



# Phonemic Awareness

Reading Recovery®  
Council of North America

[www.readingrecovery.org](http://www.readingrecovery.org)

The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000a; 2000b; 2001) identified five essential components of reading instruction. One of those components was phonemic awareness. Attention is given to phonemic awareness in every Reading Recovery lesson.

## Phonemic Awareness Instruction from the National Reading Panel Reports and *Put Reading First*

**Definition:** Phonemic awareness is defined as “the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words . . . Phonemic awareness is a subcategory of phonological awareness” (NICHD, 2001, pp. 2–3).

- “It is important for teachers to help children make the connection between the phonemic awareness skills taught and their application to reading and writing tasks.” (NICHD, 2000b, pp. 2-33)
- Because students will differ in their phonemic awareness, some will need more instruction than others. (NICHD, 2000b)
- Because there are many ways to teach phonemic awareness effectively, teachers should evaluate their methods against their students’ success. (NICHD, 2000a)
- “Phonemic awareness instruction does not need to consume long periods of time to be effective. In these analyses, programs lasting less than 20 hours were more effective than longer programs.” (NICHD, 2000b, p. 2–6)
- “Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when children are taught to manipulate phonemes by using letters of the alphabet.” (NICHD, 2001, p. 7)
- Phonemic awareness can be improved by instruction that helps children
  - hear individual phonemes, syllables, onsets and rimes, and word boundaries. (NICHD 2001, pp. 4–5)
  - “focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken syllables and words.” (NICHD, 2000a, p. 7)
  - learn letter names and shapes along with phonemic awareness (NICHD 2001, p. 7)
  - see how phonemic awareness relates to their reading and writing. (NICHD 2001, p. 6)

## Phonemic Awareness in Reading Recovery Lessons

Writing in Reading Recovery includes procedures “designed to help a child *to hear and think about the order of sounds in spoken words. This has to do with the ears hearing sounds and transmitting messages about those sounds to the brain.* To write some new words in this writing segment of the lesson a child must analyze words into a sequence of sounds, must identify what sounds he can hear and must deal with the order or sequence in which the sounds occur.” (Clay, 2005, p. 70)

## *Assessment*

In Reading Recovery, individual assessments reveal information about a child's phonemic awareness, including

- upper and lower case letters the child can identify in some way.
- phonemes the child can hear in words.
- phonemes the child can connect to letters.
- specific phonemes the child can represent with letters in writing.
- the degree to which the child can locate words in a text after hearing them.

## *Examples of Instructional Procedures*

- In writing, children learn to hear and record the sounds in words and notice the sequence of the sounds.
- Children work with letters and related sounds in a variety of ways (e.g., making personalized alphabet books to link sounds and letters).
- Children learn how to make words with magnetic letters by adding, deleting, and substituting phonemes.
- Reassembling a cut-up sentence requires children to think about sounds in words.
- As children orally read and reread texts, the teacher demonstrates ways to use phonemic awareness and letter-sound relationships to monitor reading accuracy and to solve new words.

## *References*

- Clay, M. M. (2005). *Literacy lessons designed for individuals part two: Teaching procedures*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000a). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000b). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction: Reports of the subgroups* (NIH Publication No. 00-4754). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, DHHS (2001). *Put reading first: Helping your child learn to read*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.