



State of Israel
Ministry of Education
The Pedagogical Secretariat
Languages Department
Inspectorate for English Language Education



BUILDING BLOCKS 1 OF 3

A FRIENDLY GUIDE FOR ELEMENTARY EFL TEACHERS



Phonological Awareness Through Structured Practice

Hear the sounds of English, before seeing any letters.

1 OF 3

The foundation · all done by ear · no letters yet

WHERE THIS FITS

The Building Blocks journey to reading

These guides build on each other, step by step. You are on Building Blocks 1 - the very foundation.



BUILDING BLOCKS 1

Phonological awareness

Hearing and playing with sounds by ear - rhythm, rhyme, first and last sounds. No letters yet.

★ This guide • YOU ARE HERE



BUILDING BLOCKS 2

Orthographic patterns & sight words

Connecting those sounds to the letters on the page - spelling patterns and words that reach automatic recognition.

→ Next



BUILDING BLOCKS 3

Reading fluency

Practising until reading is smooth, fast, and full of meaning - the bridge to comprehension.

→ Later

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Hearing and playing with sounds



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Reflect & bridge to Building Blocks 2

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START HERE

Where reading begins

Building Blocks 1 is the foundation - there is nothing before it. It is all done by ear.



It is oral

Children learn to hear and play with sounds. No letters or writing yet.



It is the foundation

It develops before reading and writing and prepares the ground for literacy.



It makes the rest easier

Strong sound skills now make Building Blocks 2 letters and Building Blocks 3 fluency come faster.

💡 Speaking comes naturally - reading and writing do not. They must be taught. (Treiman & Kessler, 2014)

THE BIG IDEA

What is phonological awareness?

The ability to hear and play with the sounds of spoken language - an oral skill that grows before reading and writing. Children work from bigger sound units to smaller ones: rhythm & syllables → rhyme → single sounds (phonemes). (Adams, 1990; Wagner & Torgesen, 1987)



Listening & repetition

Hear English sounds again and again, and say them back.



Rhythm & rhyme

Feel the beat of words and notice words that rhyme.



Sound discrimination

Tell English sounds apart - same or different.

💡 Hearing and working with single phonemes is called phonemic awareness - the smallest and most advanced part of phonological awareness.

Can-do statements

What pupils can do by the end of Building Blocks 1 - building from bigger sound units to smaller ones.

1 Tell whether two words begin with the same sound.

2 Recognise rhyming words.

3 Clap the syllables in a word.

4 Identify the first and final sound in a word.

5 Blend simple spoken sounds into a word.

6 Segment a simple spoken word into its sounds.

 Steps 5-6 work with single phonemes - this is phonemic awareness, the most advanced part of Building Blocks 1.

Where Building Blocks 1 fits: the reading rope

Skilled reading weaves two strands together (Scarborough, 2001). Building Blocks 1 develops the oral language and sound-processing skills that lay the groundwork for decoding later.

Word recognition

Our building blocks

 Phonological awareness - oral sound skills that prepare for decoding **BB 1 ★**

 Decoding - sound-spelling patterns, with spelling **BB 2**

 Sight recognition - matching decodable text **BB 2**

Language comprehension

Grows in parallel, all year

 Background knowledge

 Vocabulary

 Language structures

 Verbal reasoning

 Literacy knowledge

Both strands together → skilled, fluent reading. [Read more - the Science of Reading & Scarborough rope \(Amplify\)](#)

Four skill areas to practise

Built through songs, movement, and storytelling - always playful.



Rhythm & syllable division

Feel the beat; clap the parts of a word.



Rhyming

Notice words that sound alike at the end.



Distinguishing between sounds

Same or different? Tell sounds apart.



Initial & final sounds

Hear the sound at the start and the end.

English has new sounds to learn

Your pupils are learning a whole new sound system - some English sounds do not exist in their first language. Hearing comes first: children often cannot hear a new sound before they can say it. This is normal - perception before production just needs extra listening practice.



Contrasts that often need extra listening

b/p

bat - pat

v/w

vest - west

th/t

thin - tin

th/d

they - day

i/ee

ship - sheep

a/u

cat - cut

s/sh

sip - ship



Hear the difference first, say it later.

Same or different sounds

Compare the beginning or final sounds of two words.



Thumbs up if the words start the same - **sun** / **snake**.



Clap when you hear the target sound in a word.



Sound Hunt: find objects that begin with /s/.



Say a word, children repeat it, then compare.

Examples: set / get · bag / bat · s / g. Instructions can be given in L1.

 TRY THIS ACTIVITY

Clap the beat

Feel the rhythm of English by clapping and jumping the syllables.

 Clap the word: **ba · na · na** - 3 claps

 Jump once per syllable: **sing · ap · ple**

 Clap the syllables in your own name.

 Repeat short chants and action songs with clear beats.



ba · na · na

Movement + repetition strengthen listening and phonological awareness.

Rhyme time

Listen for words that sound alike at the end - oral and playful.



Do they rhyme?

Thumbs up for cat - hat. Thumbs down if not.



Odd one out

Which does not belong? dog - log - sun.



Sort by rhyme

Sort picture cards into rhyme groups, with support.



Digital option: Wordwall listening games - pupils listen to a word and choose the one that rhymes.

First & last sounds

Hear the sound at the start and end of words - supported by pictures.



Sound Boxes

Sort pictures by their first sound.



Mystery Bag

Pull out an object; say its first sound together.



Match to picture

Match a spoken word to the right picture by its beginning sound.

Sound & movement together

Children respond to sounds with their whole body.

 **B-b-b** bounce the ball - bounce on each /b/.

 **Ssss** the snake is sliding - glide your hand.

 Jump or clap when you hear the target sound.

 Sing action songs with repeated sound emphasis.



Moving the body helps the sound stick in the memory.

Listening to stories

Big story books full of repeated sounds, rhymes, and patterns.

👏 Raise a hand when you hear a target sound.

👉 Tap softly when a repeated word appears.

🎵 Notice rhyming words during the story.

👏 Clap the syllables: but · ter · fly.

Try these big books

🐻 Brown Bear, Brown Bear

👏 Hand, Hand, Fingers, Thumb

Repeated language lets children hear the same sounds again and again.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT

In your EFL class



Keep it oral

No letters yet. Everything is listening and speaking.



Short & often

Brief daily bursts beat one long lesson.



Use L1 to explain

Give instructions in the first language; keep sounds in English.



Show & move

Support with pictures, gestures, songs, and games.



Check with can-dos

Use the can-do statements to see who is ready for Building Blocks 2.



Keep it joyful

Playful, meaningful activities keep children engaged.

 Extra listening for unfamiliar sounds: give more practice with English sounds missing from your pupils first language (e.g. p / ch / w) - hearing the difference comes before saying it.

Reaching every learner

The sound games stay the same; you adjust the support. A multi-tier system of support (MTSS) helps you plan for many home languages, struggling learners and gifted pupils.

● TIER 1 • EVERYONE

Short daily oral sound play for the whole class - songs, claps, rhymes.

↓ Struggling: fewer sounds at once, more repetition, more L1 support.

◆ TIER 2 • SOME

Small-group re-practice of the hardest skill, two or three times a week.

↑ Gifted: blend & segment longer words; be the sound leader.

● TIER 3 • A FEW

Intensive one-to-one: slower, more repetitions, extra pictures and gestures.

🌐 Many home languages: extra listening for sounds missing from each L1.

Quick screening checks

A two-minute, one-to-one check - playful, not a test. It flags who needs a little more, early.



Segmenting: say cat - can the child tap out /c/ /a/ /t/?



First & last sound: first sound in sun? last sound in dog?



Blending: /m/ /a/ /p/ - what is the word?



Rhyme: does cat rhyme with hat? with dog?

► A child who still struggles to hear or segment sounds after lots of practice may be at risk (e.g. dyslexia or a processing delay). Note it, add Tier 2/3 support, and tell the literacy coordinator - early help matters most.

How much, how often

A suggested rhythm for curriculum mapping. Sound work is oral and quick - short daily bursts beat one long lesson.

STAGE 1 • PRE-A1

Building Blocks 1 - the foundation

Mostly oral sound work. Build the ear before any letters.

STAGE 2 • A1

Building Blocks 2 & 3 begin

Letters, spelling patterns and fluency - once sound skills are secure.



5-10 min a day

Oral sound play, every day - the daily dose that builds the ear.



Woven in, not extra

Slip it into songs, transitions and story time.



Keep it going

Sounds do not stop when letters start - keep a few minutes alongside Building Blocks 2.

Reflect & self-assess

Ask yourself

Do I keep every activity oral and playful, with no letters yet?

Which of the four skill areas do my pupils find hardest?

Do I give extra listening for English sounds missing from my pupils first language?

How do I use the can-do statements to see who is ready for Building Blocks 2?

Now I can...

- ✓ explain how phonemic awareness fits inside phonological awareness.
- ✓ lead activities that move from big sound units to small ones.
- ✓ run a minimal-pair listening task, e.g. ship - sheep.
- ✓ give instructions in L1 while keeping the sounds in English.
- ✓ use songs, movement and stories to build sound skills.
- ✓ check pupils against the six can-do statements.

From sounds to letters



Now (Building Blocks 1)

Children can hear the sounds of English - rhythm, rhyme, first and last sounds.



Next (Building Blocks 2)

We connect those sounds to the letters on the page - spelling patterns and sight words.

SOURCES

References for Building Blocks 1

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BUILDING BLOCKS 1 OF 3 · COMPLETE

Great ears make great readers!



Play with sounds a little every day - short, playful, and joyful.

1 • Listen & repeat

2 • Rhythm & rhyme

3 • Tell sounds apart