

## Boost Phonics Skills at Home With the Making Words Strategy

Why do we recommend spending 3–5 minutes a day doing word study lessons like Making Words? Focused word study lessons:

- **Sharpen phonics and phonemic awareness skills** without time-consuming and energy-sapping skill and drill. Fun, quick, familiar activities target the specific challenges your readers face—they allow students more time to apply those skills to real reading.
- **Help make word-solving automatic.** Word study lessons follow predictable routines to help readers quickly and accurately identify words. Making Words, for example, uses visual/auditory matching to help students quickly recognize reading miscues (e.g., *cat* versus *cot* or *scrap* versus *strap*). When readers can see and hear differences in similar patterns, they can spend more energy on comprehending what they are reading and less on figuring out individual words.

Making Words is one of the eight word study activities we recommend using regularly during a guided reading lesson. It is best suited for students reading at Levels A through I. Here are ways to turn it into a fun home learning experience, whatever students' access to technology is.

### Teaching students who have a device of their own:

- You may be able to livestream a lesson with a group of students at a similar reading level or you may pre-record a lesson and post it, adding pauses to allow students to do their work with letters before you move to the next step or example.
- Preparing your materials in advance and having students do the same will ensure the lesson goes smoothly. Display and work with your magnetic letter set on a magnetic surface, such as a baking tray, that can be held up in front of the camera. If you don't have magnetic letters, consider mining your board games for letter tiles that can be displayed on a letter tray. Or write letters on sticky notes and display them on a board you can prop up in front of the camera.
- Provide similar options for students to make a letter set at home. If students don't have magnetic letters, letter tiles, or sticky notes, they may simply write letters on sturdy paper, and cut the individual letters into squares, with the help of an adult. Having two full sets of letters, stored in baggies, will help when a letter appears more than once in a word. When students are participating in a livestream, make sure (or, if they are watching a recorded lesson, have caregivers make sure) they are working on a flat, sturdy surface so they can manipulate letters easily.

- Select a skill focus that matches your students’ reading level and a series of three to four words that targets that skill focus. (See the Making Words by Text Level chart on the last page for suggested skills focus by level and examples of word series.) Remember that each word in the series should differ by only one letter or letter cluster: This focuses students’ attention to the specific letter/sound pattern you’re teaching.
- Follow the steps you saw in the classroom demonstration video for the target reading level, pausing to allow students to do each action and check their work. Here are the Making Words steps and cues for all levels:
  1. Tell students the letters they will need and have them remove those letters from their tray. Call out the letters in alphabetical order so students can quickly find them on their trays.
  2. Dictate a word for the students to make and tell them how many letters they will need.
  3. After students make the word with the magnetic letters, tell them to check the word by saying it slowly as they run their finger underneath it. This should help them notice their errors or confirm their accuracy.
  4. (Level D and higher) Have them break the magnetic letters at the onset and say each part separately and then together (e.g., *dr op*, *drop*).
  5. Dictate a new word that differs by one letter (or letter cluster if you are targeting blends).
  6. Before students reach for the letters to exchange, teach them to say the new word slowly as they slide their finger under the current word. This helps them decide which letter or letters they will need to change to make the new word.
  7. Close by encouraging students to apply the strategy—in this case, to check words they may have trouble reading by running their finger under the word slowly and checking all the sounds together.
- At first you will have to tell students which letter to change, but they will soon be able to make changes without your help. The process students use to determine the mismatch between a sound and a letter is the same process they will use later to self-correct during reading.
- Ideally, you’ll be able to see students’ work as they move through the word series. In a prerecorded lesson, have students move through the series with a caregiver, reading the words aloud slowly and checking for accuracy.

**Teaching students who share a device at home:**

Follow the same steps and suggestions as above, using a pre-recorded lesson, and encouraging students to share their word-making process with a caregiver or older sibling.

**Teaching students who may have limited or no online access:**

If you are creating packets of materials to send home, consider supplying the following:

- A grid of alphabet letters that can be cut apart for students to work with or encourage students to make their own set of letters. (See options for gathering or making a letter set at home above).
- Several series of words that caregivers can use over a few days when doing the Making Words activity.
- A letter with directions such as:

Thank you for taking a few minutes to do the Making Words activity with your child. This activity will help your child figure out words more quickly so reading becomes easier and more enjoyable!

This is the series of words you'll read aloud to your child as he or she spells each word with the letters from the letter set:

*[Provide a three to four word series reflecting the level/skill focus this student is working on.]*

Here are the steps to follow:

1. Have your child arrange all the letters in alphabetical order on a tray or clear table space.
2. Tell your child the letters that are needed for the first word. For example, if the word is *hop*, he or she will need an *h*, *o*, and *p*. Have him or her find the letters and put those letters out on the table. (It's easiest to give the letters in alphabetical order so your child can locate them quickly.)
3. Now say the word and encourage your child to spell it.
4. Tell your child to check the word by saying it slowly as he or she runs a finger underneath it. This should help your child notice any errors or confirm that the word is spelled correctly.
5. If it's not too challenging for your child, have him or her break the word into logical parts and reassemble it—for example, *h op*.
6. Read the next word in the series. It will differ from the word the child has just spelled by one letter (or letter cluster)—for example, *shop*.
7. Repeat steps 3, 4 and 5 for each word in the series.

Tip: At first you may have to show which letter to change, but your child will soon be able to make changes without your help. The process children use to figure out the mismatch between a sound and a letter is the same process they will use later to correct themselves during reading.

## Making Words Lessons by Text Level

Text Level	Skill Focus	Example
<b>A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial consonants</li> </ul>	<i>dad-had-sad-lad</i>
<b>B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial and final consonants</li> <li>Short a and o</li> </ul>	<i>can-cap-map-man-pan</i> <i>hot-hop-hog-log-lot</i>
<b>C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All short vowels</li> <li>CVC words</li> </ul>	<i>hop-hip-sip-sap-sat-hat</i>
<b>D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digraphs</li> </ul>	<i>hop-shop-ship-chip-chin</i>
<b>E</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial blends</li> </ul>	<i>rim-brim-slim-slam-slap-clap</i>
<b>F</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Final blends</li> </ul>	<i>went-wept-west-pest-past-pant</i>
<b>G</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial and final blends</li> </ul>	<i>band-brand-bland-blank-blink</i>
<b>H</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Silent e</li> <li>Vowel patterns</li> </ul>	<i>rip-ripe-gripe-grip-grim-grime</i> <i>down-drown-frown-crown-clown</i>
<b>I</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vowel patterns</li> </ul>	<i>coat-coast-boast-boat-goat-gloat</i>

