

Especially for practitioners working with preschoolers! 

Sound Advice

 *Phonological Awareness*

By the time they get to preschool, most children are fairly adept at using speech to communicate their wants and needs to those around them and are ready to start doing more complicated tasks with language. Playing games that help preschooler in your class practice skills like rhyming, listening for different sounds, and putting sounds together will get them ready for reading and writing later on.

What is the practice?

Playing games that involve listening for and manipulating sounds, as well as encouraging your preschoolers to use words in a variety of ways—for communicating ideas, needs, and playfulness—help preschoolers become more confident in their use of language. Research shows that children who have lots of opportunities to use words and listen to language in a wide variety of contexts have an easier time learning to read and write.



What does the practice look like?

Singing songs, reciting nursery rhymes, playing games where children say words more quickly or slowly, and helping preschoolers use words to describe the world around them are all ways that they build their vocabularies and become sensitive to all the sounds that make up our language.

How do you do the practice?

There are many ways to incorporate verbal play into your daily classroom routines with preschoolers. Some games can be played in groups at circle time, and some opportunities occur naturally during the free play periods of the day with several children or only one at a time. The important thing is to follow the interests of the children in your care to make sure they are actively participating and benefiting from these activities.

- With a large group of children, you can teach songs or nursery rhymes—particularly those with movements or hand gestures—to help children begin to pay attention to rhymes. Pause at the end of a line to let children fill in the rhyming word, and point out which words it “sounds like.” Have the children help you compile a list of words that “go together” or rhyme.
- Another group game is to pick a particular sound—**Mmmm**, for example—and have children help compile a list of words that *begin* with that sound (or, for more advanced preschoolers, that *end* with that sound). Allow children to work as a group to write and/or draw a list of such words.
- Help children learn the characteristics of words by drawing out compound words slowly (for example, **bbaath...ttuubb**) and having them repeat the sounds together quickly. You can reverse this, too, by saying words quickly and having children break them down into individual sounds. As children get better at these games, you can use shorter words with less obvious breaks, such as **ccc...aaa....ttt** to challenge them.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Are the children in your care eager to participate in songs, including making up their own?
- Do they show awareness of sounds and rhymes?
- Do they use increasingly complex structures when talking with adults or peers?

Take a look at more 'sound advice'

Simon Says...Listen!

Mary's preschoolers have been learning new vocabulary in their week-long theme of learning about their bodies. At circle time, she organizes the children to play *Simon Says* to help them with listening skills and with identifying body parts. "I'll be Simon first," she says, "and then we'll take turns." She adds to the traditional game by telling the children that each time they touch a body part or do an action, they will say the name of the body part they are using. She starts with "Simon says, touch your head." The preschoolers reach for their heads and say *head!* "Simon says, jump up and down." They jump in place but have different ideas about which body parts this uses: some say *feet*, some say *legs*, some say their *whole bodies*. Mary pauses in the game for a moment so they can all contribute their ideas and be heard. The game continues with children taking turns as Simon, practicing both their listening and speaking skills.



Snacking on Conversation

Gina's preschool class is seated at their table for snack time. Once everyone is served and they are ready to eat their pretzels, fruit slices, and juice, Gina encourages the children to talk about what they are tasting. "How does this snack taste to you?" she asks. "Salty," one child volunteers. "The pretzels taste salty to you?" Gina asks. "What else?" "Soft," someone else said. "What's soft?" Gina asks. "The oranges," the children say. "And the pretzels are...?" "Hard," they answer. "So pretzels are hard and salty, and

what else?" Together, they compose a list of the characteristic tastes of pretzels, then move on to the fruit and juice. The activity keeps the children focused on what they are eating, as well as engaged in using their words and listening to everyone's contributions.

Signs and Rhymes

In Portia's inclusive preschool class, the children are working through a unit on nursery rhymes, and have been talking about listening for and identifying rhymes they hear in speech. At circle time, she leads the children in reciting a short rhyme—*Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jump over the candlestick*—while taking turns being Jack and jumping over the candles made from rolled cardboard they glued and painted earlier in the week. When it's time for Henry, a child with difficulty in language processing, to take a turn as Jack, Portia teaches all the children the sign-language sign for *jump*. "Okay, Henry, you're Jack," she says. "Go stand by the candle, and listen and look for *jump*," she says, emphasizing the word vocally and with the sign. Together, the class recites the rhyme, leaning on the rhyming words at the end of each line. Henry watches his teacher's hands, and when he sees the sign for *jump*, he jumps over the candlestick. During the next few days of this exercise, Portia gradually fades the signing until Henry jumps each time he hears *jump*, and starts joining in on the other words in the rhyme as well.

