

## Word Building

**Time:** 30 minutes, 2 or 3 days a week

**Group Style:** Whole group, easily adaptable to small group or individual instruction

**Grade Level:** K-1 (can be used to help older struggling readers)

### **Rationale**

This strategy provides systematic, direct instruction that helps students to:

1. learn to decode and blend individual sounds in words, and
2. practice manipulating sounds in order to gain automatic familiarity with the patterns of sounds in words.

### **Materials**

- One set of letter cards per student
- A set of large letter cards for the teacher
- A pocket chart
- Lists of words
- Sets of silly sentences
- One journal per student

### **Preparing for the Lesson**

For practical information on preparing the necessary materials, please view [Word Building Preparation](#).

### **Sequence of Sounds**

The sequence in which you teach sounds often affects a student's ability to learn to decode. For information about the sequence recommended by Dr. Beck, which is based on the confirmed research findings of Dr. Beck and others, please view [Word Building Sounds Sequence](#).

### **Procedure**

**Important Note:** Word building is a strategy for teaching students to decode, not encode. In practical terms, this means that you should make sure you don't tell students a word and ask them how to spell it, because this would be asking them to encode the word. Instead, you always provide the spelling of the word and then ask them to decode it, to tell you what word those letters make when put together in that particular order.

1. Students who are sitting quietly are selected to pass out letter cards. You give each student a baggie or other container of letters, and tell them to hand one to each of their classmates.
2. Students should be instructed to place their letters in ABC order in a straight line across the tops of their desks or in a tag board letter holder (a folded-over strip into which the cards may be inserted with the letters still showing).

*Note: Unless you are having students cut out letter cards each time, you may want to begin by practicing the procedure for handing out and arranging letters, and the procedure for collecting letters at the end. Practicing this procedure till it runs smoothly*

can save a lot of time and hassle. Once students have been trained, it is much more efficient to have them distribute and collect letters than it is to have the teacher do so. It also frees up the teacher to circulate and make sure individual students are on track.

3. Line up your own letter cards in the top sleeve of your pocket chart. After the students have had practice with putting letters in ABC order, you may want to put your letters out of order and see if the students can tell you how to correct your mistakes.

4. Review each letter with the students. Ask them what the name of each letter is, what sound it makes, and how to write it in the air with their fingers. Say the answers in unison with them, modeling the correct response. Listen and watch to see if any of them respond incorrectly. The dialogue runs as follows. • **Teacher:** "What letter is this?"

- **Teacher and Students Together:** "A."
- **Teacher:** "What sound does it make?" Teacher and Students: "/a/."
- **Teacher:** "How do you write it?"
- **Teacher and Students:** Write the letter in the air with fingers.

5. Make the first demonstration word by pulling down the necessary letters and lining them up close together in a lower sleeve of the pocket chart.

6. Tell the students, "**This is the word sad.**" Then tell them to read the word together with you. Read the word together slowly, running your finger underneath each letter as you make the sound. Then say the word together at normal speed. This emphasizes the fact that you blended the sounds together to make a normal word that they can recognize.

7. Next, tell the students you can change this word into a totally new word, just by changing one letter. Change the one letter necessary to make your second demonstration word. Repeat step 6 with this new word.

8. Now you are ready to tell the students that they can make new words with their own letter cards. Explain that you will tell them which letter to change, and then they will tell you what new word has been made. Train them to put the old letter back into its place in ABC order before they take out the new letter. Explain that sometimes you will take two letters that are already in the word and make them switch places, and sometimes you will add or take away a letter without changing any of the other letters in the word.

9. For the first word, tell them what letters to use in what order. For example, "**Take down your m and put it at the beginning of the word. Take down your a and put it in the middle of the word. Take down your d and put it at the end.**" Then ask, "**What is the word?**" (If they struggle, this is a good time to model cumulative blending, adding one sound at a time cumulatively until you have sounded out the whole word.)

10. For the rest of the word list, you will tell them what letter to change. You might use such phrases as, "**Take out your d and put your t in its place,**" "**Change the d to t,**" "**Take the**

**d and the t in your word and change places," "Take out the d," or "Add a t between the s and the a."**

11. As soon as you tell them what change to make, always ask, **"What is the word?"**
12. When they tell you the word, immediately write it down in a column on the chalkboard. Once you have finished building the different words, have them go back and read through this column of words to review and consolidate. This column of words will also show them graphically how one small change can produce a new word.
13. The students should then copy this column of words into their journals. This is an important step, because it requires students to practice actually writing down the words they learned, with the letters in the proper sequence. This step helps them make the connection between spoken words and the written code for these words.
14. End your lesson by having fun with the silly sentences. Students really enjoy these. Write a silly sentence on the board, using the words you just practiced. Run your finger under the words as the students decode them.
15. Because each silly sentence is a question, go ahead and have fun with your kids talking over possible answers to these silly questions.

For a specific example, view [Sample Word Building Lesson](#).

### **Notes**

Although this strategy takes time and effort, it is definitely worthwhile. Because it systematically and directly teaches your students to decode, it saves a lot of time in the long run and helps prevent possible later decoding problems as well.

A lot of things happen in quick succession during a word building lesson. It may take a little time to get the hang of word building, and that's okay. Just take it one piece at a time, and word building will soon become a part of your classroom routine.

# Word Building Sample Lesson

## Organizing Letter Cards

1. Students hand out letter cards for a, i, d, m, s and t.
2. Students line up their cards in ABC order.
3. You line up your cards in ABC order in the top sleeve of your pocket chart.
4. You review the name, sound and formation of each letter with your students.

## Demonstration Words

1. Make your first demonstration word, 'had,' in your pocket chart.
2. Tell students, "This is the word 'had.' Read the word with me: /h/.../a/.../d/. \*Had." (Run your finger under each sound as it is made. Do this each time to emphasize letter-sound correspondence and blending.) \*When you see / / on either side of a letter, it indicates that the sound of the letter should be said, not the letter's name.
3. Tell students, "Now I'm going to change this word into a totally new word, just by changing one letter." Take out the a, replace it in its proper place above, take down the i, and put it in the middle of the word. Say, "This is the word 'hid.' Read the word with me: /h/...../i/.../d/. Hid."

## Students Build Words

1. Tell students, "Now, you are going to make new words. I will tell you which letters to change each time, and then you will tell me what new word we have made. Make sure that you put old letters back into their proper place in ABC order. I'm going to tell you right now that sometimes I'm not going to put a new letter into the word. Sometimes, I will tell you to make two letters in the word swap places. Or I might tell you to take out a letter without replacing it. I might even tell you to add a letter to the word without taking any letters away. So you're going to have to listen very carefully. Are you ready? Okay, let's try it."
2. Tell students, "Here is your first word. Take down the m and put it at the beginning of the word. Take down the a and put it in the middle. Take down the d and put it at the end. What is the word?" (mad) Write mad at the top of a column on the board.
3. For the next word, "Take the d off the end of the word and put a t in its place. What is the word?" (mat) Write it on the board under mad.
4. "Take the m off the front of the word. What is the word?" (at) Write it on the board under mat.
5. "Put an s before the a. What is the word?" (sat) Write it on the board.
6. "Take the a out of the middle and put in the i. What is the word?" (sit) Write it.
7. "Take off the s and put in an h. What is the word?" (hit) Write it.
8. "Take out the i and put an a in its place. What is the word?" (hat) Write it.
9. "Change the h to an m. What is the word?" (mat) Write it.
10. "Put an s between the a and the t. What is the word?" (mast) Write it.
11. "Change the a to an i. What is the word?" (mist) Write it.

## Students Write Words

1. Have the students read aloud the column of words from the board.
2. Students then copy this column of words into their journals.

## Silly Sentences

1. Write the first silly sentence on the board: "Can a rat hit your cat?" Remember to underline those words which you will tell the students because they are not yet able to read these words for themselves.
2. Tell the students that it's time for Silly Sentences. Tell them you will give them any words that are underlined, because those are words they haven't learned to read yet.
3. Have students read the sentence aloud as you run your finger underneath it. Supply any underlined words.
4. Talk about this sentence. Have fun with it. "Can a rat hit your cat?! What could possibly be the answer to such a silly question? Do you think that rats go around hitting cats? Can they hit your cat?"
5. Repeat this process with the rest of the silly sentences:  
"Would a mad cat sit under a hat?"  
"Can an ant sit on a sad cat?"  
"If you had a cat, would you and the cat sit in a mist?"  
"Can a cat climb a mast?"

a	b	c	d	e
f	g	h	i	j
k	l	m	n	o
p	q	r	s	t
u	v	w	x	y
z	th	sh	ch	ph