

TIP SHEET 6

TEN TIPS TO ENCOURAGE PHONEMIC AWARENESS



The advice given on this tip sheet is by Lucia Smith, Speech Pathologist.

It is based on experience from her clinical work along with her work consulting with teachers and parents.

It is difficult to address all children's communication styles in a single tip sheet.

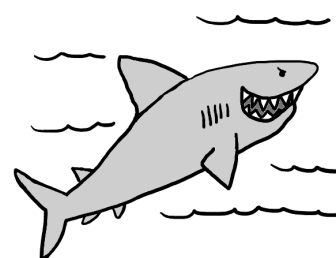
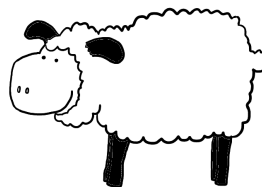
If you are concerned about your child's speech or language development, please see a speech pathologist.



© Lucia Smith 2007
www.pelican-talk.com

Phonemic awareness is the awareness that words are made up of individual sounds, the ability to perceive these sounds and the ability to “play around” with them. It is a very important pre-literacy skill. In fact “one of the most compelling and well-established findings in the research on beginning reading is **the important relationship between phonemic awareness and reading acquisition**”. (Kame-enui, et al., 1997). It is also “**the single best predictor of reading success** between kindergarten and second grade”. (Adam, Stanovich, 1995).

If you showed some young children the two pictures below and asked them why they would go together, they might say that the sheep and the shark are both animals. This is an answer relating to the actual *meaning* of the things in the picture. You might then ask “Are there any other reasons why they would go together?” Children who were phonemically aware, might have the answer - that their names both start with the same sound.



For children to be phonemically aware, they should be

encouraged to think about actual words; the sound of the word and how they might be similar or different to other words. Very young children do not do this, but from preschool onwards they can be exposed to activities that either incidentally, or more explicitly promote phonemic awareness. When a child becomes phonemically aware, they often discover the joy of playing around with the sounds that make up words.

a phoneme = a speech sound

When thinking of phonemes, remember that there are more phonemes than those represented by the 26 letters of the alphabet. The sound made by “ch” is a phoneme as are the sounds made by “th” “sh”, and “er”. When playing around with phonemes, I start mainly with consonant phonemes. Vowel phonemes can be very similar to each other and difficult for young learners to perceive (eg. the “ar” sound in “car” and the “u” sound in “cup”).

Over the page are ten tips to encourage phonemic awareness. They are written roughly in order of difficulty.

1. Alliteration: Go to your library and ask for books that contain “alliteration”. This means sentences that contain many words beginning with the same sound. (Eg. Four fat frogs). Alternatively you could make up your own. You don’t have to go through the alphabet. Try using colours or numbers. Eg. One worm... two tigers... three thistles or I saw a ... red rat ... a yellow yak.... a mauve mouse... The sillier the better. Just hearing alliteration will be stimulating your child’s awareness. You might “hover” on initial sounds to exaggerate them a little. (It is easier to do this with the long sounds).

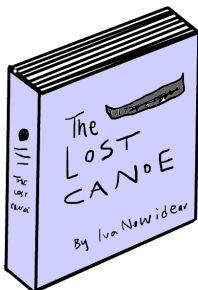
***Long Sounds/Phonemes are ones you can “hold on to”.
Prolonging them does not distort the word to the point that it
becomes unrecognisable to a child.***

Some Long Phonemes = f, s, sh, th, l, r, z, v

2. Explore Sounds. Play around making individual sounds with your mouth and get your child to copy. Look in the mirror and make sounds together. This helps children become more aware of what their mouths can do. See which sounds you can make with your lips together (m, b, p) and which sounds you can make with your teeth together (s, z) . Watch what your tongue does when you make a “l” sound...and can you make a “t” sound without moving your tongue at all?

3. Play with Starting Sounds. Even including some sound play in the way you talk with your child will expose them to sound patterns. Name your child’s friends using alliteration; “Jolly Jack... Big Ben... Nice Ned.”

4. Sound Scrapbook Get a scrapbook and delegate a page for each sound. Cut out pictures from magazines and stick them on the corresponding pages. You do not have to work through the alphabet in order. You might even make a page for each member of the family and work from there. (Dad’s page has all words starting with the “d” sound. Mum’s has all “m” words, Sean’s page has all “sh” words, and Seth’s page has all “s” words). Remember that “shoe” and “sun” do not start with the same sound and should not go on the same page if you are making a **sound** book (as opposed to a letter book). As you present a picture to your child, say something like; “mouse....Listen and watch my mouth say the word - Mmm... ouse... what sound was at the start?” If your child chooses the wrong page/sound (eg. s) , say “Ssss...ouse. Souse? Does that sound right?”



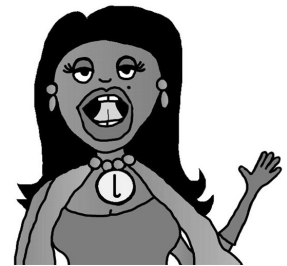
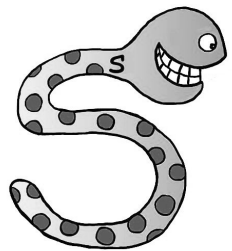
Some words start with BLENDS. These are when there are two consonant sounds together. For example, stop, train and blue.

Young children may have trouble perceiving the first sound when the word starts with a blend. (Many young children even have trouble saying blends when they say the words).

In the early stages of phonemic awareness activities, I steer clear of words starting with blends. Note: sh, ch and th are NOT blends. These combinations include two consonant letters, but only ONE consonant SOUND. These are fine to use in early awareness activities.

5. The Speech Sound Set ©

The Speech Sound Set © from Pelican Talk also promotes phonemic awareness. It develops a child's understanding of *exactly* what a phoneme is and where one phoneme ends and another one starts. If you asked a young child what sound the word "table" starts with, some might say "tay", others might say "tabe". Children who are aware of *individual speech sounds* (phonemes) are more likely to answer correctly with "t". The Speech Sound Set © exposes children to each consonant phoneme through a set of fun characters. It can also help develop clearer production of speech. For example, children learn that the "s" sound is the sound that Sammy Snake makes and the "sh" sound is the sound that "Sharna Shoosh" makes. Lovely Lara makes the "l" sound. Children learn about the mouthshapes that make all the sounds and later, they learn about the letters that go with them. The Speech Sound Set © comes on CD-ROM with lots of pictures, flashcards, colour-ins, slideshows and stories. Most of the materials are to be printed out and used. It also contains further tips to develop phonemic awareness and letter



correspondence in kindergarten and the early years of schooling. There is a Speech Sound Set © flashcard set which is also sold separately. See www.pelicantalk.com

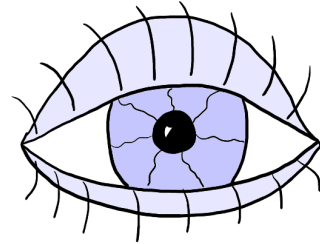
6. Matching Pairs You may have some games at home that contain picture cards. Often Memory games or Bingo Games are good for this. If you don't have a set of picture cards, make your own by cutting and pasting magazine pictures on to cards. Alternatively, you can start with the set provided at the end of this document.

Lay out two pictures (eg. shark mouse) and hold another in your hand (eg. shoe). Together, talk about what sound is at the start of "shoe". Think about the mouthshape and the *sound* of the sound. Now look at the other two pictures and find which one also starts with that sound. You might say something like "sh....ark shark.... sh...ouse....shouse... ooh that doesn't sound right... I think shark and shoe go together." Some children will find this very easy whereas others will need lots of explaining and lots of playing around with the sounds. Start with very different sounds ("sh" and "m", "d" and "f" etc...) rather than similar sounds ("ch" and "sh" are quite similar sounds as are "th" and "f").

(if you feel like YOU need to learn more about speech sounds so you can help your child, you may find useful the training CD-ROM "All You Need to Know About Speech Sounds" which is available from Pelican Talk .

If your child doesn't yet say a sound in their speech, it may be difficult for them to perceive the sound in phoneme awareness tasks. For example, your child might be saying "fin" for "thin" and "fanks" for "thanks". "th" is a later developing sound. It doesn't mean that you shouldn't include these sounds in phonemic awareness tasks, but remember that your child may have more trouble perceiving and making them. See if focusing on the mouthshape helps. For example, "Look at my mouth. I stick my tongue out for the 'th' sound and I stick my teeth out for the 'f' sound". If your child has trouble making lots of sounds and they are difficult to understand by three, please consult a speech pathologist or email me with your concerns.

7. "I Spy with my Little Eye". Play this game, but do it with sounds rather than letter names. You might even restrict the amount of objects that your child needs to guess from. For example, lay out 10 things on the table and say "I spy with my little eye, something beginning with... (say a sound). Once again long sounds will be easier for your child to perceive and match to objects.



8. What am I Going to Say? One fun game goes like this...Get together some paired objects from around the house. Put one set in a pillow case and lay the other set in front of your child. Start with only 3 or 4 pairs that begin with different sounds. Check that your child can name each object before starting. Next choose one object and hold it inside the pillowcase. Tell your child to listen to you as you start to say the word. Say only the *first sound*. Your child must listen and watch your mouth and then find the matching object. (The reason that there must be duplicates is that this is a game to work on your child's listening skills and not memory skills). Some examples of easy to find sets are: Game One - 2 forks, 2 soaps, 2 matches, 2 shoes . Game Two - 2 knives, 2 shells, 2 marbles, 2 rings. In time, introduce some short sounds and see how your child goes. Game Three - 2 keys, 2 pens, 2 sticks, 2 lemons. A child who has had time playing with The Speech Sound Set © will be good at using not only listening, but the look of your mouth as you say the sound. Being aware of mouth shapes can really help with literacy later on, particularly for children who are more visual than auditory.

Research has shown that blending and segmenting at a phoneme level (single sound level) are two critical phonemic awareness skills that must be taught. There are lots of phonemic awareness skills that come before this, but these two skills are two of the most vital to work towards.

9. Slow Old Tessa - Blending Game. The skill developed here is called **phoneme blending** and children have usually mastered blending two and three phonemes by six years of age.

I use a turtle puppet that children love. Its mouth doesn't even move, but children love listening to "her" and trying to guess what she is saying. Try finding a turtle toy or puppet – or you could use a different creature. I tell the children that Tessa talks very very slowly and you have to try and put all her sounds together to make a word. I will start by putting several objects or pictures on the floor and get Tessa to "say what she wants" by saying only a sound at a time, with a little pause in between.

Start with two sound (phoneme) words; sh-oe , e-gg, c- ar, t-ea, h-ay, d-oor, p-ie s- aw

If your child can do this easily, move on to three sound words; p-e-g, s-o-ck, f-a-n, m-o-p , r-a-g, p-e-n.

If at any stage this is too difficult, you may just say the sounds and then blend them more together (with less pausing in between)... or you may say the sounds and then blend them together yourself and say the word. Even if your child hears this being done, it will develop their awareness.

If the three sound blending is too difficult, try just separating the first sound and the rest of the word (this is called onset and rime). For example, instead of p-e-g, say p-eg. This is easier and when it is mastered, then three sounds can be re-tried.

10. Chop it up. Children also need to learn to break words into the phonemes that make them. This skill is called segmenting. By the age of 7 years, children have usually mastered segmenting 3 and 4 sound words (including blends).

To develop segmenting skills show a child how a word can be chopped up into sounds. There are two games I play to do this:

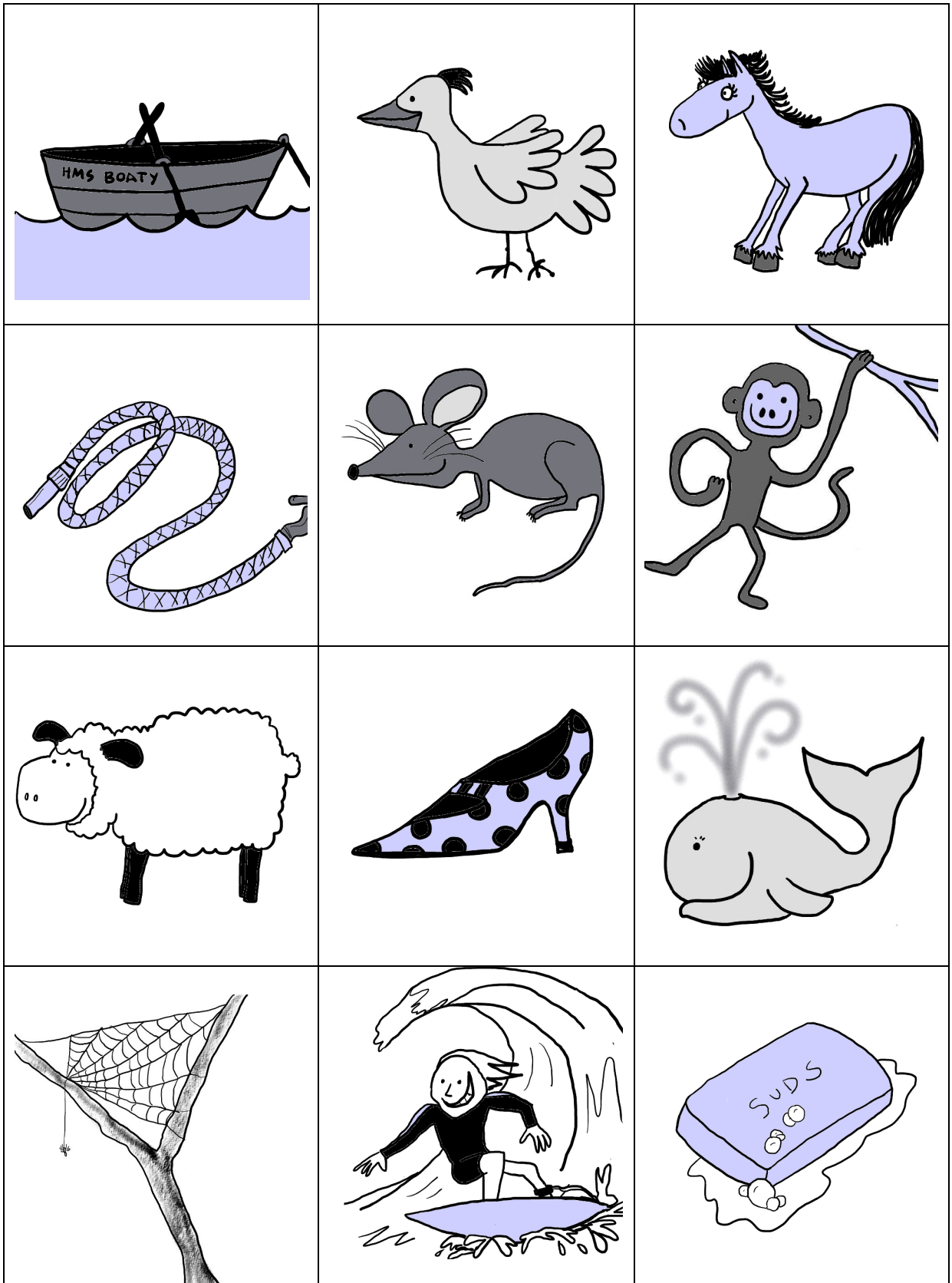
- **Chop a picture;** I take a picture (eg. of a mouse) and I chop it up into three pieces as I say m.... ou...se. Then I put the three piece side by side and say “mouse” “m”...(touch the first piece) ...”ou” (touch the second piece) and “se” (touch the third piece). I then might put the three pieces on a piece of paper and write the letters under each part.
- **The marble game.** I will take three marbles and have them lying side by side in my hand. I say “Let’s pretend this is a word... and each marble is a sound.” I then think of a three sound word (eg. match). “My word is ‘match’ and here come the sounds.” I then drop each marble into the child’s hand as I say each sound... “M...a...tch... Match”. I then get the child to tell me what word is in their hand and “to give me back the sounds one by one.” If the child doesn’t segment each sound, they can be left with a marble. (Eg. “ma....tch). If this happens, give the marbles back and see if they can “pull out” all the sounds. I find that this game is very popular with young learners. At the end of the session, they can keep the marbles.
A nice add-on to this game is to stick the marbles in play-doh (this stops them rolling away) and then write the letters that go with each sound below each marble. Try and stick to words with quite regular spelling, or as an adult, you do any tricky spelling, as the child says each sound.

In both segmenting and blending games, start with two sound words and then work up to three and four sound words. You will find some lists of words at the end of this document.

Above all, keep learning about sounds fun. Remember that you can’t *force* phonemic awareness, but you can present activities that will promote it. The more you talk about, think about and play with sounds, the better. What the research shows us, is that there are definite developmental stages that children move through, but it also shows us that phonemic awareness *can* be taught and *should* be a part of all good literacy programs. Teaching should be explicit (not just incidental), structured and systematic.

If you have any questions or feedback regarding the tips given above, please email me at lucia@pelicantalk.com

SOUND MATCHING CARDS – cut up.



Boat-bird-horse-hose-mouse-monkey-sheep-shoe-whale-web-surf-soap.

Words with regular phonetic spelling are in bold. These are great for early spelling practise when children have learnt common letter-sound correspondences.

2 PHONEME WORDS

egg shoe car pea sea door tea go lie bee me poor war
far her row show know mow arm knee tie pie more
bear wear pear two who **in** off out cow now low
tear ice **on** no of age

3 PHONEME WORDS

bat cat mat hat lot got hot rot fit pit sit sat lit
shop shot chop chin shin pin fin ant and lid
ham cup lip dip end sun much top nut shut red
bed peg shed pet get fun chat
mean date hide phone pine read rhyme calm warm
worm learn bird cart rake walk said head foot like fly
choose bake make leap sharp short stone book fry

4 PHONEME WORDS

lend mend brat ant skip trip trap milk drop
stop crack lost plug drip sand track chips slip clip
bring please dream break creep snake kind clean
grime plate train stray bleed cream thread