

Phonics Strategy

Strategy: Closed & Open Word Sorts.

- These activities that provide students opportunities to examine words and categorize them by spelling patterns and/or sounds. These strategies will enhance reading and spelling.
- Two-step sorts, writing sorts, blind sorts and speed sorts will also be included with this strategy.

Appropriate Grade Level: K-5

Materials Needed:

- Teacher word lists
- Paper/pencil or dry erase board/marker/eraser

Procedures/Steps:

Closed Sorts

1. Teacher will choose the categories and model the sorting procedure.

Example: Present three categories, read three words (bolded), and place them in the correct column. Then, ask students to sort the remaining words.

Short /i/ words

pig

Short /u/ words

gum

Short /a/ words

man

Other words: **jug, bit, pat, run, wag, big, dug, kit, cat, plan, lip, hum, tan, cub, chin, clap, cut.**

2. Introduce patterns without naming the categories.

For Example: Students have mastered short vowel sounds (**CVC** words) and are ready to learn long vowels. Introduce the **VCe** pattern by using a word sort. The words to be sorted might include: **van, vane, pan, pane, can, cane, Jan, Jane, man, mane, mad, made, hat, hate, tap, tape, cut, cute.** Sort the words and discuss the new pattern.

3. Word sorts can be designed to focus on a single new concept or can be used for a review with mixed concepts.

For Example: Students know the **CVC** pattern with short /a/, so you create a sort with /a/ words and the new /o/ sound. An example of a mixed design would be sorting for all the short vowel sounds.

4. Word sorts can be scaffolded for struggling readers by choosing known words, by keeping the sorts focused on a single new category, and by providing more modeling. Color-code the spelling pattern. Example: plaid.

Open Sorts

- Students organize sets of words into categories based on what they notice about the words. (Use same procedural steps as you would for closed sorts.)
- Open sorts are most effective after students have had many opportunities with closed sorts and understand the concept of sorting.

Two-Step Sorts

- As students begin to understand the complexities of short and long vowel sounds, they may be asked to do two-step word sorts. First they sort for sound and then for spelling.

For Example:

- In step one, students sort for sound.

Short /a/

dad
flag
fan
crab
fast
grass

Long /a/

make
pale
great
paint
mail
say

- In step two, students sort for spelling.

ay

day
say

ai

mail
paint

ea

great
neat

VCe

make
pale

Writing Sorts

- Writing sorts provide opportunities for students to practice spelling words.
- Words are sorted on paper or dry erase boards.
- Words are written down under category headings of key words.
- Writing sorts can be done individually, with partners, or in small groups.

Blind Sorts

- Even when teachers incorporate sound and pattern, students sometimes rely primarily on visual patterns.

For Example: When sorting short /i/ and short /a/ words, students may just place all the words with **a** in one category and all the words with **i** in the other.

- Blind sorts reduce students' reliance on visual cues. Words are spoken and sorted without students seeing them.

- Blind sorts force students to depend on their knowledge of sounds and their associated pattern to determine where to place words.
- Blind sorts involve students working with a partner.
- Key words are placed in front of the students.
- One student calls out the words.
- Without looking at the word, the other student decides where the word belongs and points to the appropriate category. The word is then placed in that category. Mistakes are corrected.
- Once all words are placed, the student who did the sorting reads all the words under each category. Then roles are reversed.
- Blind sorts can also be written. In a written blind sort, students write the words under the key words instead of pointing. This kind of sort can be done in small groups as well as with partners.
- Substituting pictures and/or including words that are exceptions to the patterns being sorted can also be effective.
- Blind sorts can be used to monitor students' word study and spelling progress.

Speed Sorts

- Speed sorts are practiced after students can accurately categorize words. The objective is to develop automaticity (fluency).
- Speed sorts can be practiced with a partner. Students alternate between sorting and timing the activity. Students sort words more than once, trying to improve their speed while maintaining accuracy.

Word Hunts

- Word hunts provide extensions for word sorts. Word hunts encourage students to find other words in their reading that contain similar spelling patterns and sounds.
- Encourage students to identify words that do not fit under the word sort categories. Noticing these words can lead to understanding that exceptions may have commonalities as well.

For Example: *have, love, and give* are exceptions to the common VCe pattern.

Comments/Tips:

- These have been included in each section above.

Source: Adapted from: Bear D, R., Invernizzi, M., Templeton, S., & Johnson, F. (2000). *Words their way: Word study for phonics, vocabulary and spelling instruction* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill; Ganske, K. (2000). *Word journeys: Assessment-guided phonics spelling, and vocabulary instruction*. New York: Guilford Press.