What is continuous blending, and why is it important?

In the Being a Reader program, we recommend using continuous blending for phonological awareness and reading decodable word activities. In continuous blending, words are “sounded out” with no stopping or pausing between sounds. For example, in sounding out the word am, the sound of a is held for 2 seconds, because it is continuous, and then the sound of m is said without any break between the two sounds. Phonemically, the result is “/aamm/.” This scaffolding offers critical support in blending individual sounds to make a word. Presenting sounds without continuous blending (for example, /aa/ [slight pause or break] /mm/) while reinforcing the individual sounds, does not present the same opportunity to hear them in combination and recognize the word.

For an example of continuous blending, refer to this model video from the SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words) program. This video shows the teacher providing additional visual support suggested in teacher notes in the Being a Reader lessons.

*If the students have difficulty blending, you might:

- use a visual aid. Draw three blanks side by side on a wipe-off board and point to each blank as you say each sound again slowly. Sweep under all three blanks as you say the word. Then have the students say the sounds as you point to the blanks and say the word as you sweep under them.
- model and have the students blend without stopping between.
- the sounds, for example, “/ããmm/” rather than “/āā/ [pause] /mm/.”
- practice blending when (a) orally blending phonemes during phonological awareness (“Blend”), (b) blending printed decodable words (“Sound,” “Again,” “Read), and (c) reading decodable words in the stories (“Sound,” “Read”).