

Phonics With Key Words — At Home

Absorbing Phonics Naturally

In this approach, we don't treat phonics as an isolated memory exercise, as if it were the multiplication table. Instead, we help the child **absorb phonics through its use**, by incorporating it into a writing process that's based on the child's own Key Words. Since Key Words are captions for the child's "mind picture," they're about something that's already captured their *interest and imagination*. This makes them a powerful magnet for skill development. So as the child watches their Key Word being spelled, they **automatically absorb phonics and other skills — in much the same way they learned to speak**. The following describes how you can help them do that. The directions are designed for anyone working with one or more children at home.

Activities To Help a Child Develop Phonetic Skills

As you begin to address phonics, you need to be sure the children are familiar with the concept of the alphabet. If not, first teach them to sing the Alphabet Song, to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

Later, slowly sing the song together, as you point to each letter on an alphabet chart. (You can simply print the alphabet out on a sheet of paper, using a Comic Sans font: Aa Bb Cc Dd, etc.)

This activity is only so they know what you mean when you speak of the alphabet and say the name of a letter. They don't need know the name of every letter before you begin with the two phonics activities described next. They just need to know what you're talking about when you refer to "letters."

Simple Activities To Help a Child Develop Phonetic Skills

As the child is becoming familiar with the alphabet in this way, you also begin to carry out the following two basic activities:

1. **Phonemic Awareness: Playing With "Today's Sound."** Draw the child's attention to one sound per day and have them play with it. Print one very large letter on a piece of paper, using Comic Sans font. Draw the child's attention to the **common sound that letter makes**. This is so they can readily *notice, hear and differentiate between the different sounds in their own Key Words*. Work on just one sound a day (starting with consonants, then vowels, then diagraphs, etc.).

Here are some ideas to get you started. Have them —

- Say their name, substituting today's sound. (If the sound is "S" and their name is Nancy, they say, "Sancy")
- Repeat this with what they're wearing and with objects around them.
- Name objects in the room or clothing they're wearing that start with that sound.
- Bring objects to you that begin with that sound.
- Make up other ways to play with that sound.

As you end this session, put the large letter you printed on or near an object that begins with that sound. Place it where the child will see it often and refer to it occasionally. Occasionally ask them to put a new object beside it that starts with that sound.

As you end this session, give them a magazine and suggest they cut out pictures that start with that sound. Leave them to it — then later, check the pictures they found and eliminate any mistakes. Then help them paste the pictures onto the paper with the large letter on it. Save it to create a growing "Alphabet Book." If you already have an extra binder on hand, you might use it for this book.

the alphabet song

Be careful to slow way down here!

D G D G D A D

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P

G D A D G D A

Q R S and T U V W (dou-ble u) and X Y Z

D G D

Now I've said my A B C's.

G D A D

Tell me what you think of me.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Use Comic Sans font to make your own chart.

Simple Activities To Help a Child Develop Phonetic Skills, Cont.

2. Spelling Key Words. At another time that same day, have a session with Key Words. (To refresh your understanding of how to give Key Words go to the page *For Parents* in KidsWriteToRead.com and click on the link, *Working Through the Steps With Key Words*. If your child is very young, also read, *Key Words With Preschoolers*.)

Start any child who's new to Key Words at Step 1 — even a child who already know something about reading and writing. For at first you're just getting them used to the procedure. Later you can move them forward into the Step appropriate for them.

As you write the child's Key Word for them, **draw their attention to the letters needed to spell each day's new Key Word**— even if that day's word does not use the sound you chose to emphasize in your phonemic awareness play. The idea is just to get them to focus on the sound/letter connections, and it doesn't have to be done strictly in sequence or coordinated with Today's Word. (This as the Key Word cannot be something contrived to fit with your other activities — to be effective, the Key Word must come from the child's heart.)

Eventually, with the combination of phonemic awareness play and watching each day as you write their Key Word, the child soon *absorbs* enough of the connections to help supply some of them. After repeated experience with this, they have enough of those connections to begin writing on their own. For more on their 6-Step progression toward reading, return to the page *For Parents* and click on the link *Working Through the Steps With Key Words*, to see the overview of all the Steps.

***** PLEASE PAUSE HERE: You now have all you need to help your child develop phonics skills that will apply to both writing and reading. Day after day they will be absorbing phonetic connections — just by helping you supply the letters needed to spell their Key Words, and later as they write on their own. But if you want to explore more systematic ways to work with phonics — read on. *****

Alphabet/Noun Charts and Sound/Story Cartoon Systems

The phonics activities described so far **can be done with no special phonics pictorial materials of any kind — just the alphabet chart you made up yourself.** But for a more thorough treatment, we look now at two different types of phonics materials.

1. Letter/Noun Charts. Most classrooms have noun charts: “A” is for **Apple**, “B” is for **Baby**, “C” is for **Cat**, etc. You can buy one online. They are good for learning the **one most common** way to spell the different sounds in English. But they don't show all the **uncommon ways** some of the sounds can be spelled. For instance, the “S” sound as is “**step**,” can also be spelled with a “C” as in **cent**. Yet an alphabet noun chart doesn't reflect this. So they are limited when it comes to spelling.

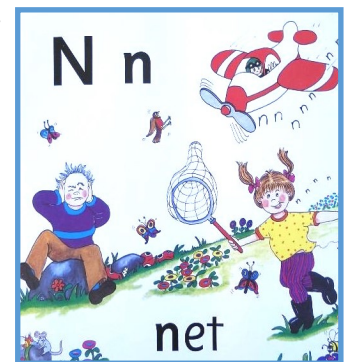
2. Story/Sound Systems.* The set shown here is an example of this type of system. It has a chart for each of the sounds spoken in English. Each chart connects a sound to the story suggested by a cartoon and shows the common way that sound can be spelled.

Phonemic Awareness Activities With A Story/Sound System

You make up a story to go with each cartoon, for they need to resonate with the child you're working with. For instance, the story here could be, “The insects and birds are buzzing around the man. The girl and the plane are making an “Nnnnn” sound. So he's holding his ears and feeling a little crazy.”



In the phonemic awareness activity, the child would listen to the story, then make the “Nnnnn” sound while holding their ears. They might also pretend to duck so they don't get hit by the plane. Children love acting this out and usually remember which cartoon associated with the sound, from then on.



*A member of our Facebook Group, *Helping ALL Children Write To Read*, brought this set to our attention. It's by Jolly Phonics, found on Amazon, for under \$15. But again, while this type of system has advantages, it is *not necessary*. Key Words can be very effective with an alphabet chart, with letters only.

Phonemic Awareness Activities: Introducing a Story/Sound System, Cont.

With these connections established, you can also use these charts as an extremely valuable support for spelling — by having them not only show the common way to spell a sound — *but every way possible*. You would modify this chart, for instance, when you've noticed that the "Nnnnn" is also spelled "Kn" as in "Know." (More about this later.)

Here's how a session goes —

1. Review Sounds. Before introducing each day's new sound, review previous sounds by showing the cartoons in quick succession while the group calls out the sound. (You might also mention the story briefly, but it's not usually necessary.)

2. Introduce Today's Sound. Work with just ONE new cartoon a day. (Begin with consonants, then vowels, etc.) For the new sound, tell a very brief story suggested by the cartoon, ignoring the letter that appears on it. The focus is only on *distinguishing the sound itself, plus connecting the story to the cartoon*.

3. Play With the Sound. Have the children play with the sound in a variety of ways:

- **Feel the sound**, as the children in the picture on the previous page were feeling how the "Nnnnn" sound vibrates their nose,
- **Identify whose name begins** with that sound,
- **Listen as each child substitutes** Today's Sound for the beginning sound of their name,
- **Identify some things that begin with the sound.** This might be one of their own physical attributes or an article of clothing they're wearing. Or it might be having them find things in the room that start with the sound.



Immediately following this play, place that cartoon on or near something that starts with that sound. Refer to it occasionally and have the child add objects to it..

Create a Chart For Beginners

To create a chart for beginners, copy and reduce the large cartoons enough to fit all of them together on one chart. Place it where to see it, the child must get up and walk away from where you're sitting to work on Key Words together. Here's an example of the *first row* of the chart:



Using The Chart For Beginners At Steps 2 — 4

A child operating at Steps 2 - 4, will use the chart above to search for the **ONE new sound** you find they need to focus on each day as you write their Key Word. Here's how that session goes:

1. As you write the child's Key Word, say each sound as you go, hesitating between letters — waiting to see if the child can supply any of the letters needed to spell it. For example, a child has been working at Step 2 for awhile and knows how to use the chart. They've asked for "robbers." So you would pause and make the "Rrrrr" sound, asking if they remember how to spell that sound. If not, ask *which cartoon makes that sound*. If the child doesn't remember, they remind them of the dog growling. "Rrrrr."

2. Say the sound together, and have the child leave you to look for the cartoon with that story on the chart. When they find the "rrrrrrr's" coming from the dog and return to show which letter is needed, have them trace it on the table, with the index finger of their writing hand. (If they forget, they have to go back to look again. Having to connect the sound/letter for that long, most children will remember that connection the next time they need it.) So we're *capitalizing on their ability to absorb connections* — just as we do when we help a child learn to speak.



Independent Writers (Steps 5 & 6) Use A Wall Strip Dictionary For Spelling

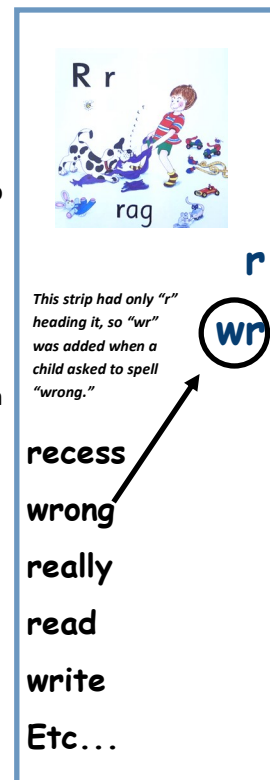
Another advantage: You can also use the sound/story cartoons as the basis for spelling. They can either be used in book form — 2 cartoons on each page, with space between each for writing words — or if you're working with more than one child, you can make a Wall Strip Dictionary, shown here, that they both will use. (With more than one child, the children much prefer the Wall Strip Dictionary — it seems to be something about working on a common device.)

This is a set of strips hangs from cup hooks, in alphabetical order. When a child needs to spell a word, they walk along the row of strips and find the cartoon for the beginning sound of the word they need.

Once they find the correct story, the child first looks to see whether the word they need is already written on the strip (because someone else had previously asked for it). If yes, they take it to a table and copy it.

If the word's not there, they take the strip it to you. First you check to see if the word is already there. If so, cover the words below and above it -- leaving 4 or 5 words for the child to choose from. A child will then usually recognize the one they need and copy it. If the word is not there, the child helps supply the letters needed, as you spell it. (Children don't write on the strips.)

Rest assured that **you do not need to know ahead of time** all the different ways the many sounds in English can be spelled. All you need is a chart that isolates each of the sounds spoken in English and ties each to a cartoon story. If an uncommon way to spell one of the sounds is missing from the Wall Strip Dictionary you've made, you simply add it as shown here.



Beyond Phonics: A Significant Benefit To The Kids Write To Read Approach

Please notice that —

A child who moves from Speech directly into Books,
MASTERS 1 SKILL:
READING

A child who moves from Speech through Writing,
 Then into Books,
MASTERS 2 SKILLS:
READING AND WRITING!

Overview Of One Version Of Sound/Story Cartoons

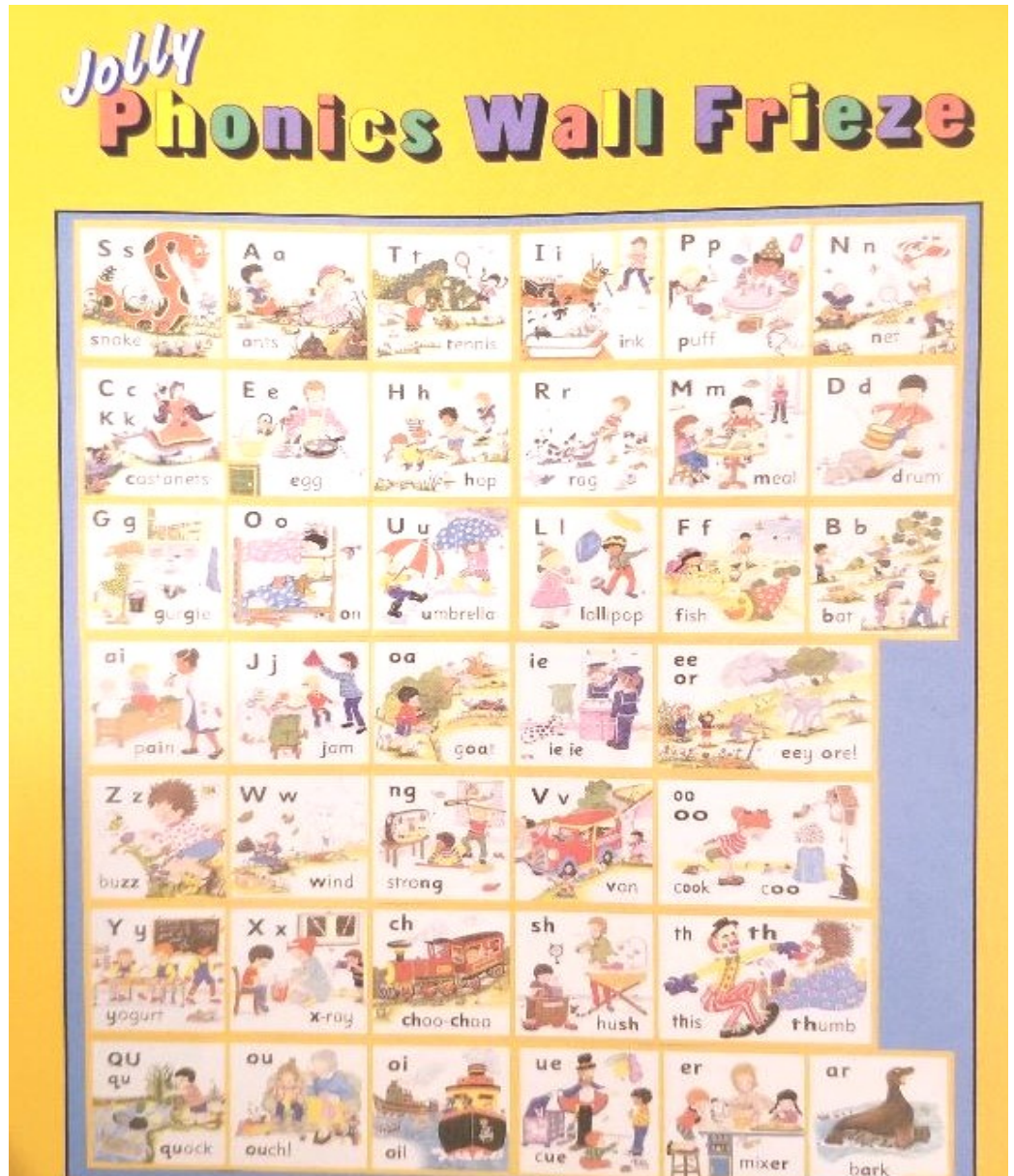
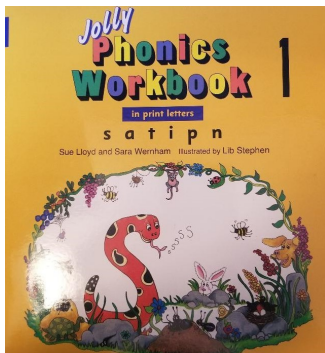
Here's a photo of the set of Jolly Phonics cartoons. This system was brought to our attention by a member of the Facebook group, Helping All Kids Learn To Read. (And with a google search you might find others you like better. But this set is well done and costs less than \$15.) To see it on Amazon, return to the opening page of *For Parents* and click on the link next to the topic of phonics.

Please note: This program also has workbooks with well-designed activities, coordinated with the cartoons. The children could use these for practice.

But it's not recommended that worksheets of any kind (including math) be allowed to take time away from the Key Word writing process.

With writing being the only requirement during a time devoted just to writing, you child may surprise you with their creativity and love for writing their own stories.

Requiring other work activities during "writing time" is likely to curtail this. So it's best to designate a separate "practice time" for workbooks.



This frieze has seven sections that can be put up individually. Or they can be used to form a continuous strip around the wall. Each illustration can also be laminated for use alone. Or each can be reduced to create the charts as shown earlier.