

# Elkonin Boxes

Elkonin Boxes are a widely-used, evidence-based practice for teaching phonemic awareness. Elkonin Boxes are very versatile. They can be used initially to teach children how to segment and blend phonemes. Then, later on, they can be used to help children learn how to connect letters to sounds, as they begin to map phonemes to letters.

## Directions

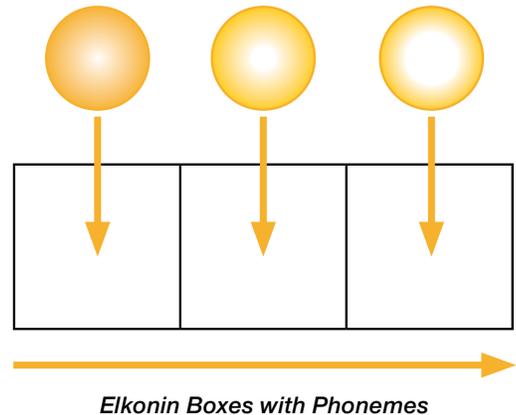
Make a short list of two- or three-sound words with continuous sounds (words beginning with f, h, l, m, n, r, s, v, z). Continuous sounds are easier for children to elongate as they differentiate sounds.

Give each child a paper with a row of two or three boxes (depending on whether you are using two- or three-sound words) and a set of colored discs (preferably each of a different color, but the same color will work as well). Have students place a colored disc above each box.

Tell students the first word on your list.

Repeat the word as a group, slowly saying each sound in the word and pulling one letter tile down into the box for each sound as it is said. Supports English language learners because the meaningfulness, the familiar vocabulary, and the immediacy of personal narratives often makes such stories “more tellable” than other kinds of stories in speakers’ first and second languages.

Have students run their finger under the boxes from left to right as you blend together the individual sounds as a group.



## Example

**Teacher** — “The word is “hat.”

**Teacher** — “/h/-/a/-/t/” (students say the sounds with the teacher and pull a disk down into a box for each sound)

**Teacher** — “h-a-t” (teachers and students blend the sounds to make the word, running their finger from left to right under the box)

## Notes

It is easier to teach students to use Elkonin Boxes during small group instruction, and they are often used as an activity for groups or individual students who need more help with phonemic awareness, in general, and segmenting or blending phonemes, in particular. But Elkonin Boxes can also be used as a whole group activity once students have learned to use them in small groups. However, only use them as a whole group activity if all students in the class need practice segmenting and blending phonemes.

Words that start with different, non-continuous consonants, like c, d, r, p, etc., can be used with Elkonin Boxes as well, but may be a little trickier initially.

As students become more familiar with the routine of segmenting and blending sounds in Elkonin Boxes, give them more responsibility for saying and blending each word independently (steps #4 and #5) rather than doing it chorally as a group. Then, as you listen to each student working, you can determine if their segmenting and blending is improving.

## Elkonin Boxes with Phonemes and Letters

This is the same as above, but you use letter tiles instead of colored discs. It is useful to use groups of letter tiles, divided into onsets (initial consonants) and rimes (middle vowel and final consonant) that can be reconfigured to make more than one word, so that you can do a sequence of Elkonin Boxes with the same letters (i.e., initial consonants (m, b, s, c) and rhyme (at) for mat, bat, sat, cat).

## Adapted From

Foorman, Barbara et al. “Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade.” (NCEE 2016-4008). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from the NCEE website: <http://whatworks.ed.gov>.