The Nuffield Speech and Language Unit Programme for Phoneme segmentation and blending

1 Sound/symbol links

Children first learn to select a range of consonant and vowel symbols to sound.

2 CV segmentation and blending

They then begin to identify the consonant in CV words, selecting the appropriate symbol picture. This is from an adult's production at first. The cue "begins with…" is associated with this task (e.g. "me begins with…(m)"). We usually start just with m/s, as these sounds are perceptually very different and are also easy to prolong. Other consonants are added, until the child is choosing from a full range of plosives and nasals, plus easier glides and fricatives /p b m t d n k g h w l f s/. These have their own place on a home grid, to make it easier for the child to locate the picture he wants.

	p	b	m	f	
	t	d	n	s	l
	k	g	w	h	

Table 1: Consonant Home Grid

Children then begin to select the vowel as well, starting just with a choice of / ee ah oo /, then adding the other long vowels and diphthongs. Vowel symbol pictures are kept separate from the consonants, and are on different coloured card (e.g. white for consonants and blue for vowels). The child places the consonant and vowel pictures on a coloured strip (white + blue), to reinforce the sequence of the task. Vowels are cued with "sounds like…" (e.g. "me sounds like…(ee)").
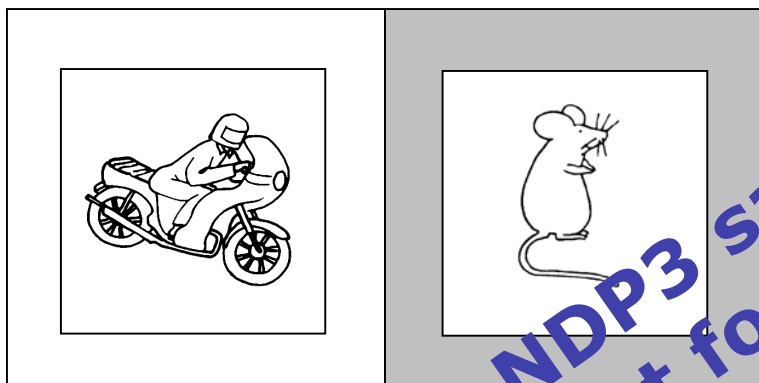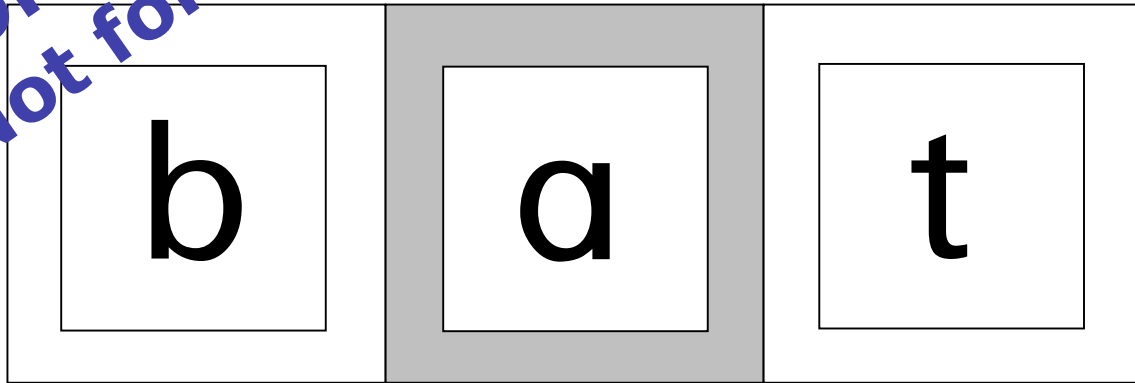

Example of CV segmentation - 'me'

CV pictures with the appropriate sound symbols on the back allow objective feedback. Blending is practised by reversing these cards, and asking the child to say the 2 sounds and work out the hidden word. Non-words can be practised to consolidate skills.

The remaining consonants are added to the consonant grid, as appropriate for each child.

3 CVC segmentation and blending

Once children are confident with CV words, CVC words can be attempted. A three box strip is used (white-blue-white), and a third cue "What's the sound at the end?" is added.

Above: example of CVC segmentation - 'bat'.

CVC words with short vowels are worked on using letters rather than symbol pictures, as children by this stage have learned a basic range of letters/sounds.

Non-words and simple manipulation tasks can be used to extend and consolidate skills. For example, a child can be asked to make a word (e.g. came) with his symbol pictures, and then change one sound to make it say "cake", then another to make "lake" and another to make "like". This is the equivalent of some of the harder metaphonological tasks, but with the visual support of the symbol pictures.

4 Consonant clusters

Once CVC can be segmented and blended, and the child has begun to work on clusters in his speech, CCVC and CVCC words can be attempted. Consonants are arranged as above, with additional consonants placed above the grid. Vowel symbols can be grouped in terms of long vowels, diphthongs and short vowels, or a limited selection can be used. A four box strip, (white/white/blue/white for CCVC), is used to prompt the child, and he is reminded that there are two sounds to listen for at the beginning/end.

CCVC and CVCC words with short vowels can also be worked on using letters. Reinforce the sequence of the alphabet, by setting the letters out in a rainbow shape, or use letters from an alphabet jigsaw.