

INSTRUCTIONAL SHEET



PHONEMES AND GRAPHEMES

Phonemes, or sounds

Phonemes are speech sounds. Phonemes are combined with other phonemes to make words.

Phonemes are important for three reasons (Moats, 2010):

1. Phonemes change the meaning of words. For example, the spoken words *built*, *belt*, and *bolt* differ by only one vowel sound, and that one sound difference completely changes the meaning of each word. In another example, the spoken words *pat* and *bat* differ only by the voiced or voiceless consonant at the beginning of the words, and that one sound difference completely changes the meaning of each word.
2. Phonemes help a reader to match the sounds of his or her language to written letters. Without an awareness of sounds, one could not match sounds to letters and read unfamiliar words.
3. Research has found that good readers can identify, sequence, and manipulate phonemes. Therefore, it is important for teachers to directly teach children about phonemes to be effective in both reading and spelling.

Graphemes, or letters

A *grapheme* is the letter or letters that are written to spell a phoneme. A grapheme may be one letter, such as “p” for the beginning sound in the word *pot*. Sometimes a grapheme is made up of several letters to represent a sound, such as *igh* in *eight*.

