

Intervention activities to support blending

Many intervention activities are provided for developing the skill of blending, including auditory blending.

Auditory blending

Practising auditory blending is important for children who struggle to hear a word after its letter sounds have been spoken. These children, when hearing /d-o-g/, for example, might respond by saying *dad* or *dig*, or they might just shrug and say they do not know. The ability to hear the word does not come easily to some children and needs to be taught. The following activities (which may be better done with one child at a time) help children to develop the skill of auditory blending.

Blending with pictures

Start by using pictures of words that have two or three sounds in them, such as *ant*, *cow*, *car* or *church*. Put two pictures – for example *cow* and *car* – on the table and ask the child to say what they are. Then ask the question *Which one is the /c-ar/*? If the right one is chosen, you can give the child the picture [*demonstration*]. This activity reduces auditory blending to its simplest form. I have not known a child who is unable to do it, although I imagine it is possible. Do the activity several more times, using a different pair of pictures each time. As the children improve, increase the number of pictures to three or four to make the activity that little bit harder.

Guess the picture

This game can be played with either one child or several children. Hold a picture in your hand so that it cannot be seen by the children and say, for example, *In my hand is a /m-oo-n/. What do I have in my hand? Whoever says moon gets the picture* [*demonstration*]. Advice on how to obtain pictures for activities like these can be found in the *Resources* section on the home page (or by scrolling down to *Links* at the bottom of the screen in the section *Preventing Problems*, Part 4).

Objects in a bag

A similar activity to *Guess the picture* can be carried out with objects in a bag, such as a book, fork and comb [*demonstration*]. Alternatively, if these are not to hand, you could show the children a scene in a book and say the sounds for an object in the picture. As always, it is better to stick to short words.

I hear with my little ear

Say *I hear with my little ear a word. What is it? /f-o-x/*. The children then give the answer *fox* [*demonstration*].

Word blending

Once children are able to hear a word when someone else says the sounds, the aim is for them to hear the word when they say the sounds themselves. This, of course, is word blending.

The word bank and word blending boxes are useful resources for word blending activities. The word bank provides a list of words for each letter sound. These words only use the focus sound and other letter sounds taught so far, so the children are never asked to blend a letter sound they do not know. The words can be put onto colour-coded cards and kept in word blending boxes, one for each group. This makes it easy to find word cards for /ai/ (yellow) and /j/ (blue) when practising these two target sounds. The downloadable sheets are available in the *Resources* section on the home page (or are accessed by scrolling down to the bottom of the screen in the section *Preventing Problems*, Part 4).

Blending words with the focus letter sounds

Word-blending practice using the focus letter sounds (in this case /ai/ and /j/) is always important. It helps to reinforce the learning of the two letter sounds as well as improve the skill of blending. There are various ways this can be done. For example, write the words (such as *pain*, *fail*, *laid*, *jet*, *job*, and *jacket*) on the board and ask the children to sound out and blend the words together [*demonstration*]. Once they have done this, encourage the children to say the words again, this time without the blending. Alternatively, put /ai/ and /j/ word cards in the middle of the table and ask each child to pick a card, blend the sounds and say the word. If the children say their word correctly, they keep it and pick up another word to blend. Then, once the game is over, the children count the number of words they read correctly. The children could also be given three words each to work out for themselves. They take it in turns to say their words, preferably without having to blend them again.

Blending words with consonant blends

Some children find it difficult to blend words that start with two or three consonants, such as *stain* and *brain*; they can say the sounds /s-t-ai-n/, but cannot hear the word. If these children learn to blend the consonants and say them in one go – /st-ai-n/ and /br-ai-n/ – they find it much easier to hear the word. These children benefit from targeted practice of initial consonant blends (the consonants used at the beginning of many words), such as /cr/, /gr/, /cl/, /st/, /sn/, /sk/ and /spr/ [*demonstration*]. It is well worth doing.

Support for short auditory memory: Consonant and vowel blending

Very occasionally, a child has an auditory memory that is so short that if s(he) blends a word, the first sound has been forgotten by the time the last sound is said. This is a huge handicap for blending, but fortunately it is very unusual. Children with this problem benefit from targeted practice of blending a consonant and a short vowel. Fortunately, this activity also develops general fluency in blending, so it is good for all the children in the group.

The aim is to practise snapping the consonant and vowel together. Start by asking the children to say these blends together in one go [*demonstration on video*]:

/ja/ /je/ /ji/ /jo/ /ju/
/pa/ /pe/ /pi/ /po/ /pu/
/sa/ /se/ /si/ /so/ /su/

A bit of chanting like this helps develop the skill. Follow this by putting a few on cards in the middle of the table. The children each choose a card and say the blend as fast as possible. If they say it correctly, they keep the card and take another one. If the children say /d-i/ ... /di/, remind them that they have to say the sounds in one go. Ask them to put the card back and try another one.

Once the group is good at blending a consonant and vowel, the children can progress to blending a consonant blend and a short vowel, such as /gra/, /cri/, /bre/, /dru/, /fru/, /fle/, /splo/ and /stri/ [*demonstration*].

Cards to practise consonant blends and the snapping together of a consonant and vowel or a consonant blend and vowel can be downloaded from the *Resources* section (or by scrolling down to the bottom of the screen in the section *Preventing Problems, Part 4*).

Blending lists of words

The aim of this activity is to bring fluency to blending and to practice the focus letter sounds (in this case /ai/ and /j/). Write or type a list of words (using suitable words from the word bank) and give them to the children. The children can blend the words together as a group, individually or in pairs. If possible, encourage them to read the words again without the blending. The list also goes home so that parents or guardians can listen to the children while they blend and read the words. (A tick could be written next to every word that is read correctly.) Of course, the list would only go home with children who can blend words. This is also a good time to add /ai/ and /j/ to the children's letter-sound boxes, if appropriate.