

Sound Spelling Card Games

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Use these Sound Spelling Card Games to build the phonemic awareness skills that are foundational for learning to read and spell. While the games are not necessarily the primary way to teach phonemic awareness and phonics, these activities are playful ways that will support learning. Short, positive sessions of five to ten minutes make a real difference over time. The games below are grouped into two sections: Phonemic Awareness Games, which are sound-only, and Phonics Games, which add a reading and spelling component.

Each game uses the Sound Spelling Cards directly. One adult and one child is all you need.

For more information on instructional routines, please see our resource page at www.veritasedconsulting.com/resources.

Before You Play

A few things to keep in mind across all games:

- **Focus on sounds first.** Each card represents one sound, not a letter.
- **Name the pictures.** Each card shows a picture to help the child remember the sound.
- Keep sessions short and positive. Five to ten minutes is ideal.
- **Stop while it is still fun.** Confidence builds faster than you think.
- **Mistakes are part of learning.** Praise effort, correct gently.

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Phonemic Awareness Games

Game 1: Build a Word

Skills: Blending sounds to read **Players:** 1 child + 1 adult **Time:** 5–10 minutes

How to Play

- Choose a simple word to start (two or three sounds work best).
- Lay out the matching Sound Spelling Cards from left to right.
- Point to each card and say the sound slowly.
- Ask the child to blend the sounds together to say the word.
- Celebrate the attempt and try another word.

Example: /m/ – /ă/ – /p/ → *map*

Tip: Slide a finger under the cards from left to right as the sounds blend together. This connects the physical cards to the act of reading.

Make It More Fun

- Use a silly voice while blending.
- Let the child slide their own finger under the cards as they blend.
- Pretend the sounds are "sticking together" as the cards get closer.
- Use a hand puppet to lead the activity.

Level Up

- Use longer words with more sounds.
- Mix in different spelling cards for the same sound to show that one sound can be spelled more than one way.
- Use a second set of cards to build words that have the same sound more than once.

Game 2: Sound Detective

Skills: Segmenting sounds to spell **Players:** 1 child + 1 adult **Time:** 5–10 minutes

How to Play

- Say a word out loud. Do not show it written. Use it in a sentence.
- Have the child repeat the word slowly.
- Ask: "How many sounds are in that word?"
- Ask: "What is the first sound?" Have the child find the matching card and place it first.
- Repeat with each remaining sound until the child has built the word from left to right.
- Say the sounds together to check the word.

Example: *ship* → /sh/ – /i/ – /p/

Tip: Draw a row of boxes on paper — one per sound — and have the child place a card in each box as they build the word. This makes the segmenting process visible.

Make It More Fun

- Pretend to be "sound detectives" solving a mystery word.
- Use small objects or toys that match the words.
- Give a point or token for each sound identified correctly.

Level Up

- Ask the child to point to and choose between different graphemes on a card to spell each sound.
- Have the child write the graphemes on paper, then show the correct spelling and compare.

Game 3: Sound Match

Skills: Recognizing individual sounds **Players:** 1–2 players **Time:** 5–10 minutes

How to Play

- Lay out three to six cards face up.
- Say one sound (not a letter name).
- The child points to or picks up the matching card.
- Have the child say the sound and name the picture on the card.

Tip: Let the child take a turn saying the sound for you to find. Switching roles builds confidence and reinforces learning.

Make It More Fun

- Turn it into a race — who can find the card first?
- Act out the picture or make the sound together.
- Use a timer and see how many correct matches can be made in one minute.

Level Up

- Say a word and ask the child to find the card for the first, middle, or last sound.
- Increase the number of cards in play.
- Say a word and ask the child to find all the cards that match the sounds in the word.

Game 4: Keyword Code

Skills: Retrieving a phoneme from its keyword picture, then blending it into a word **Players:** 1 child + 1 adult
Time: 5–10 minutes

How to Play

- Choose a word for the child to build (e.g., "school").
- Instead of saying the sounds, say the keyword for each card in order (e.g., "sun...clock...moon...lamb").
- The child recalls the sound each keyword represents, says it, and blends the sounds into the word.
- Show the matching cards afterward so the child can check the blend.

Example: *Keywords: sun, clock, moon, lamb* → *sounds /s/-/k/-/ōō/-/l/* → word **school**

Tip: This game works because the child has to retrieve the sound before blending, not just look at a picture and blend automatically. That extra retrieval step is what builds lasting memory for the sound-picture connection. This game is helpful as children are initially remembering all of the Sound Spelling Cards.

Make It More Fun

- Frame it as cracking a "secret code" or a riddle with the keywords as clues.
- Let the child give you a keyword code to crack.

Level Up

- Use keywords for sounds the child has learned recently but has not fully mastered.
- Build two-syllable words that require the child to also track syllable breaks.

Game 5: Sound Wall Scramble

Skills: Rapid sound-to-symbol retrieval **Players:** 1 child + 1 adult, or a small group or whole class **Time:** 5–10 minutes

How to Play

- Spread 8 to 12 Sound Spelling Cards around the room, floor, or table, picture-side up.
- Call out a sound, not a letter name.
- The child races to find and touch the matching card, then says the sound and names the keyword picture.
- Reset and repeat with a new sound.

Example: Call *"/TH/"* as in *"this."* Child finds and touches the Feather card, and says *"/TH/, Feather"*.

Tip: Rotate which cards are in play every few rounds so the same few sounds do not dominate. This keeps review spread across everything the child has learned, not just what was taught most recently. This game is helpful as children are initially remembering all of the Sound Spelling Cards.

Make It More Fun

- Hide the cards around the room ahead of time and play it as a scavenger hunt.
- In a small group or classroom, split into teams and award a point for the first correct find.
- Set a timer and try to beat a previous best time instead of competing against another child.

Level Up

- Increase the number of cards in play as the set of learned sounds grows.

Phonics Games

Game 1: Spelling Detective

Skills: Applying spelling rationales to select graphemes **Players:** 1 child + 1 adult (or 1–2 players) **Time:** 5–10 minutes

How to Play

- Choose a word that has a sound spelled more than one way (e.g., "watch").
- Identify the sound in the word that has more than one possible spelling (e.g., /ch/).
- Show the Sound Spelling Card for that sound (e.g., the Cherries card).
- Ask the child which spelling on the card was used in this word, and why.
- Celebrate with the child when they correctly explain their reasoning.

Example: Word "watch," sound /ch/, Cherries card (ch, tch). Because watch has a short vowel right before the sound, the child reasons it should be **tch**, not ch.

Tip: For a child who isn't ready to explain the reasoning yet, point to two spelling choices on the card and have them just point to the one used in the word. Add the "why" once they are pointing correctly and consistently.

Make It More Fun

- Use a bell or buzzer for the child to "ring in" with an answer.
- Play it like a mini game show, with you as the host asking the questions.
- Let the child be the host and quiz you. Miss one on purpose so they get to correct you.

Level Up

- Say a word. Have the child find the Sound Spelling Cards that spell the whole word, put them in order, and spell the word on paper. Celebrate correct spelling, and gently explain the reason for any mistakes.
- Mix in a card the child has not fully mastered yet alongside a familiar one.

Game 2: The Investigative Reader

Skills: Visually recognizing a spelling pattern in printed words **Players:** 1 child + 1 adult **Time:** 5–10 minutes

How to Play

- Choose one Sound Spelling Card without telling the child which card.
- Ask the child what they already know about the ways that sound can be spelled.
- Hand the child a book, magazine, or on-screen text and have them read to find and point to examples of each spelling.
- Award a point for every new spelling pattern the child finds, naming the sound and the card's keyword each time.
- Celebrate how many patterns they found.

Example: Card /ē/ (Bee card). While reading, the child finds and points to she, teacher, funny, and brief — earning a point for each new spelling: e, ea, _y, _ie.

Tip: If the child is not ready to search open text yet, start with a controlled list of four to six words pulled from the back of the card before moving to a real book or passage. This game builds visual pattern recognition, not new decoding.

Make It More Fun

- Use a different colored highlighter for each spelling pattern found.
- Time a short round and see how many patterns the child can spot.

Level Up

- Continue the game over several days, moving to a new spelling pattern each time.
- Slip in a word that only looks like it belongs (e.g., head among long e words) and have the child reject it.
- Use words from two different Sound Spelling Cards in the same list and have the child sort by sound before they spot the spelling.

Game 3: Spelling Judge

Skills: Evaluating correct vs. incorrect spellings **Players:** 1 child + 1 adult **Time:** 5–10 minutes

How to Play

- Write two or three versions of the same word, only one spelled correctly (e.g., raen, rain, rayn).
- Use the word in a sentence (e.g., The rain fell softly on the hills.)
- The child acts as "judge" and rules on which spelling is correct.
- Ask the child to explain the ruling before you confirm it.
- Turn the card over and check the verdict against the real word list.

Example: *Case: raen vs. rain vs. rayn. Verdict: rain.*

Tip: Include one wrong answer that borrows a spelling from a different Sound Spelling Card, not just the wrong pattern for this sound. That way the child has to listen carefully instead of just guessing by eye.

Make It More Fun

- Use a toy gavel or a deep "judge voice" for rulings.
- Let the child write the "wrong" spellings for you to judge for a round.

Level Up

- Select four or five words that are above grade level and that they may not recognize, but that follow regular patterns.
- Move to two-syllable words with the target spelling in the unstressed syllable.

Game 4: Spelling Sort

Skills: Categorizing words by spelling pattern **Players:** 1 child + 1 adult, or a small group of 3–4 **Time:** 10–15 minutes

How to Play

- Choose one Sound Spelling Card.

- Write several words for each spelling pattern on the card on separate index cards or pieces of paper.
- Set out one pile, column, or plastic bin for each spelling pattern on the card.
- Depending on the child's phonics level either have the child read the word aloud on one card at a time or read the word to the child and then hand them the card.
- The child reviews the spelling of the word and places each word in the pile that matches its spelling, not just how it sounds.
- Check each pile together by pointing to and verifying the spelling pattern.

Example: Card /ō/: piles for o, o_e, oa, ow. Words: go, note, goat, snow.

Tip: With younger children, use bins or paper plates on the floor so they can move around while they sort.

Make It More Fun

- Turn the piles into floor stations and have the child walk each word card to its spelling.
- In a small group, give each child a stack and race to sort correctly. Accuracy counts more than speed.

Level Up

- Mix in patterns from two related Sound Spelling Cards at once.
- Include a less common spelling from the card alongside the most frequent ones.

Game 5: Blank Builder

Skills: Applying knowledge of spelling patterns **Players:** 1 child + 1 adult **Time:** 5–10 minutes

How to Play

- Say a word, then say the word in a full sentence so the child knows its meaning. Then say the word again. (e.g., "Night. It is dark at night. Night")
- Ask the child to say the word.
- Write the word with the target spelling left blank (e.g., n__t).
- Show the matching Sound Spelling Card.
- The child chooses which spelling from the card completes the word and writes it in.
- Write the word correctly for the child to see and have them compare their finished word to the correct model.
- Ask the child how they knew to choose that spelling. (If they made an error, explain to them how they could have known the correct spelling.)

Example: Blank: n__t. Card /ī/: igh, i_e, y, ie. Child writes **igh**

Tip: Say the word in a sentence and have them say the word back to you before showing the blank. Children spell more accurately when they know what the word means and have pronounced all its sounds correctly.

Make It More Fun

- Turn it into a "mystery word" envelope: the child unfolds one clue at a time, sentence first, before writing.
- Let the child write a blank of their own for you to solve.

Level Up

- Use words that are harder or less familiar, but that follow predictable patterns using spelling patterns that you have been focused on for reading.
- Put the Sound Spelling Card away and see if the child can recall the spelling from memory, checking the card only after they commit to an answer.

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