



Phonological awareness activities for preschoolers

Phonological awareness activities involve listening for and manipulating the **sounds** in spoken language. Phonological awareness is different from phonics, which focuses on the association between letters and their **sounds**. Exposing preschoolers to games that focus on the **sounds** in language is an important stepping-stone on the road to reading. Early childhood educators can engage children in phonological awareness activities at small group times, transition times, center times or meal times. Educators who provide preschoolers with opportunities to explore the **sounds** in language support children's emergent literacy development.

The typical sequence of phonological awareness moves from easier activities (listening) to more challenging activities (blending and segmenting) and includes:

- 1. Listening:** Listening for sounds and for the differences in sounds, like tapping vs. clapping.
- 2. Rhyming:** Exposing children to words that sound the same, like cat and hat.
- 3. Alliteration:** Emphasizing the same beginning sound in a song, poem, book or finger play, like "Willoughby, Wallaby, Woo."
- 4. Words and sentences:** Understanding that words make up sentences or phrases, for example, listening for and counting the words in the phrase "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."
- 5. Syllables:** Identifying the syllables in a word, for example, clapping the syllables in a child's name.
- 6. Blending and segmenting sounds:** Adding and taking away sounds in a spoken word, for example, taking the "c" sound away in the spoken word cat and understanding what is left is the spoken word "at."

The following are examples of some activities in each skill area. This is not a complete list, but is meant to show the different types of activities in each skill area.

Additional resource: *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children* by Marilyn Adams

Listening activities:

1. Children close their eyes and listen as you make a sound. Then children guess the sound. Add two or three sounds in a row as children become better at the game.
2. Make sound shakers out of small containers. Show children what items are in each container (for example, beans, cotton ball, button, coins). Mix up the sound containers and have children listen to the sound each makes and guess what is inside. As children become better at the game, add an additional matching container of another material. Have children listen and choose the matching sound containers.

Rhyming activities:

1. Sing rhyming songs with children like "Willoughby Wallaby," do finger plays like "The Itsy, Bitsy, Spider" and read rhyming books like *Moose on the Loose* or *Fox in Socks*. Emphasize the rhyming words.
2. Gather small props or pictures that represent rhyming objects (car-star, chair-bear, cat-hat, house-mouse, bell-shell). Hold up an object or picture. Pass around a rhyming box with three items or pictures in it, with one item that rhymes with the object you hold. Ask children to choose a rhyming object from the box that rhymes with your item. Emphasize the rhyming words. Play several rounds of the game holding up different objects.

Alliteration activities

1. Read books like *Silly Sally* by Audrey Wood, *Pigs in Pajamas* by Maggie Smith, and *Some Smug Slug* by Pamela Duncan Edwards. Emphasize the same beginning sound in words as you read.
2. Use children's names as a base for alliteration activities. Have children do movements that match their names (Maria marches, Devin dances, Jessie jumps, Chris crawls). Emphasize the same beginning sound in the name and movement.

Syllable activities

1. Explain to children that syllables are parts of words. Model clapping out the syllables in your name. Have children help you clap out the syllables in their names and count the syllables or parts.
2. Explain to children that syllables are parts of words. Model clapping out the syllables of a word. Pass a Syllable Box around with small props or pictures for children to choose from. After a child chooses a prop or picture, have the group clap out the syllables in the word and count the syllables.

Segmenting and blending activities

These activities are more challenging for children and are introduced after children have had many opportunities to practice less challenging skills.

1. Play a guessing game. Use props or pictures. Tell children you're going to give them some clues, or ways to figure out what the object is that you have chosen. For example, say, "I'm thinking of an animal. Its name starts with the "c" sound (say the sound not the letter) and has an "a" sound (say the sound not the letter) in the middle and ends with a "t" sound (say the sound not the letter)." Say the sounds again for the group. "It has four legs and whiskers. Who can tell me what it might be?" After a child guesses "cat," show the children the prop or picture of the cat and blend the beginning, middle and ending sounds together again to model for the children.
2. Have children "take apart" or "put together" a word. Use words from familiar finger plays, songs or rhymes like "The Itsy, Bitsy Spider." Use props or pictures to make the game more fun. Say something like, "I need you to help me put a word back together. (Say the word in parts) Spi---der. Who can tell me what word that is?" Emphasize the blending of the word after children give the correct response and show them the prop or picture.