

# 4 Program Information: Individual Sessions

## 4.1 Section Overview

In this section of the handbook, you will find a guide to the elements that make up each individual session. This section contains:

- an overview of the core individual session elements
- a structure for the introduction and narrative elements of each teaching session
- timing guidance for the individual sessions.

A session-by-session guide for the letter-sound/phonological awareness activities is given on pages 146–162 of this handbook.

## 4.2 Individual Session Elements

Individual sessions enable you to concentrate on a student's individual needs and you will therefore need to tailor each individual session to the needs of the student. To help you to do this, we have provided:

- a session structure for you to use when planning these sessions (mainly for vocabulary and narrative)
- some materials to use in each session
- a session-by-session guide for the letter-sound/phonological awareness activities.

### 4.2.1 Listening

As developing listening skills is a vital part of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, Ted's Listening Rules should be used in the individual sessions as well. The rules are briefly revised at the beginning of every individual session, focusing on the skill with which a student had most difficulties. You will not be able to award the Best Listener in an individual session but you can give the student praise for using the Listening Rules.

### 4.2.2 Introduction

The introduction can follow the same pattern as the group sessions except for reference to the Best Listener award. The introduction is an opportunity for you to settle the student into the session quickly, revise the Listening Rules and the days of week and encourage good listening.

### 4.2.3 Letter sounds and phonological awareness

#### Aim

In this section of an individual session, you should aim to revise the letters and letter sounds covered in the group sessions. Furthermore, the letter-sound work is combined with phonological awareness activities in order to promote overlearning of the letter sounds and shapes and to support students in phonological awareness skills such as blending and segmenting, which are important for literacy.

If the student has had difficulties with specific letter shapes or letter sounds, use this time to focus on those. If students have been missing group sessions (e.g. due to illness), this section of the individual sessions is a good opportunity to introduce students to the letters and letter sounds they have missed. Please follow the procedure for teaching a letter and its letter sound from the group sessions (see Box 3.3 on page 21).

If students are familiar with all letters and letter sounds covered in the group sessions, or after revising the letters with which a student had difficulties, use the letter-sound/phonological awareness activities outlined on pages 146–162 to expand a student’s phonics skills.

Choose one phonological awareness activity for each individual session. Start with the beginning activities before moving on to blending or segmenting activities. Try to alternate between blending and segmenting activities.

Blending word sounds is a crucial task for reading new words, and segmenting is important in working out how to spell words. Students often find these skills quite difficult and there is a good deal of variation in how quickly individual students grasp these concepts. For this reason, we are introducing the phonological awareness activities mainly in the individual sessions. This means that you can ask individual students to work at a level that they can manage, always trying to move them on to the next level and to reduce the levels of support (‘scaffolding’).

You will probably spend most of the phonological awareness activities on CVC words (consonant-vowel-consonant words, e.g. ‘cat’). This is important as they are a very common kind of word and are generally a good way to teach blending and segmenting skills. However, it is also important to include some CCV or CCVC words, to give students opportunities to deal with consonant clusters that occur frequently in English. As consonant clusters (CC) are more difficult to blend or segment than CV structures, you may need to give a student more help when working with words containing them.

### **Beginning activities**

Beginning activities aim to deepen students’ letter-sound knowledge and to provide them with a solid basis for blending and segmenting words. The phonological activities focus on initial as well as final sounds, and their identification.

### **Blending activities**

Activities in this section aim to improve students’ blending skills. To support students who have difficulties with blending, or to introduce students to blending, you could use the following techniques.

- Tell students that they have to say the individual sounds really quickly, so that there are no gaps between them. You can show students how this works by saying a word segmented and then shortening the gaps between the sounds.
- Stretch the separate sounds so that the gaps disappear. Some sounds won’t stretch very easily (e.g. ‘stop’ consonants, such as /b/, /t/, /g/, /p/, /d/ and /k/). It is best to blend these sounds with the vowels next to them a little: PPEEEEE – T. Do not insert additional vowels that are not in the word to stretch consonants (e.g. DAWG for ‘dog’).

### **Segmenting activities**

Activities in this section aim to improve students’ segmenting skills. Introduce the idea of stretching a word, and then separating the sounds. You may want to combine it with blending, to show students that both can be done with the same word. Once the basic segmenting idea is secure, start asking students to stretch words for you and then to separate them into their sounds. To help with memory problems, you can repeat the stretched word for them.

You may want to introduce segmenting with coloured cubes or tokens, and use a similar approach (with or without cubes or tokens) if students have difficulties with segmenting activities (see Gillon & McNeill, 2007; Gillon, 2008):

**NELI practitioner:** Let's look at the word 'pet'. Can you stretch this word for me?

**Student:** PPPPEEEEEEEETTTT.

**NELI practitioner:** Good! Now, 'pet' has three sounds [put three cubes/tokens in front of the student]. What is the first sound you hear?

**Student:** /p/.

**NELI practitioner:** Well done! [Push one cube/token forward]. PPP-EEEEETTTT. [Stretch the word, with a little break after the sound that has already been identified]. What's the next sound?

**Student:** /e/

**NELI practitioner:** Good! [Push next cube/token forward]. PPEEE-TTTTT. What's the sound at the end?

**Student:** /t/

**NELI practitioner:** Good. [Push one cube/token forward]. Now say all the sounds of 'pet' again.

**Student:** P-E-T. [Push the corresponding cube/token as the student says the sound].

Once students know the letters for the sounds in an activity, you may want encourage them to write down the segmented word letter by letter.

## 4.2.4 Vocabulary revision

### Aim

In this section of the session, you should aim to revise the vocabulary covered in the previous one or two group sessions. If the student has had difficulties with specific words, use this time to focus on those words.

If a student has had difficulties with specific words that were taught earlier in the program (i.e. not only those words covered in the previous one or two group sessions), you could also revisit those words.

If a student has been missing group sessions (e.g. due to illness), this section of the individual sessions can also be an opportunity to introduce the student to the new Special Words they have missed.

### Instructions

For words you feel the student knows following the group session, work as follows.

- Use the **picture prompts** (flashcards) and materials from the appropriate group session to revise the word.
- Show the prompt and ask the student for the word.
- If they struggle to find the word, try to help the student to retrieve the word by describing the target word (semantic help) or telling the student the first sound of the target word (phonological help).
- If the student still struggles to find the word, tell them the word for which you are looking.
- Make a note that this word might need to be revisited in the next individual session.
- Encourage the student to think about the word in different contexts. For example, if you are revising the word 'button', you might want to ask the student where else they might see a button

apart from on clothes, e.g. on computers, on telephones, on the TV, etc.

- If you are revising a verb, e.g. ‘throw’, you might want to introduce the student to the past tense or present tense, as in *‘Yesterday I threw the ball’* and *‘I am throwing the ball’*. Show the student the original flashcard and write down the new form of the verb so they can see that it looks different.
- You might also want to think about alternative contexts, e.g. *‘I threw a party’*, *‘I threw this away’* etc. (see ‘Advanced uses of vocabulary’ in Table 2.1 on pages 9–13 for some ideas).

For words with which you feel the student had difficulty in the group session, work as follows.

- Use the **picture prompts** (flashcards) and materials from the group session to remind the student of the word.
- Show the student the picture prompt/materials from the group session and say the word. Use real objects as examples of the word if you feel it is appropriate.
- Ask the student to point to the picture/item and repeat the word.
- Ask the student to close their eyes and think about the picture or item they have just seen while saying the word out loud.
- Repeat both of these steps a number of times to encourage overlearning.
- Give the student the definition of the word.
- Talk about the word in the context in which it has been taught, e.g. if you are revising ‘sleeve’, ask, *‘Have you got a sleeve?’*, *‘Is it a long sleeve or a short sleeve?’*, *‘What other things might have sleeves?’* (e.g. jumper, coat, shirt) and *‘What do we do with our sleeves when it is hot or when we are going to do some painting?’*
- Make a note to revise this word in the next individual session.

## 4.2.5 Narrative task

### Aim

This task gives you the opportunity to help develop the student’s story-telling skills. The task is divided into two sections and is carried out over two sessions in each week.

### Instructions

First session each week:

- Choose either a **three- or four-sequence picture story** (12 stories provided) or a **personal event narrative prompt card** (12 cards provided) from the materials relating to the individual session section.
- Place the picture sequence or narrative prompt on the table in front of the student and ask them to look at the picture(s).
- For picture sequences, say to the student, *‘These pictures tell a story. The story starts here* (point to picture 1) *and finishes here* (point to picture 3). *Can you try telling me the story?’*
- If the student has difficulty starting the story, you can use prompts such as *‘What is happening in the first picture?’* to get them started.
- Give non-specific prompts to encourage the student such as *‘mmm ... , yes ... ,’* etc.
- If the student has difficulty moving on from picture to picture, you can guide them by asking *‘What is happening in the next picture?’* and *‘What is happening in this picture?’* (pointing at appropriate picture). See also Box 4.1 on page 33 for personal event narrative instructions.
- For narrative prompts, say to the student, *‘Can you tell me what is happening in this picture?’* Give the student as much information as they need so that they are fully aware of what the picture is showing. Ask the student if they have ever experienced what the picture is showing,