

Instructions

The Sandpaper Letters were created in order to help the young child (approx. ages 2.5 to 4 years) gain multi-sensory letter-sound knowledge. By tracing a letter and saying its sound, the child develops muscular memory of a letter's form, auditory memory of a letter's sound, and visual memory of a letter's shape.

The letters must be constructed in a way that they provide a clear, tactile stimulus that guides the child to accurately and gently trace each letter's form with their fingers. This is achieved by creating a smooth backing beneath a slightly rough/textured surface in the precise shape of each letter. The texture must awaken the child's tactile sense and also require a light touch. A very fine grit of sandpaper is preferred. The grit must not be too rough or it may damage the child's skin.



There are three typical methods used to make sandpaper letters:

- ***Option 1-Sandpaper (recommended):*** Precisely cut the letters out of very fine sandpaper and glue them onto smooth color-coded boards (pink for consonants, blue for vowels, and green for phonograms)
- ***Option 2-Felt:*** Precisely cut the letters out of felt and glue them onto smooth, color-coded boards
- ***Option 3-Sand:*** Print the letters on heavyweight color-coded cardstock and precisely glue sand onto the letter forms

Materials:

- A printer
- Color-coded smooth backing boards; blue (5 vowels), pink (21 consonants), and green (17 phonograms); may be made from heavyweight cardstock, laminated cardstock, painted/sealed wood, foam board, etc.
- A paper cutter or scissors (if cutting cardstock)
- Scissors and a craft knife (if cutting sandpaper or felt)
- Glue (e.g., Gorilla glue), rubber cement, or a glue stick (test the method that works best for your materials)
- Very fine grit sandpaper, felt, or fine sand

Card Sizes: There is a dashed line on each page indicating the desired size and color of each letter card. (If the dashed lines are outside the printable area, the card should be 8.5" x 11".) ***If you are cutting these out of cardstock, be sure to cut just inside the dashed lines. The lines must not appear on the final letters as it causes a visual distraction for the child.***

These cuts will create letter cards of many different sizes. This is intentional as it gives children inherent knowledge of the dimensions of each letter. Notice that the left margin is larger than the right margin. This subtly guides the child to orient each letter right-side up.

Once you have cut out all of the letter cards, round the corners (a kraft corner rounding punch works well and will give you consistent corners). This will significantly extend the life of your letters.

Sandpaper option: Purchase sheets of very fine grit sandpaper (between #220 and #320; use the same grit for all letters). Print out the letter templates on plain paper. Use the dimensions and color listed on each page to guide you in preparing your boards. Roughly cut out each letter (you will do the precise cut later with the craft knife). Use a glue stick to lightly glue each letter to the back of the sandpaper; you will remove the paper templates later so do not glue firmly in place. Glue the letters face-down to the sandpaper backing; this will orient the letters in the correct perspective from the sandpaper side). Precisely cut the letters out of the sandpaper (practice with a craft knife first). Remove the paper template backing (as much as possible). Then, permanently adhere the sandpaper to the color-coded boards. The edges must not lift up at all. Use the template to guide your placement so that the appropriate margins are maintained. The left margin is the largest (minimum 1.5"). The bottom margin is approx. 1". The right margin is approx. 0.75".

Felt option: If your child has tactile defensiveness, you may need to choose a substance other than sand to add texture to your letters. Felt is one option. Find a felt-like texture that your child enjoys touching. It must have enough texture to be readily distinguished from the smooth backing; if their fingers slide off of it while tracing, there must be a clear tactile message that they are off course. It cannot be thick; the child should feel the smooth board easily if their fingers stray while tracing (their fingers should not 'fall off' the felt). Cut the felt out in the precise shape of each letter (practice with a craft knife before cutting the letters). You may wish to pin the letters to the felt, trace around the letters, and then cut just inside the lines (so the lines do not show). Then, permanently adhere the felt to the backing boards. The edges must not lift up at all. Use the template to guide your placement so that the appropriate margins are maintained. The left margin is the largest (minimum 1.5"). The bottom margin is approx. 1". The right margin is approx. 0.75". For color-coding, you can choose to use (1) one color of felt (tan like sand) and color-coded backing boards or (2) a neutral color for all backing boards (like natural wood or white cardstock) and color-coded felt (pink for consonants, blue for vowels, green for phonograms).

Sand Option: Print the letters on heavyweight color-coded card stock. Vowels should be printed on blue cardstock. Consonants should be printed on pink cardstock. Phonograms should be printed on green cardstock. Print in draft mode so that the toner is lighter in color/less saturated.

We recommend testing your glue method on scrap before gluing your final letters. Carefully spread your glue on a printed letter (a paintbrush is helpful here) so that the glue precisely and completely covers the letter and mimics its shape. Immediately spread a generous amount of very fine sand on the glue. Let sit for 5 minutes. Tip the card to the side to pour the excess sand back into the tray. Repeat as necessary until the letter's shape is saturated with sand. You want the printing to be completely obscured by the sand; the ink/toner should not be visible. Allow it to dry overnight. Test your results the next day by tracing the letter with your fingers repeatedly. Only a tiny amount of sand should come off when you trace.

Storage

You can store your letters upright in a sturdy box that is about 3" high. You might try covering a large shoe box with fabric to create a special container.