

# HEARING AND RECORDING SOUNDS IN WORDS USING SOUND BOXES

Elkonin boxes can be used to teach phonemic awareness by having students listen for individual sounds and mark where they hear them in the boxes. Each box in an Elkonin box card represents one phoneme, or sound.

Example: *ship*, which is spelled with four letters, has only three phonemes: /sh/ /i/ /p/.

sh	i	p
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Example: *boy*, which is spelled with three letters, has only two phonemes: /b/ /oy/.

b	oy
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Example: *chatter*, which is spelled with seven letters, has only four phonemes /ch/ /a/ /tt/ /er/.

ch	a	tt	er
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Here is a step-by-step process for using Elkonin boxes.

1. Teach the task. [Click here to use the practice worksheet](#) (or use your own pictures and make your own practice cards).
  - Model for the students. Articulate the word very slowly and push counters (I like pennies the best) into the box, sound by sound. Do not isolate the sounds; say them slowly, stretching the word. But it is also important not to change the sounds by saying the word too slowly.
  - Now have the students try. Share the task until they can coordinate the saying and pushing together.
2. Use sound boxes to help students hear sounds in words. After the students are able to say words slowly AND push the counters into the box, begin to use the boxes when students are writing new words.
  - Draw a box for each sound on a practice page.
  - Have the students push the pennies into the box. Ask: What can you hear? How would you write it?

- Have the students write the letter into the boxes – in any order they hear them. Do NOT insist on a beginning-to-end approach.
- Have the students record letters they can hear and know how to write. The teacher should record sounds the students do not hear or know how to write.

3. Shift your question from *What can you hear?* to *What letters do you expect to see?*
4. Do away with counters. This should happen very quickly after just a few days of learning the task. Have the students push their finger into the box instead of using the counters.
5. Shift to hearing and recording sounds in sequence. After the students can hear and record most of the sounds, ask them to fill in the boxes in sequence, left to right. If a student struggles with this, you may want to use counters again briefly. You also will want to introduce students to common exceptions, such as the silent *e*, as well as common sounds that are recorded with two letters, such as *ch*, *sh*, and *th*.

ch	i	n
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6. Attend to spelling using boxes. Once students are able to record sounds in order, you can begin to show them how to think about spelling something that may not look the way it sounds. This time, make a box for every letter and not just for the phonemes. Have the students run their fingers under the boxes.

s	h	e	e	p
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As students become more proficient at hearing sounds and words, you will use the boxes less often. See *Literacy Lessons: Designed for Individuals, Part Two*, pages 69-81, for more in-depth information on using sound boxes.