FIELD NINE

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FOR PRESCHOOL AND EARLY ELEMENTARY SLPS

Phonological processes from probe to practice

An ages reference, a 30-word probe, a cycles planner, 100+ minimal pairs for seven patterns, multisyllabic word lists and a family handout. Every pair uses two real, picturable words.

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PRESCHOOL + K-2 · PRINT AND GO · 14 PAGES

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REFERENCE

Phonological processes at a glance

A phonological process is a predictable way young children simplify adult words, and most children drop each one by a fairly steady age. A pattern that hangs on well past that age, or one that is unusual at any age, is worth a closer look.

PROCESS	WHAT THE CHILD DOES	EXAMPLE (TARGET → CHILD)	USUALLY GONE BY ABOUT
Prevocalic voicing	Voices a quiet sound before a vowel: p, t, k become b, d, g.	pie → **"bye"**	**3;0**
Word-final devoicing	Makes a voiced sound at the end of a word quiet.	bed → **"bet"**	**3;0**
Final consonant deletion	Leaves off the last consonant.	boat → **"bow"**	**3;3**
Fronting	Moves a sound made at the back or middle of the mouth to the front: k to t, g to d, sh to s.	key → **"tea"** shoe → **"sue"**	**3;6**
Consonant harmony	Changes one consonant to match another one in the same word.	dog → **"gog"** top → **"pop"**	**3;9**
Weak syllable deletion	Drops an unstressed syllable.	banana → **"nana"**	**4;0**
Cluster reduction	Drops one sound from a consonant cluster.	spot → **"pot"** blue → **"boo"**	**4;0**
Stopping	Swaps a long, airy sound (s, f, sh, z, v, ch, j, th) for a short popped sound like t, d, p or b. Ages differ by sound.	sun → **"tun"** fan → **"pan"**	f, s **3;0** v, z **3;6** sh, ch, j **4;6** th **5;0**
Gliding of liquids	Swaps r or l for w (sometimes y).	ring → **"wing"** leaf → **"weaf"**	**5;0**

Atypical or unusual at any age, worth a closer look

NO TYPICAL AGE

Backing
Moves a front sound back: t to k, d to g.
tea → **"key"** dig → **"gig"**

Initial consonant deletion
Leaves off the first consonant of the word.
boat → **"oat"** sun → **"un"**

Glottal replacement
Swaps a consonant for a glottal stop, the catch in the middle of "uh-oh".
bucket → **"bu-et"** (catch for k)

How to read the ages. 3;6 means 3 years, 6 months: the age by which most typically developing children have stopped using the pattern. Ages vary between studies and norms tables, sometimes by a year or more, so treat them as a guide. You decide what needs treatment.

Pattern or sound? A phonological pattern changes a whole class of sounds the same way, like every k and g moving forward. A speech sound error that affects one sound, like a lisp on s, points more toward articulation. Patterns that belong to a child's dialect or home language are not errors.

Ages: Bowen, C. (2011). *Table 3: Elimination of phonological processes in typical development*. speech-language-therapy.com. Bowen's table is adapted from Pamela Grunwell's research on phonological development. Process descriptions and examples on this page are our own.

SCREENING

Quick process probe

Student _____ Age _____ Date _____ Examiner _____

Show a picture or object and ask the child to name it. If they can't, name it in a sentence, talk about something else, and ask again ("This is a boat. ... What's this one?"). Write what they said, then the process code. Words are grouped by the pattern they sample, so you can tally down the page.

#	WORD	SAMPLES	CHILD SAID	PROCESS
1	boat	FCD final t		
2	cup	FCD final p		
3	moon	FCD final n		
4	bed	FCD final d		
5	bus	FCD final s		
6	cookie	FR k start, middle		
7	goat	FR g start		
8	duck	FR k end		
9	pig	FR g end		
10	sun	ST s		
11	fish	ST f, sh		
12	van	ST v		
13	shoe	ST sh		
14	chair	ST ch		
15	thumb	ST th		

#	WORD	SAMPLES	CHILD SAID	PROCESS
16	spoon	CR sp		
17	star	CR st		
18	snake	CR sn		
19	block	CR bl		
20	plane	CR pl		
21	banana	WSD 3 beats		
22	elephant	WSD 3 beats		
23	potato	WSD 3 beats		
24	rain	GL r start		
25	rabbit	GL r start		
26	leaf	GL l start		
27	lamp	GL l start		
28	pie	PV p		
29	toe	PV t		
30	cow	PV k		

Tally

	FCD	FR	ST	CR	WSD	GL	PV	BK	ICD	GR	Other
Pattern	Final consonant deletion	Fronting	Stopping	Cluster reduction	Weak syllable deletion	Gliding	Prevocalic voicing	Backing	Initial cons. deletion	Glottal replace-ment	
Probe words	5	4	6	5	3	4	3	-	-	-	-
Used in its group											
Heard elsewhere											

Patterns to look at more closely _____ Stimulable for _____

This is a quick, informal screen with no norms behind it. Tally patterns you hear outside a word's group on the last row (fronting on "cow" still counts as FR). Atypical patterns can show up on any word. Use what you find to plan a fuller sample.

TREATMENT APPROACH

The cycles approach at a glance

Cycles was developed for children whose speech is very hard to understand because several patterns are active at once. You rotate through a few target patterns on a set schedule, then come back around to the ones that still need work.

The core ideas

1. **Target patterns.** Choose a few patterns the child is missing, such as final consonants, k and g, or s-clusters, and work through them one at a time.
2. **A set block of time.** Each pattern gets a planned amount of time. When the time is up you move on, even if the child isn't using the pattern yet.
3. **Listening first.** Auditory bombardment: the child hears a list of words with the target, read aloud (often with light amplification), with no pressure to say them.
4. **Then production practice.** A small set of target words, practiced in play with the support the child needs.
5. **Cycle back.** When every pattern has had a turn, one cycle is done. The next cycle picks up the patterns that still need work.

Why move on by time?

The idea is to give the child's system a nudge in several directions and let new patterns start to take hold between cycles, instead of waiting on one sound to reach criterion.

Picking target words

Choose words the child can say with help (stimulable) and that are easy to picture. Keep the same 3 to 5 words for the whole block so the child gets many tries with each one.

Cycle planner

Student _____ **Cycle #** _____ **Time per pattern** _____

PATTERN	WEEKS / DATES	TARGET WORDS (3-5)	LISTENING LIST	NOTES

Description based on Hodson, B. W., & Paden, E. P. (1991). *Targeting intelligible speech: A phonological approach to remediation* (2nd ed.). Pro-Ed. This page is a plain summary of the approach. See the original for session structure and target selection.

MINIMAL PAIRS · FRONTING

Fronting pairs

The child moves back sounds forward, so k becomes t and g becomes d. Each card puts the target word on the left and the word the child says now on the right. Both are real words, so a mix-up changes the meaning.

k vs t

start and end of words

	TARGET		CHILD MAY SAY
1	key	vs	tea
2	cub	vs	tub
3	cape	vs	tape
4	cop	vs	top
5	cart	vs	tart
6	coast	vs	toast
7	back	vs	bat
8	bike	vs	bite

g vs d

start, middle and end of words

	TARGET		CHILD MAY SAY
9	go green light	vs	dough play dough
10	gear	vs	deer
11	gate	vs	date
12	gill	vs	dill
13	buggy	vs	buddy
14	bug	vs	bud
15	mug	vs	mud
16	beg	vs	bed

Cue it

Give each sound a name and a hand cue. K and g are "back sounds," made with the back of the tongue lifted. T and d are "tip sounds." Touch your throat for back sounds and point to your front teeth for tip sounds.

Two in one sentence

- The cub is in the tub.
- Put the mug in the mud.
- A bug sat on a bud.
- The deer has new gear.

MINIMAL PAIRS · STOPPING

Stopping pairs

The child swaps a long, airy sound for a short popped one: s becomes t, f becomes p, sh becomes t. Target word on the left, the word the child says now on the right.

s vs t

usually gone by about 3;0

	TARGET		CHILD MAY SAY		TARGET		CHILD MAY SAY
1	sail	vs	tail	2	sew	vs	toe
3	sub	vs	tub	4	sack	vs	tack
5	sea	vs	tea	6	kiss	vs	kit

f vs p

usually gone by about 3;0

7	fan	vs	pan	8	fig	vs	pig
9	four	vs	pour	10	fair	vs	pear
11	puff	vs	pup	+	_____	vs	_____

sh vs t

usually gone by about 4;6

12	shoe	vs	two	13	shop	vs	top
14	shower	vs	tower	15	shy	vs	tie
16	cash	vs	cat	+	_____	vs	_____

Cue it

S, f and sh are "long sounds" you can stretch: ssss. T and p are "short sounds" that pop once. Slide a finger along the table for a long sound and tap once for a short one.

Two in one sentence

- Put the fan in the pan.
- The pig ate a fig.
- A sail on a tail.
- Pour four cups.

MINIMAL PAIRS · FINAL CONSONANT DELETION

Final consonant pairs

The child leaves off the last consonant, so "beet" comes out as "bee." Each card puts the closed word (with its last sound) on the left and the open word the child says now on the right.

CVC vs CV

endings: t, d, p, k, n, s, z, ch, th

	TARGET		CHILD MAY SAY
1	beet	vs	bee
2	boat	vs	bow (ribbon)
3	toad	vs	toe
4	couch	vs	cow
5	pipe	vs	pie
6	bike	vs	bye (wave)
7	tooth	vs	two
8	seat	vs	sea
9	moon	vs	moo
10	nose	vs	no (head shake)
11	meat	vs	me
12	peach	vs	pea
13	goat	vs	go
14	road	vs	row (a boat)
15	teeth	vs	tea
16	boot	vs	boo

Cue it

Call the last sound the word's "tail" and help the child hear when it's missing. Push a toy car to the end of a paper road, or close your hand, as the last sound comes out. Start with the endings the child can already say on their own.

Two in one sentence

- A bee sat on a beet.
- The cow is on the couch.
- A toad on my toe.
- The goat said go!

MINIMAL PAIRS · CLUSTER REDUCTION

Cluster pairs

The child drops one sound from a consonant cluster, so "spot" comes out as "pot." Every pair below uses two real words. Target word on the left, the word the child says now on the right.

s clusters

sp, st, sk, sn, sw, sl: the s drops

	TARGET		CHILD MAY SAY
1	spot	vs	pot
2	spy	vs	pie
3	stool	vs	tool
4	scoop	vs	coop
5	snow	vs	no (head shake)
6	snail	vs	nail
7	sneeze	vs	knees
8	swing	vs	wing
9	slime	vs	lime
10	slip	vs	lip

l clusters

bl, cl, gl, pl: the l drops

11	black	vs	back
12	blow	vs	bow (ribbon)
13	blue	vs	boo
14	clap	vs	cap
15	glue	vs	goo
16	plug	vs	pug

Cue it

Say each sound slowly, then slide them together: s... pot, spot. Set two blocks side by side, one per sound, and push them together as you blend.

Two in one sentence

- A spy ate a pie.
- The snail has a nail.
- Clap for my cap.
- Blue glue is goo.

MINIMAL PAIRS · GLIDING

Gliding pairs

The child swaps r or l for w, so "ring" comes out as "wing" and "lake" as "wake." Target word on the left, the word the child says now on the right.

r vs w

r is a later sound for many children

	TARGET		CHILD MAY SAY
1	ring	vs	wing
2	run	vs	one
3	rail	vs	whale
4	reel	vs	wheel
5	ripe	vs	wipe
6	rink	vs	wink
7	rag	vs	wag
8	read (a book)	vs	weed

l vs w

start of words

	TARGET		CHILD MAY SAY
9	lake	vs	wake
10	light	vs	white
11	lick	vs	wick
12	lock	vs	wok
13	leap	vs	weep
14	leak	vs	week
15	lay	vs	weigh
+	_____	vs	_____

Cue it

Use a mirror. W has round lips, like a kiss. For l, the lips stay relaxed and the tongue tip lifts to the bump behind the top teeth. Because r develops late for many children, decide whether r belongs in this cycle or a later one.

Two in one sentence

- A ring on a wing.
- Wake up by the lake.
- Reel in the wheel.
- Lock up the wok.

MINIMAL PAIRS · BACKING AND PREVOCALIC VOICING

Backing and voicing pairs

Two smaller sets. Backing is unusual at any age, so look closely before you treat it. Prevocalic voicing is one of the earliest patterns to go.

t d Backing: front sounds move back

ATYPICAL

T becomes k and d becomes g. These are new pairs; flip any fronting pair for more.

	TARGET		CHILD MAY SAY		TARGET		CHILD MAY SAY
1	tall	vs	call	2	tick	vs	kick
3	tail	vs	kale	4	torn	vs	corn
5	net	vs	neck	6	dot	vs	dock
7	sit	vs	sick	8	pat	vs	pack
9	down	vs	gown	10	dust	vs	gust
11	dull (pencil)	vs	gull	12	bad (thumbs down)	vs	bag

p t k Prevocalic voicing: quiet sounds get a buzz

GONE BY ABOUT 3;0

P, t and k become b, d and g at the start of a word.

	TARGET		CHILD MAY SAY		TARGET		CHILD MAY SAY
1	pea	vs	bee	2	pear	vs	bear
3	pig	vs	big	4	peach	vs	beach
5	toe	vs	dough	6	ten	vs	den
7	tuck	vs	duck	8	time	vs	dime
9	coat	vs	goat	10	cold	vs	gold
11	curl	vs	girl	12	coal	vs	goal

Cue backing

Call t and d "tip sounds." Before each try, have the child touch the bump behind the top teeth with the tongue tip.

Cue voicing

Hand on the throat: b, d and g buzz, while p, t and k are quiet. Hold a tissue in front of your mouth to show the puff of air on p.

WEAK SYLLABLE DELETION

Clap the beats

For children who drop the quiet syllable: "nana" for banana, "raffe" for giraffe. Each word is split into beats, with the strong (stressed) beat in color. The weak beats are the ones most likely to go missing.

2 BEATS		3 BEATS		4 BEATS	
1	bal·**loon** ◯◯	1	ba·**na**·na ◯◯◯	1	**wa**·ter·mel·on ◯◯◯◯
2	gi·**raffe** ◯◯	2	po·**ta**·to ◯◯◯	2	**cat**·er·pil·lar ◯◯◯◯
3	gui·**tar** ◯◯	3	to·**ma**·to ◯◯◯	3	**hel**·i·cop·ter ◯◯◯◯
4	ca·**noe** ◯◯	4	**el**·e·phant ◯◯◯	4	**al**·li·ga·tor ◯◯◯◯
5	rac·**coon** ◯◯	5	go·**ril**·la ◯◯◯	5	av·o·**ca**·do ◯◯◯◯
6	ka·**zoo** ◯◯	6	pa·**ja**·mas ◯◯◯	6	mac·a·**ro**·ni ◯◯◯◯
7	po·**lice** ◯◯	7	spa·**ghet**·ti ◯◯◯	7	**mo**·tor·cy·cle ◯◯◯◯
8	pa·**rade** ◯◯	8	vol·**ca**·no ◯◯◯	8	bal·le·**ri**·na ◯◯◯◯
9	ca·**boose** ◯◯	9	**di**·no·saur ◯◯◯	9	ther·**mom**·e·ter ◯◯◯◯
10	sham·**poo** ◯◯	10	**oc**·to·pus ◯◯◯	10	ar·ma·**dil**·lo ◯◯◯◯
11	sur·**prise** ◯◯	11	um·**brel**·la ◯◯◯	11	**tel**·e·vi·sion ◯◯◯◯
12	car·**toon** ◯◯	12	com·**pu**·ter ◯◯◯	12	**cal**·cu·la·tor ◯◯◯◯

Beat it out

1. Say the word and clap, tap or jump once per beat together.
2. The child says it alone. Dot one circle for each beat you hear.
3. All beats there? Mark it correct, even if a sound inside is off.

Make it harder

- Put it in a phrase: "a big balloon," "my pajamas," "the green alligator."
- Drop the clapping and listen for the beats in plain speech.
- Try 5 beats: hip·po·**pot**·a·mus, re·**frig**·er·a·tor.

DATE	2 BEATS / 12	3 BEATS / 12	4 BEATS / 12	CUE LEVEL	NOTES

RUNNING THE SESSION

A minimal pairs session

The point of a minimal pair is that the wrong sound changes the meaning. Let the child see that happen, and keep it a game.

1. **Set up.** Pick 3 to 5 pairs for one contrast. Name each picture together so you both agree on what it shows.
2. **Listen and sort.** You say one word from a pair and the child points to it or drops it in the right pile. Mix the order so they can't guess.
3. **"If you say X, I'll pick Y."** Now the child says the word and you pick the picture you heard. If "key" comes out "tea," hand over the tea and wait. Keep it light: "Oh, you said tea. Did you want the key?"
4. **The child is the teacher.** Switch roles. You say the words, sometimes the wrong way on purpose, and the child tells you whether you got it right.
5. **Track it.** Mark listening and saying trials on separate rows. Add a cue code when you helped.
6. **Move up.** When words are steady, carry the pair into a phrase ("I want the key") and then a sentence.

Trials: + correct · - incorrect · ~ close · SC self-corrected · NR no response

Cues: I independent · VC visual · IV indirect verbal · DV direct verbal · PM partial model · M model · T tactile

Student _____ **Pattern / contrast** _____ **Goal criterion** _____

Date _____ **Level:** ☐ Words ☐ Phrases ☐ Sentences

PAIR (TARGET / OTHER)		TRIALS										%	CUE
	Listen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
	Say	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
	Listen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
	Say	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
	Listen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
	Say	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		

Notes _____

Date _____ **Level:** ☐ Words ☐ Phrases ☐ Sentences

PAIR (TARGET / OTHER)		TRIALS										%	CUE
	Listen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
	Say	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
	Listen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
	Say	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
	Listen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
	Say	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		

Notes _____

FOR FAMILIES

Sound patterns, explained

Your child's speech-language pathologist (SLP) is working on sound patterns. Here is what that means, and three easy ways to help at home.

What is a sound pattern?

Words pack a lot of sounds close together. While children learn to talk, they make words easier to say, and they do it the same way over and over. These shortcuts are called sound patterns. Your SLP may call them phonological processes.

Why do kids use them?

Every young child uses sound patterns. Most children stop using them one at a time, roughly between ages 3 and 5. Some children keep them longer or use several at once, which can make them hard to understand. That is common, and it doesn't mean you did anything wrong.

PATTERNS YOU MIGHT HEAR

"tup" for cup
a back sound moves to the front

"bow" for boat
the last sound is left off

"nana" for banana
a quiet part of the word drops

Three ways to help at home

1. Say it back the right way

When your child uses a pattern, repeat the word the right way in your answer. Say it a little slower, with a little extra on the sound.

Child: "I want a tookie."
You: "A cookie! Here's your cookie."

2. Skip "say it again"

Asking your child to repeat a word can make talking feel like a test. Hearing you say it the right way, again and again, does the work. Answer what they told you and keep the talk going.

Answer the message: "You want a cookie? Me too! Let's share."

3. Play listening games

Children often need to hear a difference before they can say it. Try "Silly me": say a word the wrong way on purpose and let your child catch you.

"Look at my tup of milk!" "No, it's a cup!"

Good times to practice: BATH TIME · SNACK TIME · CAR RIDES · PICTURE BOOKS · PRETEND PLAY

This month's practice

Pattern we're working on _____

Your child may say _____ **for** _____

Practice words

_____ _____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____ _____

Notes from your child's SLP

_____

_____

Questions? Contact _____

ONE MORE THING

Patterns fade slowly. Your numbers should show it.

Phonology progress shows up across many sessions: how often the final sound appeared, how much help it took, and when a pattern is ready to cycle out. Field Nine drafts the trial counts, cue levels and note from the recorded session, so your hands stay on the picture cards.

FIELD NINE

Hands free notes.

Record the session on your phone or Meta smart glasses. Trial counts and cue levels come from what happened in the room, and the note and goal data are drafted before you walk out of the room. Nothing enters the record until you approve it.

- 5 free sessions to start
- Then $1 a session, with no subscription
- We sign a BAA with your practice

SCAN TO TRY IT

field9.ai/speech

HOW IT WORKS

1

Run your session

Put on the glasses or prop up your phone, tap record, and run the session the way you always do.

2

Review the draft

Trial counts, cue levels and a drafted note are ready when you walk out of the room.

3

Approve and sign

Change anything you want, then sign. Nothing enters the record until you approve it.

Terms of use

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A clinical note

Ages in this guide are approximate and vary between studies, and patterns that belong to a child's dialect or home language are not errors. These pages support your clinical judgment and don't replace it.

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Trial sheets, goal trackers and session notes
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Speech Therapy Goal Bank
115 fill-in goals in ten areas
14 pages

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