

How to use the Phonogram Folders

Background

These folders were first designed by Muriel Dwyer, AMI teacher trainer in the United Kingdom and Africa. She worked extensively in both English and Swahili which are both partially phonetic languages. Ms. Dwyer adapted Dr. Montessori's approach (which was developed for Italian, a purely phonetic language) for use in any language that is partially phonetic, like English. You can read the details of her program in her booklet, "A Path for the Exploration of Any Language Leading to Writing and Reading."

Display

First, place the cards and books into their corresponding pouches or red envelopes. Then place the folders into a box or basket that is just large enough to hold all of the folders when they are full with their contents. The box they are packaged in works well for this purpose. Simply remove the lid and place the folders within the open box. Place the box or basket on a shelf. If you have it, place the Phonogram Dictionary just to the right of the Phonogram Folder box.



Preparation

Introduce the Phonogram Folders to children who are reading words phonetically and who show an interest in correct spellings. In the Montessori early childhood environment this means they have success doing independent work with the phonetic object box and/or 3-part phonetic reading cards, the phonogram object box and/or 3-part phonogram reading cards, and puzzle words. The children should recognize the key sounds printed on the outside of each folder (commonly taught via the sandpaper letters) as well as know the names of the letters of the alphabet (commonly taught via songs).



Activity 1: Reading the booklets from one folder

1. Invite one or two children to work with you. Have the children walk with you to choose one phonogram folder. The first presentation should include a folder with a silent 'e' variation inside (the ai, ee, ie, oa, and ue folders all include silent e).
2. At your work area, point to the key sound on the folder and say, "What sound is this?" Then say, "Did you know that there are many ways to spell this sound? Let me show you."
3. Take each card out of the folder (leave the booklets inside for now). Repeat the sound as you lay each card on the mat in a column below the folder. Say, "Even though these are spelled differently, these all make the same sound. In case you forget which sound they make, there is a secret on the back that shows you." Playfully show them the key on the back of each card. Guide the child to lay out all the cards in a column below the folder.
4. Pick up the silent e card and place it in front of you. Take two slips of paper and write the letter "r" on one and the letter "b" on the other (or logical letters depending on the phonogram you are working with). Place the r in front of the o-e and place the b on top of the dash (e.g., between the o and the e). Put your hand over the e and read the word (rob) with the child. Remove your hand and say, "When the silent e is here, it doesn't say anything at all but it tells the vowel in front of it to say its name instead of its sound." Read the word (robe) with the child. Now write the letter "l" on a slip of paper and place it in front of the o on the card. Again, cover the silent e and guide the child to read the word (lob). Remove your hand and read the new word together (lobe). Continue for other



examples if needed until the child understands the new rule. (*Note:* Once the child understands the rule, you will probably not need to repeat this silent e presentation for other folders.)

5. Take out one booklet from the folder and say, “These booklets show you many words that have the “oa” sound in them. If you ever forget what sound it makes, you can peek at the back.” Show them playfully how to peek.
6. “Let’s place each booklet on top of its matching card.” When all booklets are placed, read one together. If they come across any words they do not know, use the word in a lively sentence to give a fun and illustrative example of its meaning.
7. When they are finished say, “You can keep reading all of these booklets.” Fade and observe while they read.
8. When they are finished reading say, “Let’s clean this up. Cards first.” Show them how to stack the cards carefully and return them to the folder. “Now the booklets.” Carefully place each booklet (one at a time) within the folder, on top of the cards, bound edge out. Emphasize the elegance of this procedure and be consistent to preserve the life of the booklets, cards, and folders.
9. Bring the folder back to the shelf together and say, “You can work with the phonogram folders anytime you like. Next time you can choose any folder at all!”



Activity 2: Reading the booklets from many folders

1. Repeat as above but invite the child to choose two or three folders at the same time. Lay the folders out from left-to-right on the top of your work area. Then, remove the cards from one folder and lay them in a column beneath their respective folder. Place each booklet on top of its respective card. Continue for each folder. Then, read! Encourage the child to ask another child if they find a word they don’t know. Model using a sentence to provide an example of its meaning.

Activity 3: Sorting the cards from two folders

1. Invite the children to choose two folders and bring them to your work area. Lay the folders out at the top of the work area from left-to-right.
2. Say, “Today we will just take out the cards and not the booklets.” Guide them to place the cards together in one stack.
3. Say, “We’ll need to randomize these; let’s thoroughly mix them up.” Model a careful but fun way of randomizing the cards from both folders into one pile.
4. When the cards are randomized into one stack say, “Let’s see if we can remember where these belong!” Guide the children to sort the cards into columns beneath their respective folders.
5. Have the children check their work when finished by using the key on the back of the cards and/or the reference key at the front of the Phonogram Dictionary.
6. Encourage the children to continue the sorting activity for all of the folders (that day or on other days) by continuing to take two folders at a time.



Activity 4: Sorting the cards from more folders

1. Once the child has experience sorting the cards from two folders, invite them to try three folders at a time.
2. Proceed in this fashion until the child is able to sort all of the cards from all of the folders at one time without much help from the control of error on the back.

Activity 5: The test

Children love the challenge of “the Test.” In this activity, they can verify for themselves that they truly know all of the spelling variations presented in the folders.

Using either a movable alphabet or pencil and paper (depending on the child), guide the child to write down all of the key sounds (from memory) and their spelling variations. They can check the phonogram folders to verify their work. Their alphabet/paper should look something like the following.

ai	au	e	ee	er	f	ie	j	oa	or	ou	oy	s	ue
ai	au	e	ee	er	f	ie	j	oa	or	ou	oy	s	ue
a-e	aw	ea	e-e	ir	ph	i-e	ge	o-e	ore	ow	oi	ce	ew
ay		ea	ur			igh	gi	oe				ci	oo
ei		ie				y		ow					u-e
		y											

Activity 6: Dictation

The children love the challenge of testing themselves and each other. They may make many mistakes at first but they have fun doing it and they learn from discovering their own errors.

Invite two children to layout the cards and booklets from one folder of the children’s choosing. Tell them that for dictation, one person will read the words in a booklet and the other person will write them. Have them decide who will read and who will write. Then, guide them to choose either a movable alphabet or pencil and paper (depending on the children). Say, “Let’s see if you can write down each word in the booklet. Kyle, you read a word from the booklet and Kayla, you write it down. Use the booklet to check if you were right.” Encourage a light heart when errors are inevitably found. Have fun with them!

Activity 7: Phonogram Dictionary (sold separately)

The Phonogram Dictionary is a wonderful extension/support for this work. When the child is stuck on how to pronounce a spelling variation encountered when reading, encourage them to use the phonogram dictionary.

1. Say, “Let’s see if we can find those letters in the phonogram dictionary.”
2. Show them how to scan the index tabs to find the spelling variation they seek and then open to that page to find the corresponding key sound.

Key Sound Reference

The key sounds that label each folder and appear as clues on the back of the cards and booklets are based on the phonogram sandpaper letters. In Montessori classrooms, the children learn the sounds that key phonograms make at the same time that they learn the sounds single consonants and vowels make. The key sound phonograms that have a common spelling variation are included in the phonogram folders. The ones that do not (e.g., the oo sound in book, the sh sound in ship) are not included in the folders. All of the key sound phonograms in the Montessori English program are listed in the table below; **phonogram key sounds included in the phonogram folders appear in red.** This scheme does not account for variations due to regional pronunciations.

Key sound	Example
ai	paint
ar	car
au	Paul
ch	chip
ee	tree
er	fern

Key sound	Example
ie	pie
ng	ring
oa	boat
oo	book
or	corn
ou	cloud

Key sound	Example
oy	toy
qu	quilt
sh	ship
th	moth
ue	blue