

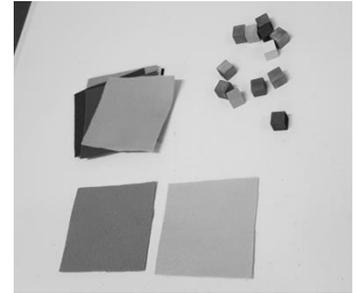
# Visual cues for Phonological Awareness

## Six activities using felts and counters

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**Using coloured felts and counters as visual cues to help students with phonological awareness, decoding and encoding.**

**Explicit teaching methods based on the procedure from *Teaching Reading Essentials* (Moats & Farrell, 2007) in LETRS Module 2 by Louisa C Moats, 2009.**



The following activities are based on exercises in the explicit teaching reading program *Teaching Reading Essentials* (Moats & Farrell, 2007). These activities can be done in a one-to-one, small group or whole class situation to help students hear the sounds in words, in order to develop skills needed to write independently. Coloured felt squares and counters are used during these activities. A different colour felt represents a sound or groups of sounds and the counters are used to represent phonemes. It is important to note that it doesn't matter which colour is used, the main aim is for students to differentiate between parts of words. Colours are a great way to provide these visual cues. The felts and counters can have magnets stuck on the back to make them useable for magnetic whiteboards during whole class instruction.

The instructions follow the "I do, we do, you do" model of explicit teaching, which gradually guides the student with modelling and practice, to skill acquisition and then independence.

If you are finding that a student is struggling to hear or separate sounds in words, go back to oral/aural phonological practice and slow---your---pace---down! Some students have not had a rich oral language experience in English. Others have specific learning difficulties, and both groups need lots of practice with the basics to acquire good phonological awareness. Lists of sounds and words for sound discrimination practice are free to download on the SPELD SA Website. <http://www.speld-sa.org.au/services/phonemic-awareness-tasks.html>

Activity 1 starts with oral/aural practice. Essentially all phonological awareness activities can be done with no visual cues, as we are training our ears to hear the sounds and our mouths to say them. However when we are asking students to take away

sounds and add them, count sounds or syllables and hold the words of a sentence in their head, many find visual cues helpful. This also aligns with multisensory instruction. Students are manipulating objects and using their fingers to count sounds as they repeat the sounds verbally. After students hear sounds in words they can represent each sound with letters.

### ACTIVITY 1- ONSET AND RIME MANIPULATION

**Materials needed:** Coloured felts; single syllable word list.

#### 1.1 Oral/Aural Practice: Blending a word using onset and rime

Choose a single syllable word e.g. net

**(I do)** "I am going to say a word in two parts. Listen carefully and try to work out what the word is."

Hold out one hand for the onset and one for the rime "n- et."

Blend the sounds together, bringing your hands together when you blend. "Say the sounds quickly. n- et, net".

**(We do)** Practise together using other words from your list. Say each word slowly by onset and rime. Say: "Let's do some together. Listen and think: sh-ed. Now say it fast: shed"

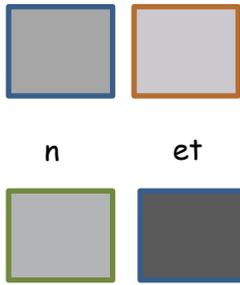
**(You do)** Give the student words from the list using onset and rime. For example p-art, m-oon, d-og. The student repeats the onset and rime and then blends the word.

**If the student is having difficulty at this point, do more "We do" practice!**

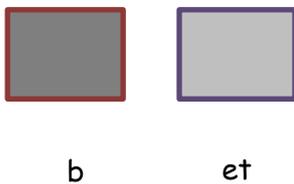
#### 1.2 Introduce visual cues: Creating rhyming words by substituting the onset

Choose a single syllable word that you know has rhyming words, for example: net which rhymes with bet, get, let, met, set, vet or boat, goat, float.

**(I do)** Place two felt squares of different colours. Say the onset and rime as you point to each square.



**(We do)** The onset and rime squares. Ask the student to match the onset and rime sequence as you demonstrate. Touch and say the onset and rime parts of several more words



as the student copies your movements with the squares.

Point to the felt representing either the onset or the rime and ask, “What does this say?”

**(I do)** Say: “I’m going to change this part (point to the onset) of the word net to make a new word.” Change the felt of the onset to a different colour as you say the new sound(s).

“If I change /n/ to /b/, I have **bet**. I changed **net** to **bet** by changing the first part and keeping the last part the same.”

Say: “If I change /b/ to /m/, I have **met**. I changed **bet** to **met** by changing the first part and keeping the last part the same.”

**(We do)** Continue giving guided practice, changing the onset to make a new word and keeping the rime the same. For example change goat to boat.

**(You do)** After guided practice, choose a one-syllable word and ask students to think how the sounds for the onset could change to make a new word. If they make a nonsense word, accept it but say the word is a nonsense word – not a real word.

Say: “When the last parts of words sound the same, the words are rhyming words.”

## ACTIVITY 2 - COUNTING PHONEMES WITH ONSET AND RIME

**Materials needed:** felts, coloured counters, word list.

**(I do)** As in Activity 1, use the felts to separate onset and rime. Select a single syllable word to find the onset and rime, for example ‘r—ain’.

Ask the student to identify the sounds in both parts by asking “What does this part say?”

Point to each felt square and count the phonemes in each, setting out a counter for each phoneme. Say: “The first part just has one sound, /r/. The second part has 2 sounds, /ai, /n/.”

Explain counting phonemes by saying, “This word has 3 sounds. (point to the counters) r-ai-n, 3 sounds. Let’s count them on our fingers.” Put up or touch a finger for each sound.



**(We do)** Ask the student to copy, pointing to the counters, saying the sounds.

Check for understanding by pointing to the different counters asking “What sound is this?”

Guide the student to set out the felts for another word, for example, “Let’s do another one together. Let’s set up another two felts for onset and rime for the word ‘cat’. C—at.” Set out two felts and point to the felts saying the onset and rime.

“Let’s think of the sounds in cat. (count the sounds and place counters on the felts for the sounds.) c-a-t. There are 3 sounds in cat.” Count the sounds using your fingers.

**(You do)** “The next word that you can try is ‘rat’. Think of the sounds in ‘rat’. Can you show me the sounds using the felts and counters?” Allow the student to use the felts and counters to represent the sounds in the word.

If the student still struggles, practise more “We do” before asking them to do the exercise on their own.

## ACTIVITY 3 -INITIAL AND FINAL BLENDS

Felts can help students who have difficulty with initial and final blends. If a student can blend CVC words, teach them using the felts to separate the onset and rime. Find a rime with an initial blend change e.g. part to start, rain to train, cat to flat.

**Materials needed:** felts, coloured counters, initial and final blends word list

**(I do)** From Activity 2, place 2 felts for the onset and rime for **rain, r – ain** . Say, “Now let’s change the onset to make another word. Change **rain** to **train**.”

Change the felt for a different onset. Say “Tr – ain, This word is now train. Say train.”

Point to the onset, say, “Let’s think of the sounds in this part. Tr has 2 sounds /t/, /r/. Let’s count them on our fingers.” Put up or touch a finger for each sound.

Ask the student to place counters for the sounds, “Place 2 counters on the felt for those sounds.”

Blend the sounds together for the whole word, sweeping your finger left to right across the counters.

**(We do)** “Let’s change **train** to **stain**.” Change the onset felt and counters. Guide the student to place 2 counters on the onset felt, counting the phonemes. Say, “I can hear 2 sounds, /s/, /t/. Place 2 counters for those sounds.”

Blend the sounds together for the whole word, sweeping your finger left to right across the counters.

**(You do)** After guided practice ask the student to change **cat** (from Activity 2) to **flat**, placing the blocks on the felts to signify the number of sounds in the word.

Students could then use a whiteboard and marker or phoneme lids to create or write the sounds.

Final blends are more difficult for students to hear. Segment the word for the students and guide the students to change the counters on **the rime felt** to change the final blend. The change will be adding, subtracting or changing the final sounds. Some change examples include ben – bent; bell - belt, dam- damp; net – next; met – melt; ten – tent; plum – plump; pod – pond; bet – best; win – wind.

#### ACTIVITY 4 - COMPOUND WORDS

Felts can also be used to extend students to simple compound words like bedroom, lunchbox and playground. If you want students to record the sounds as letters, use compound words at a suitable decoding/encoding level for your students, for example, if you have not taught the magic ‘e’ rule or that ‘oar’ says /or/ steer away from words like ‘whiteboard’. Spelling City has a list of compound words for years R -10

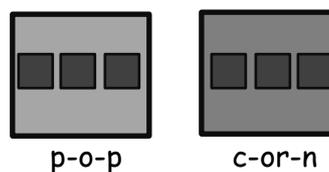
<https://www.spellingcity.com/compound-words.html>

**Materials needed:** felts, coloured counters, compound word list

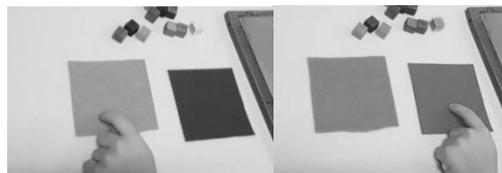
**(I do)** “We are using the felts now to help us with making a 2 syllable word – popcorn.”

Count the syllables for the word. Clap the syllables or do ‘chin drops’ and say “Pop –corn, that has 2 syllables. I’ll put out a felt for each syllable.” Place a felt out for the two parts of the word, pop- corn. Point to each part of the compound word as you say the part.

Count the sounds in each part of the compound word, placing a counter for each sound. “Let’s hear the sounds in the first part of the word. ‘Pop’ has 3 sounds p-o-p. I’m going to place 3 counters on this felt for the 3 sounds, p-o-p. ‘Corn’ has 3 sounds, c-or-n. I’m placing 3 counters for those 3 sounds, c-or-n.”



**(We do)** “Let’s do one together. The word is **bedroom**.” Count the syllables with the student and encourage them to put out the felts for the syllables. Point to each felt and say the syllable.



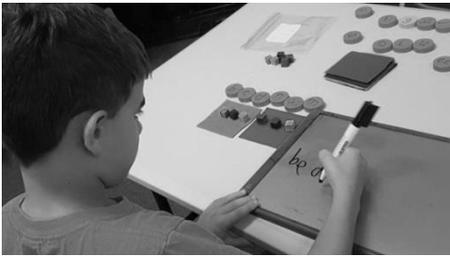
Ask the student, “What’s this part?” as you point to each part.

Guide the student in counting the sounds in each part, placing a counter for each sound. “Bed has 3 sounds b-e-d. Place a counter for each sound. Let’s count the sounds for room, r-oo-m. That’s 3 sounds. Place a counter for each sound in room.”



The student then says each sound in ‘bedroom’ and blends together, sweeping their finger from left to right, across the counters.

The student can then write the sounds on a whiteboard or use concrete materials like sound lids to create the word.



**(We do)** Choose another compound word and repeat the “we do” steps with the student, allowing them to become more independent.

**(You do)** The student is given a compound word, suitable for their level of decoding and encoding to try for themselves.

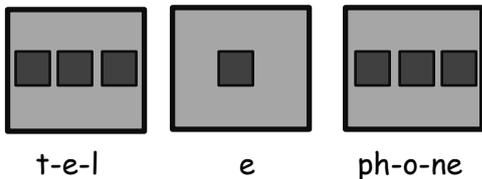
### ACTIVITY 5 - SYLLABLES AND SOUND BOXES

To help students with multi-syllabic words, teach students how to detect syllables, for example, they pinch their chin by putting their thumb underneath their chin and count ‘chin drops’.

Continue to approach new teaching points using the ‘I do’, ‘We do’, ‘You do’ explicit teaching technique.

Follow the instructions for Activity 4, placing a felt for each syllable, for example, ‘telephone’ has 3 syllables so place 3 felts.

Count the sounds in each syllable, using the counters, noting that each syllable needs a vowel sound.



To extend this activity to a spelling exercise, teach the student to record the sounds as letters using sound boxes. Each **sound** is written in a box. All the letters that represent that sound need to be in **one** box.

The student counts the number of sounds in the word and highlights the corresponding number of sound boxes, as below. The student may give a response like this:

t	e	l	e	f	o	n			
				ph	o-e				

Firstly, congratulate the student if they record all the sounds for the word. Then you can use their recording to teach them, for example, the use of ph for the /f/ sound, and the magic ‘e’ rule for a long vowel /oa/. Show the student how to correct their spelling underneath their attempt.

In this example, for the word ‘conversation’, teaching would focus on the long vowel /ai/, the spelling of the /sh/ sound and the co-articulation of the ‘o-n’.

c	o	n	v	er	s	ai	sh	n		
						a	ti	o	n	

For more help with the types of syllables in English, go to <https://speldsa.wordpress.com/category/teaching-tips/>

### ACTIVITY 6 - CONSTRUCTING SENTENCES

A student with memory difficulties may have trouble holding a sentence in their head to write it down, particularly if they have trouble with segmenting, blending and encoding. The felts can be used as visual cues to remember a dictated sentence, or a sentence that they would like to write.

Place a felt for each word in the sentence.

The student repeats the sentence several times, pointing to a felt for each word. If the student’s sentence needs improving, insert felts at this stage to add words, for example, adjectives.

The student begins to write the sentence. If the student becomes stumped with which word is next, repeat the sentence pointing to the felts, reminding them of the sentence sequence. If the student becomes stumped with sounds, use the counters on the felt to segment the sounds in the word as in Activity 4. For tricky words or sight words, write the word on a flash card for the student to copy or allow the student to ‘have a go’ using the sounds they know, then correct spelling, highlighting the tricky parts.



SPELD SA is selling sets of felts for \$8 a set.

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