

SAMPLE ACTIVITY: RECOGNIZING THE /S/ SOUND**Goal:**

- Build awareness of a consonant sound in the initial position in words

Background:

This activity might be used with non-readers or beginning readers as one of the first steps in building phonemic awareness. The activity is limited in focus:

- It involves only simple phonemic awareness tasks (isolation and categorization).
- One sound only is practiced. The /s/ sound is often one of the first consonant sounds introduced because it is a continuant, which makes it easy to blend with a vowel. A speaker can continue the /s/ and slide into the next sound, as in /s/-/s/-/s/-/a/-/d/ (**sad**). (Stop sounds like /b/ and /t/, on the other hand, cannot be continued, so they're harder to blend. For instance, try holding onto the /b/ to blend it with a vowel, as in **bad**.)
- Awareness is limited to the initial position only.

Focus:

- Recognize /s/ at the beginning of words

Materials:

- Curriculum or teacher-made materials

Grouping:

- Small groups or one-to-one

Directions:

1. Explain to learners the purpose of the listening activities to come, and make the connection to the goal of independent reading. Being aware of the sounds in words will help them learn how to recognize and spell words on their own.
2. Make the sound /s/ several times, asking the learners to listen carefully and watch your mouth as you say it.
3. Show several items (or pictures) that begin with /s/ (**sock, soap, soup, sandwich, sign**) and say the words one at a time, asking the learners to repeat after you. (Avoid words beginning with consonant blends, like **stack**, or **skip**. It's easier to hear the /s/ when it's followed by a vowel.) Say the words again, exaggerating the initial /s/, and have them repeat again.
4. Hold up a card with the letter **s** on it and explain that most of the time **s** stands for /s/ when you see it in words.
5. Explain that you are going to name several things in the room and hold up the card every time the word begins with /s/. Demonstrate with six or seven items, and be sure that some of them don't begin with /s/.
6. Hand out **s** cards to each learner and have them all practice with you as you say several words, raising their cards when they hear /s/ at the beginning of a word.
7. Watch carefully to be sure everyone is able to perform this task. (In groups, it's possible, of course, to just do what the others are doing.)
8. Moving from one learner to the next, ask them to compare the initial sounds of two words: Does **bank** start like **sock**? Does **song** start like **sock**?
9. If they seem to be able to perceive the initial /s/ you could try some independent practice. Ask them to number their papers 1-10, and then call out ten words, one at a time. Tell them to write an **s** next to the number of any word that begins with /s/. (This assumes some writing ability—which most adult learners have—and knowledge of the numerals. This practice could also be done orally, using the cards.)

Next steps:

After students have learned one sound, you can compare it to the next sounds they learn, pointing out differences. (Where are your lips and teeth when you say /f/? When you say /s/? Or /m/?) When they've learned several sounds, they can practice by identifying the beginning sounds in words you speak, or they could practice independently by listening to words on tape. As they begin to work on phonics and can read a few words, they might also write (copy) words that begin with sounds they have studied. Working with sounds at the end of words might come next.

Phonemic awareness is taught along with other reading skills. Learners should be developing decoding skills and beginning to read as they continue to develop phonemic awareness. As they progress, you'll find numerous opportunities for quick phonemic practice activities, perhaps integrated with oral reading or spelling tasks.

Summary: Phonemic Awareness Tips in a Nutshell

- *Teach phonemic awareness explicitly and systematically to learners who have phonemic awareness deficiencies.*
- *Use letters as well as sounds in teaching the phonemes. Use a structured phonics curriculum to develop phonemic awareness and decoding skills.*
- *Focus on one or two types of phonemic tasks; segmenting and blending may be most useful.*
- *Be sure learners understand the connection between phonemic awareness activities and their long-term reading goals.*
- *Integrate short phonemic awareness activities within the reading lesson. In each lesson, try to address all needed components of reading instruction—phonemic awareness and phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—as well as opportunities to experience and learn from adult-relevant materials.*