



## 'R' Blends

Welcome to 'r' blend practice! We believe that as a parent or caregiver, you are your child's best teacher and there are many things that you can do at home to improve your child's communication skills.

An 'r' blend is a combination of two or three consonant sounds. The second or third sound is the 'r' sound. Here are some examples:

- **tr:** try, trip, true
- **cr:** cry, crow, crew
- **pr:** proud, prop, pry
- **br:** clean, clap, clue
- **gr:** glue, glad, glass
- **dr:** draw, drop, drip
- **shr:** shrub, shred, shrimp
- **str:** straight, strap, strobe
- **spr:** spread, sprint, spirit
- **scr:** scrap, scrape, screen

In the speech-language pathology world, we call those two and three-consonant sound combinations 'consonant clusters'. Some children find it hard to make sounds in the 'cluster' or blend, so they leave out one or two of the sounds or mispronounce the 'r' sound. They might say 'tee' instead of 'tree'. Some children might use a different sound such as 'w' instead of 'r'. They might say 'twee' instead of 'tree'.

### Developmental Norms:

There is a significant amount of variability for the development of blends however, most<sup>1</sup> children produce all 'r-blends' correctly by **8 years of age**.

- 1 Age at which at least 90% of children produced the sound correctly in all word positions. (Adapted norms from The Goldman Fristoe Test of Articulation-2)



## How to make the “r” sound:

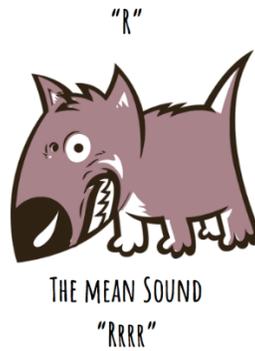
- For specific information regarding how to assist your child in making a correct ‘r’ sound, please refer to the page entitled ‘The ‘R’ Sound.
- To produce ‘r’ correctly, the teeth are together or slightly parted and the lips are rounded (i.e., puckered or in an "o" shape).
- The tongue moves back slightly and creates a hump in the middle of the mouth OR the tip of the tongue curls up and back towards the middle of the roof of the mouth.
- The voice is turned on.
- Next, ask your child to try saying a word with an 'r' blend, e.g. ‘cry’. At first, ask your child to say the word slowly. Once your child finds this easy, ask him or her to say the word faster until it sounds more natural. Typically, it is easier to make the ‘r’ in blends when the other consonant is made at the back of the mouth such as ‘cr’ and ‘gr’ blends. By starting with these blends, we are reducing the need for the tongue to move around in the mouth, as both the sounds in the blend are made at the back of the mouth.

## How to provide feedback for ‘r’ blends:

Give specific feedback! When the sound is produced correctly say: "That was a great 'r' sound" OR "I really heard your 'r' sound when you said 'grow'. Great job!"

When your child doesn't put the ‘r’ sound in the blend say: "Oops! You forgot the 'r' sound in 'grass'" OR you could say: "That sounded like you said 'gwass' instead of 'grass'. Remember to use your 'r' sound in the blend, remember, ‘grrr’.

You can give the sound a fun name. For example, the 'r' sound could be called the "mean sound" or the "pirate sound". Feel free to get creative and find a name for the sound that works best for your child!



## How often should I be practicing with my child?

A useful analogy is to compare working on speech sounds to playing a video game. In many video games, there are different levels that need to be completed or mastered in a sequence.

The length of time a child stays on one level varies greatly from child to child, and can be impacted by a number of factors. These factors include:

- The amount of cueing needed to elicit the sound correctly - we call this *stimulability*. If a child can produce a sound given proper cueing techniques, they are said to be stimuable to produce that sound. Gradually, over time, we can fade the cues so that the child can make the sound by themselves.
- Attention span: A child who is able to focus on practicing his or her speech sound, pay attention to the cues given, and pay attention to their own production is likely to make progress more quickly than a child who might struggle with attention and focus.

If you feel that your child is not making progress as expected, please contact your school speech-language pathologist for more guidance in this area.

## How to Master a Level?

For most 'levels', your child will be ready to move on once he or she is able to produce the sound at that level with 80% accuracy. You don't need to keep track of how your child is doing on each task unless you want to. You can simply estimate approximately how well your child is doing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your school's speech-language pathologist.



**Reps:** 1 – 2 Activities/Practice sessions per day

**Duration:** 5 – 15 minutes

**Levels:**

- Level One: Word (e.g., “**f**rog”)
- Level Two: Phrase (e.g., “big **f**rog”)
- Level Three: Sentence (e.g., “The **f**rog lives in a pond.”)
- Level Four: Conversation (e.g., the sound in everyday conversation)

### Why Practice? It’s Like Exercise!

Think of practicing speech sounds as similar to exercising or lifting weights. If you start off by learning correct form, exercising every day, and gradually increasing the difficulty or weight, you will be able to make great progress towards your fitness goal! The same goes for working on speech sounds. We start by showing a child how to properly produce the sound. Then, we work with the child on saying the sound on its own (isolation), then in syllables (la, lee, lie, low, Lou). After that, we target the sound at the word level- beginning, end, middle, and in consonant blends. Gradually, we move to producing the sound at the sentence level, and then at the conversational level.



### Short But Often!

Researchers have found that shorter but more frequent practice sessions are **more effective** than longer but less frequent sessions. For this reason, I recommend that you try to sneak in as many short sessions as you can throughout your week. The more you practice, the faster your child will progress. A few 5-minute sessions a day is a great place to start, but you can always do fewer if it doesn't fit into your schedule. Try practicing while driving in the car, while standing in line, or while waiting for a doctor's appointment to get in a few extra repetitions.



## Phonological Processes for /r/ blends:

A *phonological process* is a typical error pattern that young children use to simplify an adult speech sound they are not able to say. In the case of /r/ blends, the most common phonological process children exhibit is something called *cluster reduction*. Cluster reduction occurs when the child deletes one or more sounds from a cluster of consonant sounds. For example, a cluster reduction for the word "frog" would be "fog". A cluster reduction for the word "brown" would be "bown".

Cluster reduction is a common error pattern that babies and young children demonstrate when they are first learning to talk. It takes a while for them to learn to move their mouth to make two or three consonant sounds in quick succession to produce a consonant blend.

If cluster reduction continues past the age of 3 or 4, it may be something that your child needs a little help with. It is an error pattern that school SLPs work on frequently with children in the early grades. Since children typically know how to make all the individual sounds in the blend correctly, it is often quite easy to remediate their cluster reduction.

## Tips for working on cluster reduction at home:

**Be Specific:** tell your children that they are leaving off one of the sounds at the beginning of words.

**Give an Example:** give your children examples of their errors (e.g. "You said *kie* when you meant to say *cry*. You left off the /r/sound").

**Provide a Model:** have your child look closely at your mouth as you slowly say the word that starts with the cluster reduction. Stretch out and emphasize the sound they are leaving off.

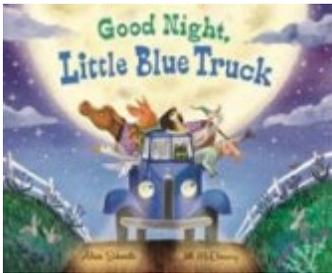
**Blend the Sounds Smoothly:** when you slow down words starting with /r/ blends for your child, it's easy to end up saying: *buh – rown*, *fuh – rog* etc. That's okay if you need to do this initially to get that /r/ sound inserted after the initial consonant, but it is important to also work on a smooth transition between the first sound and the /r/ sound without adding an extra vowel into the word.



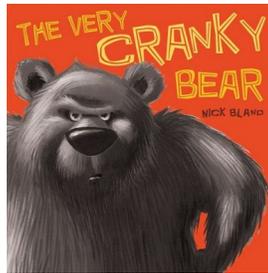
## Learning with Games

- **Drive cars:** Drive cars around a race track or create your own race track around the house!
- **Bake!** Bake brownies together!
- **Dress up:** Play dress up or dress up dolls, stuffies, toys, etc. !

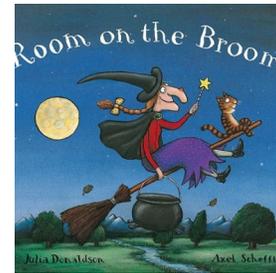
## Sound-Loaded Books: R Blends



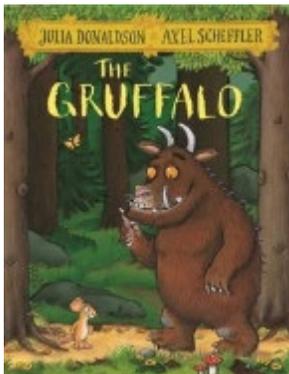
**Good Night, Little Blue Truck**



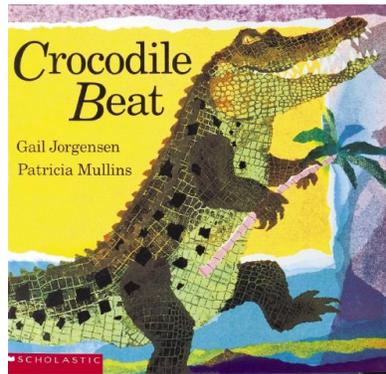
**The Very Cranky Bear**



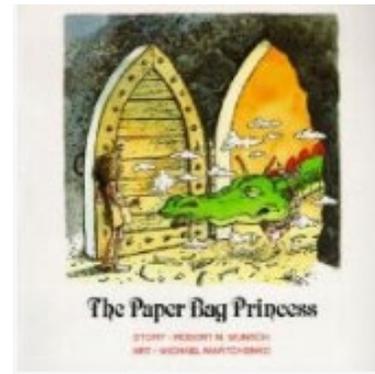
**Room on the Broom**



**The Gruffalo**



**Crocodile Beat**



**The Paper Bag Princess**

## Helpful Websites

- [Practical Speech Therapy Activities for Home Practice](#)
- [Working Speech and Language into Daily Routines](#)
- [Fun Family Crafts](#)
- [Printables for Kids: KizClub](#)



## Songs Featuring 'R' Blends

- [Youtube: And the Green Grass Grew](#)
- [Youtube: Here Comes the Firetruck](#)
- [Youtube: Driving in My Car](#)

## R Blend Crafts

- [Tin Can Drums](#)
- [Jumping Frogs](#)
- [Spring Tree](#)