

## Pairing Sounds, Articulation, and Letters

In the past, researchers have advocated teaching sounds first, then letters. More recent research has shown a reciprocal relationship between phonological skills and letter knowledge (McBride-Chang, 1999; Wagner, Torgesen, & Rashotte, 1994) and that teaching letters and sounds at the same time proves beneficial (Piasta & Wagner, 2010). Further, multiple research studies show that integrating sounds and mouth movements (articulation) is beneficial when teaching letters (Roberts, 2021; Roberts et al., 2019).

When teaching sounds, ask students to notice how their lips, mouth, and tongue move. Not only does connecting sounds to articulation (mouth movements) add value as students learn phonemes, it also helps them connect sounds to letters and the alphabet (Roberts, 2021; Roberts et al., 2019).

This strategy is a simple but effective sequence for pairing sounds, articulation, and letters. It is important to follow the sequence consistently to support students as they connect sounds with mouth movements and letters.

### Strategy: Pairing Sounds, Articulation, and Letters

#### Pillar: Phonemic Awareness

##### Grade Level:

- ☒ K
- ☒ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6

##### Instructional Grouping:

- ☐ Whole Group
- ☒ Small Group
- ☒ Individual

##### Materials:

- Letter image, mouth movement card, small mirrors for students

##### Consider This:

- Protocols, or sequencing steps, are important when matching sounds and letters. Keep in mind that we are making the invisible visible through sound articulation and mouth movement images.
- Protocols are particularly important when working with struggling readers.

**What is it?** When students understand the alphabetic principle, matching sounds with letters benefits early learners.

**Why is it important?** While phonemic awareness focuses on sounds, evidence suggests contextualizing sounds with letters and articulation (mouth movements) benefits reading and spelling (Castiglioni-Spalten & Ehri, 2003). The specific sequences of this strategy provide consistency as we introduce sounds and mouth movements and pair them with letters.

##### What works in the classroom?

##### Sequence for Pairing Sounds and Letters With Articulation (Mouth Movements)

Display the new letter and mouth image pictures. Provide students with mirrors at their desks or tables.

1. Show the mouth movement picture.
2. Then say to students, "Look at the mouth movement picture. The letter is \_\_\_\_\_, and the sound is \_\_\_\_\_."
3. Hold the mouth image below your mouth. Say the name and sound, exaggerating your mouth movements. Do this two times.



**Students:**

Students repeat the name and sound two times.

**Teacher:**

1. Pass out mirrors. Model looking at your mouth in the mirror and say the sound or letter.
2. Tap your head and say to students, "Think. Show how your mouth makes \_\_\_\_ (letter name and sound)."
3. Hold mirror and say to students, "Look at your mouth and say \_\_\_\_ (letter name and sound)." Repeat two more times.

**Students:**

Students repeat the name and sound twice.

**Teacher:**

1. Say to students, "Look at the mouth movements that make the letter. Say \_\_\_\_ (letter name and sound)."
2. Show the mouth movement picture. You can also refer to the image on the sound wall (described in chapter 1, page 43) in the classroom.

**Students:**

Holding mirrors, students repeat the sound and name the letter three times while looking at themselves in the mirror.

**References**

- Castiglioni-Spalten, M. L., & Ehri, L. C. (2003). Phonemic awareness instruction: Contribution of articulatory segmentation to novice beginners' reading and spelling. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 7(1), 25–52. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532799XSSR0701\\_03](https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532799XSSR0701_03)
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