

# Word Awareness

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Not all students have the concept of a word. Before they learn to read, they hear words run together, for example: djeetyet? (did you eat yet?) and cupacoffee (cup of coffee). They do not know the unit of letters separated by spaces represents a word. Some think that a single letter represents a word.

To teach the concept of a word, use meaningful nouns such as the student's name, names of other people, and familiar objects. Say, for example, "This word says *Mike*. Let's point to each letter in the word *Mike* and then say the letters, *m-i-k-e*." Ask the student to draw a picture and have you write the name of the picture. Write labels for objects in the room. Explain that we hear words, say words, write words, and read words.

Looking at the title of a book, such as *Hop on Pop*, show that words in print have spaces between them. Say, "I will read these three words to you." Speaking slowly and clearly point to each word. Repeat. Next say, "I will read the words again, and you point to each one when I say it. Repeat and vary the task with other book titles.

Read some pre-primer books to the student while pointing out the words. Begin with a book only with one phrase or sentence to a page. Speak clearly at a moderate rate while running your finger under each word. After modeling, ask the student to point while you read aloud.

Writing the student's dictated words, phrases, and sentences and then reading the dictation while pointing is helpful. When the student copies words or begins to write her own words, point out that the space needs to be left between words. Other exercises include asking the student to draw a "cloud" around each word and to "cup" a word with her hands.

You may practice saying sentences and have the student use a counter (raisins, small crackers, or small pieces of paper) for each word that is heard. Then count the words. Speak clearly with short pauses between words; then speak normally; then slowly. Start with short sentences and gradually expand them: "I see shoes." "I see your shoes." "I see your brown shoes."

After the student understands the concept of a word, you may need to do similar exercises to help her be aware of syllables within words. Students usually enjoy clapping their hands to a "beat" (syllable). Use the student's name and the names of friends and family members to clap beats. As words are being learned, slash marks can be put in the words to divide the parts that are heard, as in *re/mem/ber*.