



Phonological Awareness Content Guide

This guide outlines the skills that 3- to 5-year-old children need to be taught in order for them to develop phonological awareness. *Phonological awareness* is the ability to recognize and manipulate the spoken parts of sentences and words. Phonological awareness, and in particular phonemic awareness, is one of the strongest predictors of early reading outcomes. Current research shows that children are capable of developing their skills related to the identification, isolation, and manipulation of the smallest sounds (phonemes) from an early age, without having to master phonological sensitivity first (Brady, 2020). As you plan instruction, be sure to design activities that support the skills included in this guide.

Phonological Awareness Skills

Phonemic Awareness is the ability to identify, isolate, and manipulate the smallest unit of sound within spoken words, called a *phoneme*. Some examples of this include:

- **Phoneme identity** refers to the ability to recognize the same sound (phoneme) in different words. Example: If given the words *bat*, *ball*, and *book*, a child identifies that the phoneme /b/ is the same in all three words.
- **Blending** refers to the ability to combine individual sounds (phonemes) to form a word. Example: Hearing /c/ /a/ /t/ and blending the sounds together to say *cat*.
- **Segmenting** refers to the ability to break down a word into its individual phonemes or sounds. Example: Segmenting the word *dog* into /d/ /o/ /g/.
- **Addition** involves adding a phoneme to a word to create a new word. Example: Adding /s/ to *top* makes *stop*.
- **Substitution** involves replacing one phoneme with another to form a new word. Example: Changing the /c/ in *cat* to /b/ makes *bat*.
- **Deletion** involves removing a phoneme from a word to create a new word. Example: Removing the /s/ from *stop* leaves *top*.

Phonological Sensitivity is the ability to pay attention to the larger and more salient units of speech sounds in words: rhyme, alliteration, onsets and rimes, and syllables. Some examples of this include:

- **Sound awareness** is the ability to recognize, differentiate, and respond to various sounds in the environment.
- **Word awareness** refers to the ability to discriminate between words in a sentence. Example: Recognizing that the phrase *I like dogs* consists of three different words.
- **Rhyming** is the ability to listen to the sound at the end of a word and discriminate whether two words have the same ending sound. Example: /cat/ and /mat/ have the same ending sound (they rhyme), but /cat/ and /man/ do not.
- **Beginning sound awareness (alliteration)** refers to the recognition or production of words that have the same beginning sound. Example: /bed/, /ball/, and /bus/ have the same beginning sound.
- **Onset rime** refers to the ability to break up words into their onset and rime. Onset is the part of the word before the vowel; not all words have onsets. Rime is the part of the word that rhymes, including the vowel and any final consonants. Example: In the word *bake*, /b/ is the onset and /ake/ is the rime.
- **Syllable awareness** means knowing that words are made up of parts called *syllables*. A syllable is a word part that contains a vowel, or in spoken language, a vowel sound. Example: *e/vent*, *Ma/ry*, *pa/per*.





Identify Initial Phoneme

Lesson Frame

This lesson frame is a step-by-step guide to support you as you implement the Identify Initial Phoneme strategy. The suggested language and included steps will guide you and help you become more fluent with the strategy. As you tailor the lessons and make them your own, we recommend you continue to follow the general frame of the instruction as intended.

Objective	Help children develop their skills in identifying initial phonemes through an engaging, imaginative game where they become “Sound Detectives” on a mission to find the mystery sounds
Preparation	<p>No materials needed. Optional: A magnifying glass prop or detective hat for added flair.</p> <p>Preselect 5–8 words from the following list of words that contain three distinct sounds: sun, Sam, net, seat, neat, sock, mat, sack, man, nice, nap, nut, not, mop, note, nick, rat, sit, fan, ran, sat rain, light, men, ram, lamb, mitt, fit.</p>
Small Group	
Explain and Model the Activity	<p><u>Say</u>: “Today, we’re going on a fun adventure as Sound Detectives! A <i>detective</i> is a person who looks for clues to solve mysteries. As Sound Detectives, we have to listen very carefully to solve the mystery of the missing sounds. Are you ready to be detectives?” Add dramatic flair with a magnifying glass prop or detective hat for fun!</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “First it’s my turn. I will say a word and then I will think [point to your head] and say the sound I hear at the beginning.”</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “ ____ [first word from the list].” Say the word again, this time emphasizing the first sound of the word.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “The sound I hear at the beginning is ____ [phoneme]. ____ [sound] is the sneaky sound at the start of ____ [word]! I found the clue!” Say the word again, emphasizing the initial sound.</p> <p><u>Ask</u>: “What sound do you hear at the beginning of ____ [word]?” The children repeat the initial sound (phoneme) of the word.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Yes! ____ [initial phoneme] is the sneaky sound at the start of ____ [word]. You found the clue!” Continue on until all of the preselected words and their initial sounds have been reviewed.</p>
Engage in Group Practice	<p><u>Say</u>: ““Now you are the Sound Detectives! I’ll say a word, and you’ll listen closely and think [point to your head] to find the beginning sound.”</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “ ____ [word]. Think! [point to your head] What sound do you hear at the beginning of ____ [word]?” Pause to let the children say the sound.</p> <p>If any children respond incorrectly, follow this procedure:</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “My turn!” Say the word again, emphasizing the initial sound.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Now I will think, and say the sound I hear at the beginning. The sound I hear at the beginning is ____ [phoneme]. What sound do you hear at the beginning of ____ [word]?” Pause to let the children say the sound.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Yes! /_/ is the first sound in ____ [word]. You found the mystery sound, great detective work!”</p> <p>If the children respond correctly, follow this procedure:</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Yes! /_/ is the first sound in ____ [word]. You found the mystery sound, great detective work!” Repeat this procedure with all your pre-selected words.</p>

Engage in Individual Practice	<p><u>Say</u>: “Now it’s time to take turns. I’ll say a word, and you’ll listen closely and think [point to your head] to find the beginning sound. But this time, I’m only going to call on one friend to answer each time. If I point to you and say your name then you say the sound you hear at the beginning of the word.”</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “ ____ [word]. ____ [Child’s name], it’s your turn! Think! [point to your head] What sound do you hear at the beginning of ____ [word]?” Pause to let the child say the sound.</p> <p>If the child responds incorrectly, follow this procedure:</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “My turn!” Say the word again, emphasizing the initial sound.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Now I will think, and say the sound I hear at the beginning. The sound I hear at the beginning is ____ [phoneme]. What sound do you hear at the beginning of ____ [word]?” Pause to let the child say the sound.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Yes! /_/ is the first sound in ____ [word]. You found the mystery sound, great detective work!”</p> <p>If the child responds correctly, follow this procedure:</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Yes! /_/ is the first sound in ____ [word]. You found the mystery sound, great detective work!”</p> <p>Repeat this procedure with all your preselected words and until each child has gotten to say a word at least twice. Move at a brisk pace, calling on children in an unpredictable pattern.</p>
Review	<p>If time and the children’s attention spans allow, review the words and their initial sounds used in the lesson.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Sound Detectives, let’s review our words for today and say the sound we hear at the beginning of each word. My turn!” Say the word again, emphasizing the initial sound.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Your turn! What sound do you hear at the beginning of ____ [word]?” Say the sound while the children also say the sound chorally.</p> <p><u>Repeat</u> the same routine for the rest of the words used in the lesson.</p>
Closing/ Affirmation	<p><u>Say</u>: “You did amazing detective work today! You found so many mystery sounds. Give yourselves a big detective clap!” Do a fun clap, like <i>clap-snap-clap</i>.</p> <p>End the session by allowing the children to feel successful. This happens through the use of affirmations, high fives, thumbs up, etc.</p>
Individual Child	
Explain and Model the Activity	<p><u>Say</u>: “Today, we’re going on a super fun adventure as Sound Detectives! We have to listen very carefully to solve the mystery of the missing sounds. Are you ready to be a Sound Detective?” Add dramatic flair with a magnifying glass prop or detective hat for fun!</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “First it’s my turn. I will say a word and then I will think [point to your head] and say the sound I hear at the beginning.”</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “ ____ [first word from the list].” Say the word again, this time emphasizing the first sound of the word.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “The sound I hear at the beginning is ____ [phoneme]. ____ [Sound] is the sneaky sound at the start of ____ [word]! I found the clue!” Say the word again, emphasizing the initial sound.</p> <p><u>Ask</u>: “What sound do you hear at the beginning of ____ [word]?” The child repeats the initial sound (phoneme) of the word.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Yes! ____ [Initial phoneme] is the sneaky sound at the start of ____ [word]. You found the clue!”</p> <p>Continue on until all of the preselected words and their initial sounds have been reviewed.</p>

Engage in Individual Practice	<p><u>Say</u>: “Now it’s your turn. Remember, I’ll say a word, and you’ll listen closely and think [point to your head] to find the beginning sound.”</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “ ____ [word]. Think! [point to your head] What sound do you hear at the beginning of ____ [word]?” Pause to let the child say the sound.</p> <p>If the child responds incorrectly, follow this procedure:</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “My turn!” Say the word again, emphasizing the initial sound.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Now I will think, and say the sound I hear at the beginning. The sound I hear at the beginning is ____ [phoneme]. What sound do you hear at the beginning of ____ [word]?” Pause to let the child say the sound.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Yes! /_/ is the first sound in ____ [word]. You found the mystery sound, great detective work!”</p> <p>If the child responds correctly, follow this procedure:</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “Yes! /_/ is the first sound in ____ [word]. You found the mystery sound, great detective work!” Repeat this procedure with all of the preselected words.</p>
Review	<p>If time and the child’s attention span allow, review some of the words and their initial sounds.</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “You’ve been a great sound detective today! Let’s review our words and say the sound we hear at the beginning of each word.”</p> <p><u>Say</u>: “My turn!” Say the word again, emphasizing the initial sound. “Your turn! What sound do you hear at the beginning of ____ [word]?” Say the sound while the child also says the sound chorally. Repeat the same routine for the rest of the words used in the lesson.</p>
Closing/ Affirmation	<p><u>Say</u>: “You did amazing detective work today! You found so many mystery sounds. Give yourself a big detective clap!” Do a fun clap, like <i>clap-snap-clap</i>.</p> <p>End the session by allowing the child to feel successful. This happens through the use of affirmations, high fives, thumbs up, etc.</p>



Identify Initial Phoneme Reflection Tool

The SEEDS Reflection Tool helps educators and coaches reflect on instruction and write goals for continued improvement. This tool comprises a list of key “look fors” related to Identify Initial Phoneme.

This tool can be used in several ways:

1. An educator who is implementing Identify Initial Phoneme can use the checklist to review the key parts of the lesson before they teach. Educators can identify the learning stage they are in for each instructional component.
2. An educator can use the checklists after a lesson to reflect on the components implemented and think about steps for improvement for future lessons.
3. A team member or coach can use the checklists to give feedback and suggestions after an observation. The observer can celebrate components that are fluent and identify areas that may need further development.

We suggest that you first review the definitions of the learning stages:

- **Emergent:** Learning to implement the targeted instructional component.
- **Developing:** Implements the targeted instructional component somewhat accurately. Would benefit from additional practice to improve confidence.
- **Fluent:** Implements the targeted instructional component accurately and with fluency and confidence.

IDENTIFY INITIAL PHONEMES	Emergent	Developing	Fluent	NA
Selects 5–8 words from the suggested list.				
Explains the activity.				
Models the activity.				
Engages the children in group practice using appropriate signaling (“Think! Your turn!”). • <i>What sound do you hear at the beginning of _?</i>				
Follows the error correction procedure immediately for every error in group practice. (Mark NA if the children do not make any errors.)				
Engages the children in individual practice using appropriate signaling (“Ready? Listen!”).				
Follows the error correction procedure immediately for every error in individual practice. (Mark NA if the children do not make any errors.)				
Ends the session by allowing the children to feel successful (affirmations, high fives, etc.).				
SEEDS QUALITY INTERACTIONS				
Sensitivity: Is aware of the children’s current learning stage (emergent, developing, fluent) and adapts the lesson so that the children succeed (for example, notice children-initiated feelings and interests, watch/wait/listen to children, comment about children’s work, ask a question).				
Encouragement: Encourages the children by using positive nonverbal messages and verbal affirmation (for example, smile, nod, high five, caring voice, watch/wait/listen). Number of affirmations given during lesson:				
Education: Explicitly teaches new vocabulary words.				
Development of Skills Through Doing: Provides multiple opportunities throughout the session for the children to practice the skill and feel successful.				
Self-Image: Ensures that the children are engaged, look proud, and are willing to participate.				
REFLECTION AND PLANNING				
Plans next steps for children based on the Identify Initial Phoneme Planning Tool.				
Writes SMARTIE goal(s).				
Comments and observations:				



Identify Initial Phoneme Planning Tool

SEEDS educators scaffold children's learning to help them progress in their growth and early literacy skills. Learning is scaffolded by implementing SEEDS strategies and supporting the children's equilibrium using SEEDS Qualities. Once we determine what a child or group of children need, we plan for next steps.

Remember that in addition to *what* we teach, it's also important to reflect on *how* we teach. Before you begin, use the questions on the SEEDS Qualities Reflection Tool to reflect on how your instruction aligns to the SEEDS Qualities.

Follow the steps below to help you determine what level of support to provide and plan your interactions to help each child move from emergent to developing to fluent.

1. Use observation data and any anecdotal notes you may have to determine whether the children in your care are emergent, developing, or fluent. You may wish to record which children are in which learning stage on the chart.
2. Read the recommended teaching practices and scaffolding techniques for each stage and consider the following questions:
 - *How will you differentiate your instruction to meet the needs of children in different learning stages?*
 - *What teaching practices and scaffolding techniques should you consider trying?*
3. Determine which teaching practices and scaffolding techniques related to the strategy you want to implement.
4. Make an Instructional Plan.

Child Learning Stage	Teaching Practices	Scaffolding Techniques
Emergent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning to learn how to complete the targeted skill Not yet able to perform the targeted skill reliably or with a high level of accuracy <p>Example: The children are unable to identify the initial phoneme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give the children the information before asking them to respond. Use the Think Aloud strategy to model the steps involved with the activity. Give corrective feedback for incorrect responses: “My turn, your turn” with a smile. Give family members specific activities for the targeted skill to practice at home. Use Gradual Release of Responsibility to structure learning. Give encouraging feedback. Use SEEDS Qualities to interact with the children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the Reflection Tool to reflect on your implementation of the strategy. Continue with this strategy each day. Ensure the words used have distinct sounds that the children can easily hear.
Developing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give somewhat accurate responses for targeted skill Perform targeted skill slowly Need practice to improve fluency <p>Example: The children are able to identify some initial phonemes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan repetitive activities for daily practice of targeted skill. Give corrective feedback for incorrect responses: “My turn, your turn” with a smile. Give family members specific activities for the targeted skill to practice at home. Give encouraging feedback. Use SEEDS Qualities to interact with the children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the Reflection Tool to reflect on your implementation of the strategy. Continue with this strategy each day. Continue with the same words to give the children more practice. After children consistently answer accurately, change the words used.
Fluent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give accurate responses for and are accurate, fluent, and confident with targeted skill Receive daily opportunities to review and practice the targeted skill to ensure maintenance <p>Example: The children are able to fluently and confidently identify initial phonemes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan opportunities that require the children to use the targeted skill. Plan an opportunity to learn a new skill. Notice and give feedback for using the skill in other settings (for example, dramatic play with clip board, writing a letter, using a pointer to read the book at the easel during play time). Give corrective feedback and clarify targeted skill if the child is confused. Give the child activities that allow them to correctly discriminate between similar skills (for example, rhyme and beginning sounds, letter name and letter sound). Give family members specific activities for the targeted skill to practice at home. Give encouraging feedback. Use SEEDS Qualities to interact with the children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan for strong whole-group experiences to maintain growth.

Make an Instructional Plan

Now that you have reflected on SEEDS Qualities, determined learning stages, and considered next steps based on different teaching practices and scaffolding techniques, use the chart below to make a plan. List a child or groups of children in the column on the left. Then, record your plan for next steps.

Child's/Children's Name(s)	Learning Stage	What will you do next to support the child's/children's learning? (Make sure to consider SEEDS Qualities, teaching practices, and scaffolding techniques)