

Building Phonological Awareness With Elkonin Boxes

About the tool

This activity was developed by Michelle Silvia, reading coach at Robert F. Kennedy Elementary School in Providence, Rhode Island, during the spring of 2020 as part of an NCII community of practice focused on virtual intervention delivery. Please note that NCII does not endorse specific intervention programs. As such, any programs noted in these documents are used for illustrative purposes only or as potential resources for source materials (e.g., sample text, graphic organizers).

Elkonin boxes are an instructional method used to build phonological awareness by segmenting words into individual sounds or phonemes. Elkonin boxes are commonly used in the early elementary grades or with students who need additional phonics interventions. These students may score below benchmark in AIMSweb Letter Sound Fluency, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, Nonsense Word Fluency, R-CBM, or another phonics assessment (i.e., CORE Phonics) or spelling inventory. To use Elkonin boxes, the student listens to a word and moves a token into a box for each sound. Virtual Elkonin boxes are used in much the same way, with boxes created on PowerPoint or another shareable presentation. In the virtual setting, the student will click and drag a “token” on the screen, which could be any shape or image, into the respective box. This resource describes three variations of Elkonin boxes: tokens, letter tiles, and word building.

Variations

- **Elkonin boxes with tokens.** To use this variation of Elkonin boxes, the student listens to a word and moves a token into a box for each sound.
 - [Elkonin boxes - 3 phonemes with tokens](#)
 - [Elkonin boxes - 4 phonemes with tokens](#)
- **Elkonin boxes with letter tiles.** This series of Elkonin boxes builds on the previous skill, with students now moving the corresponding letter(s) into the boxes. The first slide contains an example with letters, and the second slide includes blank spaces for you to add in letters that match the lesson.
 - [Elkonin boxes - 3 phonemes with letter tiles](#)
 - [Elkonin boxes - 4 phonemes with letter tiles](#)
 - [Elkonin boxes - 5 phonemes with letter tiles](#)
- **Word building with Elkonin boxes.** This activity uses Elkonin boxes and eight letters. Students build words by creating combinations of four- or five-letter words. The first slide contains an example with letters, and the second slide includes blank spaces for you to add in letters that match the lesson.
 - [Word building - 4 Elkonin boxes](#)
 - [Word building - 5 Elkonin boxes](#)

Tips for implementation

1. Open the example Elkonin boxes linked above and adapt letters to fit your lesson. Or, create your own Elkonin boxes using PowerPoint or another shareable presentation that allows users to interact with pieces on the screen.
2. To ensure letters and tokens can be manipulated by the student, instruct the student to open the presentation in edit view, not presentation view.
3. Select an appropriate word list to use with the student. The student's teacher should provide lists at the student's instructional level.
4. Slowly pronounce one word from the list. Each sound should be stretched so that the student hears each individual sound.
5. Have the student repeat the word, phoneme by phoneme.
6. As the student says the word, have the student move a token or letter tile into a box for each sound.
 - a. If additional support is needed, have the student count on their fingers the number of sounds they hear in the word before moving on to this step.
7. If the teacher has provided a sheet to mark progress, mark which words the student boxed correctly.
8. Continue using a valid progress monitoring tool to the extent possible to measure student progress.

For additional tips and information, check out NCII's [sample lesson](#) on phoneme segmentation.