The process of saying individual sounds in words is known as phoneme segmentation. Phoneme segmentation— breaking words down into their individual sounds—is a basic, essential foundational reading skill, which helps children understand the relation between letters and sounds when they begin to read. This simple phoneme segmentation game can be easily played at school or at home.

Directions

1. Hold up a picture or point at an object of a three-sound word.

2. Ask children to name the picture or object.

3. Ask what the first sound in that word is (i.e., book: /b/).

4. As children become more familiar with the game, ask them for the last sound in the word also (i.e., book: /k/).

5. Once children know how to identify first and last sounds in words as well, ask them to identify the medial sounds (i.e., book: /oo/).

Example

Teacher	Holds up a picture of a hat.
Teacher	"What is this?"
Student	"hat"
Teacher	"What is the first sound in hat?"
Student	"h"

Notes

Like many phonological awareness activities, this is better initially taught in a small group. But once children understand how to do, it can also be done whole class.

When first introducing the game, it may be necessary to model a number of examples before children catch on: do some examples where you think aloud and you answer the question of what is the first sound in the word.

This game works well as a kind of informal, observational assessment of phoneme segmentation skills. However, remember it is common for children to misidentify the sounds in words when this game is first introduced. If after repeated practice with the game a child is still misidentifying sounds in words, they may need more direct instruction and practice with phoneme segmentation.

Adapted From

Kosanovich, M., Lee, L. and Foorman, B. (2020). *A Kindergarten Teacher's Guide to Supporting Family Involvement in Foundational Reading Skills* (REL 2020-016). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast