

The ultimate goal of explicitly teaching phonics skills and patterns is that children will use these skills they know to decode words in reading, and encode (spell) words in writing. To reach this goal, we need to teach a phonics skill/pattern with “transfer” in mind, and consider how children will get immediate opportunities to see how this skill applies in words, sentences, and text. To ensure that this happens, we can “teach for transfer” by introducing and practicing letter sounds and phonics patterns in four progressively more text-embedded stages:

- Stage 1: Graphophonemic Level (Letters and Sounds)
- Stage 2: Word Level
- Stage 3: Sentence Level
- Stage 4: Book and/or Sentence Set Level

In the template below, you can fill in a particular letter sound or phonics pattern you intend to teach, and then plan how you will “teach for transfer” by using the template stages to plan your instruction. You should move through all four stages with each skill you teach over the course of a few different lessons within a week. Stages 1 to 3 should ideally occur in one lesson eventually. Stage four instruction could be done in the context of shared reading, interactive writing, or Message Time Plus® later in the same day, or the following day.

Letter Sound or Phonics Pattern _____

Stage 1 Graphophonemic Level

- Tell children what sound the letter(s) make.
- Model saying the sound.
- Children practice.

Directly tell children what sound these letters or groups of letters make, what letter(s) make up this sound, and then have children make the sound—once with your guidance and once on their own.

Example Language

“This is the blend ‘bl’ (make sound). What two letter make up this blend? Remember, a blend is when we blend—or mix together—the sounds of two letters together to make the sound of both letters. Listen as I blend these sounds together ... now you try. (Show card for ‘bl’ again). Now make the sound on your own...”

Stage 2 Word Level

- Model blending this sound/ pattern in words.
- Gradually release responsibility to children to blend the sounds together w/out your guidance.
- Children practice on their own.

Model first, and then give children the opportunity to read, build, and manipulate words with the letter sound or phonics pattern taught in stage 1. After trying this together with your guidance (your voice is heard), have children try on their own. Activities could include: reading a list of the words (written out on a dry-erase board or chart paper); building the words from cards, letter, and tiles; or writing the words.

Example Language

“We learned the sound for the blend ‘bl.’ Make the sound. Now let’s make some words with that sound by pushing together our cards. I will do the first one. Watch me. I pushed together ‘bl’ and ‘ock.’ Let’s read that word. What is it? You are right, the word is ‘block.’ Let’s try another. Let’s push together ‘bl’ and ‘ack.’ What word did that make?”

Stage 3

Sentence Level

- Model reading a sentence or two that have word(s) with the sounds/patterns.
- Gradually release support to children to read the word/sentence.
- Children practice on their own.

Model first, and then have children read sentences with words that contain the letter sound or phonics pattern taught in stages 1 and 2. Use either the same words as in stage 2 in the sentences, or, different ones with the same letter sound or phonics pattern, or a mixture of both.

Increase the difficulty of this activity and gradually release responsibility to children to read the sentences over time (over a series of lessons). You may start this by reading all the words in the sentence but the underlined target word with the designated letter sounds or phonics pattern. The sentences should at first include the same words that you worked with in stage 2. You'll need to review the work of blending the sounds with the new pattern if children struggle with reading the word in context. Over time, you will no longer need to underline the word and could make sure the sentence or sentences contain new words with the skill/pattern, different from those used in stage 2.

Example Language

"We read some words that began with the blend 'bl' (make the sound for this blend). Now let's read some sentences with 'bl' words. Here is the first sentence. I am going to read the first part of the sentence and then I want you to help me with the second part of the sentence. (Read sentence pointing to each word as you read it.) 'I picked up ...' What are those next two words in the sentence? That is right—'the block.' So let's read the whole sentence together from the beginning: 'I picked up the block.' Let's try the next sentence. See if you can read it to me. It has a 'bl' word that you can sound out. That is right, the sentence says: 'Here is a blob.' Do you know what a blob is?"

Stage 4

Books or Sentence Sets

- Model reading a book and/or group of connected sentences with the sounds/patterns.
- Gradually release responsibility to children to read the words in the sentence.
- Children practice on their own.

Model first, and then have children read texts and/or sets of sentences with the words that contain the letter sound or phonics pattern taught in stages 1 and 2. Reading a word list, such as that used in stage 2, can be a good warm-up and support for book and/or sentence set work.

To choose text

- Some phonics curriculums come with text to share that contain the letter sounds or phonics patterns taught (often these could come in the form of big books, poems, nursery rhymes, or individual “decodable texts” for children to read).
- You can select poems, rhymes, big books that have evidence of words that have the skill/pattern.
- If you do not have access to text with a sound/pattern that you are teaching, you can write your own short, sentence practice sets instead: two-to-five connected sentences with the sound/pattern.
- If possible, the text you write should be meaningful to children in some way—connect to the life of the classroom, a book read aloud, or other learning that is happening. (This is not always possible, and the important part is giving them a chance to read words with this skill in the context of sentences that make sense.)

For example, if the class was studying short “a,” I might write the following three sentences on handouts for children to practice reading before or after reading a truck book: “The cat liked the truck. The cat sat in the truck. The cat sat on my hat in the back of the truck.” The handouts from sentence practice sets can be placed in notebooks or folders for children to further practice with at work time, or for homework, where they can read them aloud repeatedly to develop automaticity and fluency.

Example Language

“We just read a book about a painter who mixes paint to make different colors. Let’s read these sentences about the book. All the sentences have words with the ‘bl’ (sound out) in them. Remember we have been learning how to read words with this blend. Let’s try to read the sentences. I will begin the first one, and then you can help me when we get to the word that begins with ‘bl’:

The painter blends paint. She makes black paint. She uses the black paint to make a blob.