

B – l – a – c – k ... Bird??
Blending can be hard!

Blending sounds together to make a word is an essential skill for learning to read. Being able to break a word up into its individual sounds (segmentation) is another vital skill required for reading success. Both of these skills need to be taught and actively practised so that the child is able to blend and segment words quickly and easily. *It is only when these skills become automatic that reading really takes off.*

In our Reading Clinic we commonly see children who have not learnt these skills or not developed them to the level of automaticity required and thus their reading is slow and effortful. As the children are not able to use these skills they fall into the trap of looking at the general shape of the word and guessing it. Sadly this is a very ineffective and unreliable technique, that too often results in the child reading the word incorrectly, leading to confusion and frustration for everyone.

Blending spoken sounds comes before blending written letters.

Being able to blend sounds together to make a word is a critical skill that starts to develop in most children by 5 years of age.

Stage 1: Before a child has even learnt the names and sounds of letters, your child should be able to blend spoken sounds together. For example, you say to the child 'Try and guess what word I'm trying to say', Say the SOUNDS (not the letters):

f (pause) ar (pause) m

If your child can do this, give him lots of other broken-up words in order to practise blending them together. If your child cannot do this, you may need to make the pauses between the sounds a little shorter.

Stage 2: When the child is ready to enter Grade 1, stage 1 should be very easy. Stage 2 requires the child to know the names of letters and the sounds that they make, so when he/she sees a small, regularly-spelt word, he can be encouraged to 'sound it out loud'. For example, child reads the sounds that the letters make as you point to each letter:

s (pause) u (pause) n

The child is then asked to run the sounds together to say the word. This should be relatively easy if the child is proficient at stage 1.

However, a child will not be successful at stage 2 if they cannot do stage 1.

Blending skills should be acquired readily and be very well established by the end of Grade 1. *If you are noticing that your child is having major difficulties blending or segmenting simple regular words in Grade 2, then assessment by a speech pathologist is recommended.* It could be an indication that your child has



phonological awareness difficulties that need to be assessed and treated before the child can progress quickly with their reading and spelling skills.

Sometimes a child can 'fool' parents and teachers into thinking they are using these skills while reading but in fact they are using well-honed visual memory skills to memorise whole words (as a picture). The problem with this is that the working memory becomes full and then the child can't retain any new words.

How to spot a difficulty:

1. Ask your child to read aloud to you at regular intervals so you can see how 'accurately' they are reading. When a child reads silently they can be misreading several words and nobody knows.
2. Give the child some nonsense words to read and spell (see table below). As they haven't seen these words before they can't read or spell them from memory. Instead they need to use phonological awareness skills.

zeef	rike
baze	soam
faich	lose

If your child appears to be struggling with reading and spelling, it is easiest if you address the difficulties immediately so that your child's confidence around reading remains high.

Treatment for reading difficulties is very effective. Call us to discuss your child's circumstances. Good luck!

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