

## The Alphabet Arc

*A multisensory approach to developing phonic skills*



An alphabet arc can be used to support blending and segmenting skills, to teach alphabetical order and to practice spellings. It is an engaging, multisensory approach which supports auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic memory. Using a set of letters which has consonants in one colour and vowels in another (such as the one above, available from [www.smartkids.co.uk](http://www.smartkids.co.uk)), reinforces the fact that each syllable has a vowel sound in it. In this set of letters, 'c' and 'g' are also in a different colour, to denote the fact that these letters have both a 'hard' and a 'soft' sound.

### To practise segmenting and blending skills



**Segmenting:** Say a word, e.g., 'bin', and ask the pupil to find the letters to make this word. As they choose each letter, ask them to say the letter sound; once the word is made ask them to say each sound, then the whole word, aloud. If they struggle with three-letter (cvc) words, begin with two-letter (vc) words. Using a *phoneme frame* can help some pupils to understand how many letters are needed and where to

place each letter. Ensure the pupil replaces each letter in the correct place in the arc, this will reinforce knowledge of alphabetical order. **Blending:** using a phoneme frame, point to the first box, say a sound for the pupil to place in the box, repeat for the rest of the frame, asking the pupil to say each sound as they place the letter in the box, then to repeat all the sounds and blend them into a word.

### To develop phonemic awareness

**Initial phonemes:** Ask the pupil to form a word, e.g., **pin**. Then ask, 'What do you need to do to make this read **'tin'**? 'What about **'bin'**, **'win'**?' etc.

*phoneme frame*

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**Final phonemes:** Ask the pupil to form a word, e.g., **pin**. Then ask, 'What do you need to do to make this read **'pit'**? What about the **pig, pip?**' etc.

**Medial phonemes (usually vowels):** Ask the pupil to form a word, e.g., **pin**. Then ask, 'What do you need to do to make this read **'pan'**? What about **pen, pun?**' etc.

**Extension:** As the pupil becomes more competent, cvc words can be extended to ccvc words e.g. 'What do you need to do to **'pin'** to make it into **'spin'**?' etc. or cvcc words e.g. 'What do you need to do to **'pat'** to make it into **'part'**?' then moving on to longer words e.g., **'sat'** to **'spat'** to **'splat'**.

### Using the alphabet arc to help with spelling



This example uses a common spelling error ('wet' for 'went'), but the process can be used to clarify many errors. Put the letters the pupil has used in a phoneme frame (see above), it is then clearly there is a letter missing. Say the word slowly and see if the pupil can identify the sound, and then the corresponding missing letter. To reinforce learning once the pupil has formed the word correctly, the letters

could then be jumbled up and the pupil asked to rearrange them – repeat several times. The pupil could then write the word as many times as he/she can in 30 seconds, to reinforce their motor memory for the word. The word can then be written on a bookmark/ back of the pupil's book so they can refer to the correct spelling when necessary.

### Using the alphabet arc to reinforce alphabetical order



When laying out the alphabet, set out the 'a', 'mn' and 'z' as markers of the arc, then fill in the remaining space. Initially set the alphabet out together, gradually reducing support as the pupil becomes more confident. Encourage the pupil to say the letter name, rather than sound, as he/she places the letters. Play games, such as removing one letter and asking the pupil to identify the missing letter. As the pupil becomes competent with arranging the letters, time they then set a target to reduce the time by, say, 10 seconds.

If a pupil uses an alphabet arc in intervention sessions, where possible ensure it is also available in class so the pupil can transfer skills into practice. All activities relating to the arc need to be meaningful for the individual pupil and planned carefully to reflect the next step for that particular pupil's literacy development.