Acquisition of letter names and sounds is affected by factors related to the student and to the letter.

- Children just beginning preschool or kindergarten will demonstrate a broad range of alphabet knowledge, with some children knowing all 26 letters and others knowing none.
- Alphabet letters differ in regard to research-based acquisition advantages.
- Alphabet knowledge instruction can be enhanced through design and curriculum planning that considers the differences across children and across letters to support children’s acquisition of letter names, sounds, and forms (graphemes).
- Enhanced Alphabet Knowledge instruction increases students’ frequency of practice with letters through distributed instructional cycles.
- Enhanced Alphabet Knowledge instruction provides flexibility to better meet the needs of students, with additional focus on letters that are problematic for students to learn.

### Guidelines for Enhanced Alphabet Knowledge (EAK) Instruction

EAK lessons are brief and explicitly teach letter names, sounds, and written symbols.

The 3 components of an EAK lesson are: a) identifying the letter name and sound, b) recognizing the letter in text, and c) producing the letter form.

EAK lessons include teaching both the uppercase and lowercase form of the letter.

EAK instruction provides differential exposure to the alphabet letters as all letters are not equal in ease-of-learning.

EAK instruction uses multiple distributed instructional cycles (letter-a-day) rather than massed instruction with only one cycle of exposure to the alphabet (letter-a-week).

EAK instruction connects the evidence-based alphabet knowledge acquisition advantages to the distributed instructional cycles, providing alternatives and variety for alphabet instruction in whole class or small group settings.

During each EAK distributed instructional cycle, the teacher keeps record of which letters are more difficult for students to learn and applies knowledge of the evidence-based acquisition advantages to analyze student difficulties and flexibly adjusts pacing, exposure frequency, and focus to meet students’ needs.
Overview of EAK Instructional Cycles

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<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Advantage Rationale</th>
<th>Organizational Pattern of Instruction</th>
<th>Additional Considerations</th>
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<td><strong>Own Name Advantage</strong></td>
<td>Learning advantage for initial letter in first name</td>
<td>Based on frequency of initial letters in class members’ names</td>
<td>Highly motivating and responsive to young students’ developmental needs for constructing self-identity</td>
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<td><strong>Alphabetical Order Advantage</strong></td>
<td>Learning advantage for alphabet sequential order</td>
<td>Alphabetic order or beginning with the letter a and ending with the letter z</td>
<td>Possible serial effects leading to difficulty with letters in the middle of the alphabet</td>
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<td><strong>Letter Name-Letter Sound Relationship Advantage</strong></td>
<td>Learning advantage for letters that have the letter sound pronounced in the letter name and for letters that represent one sound</td>
<td>Begins with the letters easier to learn proceeding to the more difficult to learn letters</td>
<td>Instruction may proceed rapidly through the easier letters, allowing increased instructional time for more difficult letters</td>
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<td><strong>Letter-Frequency Advantage</strong></td>
<td>Learning advantage based upon letter frequency in environmental print and other printed materials</td>
<td>Begins with the letters occurring less frequently in text proceeding to the more frequently occurring letters</td>
<td>Goal is to increase focus on the letters more difficult to learn due to the lack of frequency in text</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consonant Phoneme Acquisition Order Advantage</strong></td>
<td>Learning advantage based upon normative, developmental order of consonant phoneme acquisition</td>
<td>Begins with letters more frequently articulated and acquired earlier proceeding to letters for which children have less experience producing the sound</td>
<td>Teachers can use the normative developmental pattern to identify potential reasons for difficulty with particular letters and focus on oral speech that uses the more difficult to learn letters</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Distinctive Visual Features Letter Writing Advantage</strong></td>
<td>Learning advantage based upon the number of distinctive features in written letter forms</td>
<td>Letters with similar features presented in small clusters over several days or presentation of letters with fewer distinctive features over subsequent days</td>
<td>Emphasis is on the critical distinctive features between similar letters</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Teachers of young children need to know what these advantages are and adjust instructional time and attention accordingly. -Stahl (2014) in referring to EAK Instruction*
Letter Name Identification: (~ 1-2 minutes)

This is the letter ____. This is the uppercase letter ____. This is the lowercase letter ____.
(Show and/or write the letter, explaining the form.)

Let’s practice naming this letter. What is this letter? _____.
(Point to uppercase and lowercase letters in different order at least 3 times asking students to identify the letter name.)

Letter Sound Identification: (~ 1-2 minutes)

The letter ____ represents the sound /___/. When I say the sound /___/ I place my tongue & mouth like this (demonstrate correct placement).
(Provide explanations/stories/key words to help students remember the sound.)

Let’s practice saying the sound of this letter. The letter ____ represents the ____ sound. Say the ____ sound with me, _____, _____.
(Point to uppercase and lowercase letters in different order at least 3 times asking students to identify the letter sound.)

Hint: For vowels, teach students the short vowel sound and explain that when reading words the vowel letter represents either its name or its sound.

Recognizing the Letter in Text: (~ 3 minutes)

Now, let’s find the letter _____.
(Students locate the uppercase and lowercase letter in text and state the letter name and sound each time the letter is located.)

There are a number of alternatives for student practice with recognizing the letter in text such as:
- sorting through magnetic letters/tiles to isolate the particular letter
- identifying the letter in charts of classmates’ names
- using a crayon to circle the letter in newspapers or magazines
- placing highlighter tape over the letter in easy-to-read children’s books

Producing the Letter Form: (~ 4-5 minutes)

This is how to write the letter _____. Here’s where I begin on the paper lines to write the letter ___.
(Provide description and hints about how to write the uppercase and lowercase form of the letter on lined paper.)

Let’s practice writing the letter ____ together.

Producing the letter can also use alternatives for practice such as:
- using a transparency and marker to trace over the letter as it is identified in enlarged print from children’s books
- writing the letters on small white boards as the teacher dictates
- producing the letter form with clay, pipe cleaners, or Wikki sticks

Note: Tasks such as using a rubber stamp and ink to stamp the letter or gluing items to an outline of the letter (e.g. gluing beans on the letter b) is not producing the letter form as the form has already been produced and students are not required to think about how to create the form.
Further reading:


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