

BLOG

On the IES>WWC Recommendations for Foundational Skills, Part 2: Develop Awareness of the Segments of Sounds in Speech and How they Link to Letters

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By [Marisa Ramirez Stukey](#) | Categories: [Reading](#)

In our [last installment](#), we discussed the first recommendation made by the IES/WWC in their latest [practice guide](#). The second recommendation discusses explicit teaching to develop awareness of the segments of sound in speech and how they link to letters. The evidence is strong that both decoding and encoding rely on students' ability to:

- Identify the individual sounds or phonemes that make up the words they hear in speech
- Name the letters of the alphabet as they appear in print
- Identify each letter's corresponding sound(s)

While these foci are not new to teachers of our youngest readers, the practice guide provides us with some recommendations as to how we can ensure that our students have these most basic understandings.

First, we must teach our students to recognize and manipulate segments of sounds orally. Consider the following instructional routines from [Being a Reader](#):

1 Phonological Awareness: Oral Segmenting

Have the students segment the phonemes after you say each of the words that follow. Have them clap softly as they say each sound. Then for each word, ask:

Q *How many sounds are in the word [rat]?*

rat /r/ /ă/ /t/

tap /t/ /ă/ /p/

an /ă/ /n/

rib /r/ /ī/ /b/

sit /s/ /ī/ /t/

nap /n/ /ă/ /p/

Another important consideration from the second recommendation is to name the letters of the alphabet as they appear in print. While letter naming has been a long-standing staple of early literacy instruction, the panel recommends building letter knowledge by reinforcing known letters and introducing new ones.

Letter naming routines are introduced and supported in *Being a Reader*. Students have the opportunity to explore letter names in the context of various alphabet books (i.e. *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* and *The Alphabet*) and then work on identifying the letters in their classmates' names. In addition, students who need more support in acquiring letter names have the opportunity to work in small groups to solidify this skill.

3 Introduce and Read the Alphabet Cards

Tell the students that now they will read the letters of the alphabet together. Then you will give them each a letter and they will work together to put them in order, just like the mice did in the story. Show the students the Aa card, say the name of the letter, and then have the students say the letter name aloud with you. Repeat this procedure to read each letter of the alphabet in order.

4 Build the Alphabet

Distribute an alphabet card to each student. Ask the students to look at their cards and to each think about what letter it is without saying it aloud.

Have the students share their letters with their partners by asking:



Q *What letter is on your card? Turn to your partner.*

Observe pairs as they talk. Support any student who struggles by telling her the name of the letter on her card.

Direct the students' attention to the board or wall and explain that now they will put the letters of the alphabet in order. Tell the students that it is important to move responsibly when it is their turn to post their letters on the board (or wall). Show pages 28-29 of *the alphabet* and tell the students that they can look at these pages (or another classroom alphabet display) to help them order the alphabet. Ask:

Q *What is the first letter of the alphabet? Who has that card?*

Have the student with the *Aa* card raise his hand; then have that student post the *Aa* card the board or wall. Help the student position the card in such a way that there is enough space to place the remainder of the alphabet cards.

Read the posted letter card aloud; then ask:

Q *What is the next letter of the alphabet? Who has that card?*

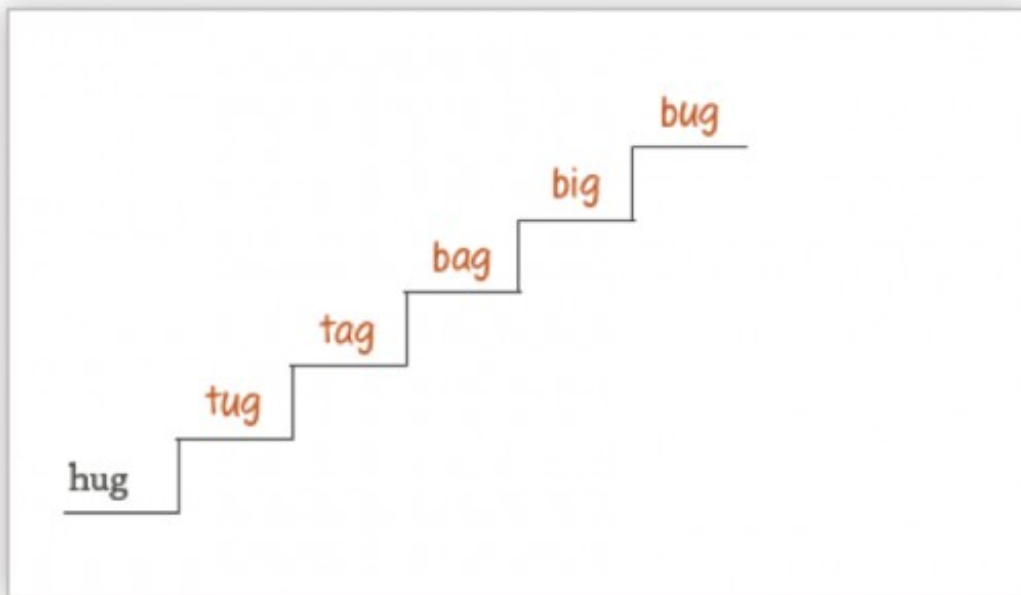
The last step in supporting students' alphabet awareness is linking their awareness of the sounds with their knowledge of letter-sound relationships. This work allows students to begin decoding and encoding words. Word building exercises that begin with CVC words and move into more complex patterns allow students to make the connections between what they say and what they can read and spell.

8 Model the “Word Stairs” Activity

Display the “Word Stairs 1” activity (🗨️ WA5) and point to *hug* on the first step. Explain that to do this activity, you change one letter, add one letter, or take away one letter from the word to create a new word. The goal is to write a word on each stair. Explain that you can change the *h* to *t*; and write *tug* on the next stair. Then show how you can change *u* to *a* to make *tag*. Write *tag* on the next stair. Ask:

🗨️ **Q** *What letter could I change, add, or take away to make a new word? Turn to your partner.*

After a few moments, signal for the students’ attention and have a few volunteers share their ideas. Point out that often there is more than one way to change a word to make a new word.



WA5

Each of the instructional strategies from this recommendation support students in their awareness of sounds in speech and how they link to letters. The next recommendation helps teachers think about how to teach students to decode words, analyze word parts and write and recognize words. Please [join us on November 15 for a webinar to discuss these important considerations for our youngest readers.](#)



1001 Marina Village Parkway, Suite 110

Alameda, CA 94501

Phone: 510.533.0213

Fax: 510.464.3670

Email: info@collaborativeclassroom.org

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