

Tip Sheet

Alphabet Activities

Alphabet activities should be used when it becomes apparent that a student is having difficulty mastering the alphabetic code. Use wooden or strong plastic (preferably only one colour) alphabet letters for each activity.

These activities should be brief (approx. 5 mins.), and should be challenging in order to encourage students to improve their skills. Always present activities in left/right direction and in alphabetical order.

The activities should give practice in familiarising the student with:

- The names and shapes of the letters (including identifying vowels and consonants) and the speech sounds (phonemes) most commonly associated with them.
- The sequential order of the letters.
- The position of each letter in the alphabet and its relationship to other letters.

The activities should give the student the opportunity to practise:

- Stressed syllables.
- Visual memory strategies.

Capital Letters

Ideally, the capital form of each letter should be presented to the students in the first instance, with the lower case characters being introduced at a later time. This is primarily because the block capital is the letter form that remains the most stable.

For example, the capital **A** is always **A**, while the lower case printed and written form may vary; **a** may appear as **a** or **ɑ**. Lower case **b** can be reversed to appear as **d**, inverted to appear as **p** etc. whereas a **B** is completely different to a **D**, and **N** looks nothing like a **U**.

In order to identify each letter, the student can pick it up, feel it (with eyes open or closed), name it, and link it to a phoneme (speech sound). In this way the visual, auditory, oral and tactile-kinaesthetic channels of learning are all interacting.

The Alphabet Rainbow

Teach the letters in alphabetical order by arranging wooden or plastic capital letters in a rainbow.



Tip Sheet

Alphabet Activities (continued)

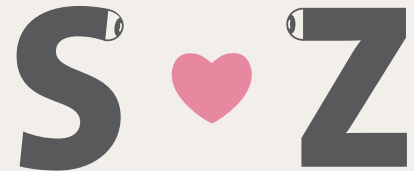
The student needs to learn that there are 26 letters in the alphabet. If necessary, teach only the first 7 letters to begin with: A B C D E F G, then the next 9 and finally the last 10 letters. Practice the alphabet activities with the student to familiarise them with the sequence of the letters. The student should practice so that he/she can name each letter and put it into sequential order to form an arc.

Once the student is able to place the letters into the rainbow formation with a good degree of accuracy, encourage him/her to check for errors:

- Are the letters in the correct sequence? What about those tricky parts we tend to confuse?
- Are any letters back-to-front?

Create memory tricks for confusing parts of the sequence, e.g. Little **M**iss **N**ice **O**nly **P**rances, or to remember the orientation of particular letters, e.g. S and Z love looking at each other.

Once the student is able to put the letters in the correct sequence, he/she can be timed to see how quickly they can create the rainbow in the right order.



The Names and Shapes of the Letters

Reciting the alphabet

The student and teacher recite the alphabet together by alternating the letters. Then try saying two letters each. Next, the teacher says two letters and the student three. Now, the teacher recites the alphabet missing out one letter. The student is asked to name the missing letter. If he or she cannot do this, the teacher recites the alphabet slowly asking the student to stop the teacher when the missing letter is reached.

Initially, the student can refer to the rainbow, then he/she should perform the task without needing to look.

Where will it land?

Scatter the alphabet letters over the table. The student drops a bouncy ball on the pile and has to tell the teacher the name and corresponding sound of the letter the ball landed on.

Feel the alphabet

The student is asked to close their eyes and a letter is placed in their hand. The student feels the letter until he/she can name it and link it to a speech sound.

Bart's vowels

The teacher pulls the vowel sounds out of the rainbow and encourages the student to make up a story or memory trick to remember what letters are vowels. Here's an example: Bart Simpson is walking down the street and sees his two friends who are called A and E. Bart knows that he owes them some money so he calls out "A! E! I owe you!" (A E I O U).

Invisible vowels

When the student has arranged the alphabet, tell him/her to turn away. The teacher removes all the vowels and closes the gaps. The student must look at the rainbow and discover what has been changed. Then see if the student can replace the vowels in their proper place, naming them and linking them to phonemes (initially short vowel sounds) as they place them.

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Alphabet Activities (continued)**The Sequential Order of the Letters****What's missing?**

While the student has his/her eyes closed, the teacher removes a letter from the rainbow and closes the gap. The student opens his/her eyes and has to find where the letter belongs and return it in alphabetical order.

To make this more difficult – the teacher removes the letter and places it upside-down or back-to-front before the student has to return the letter to its correct place and the right way up.

Before or after

The teacher puts two alphabet letters in front of the student and asks the student if one letter is before or after another letter, e.g. "Is C before or after J?" The student puts the letters in the right order to answer.

Advanced Sequencing

Divide the letters between teacher and student. At a given signal, each holds a letter under the table. The student is then asked to name the letter that he/she is holding, and place it on the table. The teacher does the same. The student then has to recite, in alphabetic order all the letters that fall between the two selected letters. (The selected letters should also be named in the sequence.) Alternatively, the student could be asked to name the letters that fall both before and after each of the selected letters.

Letter Tracking

The Letter Tracking activity at the end of this tip sheet can be enlarged and laminated and used with an overhead marker. The aim is to find the letters of the alphabet (or a selected sequence of letters), in correct alphabetic order, within the nonsense words. Record the student's time and track their improvements.

Stressed Syllables

The ability to identify the stressed syllables of words is important for both reading and spelling. Before learners can successfully break words into syllables for spelling, it is helpful to give practice in tapping out rhythms and emphatically stressing selected beats. This can begin with the alphabet.

Alphabet Rap

The teacher begins the rhythm and the student joins in: clap, tap or use any other means of identifying the rhythm (such as beating a drum). The **bolded** letter is stressed:

AB CD EF **GH** etc.

AB CD EF **GH** etc.

ABC DEF **GHI** JKL etc.

ABC DEF **GHI** JKL etc.

Sometimes start at the beginning; sometimes start at a random place in the rainbow. It is important to build knowledge of the sequence of the alphabet without the student always needing to go back to A.

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Alphabet Activities (continued)**Visual/Auditory Memory Strategies****Alphabet Memory**

To build a student's visual memory, the teacher shows the student a card with three to seven letters written in alphabetical order (e.g. A G J X). The card is hidden and the student has to repeat the sequence of letters while pulling the letters out of the rainbow. Younger students or those with visual working memory difficulties will need lots of practice with fewer items. They also need to produce the associated speech sounds (phonemes).

To add an extra challenge, students must perform a task between looking at the card and saying the letters, e.g. throwing a ball in the air three times. To build auditory memory, practice the same task but tell the student the letters verbally rather than showing them visually.

Letter Tracking

Find the letters in the nonsense words below in alphabetical order. Alternatively, highlight some of the letters (for example the vowels) and see how many times they can be identified in sequence.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

VOLIP HOFT ARN HOLBY KELM CROE PEUROT IX

RISH DOP TULT HURS LIM KREPH THOZ TIFOL

KRIK NUL GUAR QUIM AUTH QUAT RULK TAY

SUILD MEVE NEB POJ DURAT CET BOFT KALB

BOC REM TURZ BURED DIR ENCH VERF THAY

FORG CHUT APITE BEGUE QUIDE TERE GUSK GALF

BACHE DEPH LECT WALD MUND NEWK POIV FAM

WEMP SNAL FROM MEX JOP YONDE BAZE DEG

Time: **Min.** **Sec.**

This material was taken from a number of sources including:

DSF Specialist Literacy Teachers attending DSF Workshops

[Alpha to Omega](#) (1999), Hornsby, B., Shear, F., & Pool, J. (5th Edition). Heinemann: Oxford, UK. Pages 21, 229 to 233.

[The Hickey Multisensory Language Course](#) (2001), M. Combley (Ed.) (3rd Edition). Whurr: London, UK. Pages 50 to 54, 168.

[Letter Tracking 1](#) (1995). Ann Arbor Tracking Program. Novato, CA: Ann Arbor.