



S Blends

Welcome to 's' blends practice! We believe that parents and caregivers are a child's best teacher and there are many things that you can do at home to improve your child's communication skills.

An 's' blend is a combination of at least two consonants, the first of which is 's'. For example:

- **Sm:** small, smell, smile
- **Sn:** snow, snail, snack
- **Sl:** slide, slime, slip
- **Sp:** spider, spin, spoon
- **Sk:** skate, sky, school
- **Sw:** swim, swan, sweep

Blends can also be referred to as "consonant clusters." Cluster reduction occurs when children do not produce all the sounds in a blend (e.g., "sake" for "snake").

Developmental Norms:

There is a significant amount of variability for the development of blends, however, most¹ children produce all 's-blends' correctly by 7 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)

*For s-blends, please see the separate S-Blends page!



How to make an /s/ blend:

- The teeth are together and the tongue is high in the mouth, almost touching the alveolar ridge (the bump that you can feel right behind your front teeth).
- The lips are pulled back into a smile- lips are NOT rounded.
- The voice is turned off.
- Softly blow your air to create a hissy sound.
- Move from your hissy sound into the last sound of your blend. This will look different based on the last sound in the blend. It could be any of the following:
 - Popping your lips and exploding the air. E.g. "sPider"
 - Tapping your tongue up behind your teeth. E.g. "sTar"
 - Scraping the back of your tongue up at the back of your mouth. E.g. "sKy"
 - Putting your lips together and humming your air out through your nose. E.g. "sMart"
 - Holding your tongue up behind your teeth and making sound through your nose. E.g. "sNail"
 - Lifting the front of your tongue up and making a singing sound. E.g. "sLide"

[Click to watch on YouTube: Demonstration of how to produce 'S Blends'](#)

How to provide feedback for /z/:

BE SPECIFIC!

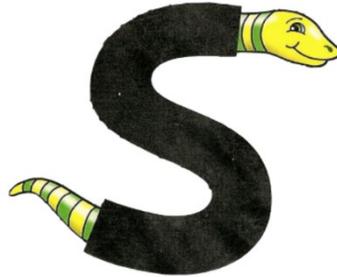
When the sound was produced correctly: "That was a great 's' sound!" OR "I really heard your 'snake' sound when you said 'star.' Great job!"

When the sound was produced incorrectly: "Oops! You forgot the 's' sound," OR "That sound like you said 'tar' instead of 'star.' Remember to use your 's' sound."



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

SNAKE SOUND



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: Isolation (e.g., the sound all by itself → “s”)
- Level Two: Syllable (e.g., “so”)
- Level Three: Word (e.g., “same”)
- Level Four: Phrase (e.g., “bright sun”)
- Level Five: Sentence (e.g., “I see the dog.”)
- Level Six: 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 /s/ 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 /s/ 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 "snake" would be "nake". A cluster reduction for the word "spray" might be "pay". It is usually the /s/ sound that children leave off in initial /s/ blends, though sometimes they might omit a different sound in the blend (e.g. "seet" for "sweet", "sar" for "star", etc).

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 in kindergarten and grade one. 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 their words.

Give an Example: give your children examples of their errors (e.g. "You said pill when you meant to say spill. You left off the snake 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 the /s/ sound if that is the sound they are leaving off.

Use a Tactile Aid: run your finger down your child's arm when you stretch out the /s/ sound in the word.

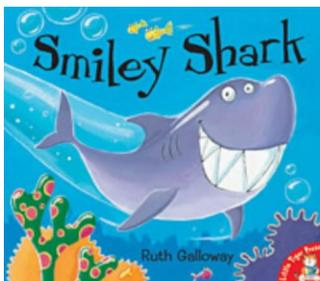


Hiss Like a Snake: you can talk about how /s/ is the "snake" sound, and you and your child can try to hiss like a snake when you make the "ssssss" sound in the word with the cluster reduction.

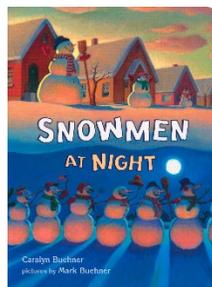
Learning with Games

- **Make and play with slime!**
- **Pretend to be astronauts in space!**
- **Build a snowman!** Go out in the snow and build a snowman! Give him an 's' blend name (e.g., Steve)! In the summer time, you could use play-doh to build a snowman and other 's' blend objects (e.g., snakes, spaceship, school bus)
- **Play I Spy!**

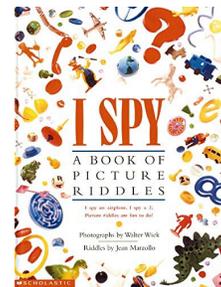
Sound-Loaded Books: S Blends



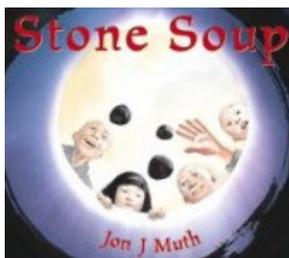
Smiley Shark



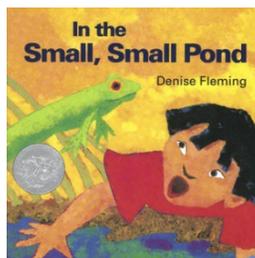
Snowmen at Night



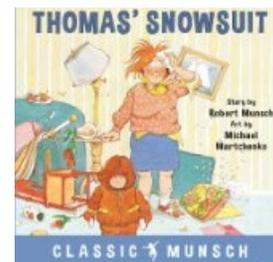
I SPY



Stone Soup



In the Small, Small Pond



Thomas' Snowsuit

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 S Blends

- [The Itsy Bitsy Spider](#)
- [S Blends Phonics Song](#)
- [Twinkle Twinkle Little Star](#)

S Blend Crafts

- [Kids Craft Room- Climbing Popsicle Stick Spiders](#)
- [Artsy Craftsy Mom - 10 Sassy Snake Crafts For Kids](#)
- [Home Science Tools - How To Make Slime](#)