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Using Sorts to help students learn Letters and Sounds

One of the tasks that we use to help students to learn the alphabet is sorts. Sorts are used to teach students to compare and contrast. Sorts help students to understand the differences and similarities between letters. It is important that we do both auditory and visual components to the sorts, so that students learn both how letters look similar and different and also how the letters sound similar and different.

Letter Sorts

For students who know less than 50% of the alphabet, we would be focusing on letters that look and sound different e.g. s and t.

We would start with Auditory + Visual Letter sorts where we present the letter and label it using both the letter name and sound. For these sorts we would give the students a mixed group of 2 or more letters and ask them to sort them. As they grab a letter, we would talk about the letter using its name and sound. If needed, we would model sorting ourselves as well. You can have the students sort the letters into columns or containers – and you can vary this to help the activity be more engaging.

This should be done on Thursday and Friday of the 5-day lesson plan.

Different Letter Sorts



A	A	A	A
A	A	A	A
A	A	A	A
A	A	A	A

f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f





Once the student can successfully sort letters with both Auditory and Visual labels, then we would move to visual only. For these sorts we would give the students a mixed group of 2 or more letters and ask them to sort them - we wouldn't say the letter name/sound at this stage. If needed, we can model sorting as well. This should be done on Thursday and Friday of the 5-day lesson plan.

Moving to Sound Sorts

When students know more than 50% of the alphabet, we have an increasing focus on letter sounds. One of the activities we do here is to shift the focus during our sorts also to being about letter sounds. You might begin these using letters that sound quite different e.g. w and k, but over time you will shift to using letters that sound and look similar e.g. m and n.

To shift into doing letter sound sorts, we are now going to get students to sort words that start with the letters we are focusing on. This puts them into the context of the sound they make. You should focus on words where the letter makes its most common sound.

Again, we would start with auditory + visual sound sorts. These have the label for each word with the picture so the student can see the initial letter. We would name the pictures as well, so that the student can hear the sound it makes at the beginning of the word.

Visual Word Sorts - Letter P



Instructions: Cut up and laminate the pictures on this page. Students can then be given two or more sets of pictures for different letters of the alphabet and sort them. Student's shouldn't do visual word sorts for too long - move onto auditory quickly.

Visual Word Sorts - Letter M



Instructions: Cut up and laminate the pictures on this page. Students can then be given two or more sets of pictures for different letters of the alphabet and sort them. Student's shouldn't do visual word sorts for too long - move onto auditory quickly.

We wouldn't do visual word sorts for very long – no more than a few weeks. Then you would move the student onto Auditory word sorts. For these, we take the label away from the word and now the student needs to sort them just by initial sound. You can say the word if needed – but we also want to try and encourage the students to say the word in their head using their inner voice and then sort it according to the sound they hear. This activity contains a number of important components for the student to further develop their phonemic awareness.

Auditory Word Sorts - Letter S



Instructions: Cut up and laminate the pictures on this page. Students can then be given two or more sets of pictures for different letters and sort them by listening to the words. A second sheet is provided with the picture names in case it is needed for an educator to refer to. Do not let the student use the version with the names or it becomes a visual sort.

Auditory Word Sorts - Letter N



Instructions: Cut up and laminate the pictures on this page. Students can then be given two or more sets of pictures for different letters and sort them by listening to the words. A second sheet is provided with the picture names in case it is needed for an educator to refer to. Do not let the student use the version with the names or it becomes a visual sort.

Resources

You can click below to access some resources to support letter and sound sorts.

[Letter and Sound Sort Resources](#)