



## How To: Promote Phonics Skills: Word Boxes & Word Sort

Young children must master phonics--the mapping of the sounds of speech to the symbols of the alphabet--before they can become accomplished readers (NICHD, 2000). Word boxes/word sort is a one-to-one intervention that can strengthen essential phonics skills (Joseph, 2002).

**Preparation.** The teacher selects up to 10 consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words each tutoring session and writes them into the *Word Boxes: Recording Form* (attached). The teacher also writes these 10 words onto index cards--one word per card. NOTE: These CVC words can be a mix from the five vowel groups: a,e,i,o,u.

**Materials.** To use word boxes and word sort, the teacher will need these additional materials:

- *Word Boxes: Recording Form* (attached)
- *Word Boxes: Phonics Practice Sheet* (attached)
- *Word Sort: Practice Sheet* (attached)
- Counters (e.g., pennies, poker chips)
- Moveable letters (e.g., magnet letters, cut-out letters)
- Markers for student use

**Procedures.** Below are guidelines for conducting both the Word Boxes and Word Sort elements of this intervention.

*Word Boxes.* For each word used in the Word Boxes intervention, the teacher follows these steps:

1. **Teacher sounds out word and puts counters into word boxes.** The teacher places counters under each of the 3 blanks on the *Word Boxes: Phonics Practice Sheet*. The teacher next reads aloud a word from the CVC word list. Then the teacher sounds out each letter sound in the CVC word. While sounding out each letter, the teacher slides a counter into the corresponding word box. For example, for the word /p-a-t/, the teacher reads the word, then pronounces /p/ and slides a counter into the first word box, pronounces /a/ and slides a counter into the second word box, and pronounces /t/ and slides a counter into the third word box.
2. **Teacher sounds out word and student puts counters into word boxes.** The teacher directs the student to put counters into the word boxes while the teacher pronounces the letter sounds of the CVC word.
3. **Student sounds out word and puts letters into word boxes.** Using cut-out or magnetic letters, the teacher lines up the letters that make up the target word under each of the appropriate blanks on the *Word Boxes: Phonics Practice Sheet*. The student is then directed to sound out each letter sound in the CVC word while sliding that moveable letter counter into the corresponding word box. For the word /p-a-t/, for example, the student pronounces /p/ and slides the letter 'p' into the first word box, pronounces /a/ and slides the letter 'a' into the second word box, and pronounces /t/ and slides the letter 't' into the third word box.
4. **Student writes letters of word into word boxes.** The student is given a marker and directed to write the letters of the target word into the appropriate word boxes. The student is then prompted to read the word aloud.
5. **[Optional] Teacher records student responses.** The instructor may want to keep a record of student performance on the word-box activity. The *Word Boxes: Recording Form* (attached) is a convenient means to track student success rate across successive reviews of the same words.

Throughout these steps in the word boxes activity, the teacher praises the student for correct performance. If the student makes a mistake, the teacher provides corrective feedback, models the correct response, and then has the student demonstrate the correct response.



*Word Sort.* At the end of each session, the teacher has the student complete a word sort with the day's target words, using the *Word Sort: Practice Sheet* (attached). Here are the steps:

1. **Teacher demonstrates the word sort: First session only.** If the student is unfamiliar with the word sort procedure, the teacher demonstrates. The teacher first reads aloud each of the keywords atop the columns on the *Word Sort: Practice Sheet*. Those words--had, red, sit, top, rug--are examples of the five short-vowel CVC word groups. The teacher then takes the 10 session CVC words written on index cards, reads each word aloud, and places it under the column of the CVC keyword whose vowel matches the target word (e.g., the target word 'pat' is placed in the first column of the worksheet under the keyword 'had'). The teacher points out to the student that target words are matched to keywords based on the shared vowel.
2. **Student performs the word sort: Subsequent sessions.** Once the student knows how to perform the word sort, he or she does this independently at the end of the session. The teacher hands the word index cards to the student and directs the student to do the word sort. The student then places all 10 cards under the matching keywords on the *Word Sort: Practice Sheet*. At the end of the sort, the teacher praises the student for correct performance. If a word is incorrectly sorted, the teacher points to that word and asks, "Is this word in the right place?." If the student does not self-correct despite the prompt, the teacher places the word in the correct word-sort column, points to the shared vowel in both target and keywords, and says, "The word [target word] should be put here because [target word] has the same vowel as [keyword]."

#### References

Joseph, L. M. (2002). Facilitating word recognition and spelling using word boxes and word sort phonic procedures. *School Psychology Review, 31*, 122-129.

NICHHD: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.



# Word Boxes: Phonics Practice Sheet

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Interventionist: \_\_\_\_\_

1



2



3



4



5



# Word Boxes: Phonics Practice Sheet

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Interventionist: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Word Boxes: Recording Form

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Interventionist: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Write up to 10 words below to be reviewed using word boxes. Then use this form to record the student's performance in identifying the letter-sound components of the selected target words. The form has space for up to 3 trials for each word. Record 'Y' in a trial if the student is able to:

1. **place a counter** in each box of the word-box form while correctly stating the matching letter-sound.
2. **place the appropriate movable letter** into each box of the word box form while correctly stating the matching letter-sound.
3. **write the appropriate letter** into each box of the word box form while correctly stating the matching letter-sound.
4. **pronounce the entire word** as written in the word box form.

	WORD	Date: _____ Trial 1	Date: _____ Trial 2	Date: _____ Trial 3	NOTES
1		_Y _N	_Y _N	_Y _N	
2		_Y _N	_Y _N	_Y _N	
3		_Y _N	_Y _N	_Y _N	
4		_Y _N	_Y _N	_Y _N	
5		_Y _N	_Y _N	_Y _N	
6		_Y _N	_Y _N	_Y _N	
7		_Y _N	_Y _N	_Y _N	
8		_Y _N	_Y _N	_Y _N	
9		_Y _N	_Y _N	_Y _N	
10		_Y _N	_Y _N	_Y _N	



# Word Sort: Practice Sheet

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Interventionist: \_\_\_\_\_

had

red

sit

top

rug