

One-on-one tutoring is often the most effective and efficient way for a student to make progress, so be assured that your time practicing phonics with a student is well spent. Creating a relaxed and fun approach to this time together is the first and most important task. Below are additional tips for getting started:

1. Get supplies and experiment with them. A few 9 x 12 whiteboards, a pack of low-density whiteboard markers in a variety of colors, a pack of 3 x 5 index cards, small and large sticky notes, and pens or markers are great for many activities.
2. Watch some videos. [Looking at Reading Interventions](#) on [Reading Rockets](#) may be the best place to start, as you can watch expert Linda Farrell work one-on-one with K-3 students on a variety of reading skills. Also on Reading Rockets is [Reading 101: A Guide to Teaching Reading and Writing](#), which has units on phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, and spelling. In addition to these series, there are short videos that can be watched in just a few minutes. Dr. Susan Nolan uses [a sound-letter deck for review](#). Dr. Anita Archer demonstrates [writing from dictation](#) with a class of second graders. There are videos made for teachers on a variety of phonics topics such as [open and closed syllables](#). And then there are videos meant to be watched by students, such as [I want to be a schwa \(it's never stressed\)](#). Once you start watching videos, you will be amazed at how much help is out there!
3. Be prepared to review. Students can review with the sound-letter and high-frequency decks and write from dictation a sentence or list of

words from the previous lesson. If the student remembers the previous material, point that out: “Wow, you have really got this!” If the student needs more review, you will indicate that is fine, too.

4. Rehearse the “sound play” and “oral brainstorming” sections of the lesson. Students tend to find phonological awareness activities fun. (Phonological awareness is the ability to identify and manipulate the sounds in words, an important skill for reading and writing.) The tutor’s part has been scripted for you, but you will be more relaxed if you have rehearsed it and know what’s coming. In oral brainstorming and sound play, all words are available, not just the words that students can read or spell, so there is more spontaneity.
5. Prepare some conversation topics. Pick some words to talk about that appear in the lesson, including the high-frequency words. Have students use them in their own phrases and sentences. Talking about words and usage builds vocabulary.
6. Decide how you will introduce the high-frequency words. Some high-frequency words are very irregular in their spellings (such as “of” or “eye”) and are simply memorized, but most high-frequency words have letters that can be sounded out combined with spelling patterns the student will learn later. Showing students the parts of words that they already can sound out reduces what they need to remember. Writing the high-frequency words multiple times helps students lock in the spelling.
7. Look at the sentences the student will read aloud in the lesson. High-frequency words appear underlined to remind you, the tutor, that these words cannot be sounded out. When students have difficulty reading high-frequency words, remind them of the word and show

them the flashcard. If students have difficulty reading a word that is not underlined, you can prompt them to sound out the word in smaller chunks of letters. At the end of each lesson, there is a “student view” page (for printing or screen-sharing) of just what the student is asked to read so that students need not be distracted by directions.

8. Practice dictating sentences at a slow pace and broken up into phrases. (The man in the truck petted his dog and smiled at me. Or, The man in the truck petted his dog and smiled at me.) Ask students to speak aloud the words when they are writing them. Speaking helps the brain to identify the sounds in the word.
9. Think about how to make the process of correcting spellings as fun as possible. (An old sock makes the perfect whiteboard eraser—and whiteboards are made for erasing.) Ask students to read aloud the sentences they’ve written and ask them if they see spellings that need to be corrected. Praise students for self-corrections and help them see additional problems to correct. If the student writes “trock” for “truck,” point at “trock” and say, “This says ‘trock,’ but you wanted ‘truck’; can you hear what’s different?” Or if the student writes “sump” for “slump,” ask the student to read the word aloud. Often, the student will notice the missing sound.
10. Find a game or two to play as a short break or to end sessions in a fun way. This can create a feeling of camaraderie and relax tension.