Word Sorts

A **Word Sort** is a hands-on activity that helps students identify phonics patterns and sort words into groups based on patterns or meanings.

“**Odd Balls**” are words that cannot be grouped into any of the identified categories of a sort. Students should be taught there are always words that “break the rules” and do not follow the general pattern.

**Closed Sort** – a word sort in which the categories are provided by the teacher.

**Open Sort** – a sort in which students create their own categories for a set of words.

How to lead a Word Sort:

1. Identify the pattern/patterns you wish to focus on. This should be based on the “sweet spot” you’ve identified for your student, but examples include the following:

* Initial Letters/Sounds
* Vowel Patterns (ie. short *a* vs. short *e*, Long *e* spelled *ea* vs Long *e* spelled *ee)*
* Words that double the ending consonant before adding *–ing* vs those that don’t
* Suffixes and/or prefixes
* Base words and root words
* Parts of speech
* Word meanings

Note: Typically it is best to start with 2 categories. Then you can increase difficulty by adding either a 3rd category, or an “oddball” category for words that don’t fit either group.

2. Create word cards for an assortment of words that fall into the categories you’ve selected, as well as a card for each category heading.

3. Start by laying out the category cards and making sure the student understands them. Then hold up your first word card, read it aloud, and model for the student how to sort the card under the proper heading.

4. Allow the student to select a card, read it, and then determine the proper category to short the card. **Make sure the student reads each word aloud to reinforce the pattern and ensure they are reading the word correctly.**

5. Continue the activity until all words are sorted.

6. Have the student read all the words in each category, and ask if he/she would like to make any changes. *(NOTE: It’s best to allow the student to sort ALL cards before making any corrections. This will allow the student the chance to self-correct if they read the cards together and can hear the difference.)*

7. End the activity by asking the student if he/she can think of any other words that might fit in either category. Or, start a word journal and go on a “Word Pattern Scavenger Hunt” to see if you can find any other words during your reading that fit one of the categories.

EMERGENT READER TIP: For students still working on very basic phonics skills, you can also consider a picture sort, rather than a word sort. Students should look at the picture of an object, such as an *apple* or an *ant*, say the word aloud, and then identify the initial sound, /a/.

Cards for picture sorts can be found online, or ask your site leader!

*For more information on Word Sorts, check out Words Their Way by Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston.*