

*Phonemes are not simply sounds that are heard, they are sounds that are SAID and heard. It is the action of SAYING that enables children to “sound-out” or segment a word into its speech-sounds.*

*Before you learn to read, your speech motor is running. You can speak and you can understand others. But in order to drive toward literacy you have to engage some new gears that help you use and understand a code—the alphabet. These gears help you en-code and de-code written words.*

TAKE THE GUESSING OUT OF READING

Trying to learn to read with just your eyes and your ears is like trying to drive a car without a motor. Speech is the motor. It’s basic wiring is packaged with the brain when it is delivered. Oral language and vocabulary are critical foundations of literacy. However, the speech motor needs to be upgraded with new gears when the brain is challenged to learn to read.

Instant word recognition is not achieved by memorizing the visual appearance of words. There is a different route that connects reading with what the brain already knows about words--the vast networks of SPEECH. Essential brain pathways for instant word recognition are not developed by teaching children to memorize sight words and to rely on pictures and guessing to read. Memorizing the words that go with the pictures in a book may look like reading, but it is not reading. Children need to develop the ability to use the alphabet code ON THEIR OWN –to de-code and en-code new words INDEPENDENTLY. Then they won’t have to depend on someone else to read or spell a word for them.

ENCODING (segmenting spoken words and using letters to spell them) is the fastest and most efficient route to reading. The alphabet was invented to make spoken words visible--to go from speech-to-print. Young children can learn that they can turn words they SAY into words they can SEE. To learn what the alphabet is for, children can learn that they are saying three sounds when they say a word like CAT, and that three shapes (letters) can stand for those sounds. Gradually they can learn to change the word CAT to HAT, SAT, FAT, MAT, etc. by identifying the first speech-bit and linking a new letter to that speech-sound. The most important concept for them to grasp is that spoken words are actually connected bits of speech and that letters can stand for those speech-bits.

We used to think that reading skills came in a systematic sequence of packages—first memorizing names and sounds of all 26 letters, rhyming and manipulating big chunks of words like compound words and syllables, then awareness of initial sounds, etc. These skills do not need to come one before another. They can all be taught SIMULTANEOUSLY and more MEANINGFULLY as children learn to encode and decode real words.

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