



*Hands-On Learning*

# Sound Sorting

Primary Concepts®

Sound Sorting with Object kits and Sound Sorting with  
Picture Card sets are available from Primary Concepts.

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## Sound Sorting

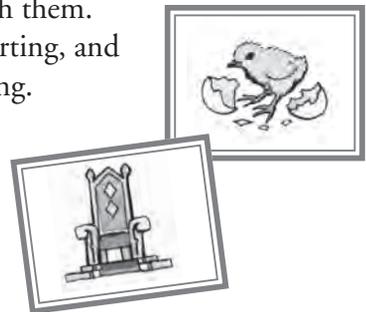
Sound sorting activities involve children actively in sorting words into groups that have the same sounds, and then connecting those sounds to the letters that represent them. The process of sorting by sound helps children attend more closely to the sounds they hear in words. They become better able to discern differences in closely related sounds. The ability to hear individual sounds in words and connect those sounds to the letters that represent them is an essential ingredient in successful reading and writing.

Sorting activities—in contrast to traditional workbook pages—involve children at a higher level of thinking. Students are more actively engaged in analyzing words, comparing and contrasting word elements, and discriminating among sounds. Once children learn the routine of sound sorting, the activity can be repeated again and again with different combinations of sounds, providing hours of valuable learning experiences for every child in the classroom. Teachers can set up a sequence of sorting stations for all children to follow or tailor specific sorting activities to the auditory discrimination needs of individual children.

This guide presents a developmental sequence of sorting activities you may wish to follow. Also described in this guide are many variations on the basic sorting activity you can use to extend the children's experience with letter sounds and give them the phonemic awareness skills they need to become fluent readers and accurate spellers.

### What You Will Need

Sound sorting activities can be successfully implemented with either picture cards or objects. Sets of miniature objects and picture cards, organized by sound, are available from Primary Concepts. Picture cards are appealing because of their compact size and the fact that children can see the word printed out on the back of the card. Objects make it easy for children to know the meanings of the words they are sorting, and children love to work with them. Some teachers start at the concrete level using objects for sorting, and then move to the pictorial level using picture cards for sorting.





In addition to picture cards or objects (or both), the following ancillary materials are useful for sound sorting tasks. All are available for purchase from Primary Concepts.

### **Sorting Mats**

Sorting Mats help children line up their pictures in columns. They are especially important for children who are sorting objects.

### **Pocket Chart**

A pocket chart can be particularly useful in demonstrating how to sort picture cards.

### **Sorting Journals**

A spiral notebook or journal gives children a place to record their sorts.

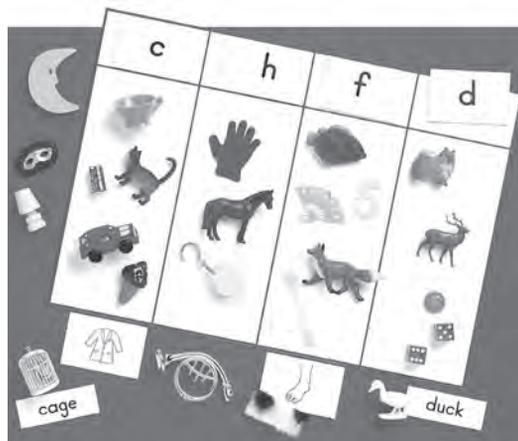
### **Letter/Sound Boards**

Letter/sound linking charts help children recall the letter that matches a sound. Either a poster on the wall or individual student letter/sound boards for each child provide a convenient reference tool.

## **Sorting Stations**

You may wish to set up several sorting stations at one time and have the children move from station to station, so that each child gets experience with each sound contrast. A typical work station would have picture cards or objects, label cards, and a sorting mat.

When the day's activities are completed, the pictures or objects will be sorted and they can be easily returned to their box, organized by sound.





## Getting Started

Demonstrate for the children how to complete a sound sorting activity. You may wish to do this at a table or desktop, or use a pocket chart.

1. Choose two to five sounds to focus on.
2. Find the objects or picture cards for those sounds, mix them up and place them, along with their corresponding label cards, on a table or in a pocket chart.
3. Invite the children to help you sort the objects or pictures by putting them into groups that have the same sound. Name the position in the word to listen for (beginning, middle, or end). Put together in one column all the words that have the same sound.
4. Ask the children what letter or letters represent the sound for each column. Place label cards at the head of each of the columns to match the sounds.
5. End the sorting experience by having the children “read” the words in each group and say out loud the sound they have in common.

A variation of this sound sorting activity is called Yes/No Sorting. Students decide whether a word has or does not have a target sound. To set up Yes/No Sorting, choose just one target sound for the sorting activity. Mix up all the objects or picture cards for that target sound with five to seven decoys—objects or picture cards with sounds that are very close to the target sound. Display the target sound label. Challenge the children to find all the objects or pictures that have the target sound.

## Recording the Sorts

If you are using picture cards, you may wish to have students record each of their sorts so that you will have a way of knowing which sorting activities they have completed and whether they were able to do the sorting activity correctly. Simply have the children turn over the picture cards and write the words in their sorting journals.

b	d	p
bee	duck	pig
boat	desk	pan
bus	dice	paint
bell	dog	pack
bone	door	pot
barn	dive	pin
bird	deer	pie



## **Auditory Discrimination**

Children vary widely in their ability to make auditory discriminations. Many vowels and consonants that sound almost the same are so similar because the mechanics of making those speech sounds can be almost identical. Subtle differences in where the tongue is placed inside the mouth and how we shape our mouths create sounds that can be hard for young children to differentiate.

One way to help children make these auditory discriminations is to have them actually see and feel how these sounds are made differently in the mouth. You may wish to have mirrors available for children to look at their mouths as they pronounce words for pictures. They can see in the mirror and feel how their mouths move differently as they pronounce words such as *can* and *cat*.

## **Assessing Progress**

Periodically check as the children are working or look at their Sorting Journals to see whether they are able to sort sounds correctly. Make note of children who need extra help with particular sounds. Then you can tailor the next sorting experience to a particular problem a child is having. A performance assessment activity is described on page 16, which you could use at the end of all the sound sorting experiences, or periodically with select sets of pictures or objects.



## Activity 1: Words That Rhyme

Learning to sort rhyming words into word families is the most fundamental of the sound sorting activities because rhyming is easier than isolating single sounds in words. Sorting words into word families provides a firm foundation on which more complex sound sorting can be laid.

### Setting Up the Sorts

Choose two or three word families for each sorting station. Mix the objects or pictures for that set with the appropriate two- or three-column sorting mat.

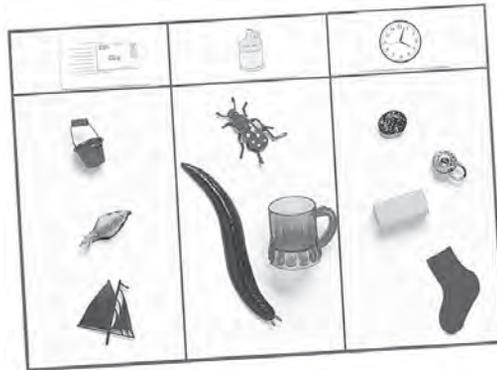


### On Their Own

Have the children sort the objects or pictures into groups that rhyme, and then label each group with a picture label. For objects, use the picture labels provided. For picture cards, the children can use one of the picture cards as a label. When children complete the task, have them report to you by “reading” the list of words that rhyme.

### Variations and Extensions

Repeat the activity for children who need more work with rhyming. Vary the sorts by selecting a different mix of rhyming families at each station. For an added challenge, you may wish to increase the number of rhyming families at a station to four or five.





## Activity 2: Beginning Consonants

After students are familiar with the process of sorting with words that rhyme, introduce beginning consonant sounds and the letters that represent them.

### Setting Up the Sorts

Choose up to four consonants for each sorting station. Mix the objects or pictures at each station. Your first round of sorting stations might look like this:

Station 1:	b	m	r	s
Station 2:	t	g	n	p
Station 3:	c	h	f	d
Station 4:	l	k	j	w
Station 5:	y	z	v	q

Notice that the letter *x* is not presented in these stations. Its most common sound /ks/ as in *box* and *six* is not typically found at the beginning of words. For this reason, children sort words with *x* when they focus on final sounds.

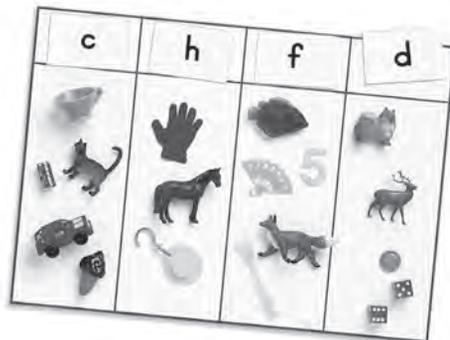


### On Their Own

Have the children say the name of each object or picture and listen for the sound at the beginning of the word. Tell them to sort the objects or pictures into groups that start with the same sound, and then label the group with the letter that represents that sound.

### Variations and Extensions

Repeat the same set of sorts, encouraging the children to complete the sorts as quickly as possible, until the children can automatically connect letter and sound.





## Activity 3: More Beginning Consonant Sorts

Some consonant sounds are more similar than others. These sorts focus attention on discriminating among very similar sounds.

### Setting Up the Sorts

Challenge the children by setting up sorts with the harder contrasts listed below. Mix up the objects or pictures for children to sort on two-column sorting mats.

Station 1: 

f	v
---	---

Station 2: 

s	z
---	---

Station 3: 

b	d
---	---

Station 4: 

p	t
---	---

Station 5: 

g	k
---	---

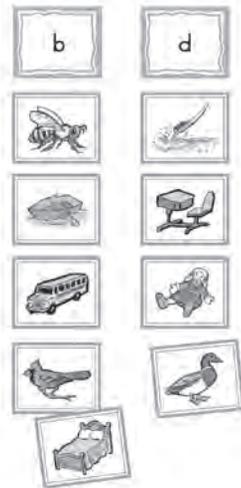
Station 6: 

m	n
---	---



### On Their Own

Have the children say each word out loud and listen carefully to the sound at the beginning of the word. Tell them to sort the objects or pictures into two groups by the sounds they hear at the beginning of the word.



### Variations and Extensions

For those children who need a challenge set up a picture sort with the consonants *c* and *k*. Because these letters represent the same sound, the children will have to use their knowledge of spelling to determine which group to put the picture in. They can turn over the cards to check.



## Activity 4: Consonant Digraphs

Digraphs are pairs of consonants that represent a single sound. The most common digraphs are *ch*, *sh*, *th*, and *wh*. Children often have difficulty distinguishing single consonant sounds from similar digraphs. The digraph *ch*, for example, is very similar to the sound of the single consonant *j*. Sorting activities are especially helpful for developing children's skill in discriminating among these closely related sounds.

### Setting Up the Sort

Mix objects or pictures that begin with consonant digraphs with objects or pictures that begin with similar sounding single consonants. See the list below.

Station 1: 

sh	s
----	---

Station 2: 

ch	j
----	---

Station 3: 

th	d
----	---

Station 4: 

wh	h
----	---

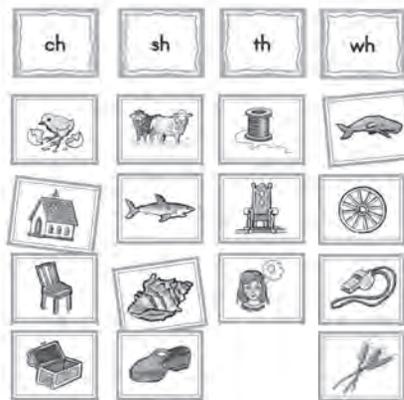


### On Their Own

Have the children listen for the sounds they hear at the beginning of the words and sort the pictures or objects into groups that have the same initial sounds. They can label each group with its letter label card.

### Variations and Extensions

On another day, you can invite children to sort just the digraphs. Mix up all the pictures or objects with digraphs and invite the children to sort the words by their beginning sounds.





## Activity 5: Final Consonant Sounds

Listening for sounds at the end of a word can be a more difficult task than listening for the sound at the beginning. Sorting activities that focus children's attention on ending sounds can help children master this important phonemic awareness skill.

### Setting Up the Sorts

Set up the sorting stations with the most common final consonants (not all consonants are typically found at the end of words). Mix up objects or pictures at each station.

Station 1:	b	p	d	t
Station 2:	s	x	k	f
Station 3:	g	k		
Station 4:	n	m		
Station 5:	l	r		



### On Their Own

Have the children listen for the sound at the end of the word, sort the objects or pictures into groups that have the same final sound, and label each group with the letter that represents that sound.



### Variations and Extensions

Have students do a similar sort with final consonants that include digraphs.

Station 1:	sh	ch	th	t	d
Station 2:	ng	nk	n	g	k



## Activity 6: Vowel Sounds

Vowels are more complex than consonants. The sounds they represent are much more difficult to distinguish. The fact that vowels are most typically found in the medial position only adds to the difficulty.

### Setting Up the Sorts

Start by having the children sort short and long vowels in five stations. Mix up the objects or pictures at each station. Use the two-column sorting mats.

Station 1:	<table border="1"><tr><td>ă</td><td>ā</td></tr></table>	ă	ā
ă	ā		
Station 2:	<table border="1"><tr><td>ě</td><td>ē</td></tr></table>	ě	ē
ě	ē		
Station 3:	<table border="1"><tr><td>ĩ</td><td>ī</td></tr></table>	ĩ	ī
ĩ	ī		
Station 4:	<table border="1"><tr><td>ǒ</td><td>ō</td></tr></table>	ǒ	ō
ǒ	ō		
Station 5:	<table border="1"><tr><td>ǔ</td><td>ū</td></tr></table>	ǔ	ū
ǔ	ū		



### On Their Own

Have the children sort the objects or pictures into groups that have the same vowel sound, and then label the group with the short or long vowel label card that represents that sound. Make sure children know the symbols for short and long vowels so they can label the groups properly. Tell them that the long vowel marker is used for vowels that “say their own name.” When children complete the task, have them report to you by “reading” the list of words that begin with the same sound.



### Variations and Extensions

Set up sorting stations for other vowel sounds in a similar way. For example, set up a station in which children sort /ou/ and /oo/ words.



## Activity 7: More Vowel Sorts

As the glue that holds together words, vowels are essential for students to master. Short vowel sounds are especially difficult to distinguish.

### Setting Up the Sort

Set up two sorting stations: one devoted to long vowels and one to short vowels. Mix the objects or pictures for long vowel words together at one station and mix up objects or pictures for short vowel words at the other station. Use the five-column mats.

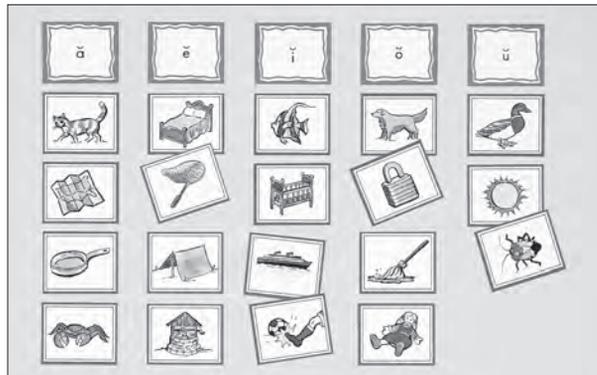
Station 1:	ă	ĕ	ĭ	ŏ	ŭ
Station 2:	ā	ē	ī	ō	ū



### On Their Own

Have the children sort the objects or pictures into groups that have the same vowel sound, and then label the group.

Let the children repeat the activity again and again until they can automatically connect sounds with symbols. Students who are having difficulty might benefit from sorting fewer vowels at one time.



### Variations and Extensions

Children who need a challenge can sort the word side of the long vowel picture cards by spelling pattern.



## Activity 8: Consonant Blends

Consonant blends are combinations of consonants that blend together in words but retain their own sounds. There are three types of blends: *r* blends, *l* blends, and *s* blends. These sorts offer an introduction to common blends.

### Setting Up the Sort

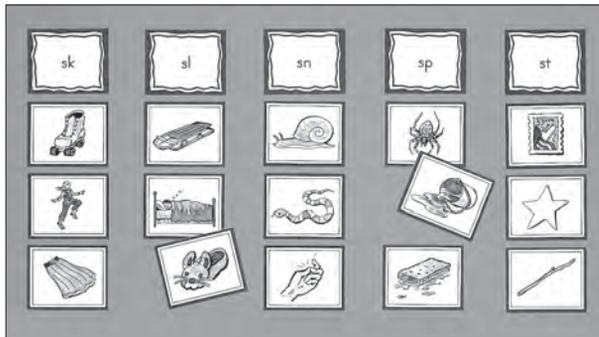
Set up the following three sorting stations. Mix up the objects or pictures at each station.

Station 1:	bl	cl	fl	gl	pl
Station 2:	cr	dr	fr	gr	tr
Station 3:	sk	sl	sn	sp	st



### On Their Own

Have the children listen for the beginning sounds in the words and sort the pictures or objects into groups that have the same initial sounds. They can label each group with its letter label card.





## Activity 9: More Sorting with Blends

These sorting experiences help children discern whether a word such as *cab* or *crab* has a blend or not.

### Setting Up the Sort

Set up sorting stations in which children sort both single consonants and blends. Mix up the objects or pictures at each station before the children begin to sort.

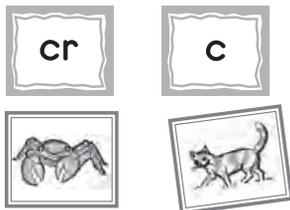
Station 1:	b	bl	br	
Station 2:	c	cl	cr	
Station 3:	d	dr	p	pl
Station 4:	f	fl	fr	
Station 5:	g	gl	gr	
Station 6:	t	tr	s	st



### On Their Own

Have the children listen for the beginning sounds in the words and sort the pictures or objects into groups that have the same initial sounds. They can label each group with its letter label card.

Note: If children are having difficulty, suggest that they say the word out loud slowly, clapping for each different sound they hear. Two sounds before the vowel indicates a beginning blend.





## Performance Assessment

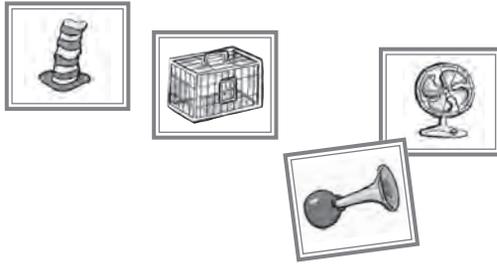
Use this activity to assess whether students are able to find words with same sounds in the beginning, middle, or end of words.

### Setting Up the Assessment

Place picture cards or objects in a paper bag and mix them up.

### Assessing Progress

Invite a child to take four or five objects or pictures from the bag, and say the words. Then ask the child to see if he can find pairs of words that share the same sound. Ask the child whether the shared sound is at the beginning, middle, or end of the word. For example, if a *hat*, *cage*, *horn*, and *fan* were taken from the bag, a child might say that *hat* and *horn* start with the same sound, *horn* and *fan* end with the same sound, and *hat* and *fan* have the same vowel sound in the middle.





## Primary Concepts Sound Sorting Resources

**Sound Sorting with Objects** (*Pre K–2*) Complete kits include engaging objects and sorting mats for Consonants, Vowels, Word Families, and Blends & Digraphs.

**Sound Sorting with Picture Cards** (*Pre K–2*) Sets of full-color cards, each in storage box with labeled dividers, for Initial Consonants, Rhymes, Vowels, Blends & Digraphs, and Final Consonants.

For these and other language arts resources, visit us at **[www.primaryconcepts.com](http://www.primaryconcepts.com)**

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