

Playing with Word Sounds: Stretch and Shorten

When beginning readers sound out words, they slowly say each sound in a word (c-a-t), and then say the sounds quickly together to “read” the word (cat). In reading, teachers often refer to this as blending. Blending (combining sounds) and segmenting (separating sounds) are phonological awareness skills that are necessary for learning to read.

Developing your child’s phonological awareness is an important part of developing your child as a reader. Many research studies indicate that kids who have weak phonological awareness also have weak reading skills.

There are lots of ways families can work to develop a child’s phonological skills. Most activities require no paper or pencil, which makes them perfect for those times when you’re stuck waiting for a table in a restaurant or at the doctor’s office. All you need is a little bit of silliness and a willingness to play with sounds.

Ask your child to listen as you stretch out sounds in words. Have your child say the word at regular speed. Start with short two-sound words, and work your way up to longer words. Try to keep the atmosphere fun and game like. If a certain word is too difficult, try using a word with fewer sounds. Once your child has gotten some practice saying the word at regular speed, switch roles. Have your child say a word slowly, stretching out each sound, and you guess what word is being said.

Here are some words to stretch and shorten:

2 sounds

at (ă-t)
up (ŭ-p)
it (ĭ-t)
off (ö-f)

3 sounds

map (m-ă-p)
lip (l-ĭ-p)
night (n-ĭ-t)
van (v-ă-n)

4 sounds

mint (m-ĭ-n-t)
club (k-l-ŭ-b)
speak (s-p-ē-k)
groan (g-r-ō-n)

5 sounds

stroke (s-t-r-ō-k)
stream (s-t-r-ē-m)
frost (f-r-ö-s-t)
plant (p-l-ă-n-t)

For more information, read “Phonemic Activities for the Preschool or Elementary Classroom”
www.ReadingRockets.org/article/377

