Instructions[1] for the
Phonological Awareness Screening Test
(PAST)

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**PDFs of all four forms of the PAST are available
for free at www.thepasttest.com**

The *Phonological Awareness Screening Test* (PAST[2]) is intended to assess phonemic *awareness*, but also phonemic *proficiency*. Phonemic proficiency refers to automatic, unconscious access to the phonemes in spoken words. Phonemic proficiency appears to be a critical skill needed for orthographic mapping, which is the process of encoding written words into long-term memory for later, instant retrieval.

The acronym "PAST" has two senses. It stands for <u>P</u>honological <u>A</u>wareness <u>S</u>creening <u>T</u>est. It also coincidentally symbolizes the fact that the PAST is based on earlier versions of this type of test, i.e., it acknowledges the *past*. It draws its origins from the *Auditory Analysis Test* (AAT) of Rosner and Simon (*Journal of Learning Disabilities,* 1971). Dr. Philip J. McInnis created his own revision of the AAT by adding substitution items (the AAT only used deletion items). He called it the *Language Processing Assessment* (LPA, 1981) and later the *Phonological Processing Test* (PPT, 1999). In 2003, I made modifications to these time-tested assessments.[3]

There are four forms of the test, A, B, C, and D. This allows for an assessment a few times a year to track progress.

The Need for "Training" Before
Administering the PAST

Do not administer the PAST unless you have been "trained." Training involves the following:

First, carefully read these instruction two or more times. They are not difficult to understand. However, there are simply too many details to fully absorb after a single reading. If the PAST is not administered correctly, it invalidates the results. Thus, being thoroughly familiar with all the details is essential, which will require more than one reading of these detailed instructions.

Second, read the section appended to the end of these instructions that covers the issue of pronouncing phonemes in isolation. To properly administer the PAST, you must pronounce consonant phonemes in isolation without adding *uh* to the end of consonant sounds.

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[1] These instructions are an adaptation of Chapter 11 of *Equipped for Reading Success* (2016), updated January 2024.

[2] There exists an unrelated test that shares the acronym PAST called the *Phonological Awareness Skills Test*.

[3] The PAST adds the following features to those earlier tests: 1) a timing element to assess phonemic proficiency; 2) corrective feedback for every incorrect item; 3) responses that are "orthographically inconsistent" with the prompts; and 4) multiple alternate forms. See more about the first two of these below.

Third, practice giving the PAST to family members and colleagues. Practice it on students for whom the outcome is of no consequence. Also, seek out feedback from a school psychologist, a speech pathologist, or a trained educational evaluator. These professionals have formal training and experience in individualized testing and can help you get the administration right. Practicing also involves using a stopwatch (or stopwatch app on your smartphone) to practice the two-second count that occurs when administering items (explained below).

Conscientiously following these three aspects mentioned above will consititue being "trained" on administering the PAST. The important point is that you administer it properly.

General Principles of Administration

Use Sounds, Not Letters

At no point on the PAST are letter names used. *Always use letter sounds, never letter names.* When you say "change /a/ to /i/," you say the *sound* made by the letter, not the name of the letter. The exception is with the "long" vowel sounds in the second part of Level J. Long vowel sounds are represented by uppercase letters in brackets (i.e., /A/). These long vowel sounds match the letter name (e.g., the /A/ in words like *cake, tame,* or *paid*).

Do not add an "uh" sound when pronouncing consonants. *Proper pronunciation of sounds in isolation is essential for children to understand which phoneme you are asking them to manipulate.* For help with pronuncing phonemes in isolation, see the appendix at the end of these instructions.

Delete or substitute the *sound* represented by the letter or letters in the parentheses. For example, in Level F, for *(t)ime*, the /t/ gets deleted.

No Practice Items and No Initial "Instuctions"

There are no formal instructions provided to the student. You simply begin by saying "we are going to play a little word game." Then start with the first item. Also, there are no formal practice items. However, for the vast majority of students, the first items at Level D1 (e. g., "Say *baseball* without saying *base*") are so easy that they function like practice items. They help students understand the nature of the task. Precisely follow the sample line at the beginning of each level printed on the test form. All items at a given level are administered the same way.

Pacing

The administration of the PAST should be quickly paced. As soon as a student finishes one item, immediately present the next. A moderately quick pacing prevents lapses of attention, boredom, and reduces administration time.

The Assessment of Automaticity

All items are timed. Immediately after verbalizing an item, count in your head "one thousand one, one thousand *two.*" To be sure your count is really two seconds, practice with a stop watch

or stopwatch app on your smartphone. If the student responds correctly before you say the word *two* in the mental phrase "one thousand *two*," he or she receives credit for an "automatic"[4] response. Put an "X" in the blank next to the word to indicate an automatic response. If the student answers correctly, but after the two second count, mark a "1" next to that item. All incorrect items are marked with a zero (0), regardless of the speed of response. See Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

SAMPLE SCORING

In general, only give credit for an automatic response if the student has begun a correct response prior to you mentally completing the word *two* in the silent phrase "one thousand *two*." If the student completes it while you are saying "two" in that mental phrase, it is still considered automatic. However, if the student starts a response but stops part way through and clearly does not complete the response until after you have mentally said *two*, it is not considered an automatic response.

Automatic responses typically take about one-second or less, but sometimes as long as about 1 ½ seconds. Non-automatic responses tend to take 2 ½ to 3 seconds or longer. There generally seems to be about a full, one-second gap between most correct responses that are automatic and those that are not (i.e., the one-second gap between 1 ½ and 2 ½ seconds).

Though there is typically a comfortable gap between correct responses that are automatic and those that are not, there will be times when responses are very close to the cutoff and you will need to make a judgment. With elementary-level students, my practice has been to give them the benefit of the doubt when they are on the borderline and if I am not entirely sure. I score it as automatic. With secondary-level students and adults, I am more strict. If a response is on the borderline and I am not sure, I score it as correct, but not automatic. To understand why, consider that many good readers in second and third grade can respond in less than one second to nearly any item on the PAST. Why should we cut slack for older students and adults taking twice that long and are thus performing in the gray area so that we would have to make a judgment call? Given how fast many second and third graders respond, it may be reasonable to assume that if it takes close to two full seconds for a middle schooler, high schooler, or adult to respond, such an individual lacks phonemic proficiency.

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[4] The term *automatic* is used here in a non-technical sense. In cognitive science, automaticity involves a fraction of a second, so two seconds is far too generous of a cutoff for the technical use of the term *automatic*. However, you will discover that skilled readers routinely respond instantly, in well under a second. That suggests automaticity.

If a student does not respond. Sometimes students do not respond to an item, either because they forgot the item or they do not think they can do it. When this happens, continue the mental count until you reach five seconds. Then repeat the same item and resume the mental count starting with "one thousand one." If the student does not respond during this second five-second opportunity, provide the correct response according to the feedback line on the test, and score that item as incorrect. However, if the student responds correctly during this second five-second opportunity, score the item as correct (i.e., a "1"). An automatic score *can only occur within the first two seconds of the first opportunity.* This extra chance is only given when there is no initial response. Do not give a second opportunity following an incorrect response.

Sometimes students will ask you to repeat an item. If they have not provided a response yet, you can repeat an item. But you will have a judgment call here. You will need to judge if the student was distracted and never heard it correctly the first time. In such a case, you can give either a correct or automatic score, depending on the speed of response. However, if you feel confident the student heard you the first time but forgot or got confused, the student should not receive an automatic score because by this point, the original two seconds have elapsed. Only correct (1) or incorrect (0) are possible.

When a student self corrects. Students are allowed to self-correct. If a student self corrects within the two-second time frame, they can still receive an automatic score. Sometimes they are initially correct but change it to an incorrect response. When this happens, ask them, "Is it ___ or is it ___?" and go with their response to this question. In such a case, only correct (1) or incorrect (0) are possible.

If you mis-speak. If you mis-speak a word, excuse yourself, skip the item, and go on to the next one, as long as it was not the last item at that level (e.g., say, "Wait, forget that one, let's try a different one"). Then, after completing the other items at that level, go back to the misspoken item and administer it again before going on to the next level. Score that item normally (i.e., they can receive an automatic score if they respond correctly in less than two seconds). If this occurs on the last item of a level, simply repeat that item immediately and use your best judgment about scoring. If you find yourself routinely mis-speaking when giving the test, seek out additional practice opportunities (see the "training" section above).

Providing Feedback

A unique feature of the PAST is that students receive corrective feedback for every incorrect item. Rest assured, providing such feedback will not allow students to develop phonemic awareness skills in the 3 to 8 minutes it takes to administer this test! Phonemic awareness is a skill that takes months or years to develop. However, students may get items incorrect because they are confused about the task expectations. Phonemic awareness tests may be unfamiliar to many students. Thus, give feedback for *every* incorrect response. That lets them know precisely the kind of response you seek. Your goal is to assess their phonemic awareness skills not their ability to adapt to unique task expectations.

On the test form, at each level, standard corrective feedback is provided. No further demonstration or explanation is permitted. This means no visual cues and no verbal cues. Do

not emphasize certain sounds. Correct every incorrect item, even if it is the last item at a level. Positive feedback is permitted ("that's right!"), especially if a child responds tentatively. Do not *teach* any item or level. This is a test, not a teaching session.

Also, *never* say anything about the *position* of the sound within the word because this is a big part of what you are testing. For example, never say anything like "see how I switched the /b/ to a /t/ at the beginning of the word?" An important part of phonemic awareness is being able to determine *where* a sound is located within a word. Saying anything about the position of the sound spoils the test. *Carefully follow the sample feedback provided on the test form.*

Routing Procedure to Speed Administration

To avoid unnecessarily lengthening the administration time of the PAST, there is a routing procedure. No student receives all 52 items. Older and more skilled students get to skip most of the easy items. Younger students and those with weaker phonemic skills do not receive items that are too difficult for them. This routing procedure varies at different levels as follows:

Syllable Levels (D1 to E3)
- Everyone begins with D1, including older students and adults. Explain that this "word game" starts out very easy. The easy ones help students understand the nature of the task without ever having to give formal instructions or provide practice items.

- For kindergarteners and potentially at-risk students in the first half of first grade, give every item at Levels D and E and then follow the discontinue rule, described below.

- For most first graders and all students beyond first grade, if the first item of D1 is responded to automatically (i.e., correct response in 2 seconds or less), skip the remaining D1 items and move to the first item of D2. If the response to that item is automatic, skip the remaining D2 items and move on to the first item of E2, then E3. When the response to the first item at any syllable level is automatic, score all the remaining non-administerd items at that level as automatic (thus a 3/3 at that level).

- However, if any of the first items in Levels D1 to E3 are either 1) incorrect, or 2) correct but not automatic (i.e., correct response after 2 seconds), administer *all* items at that level and score normally. For example, if the first D2 item is correct but not automatic, administer the other D2 items. The routing procedure resumes with E2. Thus, if the first item in E2 is automatic, do not administer the other E2 items, even though the student was not automatic with one or more D2 items. Score any unadministered items at E2 as automatic. The same for E3. In sum, if there is an automatic response to the first item at any syllable level, do not administer any more at that level and score unadministered items as automatic, even if they had an incorrect or slow response on an earlier syllable level.[5]

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[5] The reasoning is that if students can do a higher syllable level after doing poorly at a lower one, their slow or incorrect response was likely due to the novelty of the task or a lapse in attention, not due to poor phonological awareness. It is not unusual for a student to get an earlier item incorrect, or correct but not automatic, and then go on to display automatic responding at higher levels. In such cases, administering all subsequent syllable-level items after an early error or slow response would have unnecessarily lengthened the test.

Generally for students beyond kindergarten, these syllable levels do not tell us much about reading. Reading requires phoneme-level skills, not syllable-level skills. This is why we want to avoid spending time on the syllable levels. However, syllable-level skills in kindergarten usually predict phoneme-level skills later on, so they give us a hint as to whether phonological skills may potentially affect reading progress. An exception to this is if students in mid first grade and beyond do very poorly on the syllable-level items. That may be telling you that the student has some significant phonological issues. It suggests the student should receive immediate attention in terms of training phonological/phonemic awareness.[6]

To continue with the description of the routing procedure:

Initial Phoneme/Onset-Rime Levels (F & G)

For kindergarten to late first grade:

• If the first three items at Levels F or G are automatic, skip the final two items at that level and score them as automatic.

• If any of the first three items at Levels F or G are incorrect, or correct but not automatic, administer all five items at that specific level (i.e., F or G) and score normally.

• If a student displays automatic responses to the first three items at Level G, skip the remaining two even if they did poorly at Level F.

For second grade through adults:

• Use the same general procedure as described above for Levels F and G except only the first *two* items at those levels need to be automatic before skipping on to the next level.

Other Phoneme Levels (H to M)

For kindergarten through adults:

• There is no routing procedure at Levels H through M. Give *all* items at each level. Continue administering until either the discontinue rule is reached or you come to the end of the test.

Discontinue Rule

If the combined "correct" score on two levels in a row is 0, 1, 2, or 3 out of 10, discontinue the test. The exception is if, at adjacent levels, one level has 3 and the other 0. However, if one has 2 and the other has 1, that counts toward the total of 3/10 or fewer to discontinue. Consider all items in the levels beyond the discontinued levels as incorrect. For example, if a student gets only two items at Level I and none at level J (thus 2/10 across the two levels), discontinue the test. Do not administer K, L, or M. All unadministered items are scored as 0.

The discontinue rule is based only on correct responses, not automatic responses. That is, when it comes to the PAST's discontinue rule, you only consider scores that are correct, regardless of whether any of those correct scores are also automatic.

An Additional Administration Note

Occasionally with Level J, students respond by carrying over an initial phoneme from the previous item. This is an error of working memory or attention rather than of phonemic

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[6] This is said with some caution. I know of cases where a student did poorly at Levels D and/or E but went on to do okay with the phoneme levels. Some students simply seem to take longer to get the knack for the task at hand.

awareness.[7] For example, a student correctly changes *sit* to *sat* on one item. On the next item, you ask the student to change the /i/ in *hid* to /a/ and he or she says *sad* rather than *had*. That student clearly carried over the /s/ from the previous item. However, he or she correctly performed the Level J type of manipulation because the correct substitution of the /a/ for the /i/ was made, followed by the correct blending of that new phoneme /a/ onto consonants before and after that vowel. If this happens, score the item as correct (or as automatic, if the response was within two seconds). However, you should still provide corrective feedback. For example say, "*Sad?* where did you get the /s/ from? Oh, I know, you got it from the one we did before when we went from *sit* to *sat*. Let's try it again, say *hid* . . ." This second try is just for feedback. You have already scored the item as correct or automatic.[8] After having administered the PAST about 1,500 times, my guess would be that this phenomenon occurs with Level J about once every 8-10 times with elementary students. That is common enough (and potentially confusing enough!) to warrant adequate attention here.

Scoring the PAST

Passing a Level

Do not confuse the notion of "passing a level" with the discontinue rule. The discontinue rule guides when to stop administering the test. The notion of passing or not passing a level can help guide instruction or intervention. It suggests a student's level of phonemic awareness development and potentially suggests which levels need work and which do not.

Each level yields two scores, a *correct score* and an *automatic score*. For the correct score, Levels D and E are passed if all items are correct. Levels F through M are passed if at least 4 out of 5 are correct. Similarly, for the automatic score, D and E are considered automatic if all 3 items are responded to automatically. For Levels F to M, if at least 4 of 5 items were responded to automatically, students are thought to display automaticity at that level. The goal with phonemic skills is to development automaticity, not just awareness. Thus, levels with 3 out of 5 or fewer automatic responses represent levels that should receive instructional attention. Students commonly pass levels with correct scores but are not automatic at those levels. These differences are reflected in the total scoring (see Figure 2 below). Only levels passed at the automatic level do not require instructional attention.

Item Scoring

It should be clear by now that items are scored in one of three ways:

1) *Incorrect* (Score = 0). The student provided an incorrect response, or did not respond at all after two five-second opportunities (see the top of page 4 above)

2) *Correct* but not automatic (Score = 1). The student's response was correct, but it took

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[7] This almost never happens with any level besides Level J. I suspect it is because Level J is the only level that manipulates a vowel in the middle of a word. Beyond that, I cannot confidently explain this phenomenon.

[8] When you readminister the item as feedback/practice, about 99% of the time students get it right. In the unlikely event that a student gets it wrong, do not change the score—they already got it "right" with the first response. Simply provide the standard feedback and move on.

more than two seconds.

3) *Automatic* (Score = X[9]) The student responds correctly within the two-second time frame.

At each level, the "correct" score is made up of combining each score of 1 and X. This total is put in the "correct" column on the right. In the "automatic" column, only count items with Xs for that level (see Figure 1 on page 3 for an illustration).

The Total Scores

As mentioned, students receive two scores at each level, a correct score and an automatic score. If you would like, you can transfer the totals from the right hand columns to the top of the first page of the test. There are two sides to this. First, with the display on the left, you see how many items were correct and how many were automatic at the *syllable, onset-rime,* and *phoneme* levels. The reading teachers who helped me field test the PAST in the early 2000s requested this total scoring schema. They found it useful, and you may too. Second, the other side gives the highest level passed in terms of automatic and non-automatic responses. Remember that a level is passed as *correct* if at least 4 out of 5 at that level are correct. The exceptions to this are the syllable levels which require at least 3 out of 3 to be considered passing. A level is considered *automatic* if at least 4 out of 5 items were automatic (or 3 out of 3 for the syllable levels). For most children, the highest correct level will be higher than his or her highest automatic level (see Figure 2 for an illustration). It is also important to note any levels not passed that were below the highest level passed. This right hand display seems to have direct instructional relevance because it indicates where the work is needed. Any levels not correct and any levels not automatic need instructional support to develop the phoneme proficiency that students need to be efficient at remembering words.

RESULTS:

	Correct	Automatic		
Basic Syllable	12 /12	10 /12	Highest Correct Level:	)
Initial Phoneme/Onset-Rime	10 /10	10 /10	(Levels not passed below the highest correct level)	–
Basic Phoneme	8 /10	4 /10		
Advanced Phoneme	6 /20	2 /20	Highest Automatic Level:	ı
Test Total	36/52	26/52	(Non-automatic levels below highest automatic level)	E, H

FIGURE 2

SAMPLE OF SCORING RESULTS

Interpreting the PAST

The PAST correlates powerfully with reading but is not a normed test. However, the following is a very rough guide to interpreting the results of the PAST based on 1) several studies that did not use the PAST but showed when children developmentally can do specific

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[9] When I first field-tested the PAST in 2002-2003, I used a 1 for correct responses that were not automatic and a checkmark for automatic responses. But given the fast pacing of the test, and quick marking of responses, when I later scored a test, occasionally a checkmark looked like a 1 and vise versa. Then I tried an A for "automatic," but found I could make an X more quicky and legibly than an A, and never confuse it with a 1.

phonological manipulations; 2) Dr. Philip McInnis' 35 years using very similar levels on his LPA/PPT; 3) my 20+ years working with the PAST; and 4) several studies I have directly done on the PAST. However, during part of my 20+ years experience with the PAST, I worked in a school district. Like about 99% of districts back then, they did not explicitly teach phonemic awareness. Second, I have done studies in four school districts with the PAST. The first three did no formal training of phonemic awareness at the time I collected data. More recently I have gathered data from a fourth district that shifted to teaching phonics and phonemic awareness. The differences in the data sets are startling. So, due to the nature of the disparities in the instruction in the data sets I have collected, relative to the degree that your district offers phonics and phonemic awareness instruction, you may find the following guidelines to be of limited usefulness. The estimates in Table 1 are based on the three school districts who, at the time the data were gathered (between 2004 and 2014), did not teach phonemic awareness and taught a limited amount of phonics. If your district provides explicit instructions in phonics and phonemic awareness, you should expect performance on the higher end of the ranges depicted in the "Typically Achieving Readers" column of Table 1, or even higher.

Grade Level	Typically Achieving Readers	Low Achieving Readers
Mid Kindergarten	D1-E2, F, sometimes higher	D1-D2 or none correct at all
Late Kindergarten	D1-E2, F, G, sometimes higher	D1-D2; E2 or lower
Mid First Grade	E3, E4, F, G, I or higher	E2, F, G or lower
Late First Grade	F, G, H, I, J	F, G, I, or lower
Mid Second Grade	H, I, J, K or higher	F, G, H, I, or lower
Late Second/Early Third Grade	H to M mostly automatic	H, I, maybe J or lower
Mid Third Grade to Adulthood	All levels automatic	Many levels correct, I to M, many not automatic

TABLE 1

APPROXIMATE DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS FOR AUTOMATIC RESPONSES

If a student's performance matches the shaded *Low Achieving Readers* column, it suggests that phonemic awareness may be a concern. If a student's level is lower than is listed in that column, then a phonemic awareness problem is very likely. In either case, those students will require training beyond what they may be receiving in whole-class instruction.

Notice in Table 1 how small the differences can be, especially early on (i.e., K-1). Except for obvious cases of very low performance, the differences may be very slight. This is why all students should get whole class or small group phonological/phonemic awareness training in kindergarten and first grade. Next, note that over time, typically developing readers start to pull away from those with reading difficulties. Automaticity becomes a bigger factor with time, especially after second grade. After third grade, lack of automaticity at any level may indicate that a phonemic awareness difficulty may be present.

Do not be surprised if a student performs inconsistently across levels. This is because different levels involve different types of manipulations. For example, H and K involve splitting initial blends. If a student struggles with phoneme blends, he or she may not pass H, but may pass I and J. While based upon data I have gathered, the rough-cut leveling system is generally accurate in terms of developmental order based on *group* data. Any given student may display inconsistencies, which is why the discontinue rule requires poor performance across two levels in a row, not just one.

Grade Level:		Grade 1		Grade 2	
Scoring Approach:		Correct	Automatic	Correct	Automatic
Highest possible score:		5/5	5/5	5/5	5/5
Syllable	D	4.3	3.9	4.9	4.7
Levels	E	3.6	3.2	4.6	4.1
Initial Phoneme/	F	4.9	4.8	5.0	4.8
Onset-Rime Levels	G	4.5	4.2	4.9	4.4
Phoneme	H	2.6	2.0	3.7	2.8
Levels	I	2.9	1.5	4.2	2.4
	J	1.6	1.0	3.8	2.1
	K	1.7	0.7	2.7	1.0
	L	2.0	0.9	2.9	1.0
	M	1.3	0.4	2.4	0.6

Note: All raw scores reported above are out of a possible 5 points. The current version of the PAST uses different scoring at the syllable levels than when these data were collected.

TABLE 2

AVERAGE RAW SCORES ON EACH LEVEL OF THE PAST

Table 2 shows the average score out of five attained on each level of the PAST from three first grade classrooms and two second grade classrooms from a lower middle class elementary school. The first graders were tested in December to January and the second graders from February to March. *Do not treat these like norms!* The sole purpose of displaying these results is to show that based upon group data, the levels of the PAST roughly fall within a developmental sequence. You can see there is an increasing degree of difficulty reflected in a smaller average number of correct items as the test progresses. With time, the gap between automatic and non-automatic responses widens. Based upon the comments above, you should expect better results than what is displayed in Table 2 if you instruct/train your students in phonemic awareness with a program such as *Equipped for Reading Success.* When the data in Table 2 were collected, the school was not doing any formal instruction in phonemic awareness.

Appendix

Pronouncing Phonemes in Isolation

Material in this appendix were excerpted and modified from Chapter 12[10] of the book
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How to Pronounce Phonemes in Isolation

For most consonant sounds it is easy to pronounce them in isolation. However, there are some consonant sounds that are very difficult. Below is a guide to assist in this process.

Easy consonants and digraphs

The easiest consonants to pronounce in isolation are the ones that you can "stretch out." For example, there is no excuse for saying that *m* says *muh* because it is very easy to make the /m/ sound in isolation and drag it out: *mmmmmm*. That is the case with others. Each of the following are consonants that can be easily streatched out vocally:

c (soft)*, f, l , m, n, ph, s, sh, th, v, z*

"Soft *c*" refers to when the letter *c* makes the /s/ sound (e.g., <u>c</u>ent, spa<u>c</u>e). The others listed above should be self explanatory. Even though the consonants in this section are the easy ones, practice pronouncing them in isolation until they are automatic. There should not be even the slightest temptation to add an /uh/ after any of these!

Moderately difficult consonants

The following require more thought and practice to properly pronounce in isolation. It is tempting to put an /uh/ after many of these consonant sounds. But this is not necessary:

c (hard), *ch, g* (soft)*, g* (hard)*, h, j, k, r, w[11]*

The hard *c* and *k* represent the sound /k/. Say *cat* and drag that first sound before opening your mouth to produce the /a/. If you hold that initial scraping sound, that is the /k/ in isolation. The hard *g,* as in *go* is a voiced[12] version of /k/. Say *go* very slowly but stop before shifting from the /g/ to the /O/. There is no need to say *kuh* or *guh.*

To pronounce /ch/ begin by saying *child*. Try it slowly with your mouth in position for the *ch* at the beginning. Stop before opening your mouth to produce the /i/ in *child*. Focus on

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[10] Chapter 12 of *Equipped for Reading Success* provides additional discussion of producing sounds in isolation relevant for instruction. Only sounds that may appear on PAST Forms A, B, C, and D are covered in this appendix.

[11] The sounds associated with the letters *q*, *x*, and *y* are not discussed here because they are never used in the PAST Forms A, B, C, D. These sounds are covered in Chapter 12 of *Equipped for Reading Success*, from which this appendix was abstracted. Also, that chapter contains a much fuller treatment of the sounds covered here.

[12] *Voiced* means you use your vocal cords. The /g/ and the /k/ are produced the same way with the mouth, the only difference between the two is that we activate our vocal cords with /g/ but not with /k/.

producing that initial /ch/ and it will sound a bit like air coming out of a car tire. If you use your vocal cords when producing /c/, it becomes the /j/. Say the name *Jim.* Now start to say it but hold the /j/ before you start to open your mouth for the /i/. Also, the soft g (e.g., *gem*) is also /j/.

The /h/ is a breathing sound that can be held. If you were to breathe on your glasses to fog them up to clean them, you would be making the /h/ in isolation.

The *r* requires practice to say it in isolation with precision. Start to say *ride*, but hold the /r/ sound and do not say the *ide* in *ride*. Hold that /r/ and you will sound like a child playing with a toy fire engine. Make that sound very briefly and you will have pronounced the /r/ in isolation.

The /w/ is made by forming a small, tight circle with your lips and making an *oo* sound as in *food,* except that your lips are almost closed while in that circular position.[13]

Difficult consonants

The phonemes associated with *b, d, p,* and *t* are most difficult phonemes to pronounce in isolation. These consonants stop the flow of air entirely. The problem can be seen if you listen carefully as you say one of these consonants at the beginning of a word and then the end of a word. For example, slowly say *tap*. The /t/ represents the position your mouth and lips and tongue are in when you begin that word before any airflow is produced. You cannot really pull apart the /t/ as a separate sound from the /a/ that follows. The /t/ emerges into the /a/. Now try the /p/ at the end of *tap*. Note how the /p/ represents the position your mouth is in when you completely stop the airflow after making the /a/. Because these stop consonants represent a beginning mouth position as we lead into a vowel sound or the mouth position when we close off a vowel sound, they are the most difficult to pronounce in isolation. But /p/ and /t/ are easier than /b/ and /d/ because the former do not use the vocal cords.

In order to produce the sounds associated with the stop consonants *p* and *t* in isolation, we replace an unwanted voiced vowel sound (i.e., /uh/) with an unvoiced whisper or hiss. Start to say a *t* and let out a short hiss of air, like the sound when you let air out of a car tire.[14] With *p,* you are letting out an unvoiced puff of air, as if you were at the beach and got some sand on your lips and you are pushing out air from your mouth to get rid of the sand. The *p* and *t* sounds are unvoiced, so there is no need to say *puh* or *tuh*.

The *b* and *d* sounds are more difficult because they require at least some voicing to produce. The /b/ almost requires a slight amount of a short u sound (the schwa). With practice, you can make the schwa extremely short and almost unnoticeable, so it is less likely to interfere with blending. The /d/ almost requires a very shortened version of the short *i* sound (/i/), but keep it very short. Practice these. Concentrate on eliminating as much as possible any trace of a vowel sound, and you can rid yourself of *buh, duh, puh* and *tuh*!

With a little thought and practice, you can provide all the sounds in isolation needed for administering the PAST, or any other phonemic awareness test.

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[13] Here is a little trick to see what I mean. Start to say the word *food.* As you say the /foo/, before getting to the /d/, change mid-stream and say *wish.* Notice how the /oo/ in *food* glides right into the /w/ in *wish.* All you are doing here is ever so slightly closing the circle your mouth a little tighter before producing the /w/.

[14] It is more like a release of air pressure starting with an explosive /t/. For those familiar with drums, it is a bit like imitating with your mouth the sound of hitting a *closed* high-hat cymbal on a drum set.