Teach poems or songs with gestures or fingerplays. Set time aside to actively teach children songs and poems with specific movements that correspond to words in sentences, or clapping to syllables.
- ◆ Use language play as part of transition routines. For example, “If you are a ‘jumping jack’ with a name starting with /j/ have a seat!” Or provide multisyllabic group or table names that you can use in transitions to build syllable awareness. For example, “See if you can guess what table I am saying: but-ter-cup! (*repeat blending the syllables a bit more*). Yes! Will the buttercups have a seat!”
- ◆ Phonological awareness board games. For example, rhyming card go-fish, or Uno based on initial sounds, rhyming memory match, or matching of long (multi-syllabic) and short (single-syllable) words.



## Intentional Teaching Practices to Build Phonological Awareness

OBSERVE	<p><b>OBSERVE</b></p> <p>Observe children’s awareness of the sound structure of words. Do they show awareness of rhymes or of alliteration patterns (i.e., words beginning with the same first sound)? Do they pretend to make up rhymes, even with silly words? Are they interested in songs or poems and do they try to make up rhyming pairs or play with the sound patterns or rhythm of language (such as drawing out syllables or accentuating various syllables in words when talking ‘silly’)?</p>
FOCUS	<p><b>Label and Describe Various Units of Sound</b></p> <p>As you focus on different units of sound (e.g., words in sentences, rhyme endings in rhyming words, syllables in multisyllabic words, beginning sounds), use exaggerated stress and explicitly label the sound feature of the words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Words in sentences.</b> “I will clap to each word I say. I (<i>clap</i>) love (<i>clap</i>) summer (<i>clap</i>)! Now you fill in what you love and clap to each word.”</li> <li>◆ <b>Rhyming:</b> “Open, shut them, open, shut them, raise your hands up <i>high</i>. Open, shut them, open, shut them, time to wave <i>goodbye!</i> <i>High</i> and <i>goodbye</i> rhyme! They both have the ‘-igh’ sound at the end. Listen. H-<i>igh</i>. Good-<i>bye</i>.”</li> <li>◆ <b>Multiple syllables:</b> “One child goes to the rug for each syllable I clap. Ready? Ca-Ter-Pil-Lar (<i>go slowly, clap with each syllable</i>). That’s four syllables! So you can go - ‘ca’ (<i>point to child and clap</i>), and you - ‘ter’ (<i>point and clap</i>), and you - ‘pil’ (<i>point and clap</i>), and you - ‘ler’ (<i>point and clap</i>). Clap with me on this next one.”</li> </ul>
SCAFFOLD I	<p><b>Comment and Ask Questions about the Similarities and Differences in Sound Patterns</b></p> <p>When playing a structured phonological awareness game (with a game board or just as a ‘warm-up’ to other activities), help children ‘catch’ words that share similar or different sound patterns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Rhyming:</b> “Let’s warm-up our ears this morning. Catch the word that doesn’t rhyme! ‘Hat, bat, rhinoceros!’ That’s right, let’s do another!”</li> <li>◆ <b>Alliteration:</b> “My next group is the Brave, Bold, Bouncing Bears. Raise your hand if your name sounds similar to this group!” (If they need a hint, repeat the phrase and tell them, “Every word starts with /b/ so everyone in this group has a name that starts with /b/!”).</li> <li>◆ <b>Syllables:</b> “Which word is longer? Let’s clap to help us find out. Cat (<i>clap</i>). Cat-ter-pil-lar (<i>clap each syllable</i>). That’s right! Let’s try another...”</li> </ul>
SCAFFOLD II	<p><b>Prompt Children to Identify or Manipulate Various Units of Sound</b></p> <p>Ask children to break apart (segment) words into various units of sound or take units of sound and blend them together to make words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Onset-rime:</b> “(<i>read</i>) ‘Chicka, chicka boom boom. Will there be enough room?’ <i>Boom</i> and <i>room</i>, do they rhyme? Let’s break it up. B (<i>pause</i>) -oom; R (<i>pause</i>) -oom. Yes, they both end in... -oom. How about zoom? Break it up. Does it rhyme?”</li> <li>◆ <b>Blending sounds together to make words:</b> “Let’s guess which group goes to the next activity – put the sounds together, it’s the bu-(<i>pause</i>) ter-(<i>pause</i>) cup group! Let’s put the sounds together bu-ter-cup. Yes! The buttercups can have a seat!”</li> </ul>
KEEP IT GOING	<p>Consider what you learned from observing children on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities in the Setting the Stage into your regular routines.</p>