



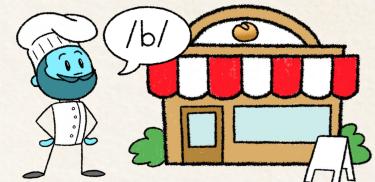
Frequently Asked Questions

What do you mean when you say “letter names” versus “letter sounds?”

Letter names are what we use to identify written letters, for example, L = “el” or B = “bee.”

Letter sounds are the actual sounds, or phonemes, made by each letter. For example, L = /L/ or /u/ or B = /b/.

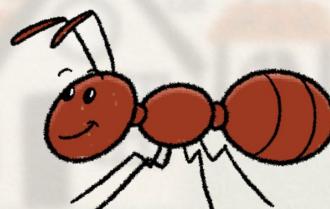
Note that the letter sound for L is not /Luh/ and the sound for B is not /buh/. We want to be sure we are modeling the actual sound the letter makes and not adding “uh” at the end of the letter sound. This may sound choppy before you get used to it, but this practice is greatly beneficial when the student starts blending.



Why did you choose “ant” in the phoneme story when the /a/ in that word doesn’t sound quite right?

Great catch! You’re right! The /a/ in “ant” is an allophonic variation, which means the sound the letter makes is influenced by the letters around it. So in this case, the /a/ sound in “ant,” is slightly different from the /a/ sound in “apple.”

We really struggled with this one, but eventually decided to use “ant” here because it fit with all of the other requirements. It’s a recognizable image, it only has one-syllable, and it worked for our stories and animations.



Why do you focus on teaching the letter sounds **before** teaching letter names?

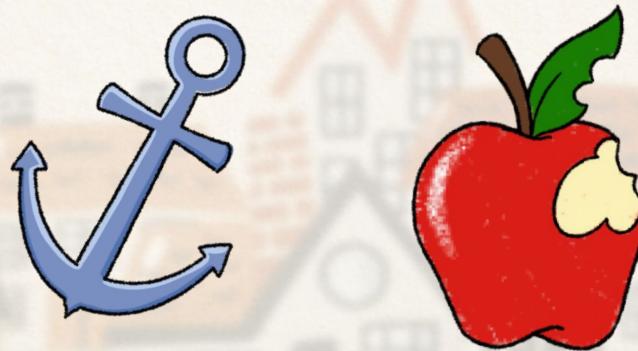
This is a decision based on the research on phonological awareness, as well as on research in child development and focus.

The research tells us that phonological awareness (the ability to recognize and manipulate the spoken parts of words) is strongly correlated with future reading ability. Without this skill, many children won't ever learn to read well.

But phonological awareness isn't innate. It is something that needs to be explicitly taught and practiced.

Many literacy programs may teach letter sounds and letter names simultaneously, but there is no evidence that learning letter names first helps with learning letter sounds. Letter sounds are what is used in learning to read words because letter sounds are most tied to speech and phonemes. Also, letter sounds are harder to learn, so more exposure for longer is helpful, especially if your core curriculum teaches letter names first.

Children may test well on assessments that show they know all of the letter names, but *still* have underdeveloped phonemic awareness skills. *If a child is unable to identify the unit of sound they're hearing, how will they connect it with the written representation of that sound?* They must first practice and gain a deep understanding of the sounds that make up words, before attempting to connect them to letters on a page.

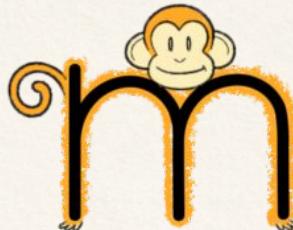


Roberts, T.A., Vadasy, P.F., & Sanders, E.A. (2018). Preschoolers' alphabet learning: Letter name and sound instruction, cognitive processes, and English proficiency. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 44(3), 257-274.

What are integrated mnemonics?

A mnemonic is something that helps you remember something.

When we talk about integrated mnemonics here in Soundkins, we are actually referring to an integrated mnemonic alphabet—letters that are built into an image meant to remind the reader of the sound. For example, we hid the lowercase letter m in this image of a monkey.



Why do you use integrated mnemonics to teach letter identification?

Research has found that children who are taught letter identification with the help of integrated mnemonics learn to identify letters twice as quickly as children who are taught using simple letters.

We use images of familiar animals and objects that start with phonemes the children already know, so they are able to quickly connect the written letter's shape with the sound it makes. (References below)

Why do you focus on lowercase letters first?

We focus on lowercase letters first because the majority of the letters a reader sees will be lowercase. Lowercase are also harder to learn and take more time to learn. Teaching both uppercase and lowercase letters at the same time increases the cognitive learning load, particularly for English learners.

Roberts, T.A. & Sadler, C.D. (2019). Letter sound characters and imaginary narratives: Can they enhance motivation and letter sound learning? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 46(1), 97-111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.04.002>

Shmidman, A., & Ehri, L. (2010). Embedded picture mnemonics to learn letters. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 14(2), 159-182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888430903117492>

Ehri, L.C., Deffner, N.D., & Wilce, L.S. (1984). Pictorial mnemonics for phonics. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76(5), 880-893. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.76.5.880>

How did you pick which animals/things to use for our characters and integrated mnemonics designs?

We set out to provide the most valuable images, animations, and integrated mnemonics for the young learners using Soundkins. We intentionally chose images that:



- were familiar to most children;
- were words with minimal syllables;
- were easily visualized, animated, and integrated as a mnemonic;
- would accurately demonstrate the letter-sound.

Why aren't you teaching q and x as having two phonemes?

Letters q and x do not have unique phonemes. This is because these letters are made of two sounds:

- “q” grapheme is made up of /k/ + /w/. For example, queen has four sounds: /k/ /w/ /ē/ /n/
- “x” grapheme is made up of /k/ + /s/. For example, box has four sounds: /b/ /o/ /k/ /s/

These are low frequency letters and with so few words with these letters, we've determined that taking the time to separate the two phonemes represented by the q and the x would end up distracting the learners rather than supporting them.



How did you choose the order of letters/sounds introduced?

We chose the letters/sounds order by looking at the most common phonemes. We also wanted to intentionally focus Module 1 on 8 unique sounds that are all made with different parts of the mouth.

Roberts, T.A., Vadasy, P.F., & Sanders, E.A. (2020). Preschool instruction in letter names and sounds: Does contextualized or decontextualized instruction matter? *Reading Research Quarterly*, 55(4), 573-600. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.284> (choice of alphabet content p578)

Do I have to follow your order or can I pick and choose which activities we do based on other factors?

We know that most teachers will be using Soundkins as a complement to another literacy curriculum, and that each curriculum has their own order of letter/sound introduction. You are welcome to change the order of letters/sounds you introduce based on your curriculum needs. Either:

- Press play on the video that links to the target skill of your choice. For example, if your program covers /t/ and /b/ this week, play the /t/ and /b/ phoneme videos from Soundkins (can use the search bar), OR
- Manually adjust the order of activities you see: Account section > Sequence > Click “Soundkins Default” > Select “Customize” > Click activities to add to your sequence. You can also drag and drop within the sequence and click “x” to remove from the sequence. If you change your mind, select “Soundkins Default” to reset. ([video](#))

Is this program good for people who want to limit screen time?

YES! We've intentionally made all of our activities less than 5 minutes long, so there is no excessive screen time here! Our printable supplemental activities can extend the learning off the screen.



What is unique about Soundkins's methodology?

Soundkins activities focus on these essential skills for reading: phonemic awareness, letter sounds, and blending.

Traditionally, this instruction is spread out over a 1-3 year sequence, with instruction in blending and word reading arriving at the end of the sequence.



Soundkins Innovation: We developed a novel configuration of this traditional sequencing to teach 4-year-olds to read with 10 weeks of instruction. **Our research studies have shown that word reading is within the cognitive capacity of Pre-K children.**

The program teaches a first set of eight phonemes in oral language and then teaches their associated eight lowercase letter sounds and ends with blending instruction for 2- and 3- phoneme words built from those letter sounds for those children who have mastered the sounds. The cycle is repeated with a second set of nine phonemes, letter sounds, and blending and finally a third set in this order.

