

Phonemic Awareness and Phonics, Grade 1

Blending

About the routine

Learning the sounds and their spellings is only the first step in learning to read and write. The second step is learning to blend the sounds into words.

Blending is an important strategy for students to learn in order to figure out words they have never encountered in text. Initially, blending allows children to read words that are part of their speaking vocabulary. Later, they will use this strategy to read words that are unknown in terms of meaning as well. Initially, students will be blending sound-by-sound. Ultimately they will sound and blend only those words that they cannot read. Eventually, the blending process will become quick and comfortable for them.

Blending techniques

Initially, lines to be blended are written on the board or an overhead transparency *sound-by-sound* as students watch and participate. The lines and sentences should not be written out before class begins since sound-by-sound blending teaches the process of blending.

Blending words

In each lesson, blending is continued with systematically arranged words that you build at the board or on an overhead. By blending words with you sound-by-sound, students learn the blending process, which allows them to work out the words they meet in their reading independently. It provides maximum teacher support. Blending is a critical strategy for reading unfamiliar words.

Sound-by-Sound Blending

- Write the spelling of the first sound in the word. Point to the spelling.
- Have students say the sound with you as you say the sound. (Later, you will drop your verbal support.)
- Write the spelling of the next sound. Point to the spelling.
- Have students say the sound with you as you say the sound.
- After you have written the vowel spelling, blend through the vowel (unless the vowel is the first letter of the word), making the blending motion—a smooth sweeping of the hand beneath the spellings, linking them from left to right. As you make the blending motion, make sure that your hand is under the letter that corresponds to the sound you are saying at the moment.
- Have students blend through the vowel as you move your hand.
- Write the spelling of the next sound. Point to the spelling.
- Have students say the sound with you as you touch the spelling.
- Continue as described above through the remaining spellings in the word. After pronouncing the final sound in the word, make the blending motion from left to right under the word.
- Have students blend the word.
- Have the students read the word naturally, as they would say it.

- Ask a student to read the word again and to use it in a sentence. Ask the student or another student to extend the sentence—to make it more interesting by giving more information. Help the student by asking an appropriate question about the sentence. For example, "How did it happen? When did it happen? Where? Why?"
- Continue blending the words in this fashion.
- When all of the words have been blended, randomly point to words and ask individual students to read them. Review the words as directed in each lesson in the *Teacher's Edition*.

Blending Multisyllable Words: Sound-by-Sound Blending

- Blend the first syllable sound-by-sound.
- Cover the first syllable and blend the second syllable, sound-by-sound.
- Blend any remaining syllables sound-by-sound.
- Uncover all the syllables and blend them together.
- Read the word naturally.

Whole-Word Blending

Whole-word blending turns greater responsibility for blending over to the students. In whole-word blending, the word is written in its entirety, as the reader sees it in connected text. Children blend the spellings from left to right, from beginning to end.

- Write the whole word to be blended on the board or on an overhead transparency.
- Ask students to blend the sounds as you point to the spellings.
- Then have students read the whole word and then read it again naturally, as they would say it.
- Ask students to use the word in a sentence and then extend it.
- When all of the words have been blended, randomly point to words and ask individual students to read them. Review the words as directed in each lesson in the *Teacher's Edition*.

Blending Multisyllable Words: Whole-Word Blending

- Write the word, for example, "Sunday" (Sun-day).
- Cover the second syllable with an index card and blend the first syllable using the whole-word blending routine.
- Then cover the first syllable and blend the second.
- Uncover the first syllable and blend the word.
- Reread the word naturally.

Blending sentences

Blending sentences, the logical extension of blending words, helps students move from word fluency to sentence fluency. The procedure varies greatly from early to later sentences as students' skills develop.

Students participate in each sentence's development. Initially sentences are built using the sound-by-sound blending procedure, except for high-frequency sight words. Once whole-word blending is introduced, the words in the sentences are blended using the whole-word blending procedure. By the middle of first grade, many children are able to just read the blending words and sentences, stopping to blend only words that are problematic. Regardless if it is sound-by-sound or whole-word blending, the students should reread the sentences with intonation and discuss capitalization and punctuation.

1. Write the sentence on the board or on an overhead transparency, underlining any high-frequency sight words—words that students cannot decode either because they are irregular or because they contain sounds or spellings that the children have not yet learned. If students have not read these words before, write the words on the board and introduce them before writing the sentences. Sight words will not be blended but read as whole words.
2. Have students read the sentence using the sound-by-sound blending routine or the whole-word blending routine, when they are ready. Help them read high-frequency sight words if necessary.
3. Have students reread the sentence with normal intonation.
4. Proceed in this manner for all sentences.
5. After reading the sentences, discuss features of sentences, such as capitalization and punctuation as appropriate.
6. To review, call on students to read the sentences.

Helpful hints

- If a word has one syllable, have them blend each sound of the word. If the word has more than one syllable, have them blend each syllable sound-by-sound and then blend the syllables together.
- When you feel your students are catching on to sound-by-sound blending, reduce support by dropping the verbal cues (e.g., "sound-sound-sound-blend"). Once students become comfortable with sound-by-sound blending, move to the procedure for whole-word or syllable blending. You will know they are comfortable when they are reading the word before you point to the spellings.
- Once students are comfortable with whole-word blending, drop the verbal cues.
- In cases in which a line of words introduces or reinforces a spelling pattern, blend all words, discuss the spelling pattern, and then have them use selected words in sentences. Eventually, students, rather than you, should point out the common spelling patterns.
- At the beginning of the year, blend sound-by-sound and then whole-word with as much direction as is necessary for success. Reduce your verbal directions as soon as possible. You have made good progress when you no longer have to say "sound—sound—blend," because students automatically sound and blend as you write.
- As the first grade year progresses and you move to whole-word blending, feel free to drop back to sound-by-sound blending when you introduce the more complex long-vowel and variant vowel sounds and spellings.
- In second grade and beyond, you may need to use sound-by-sound and whole-word blending during Workshop as you preteach blending and word analysis.
- For students who are having difficulty blending sounds and spellings, you may want to preteach or reteach the word lines during Workshop. To support these students, write the vowels in red or orange to highlight the vowel spellings, which may be problematic for these students. Students can easily see, for example, that a_e is one vowel spelling for the long a sound.
- Refer to the *Sound/Spelling Cards* if students are unsure of the sound of a spelling. Students should use these cards to solve problems during blending.