

Compounds and Contractions Activities

Compound words and contractions are formed by joining two words. Being able to recognize the two words that make up a compound or a contraction helps children read the word more fluently and understand its meaning. Forming compound words and contractions helps children understand the structure of these words better.

I. Reading and Understanding Compound Words

Purpose: Identify smaller words in compound words and use those smaller words to read and understand the compound words

Write *backpack* on the board. Remind children that when they read a longer word, they should first look for smaller words and word parts they know in the word. Ask what smaller words are in the word (*back*, *pack*) and underline each word they say. Draw a vertical line between the two words. Remind children that words made of two smaller words are called *compound words*. Tell them they can read compound words more quickly by finding and reading each word in the compound word. Point to *back* in *backpack* and have children read it. Quickly point to *pack* and have them read that word. Have them reread the compound, blending both words quickly and smoothly. Remind children that they can often figure out the meaning of a compound word by thinking about the meanings of the two smaller words in it. Explain, for example, that a *backpack* is a *pack* you wear on your *back*. Point to each smaller word as you use it to explain the compound word.

Continue with other decodable compound words. Start with compounds children can easily recognize and whose meaning can be understood by thinking about the meanings of the smaller words, such as *sandbox*, *bedtime*, *mailbox*, *bath tub*. Gradually include compounds of more challenging words, such as *flashlight* or *teaspoon*. Call on children to underline the smaller words in each compound and draw the dividing line between the words. Some might identify too small of a word that won't help them decode or understand the larger word, for example, finding *and* in *sandbox* or *too* in *toolbox*. If so, guide them to look for a bigger word and underline it for them. If one of the smaller words is a multisyllabic word, such as *candle* in *candlestick*, help children break that word into parts to figure out how to say the word and blend it with the other word in the compound.

back|pack

sand|box

bath|tub

bed|time

mail|box

rain|drop

sun|shine

flash|light

candle|stick

butter|fly

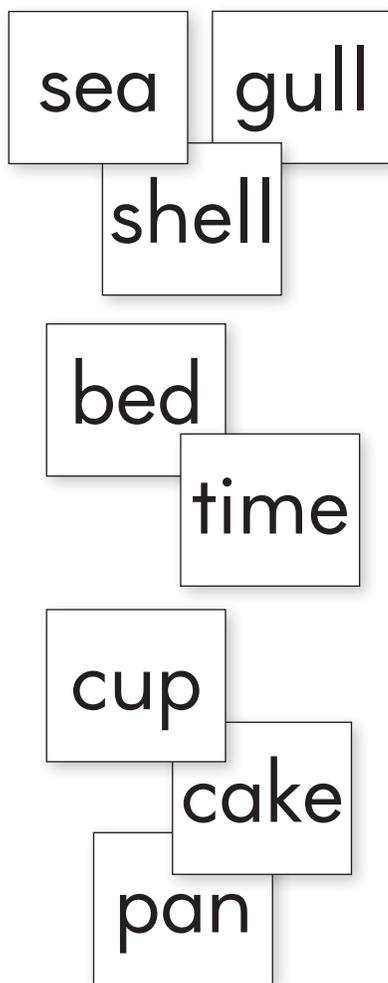
Give examples of compound words whose meanings can't be fully understood using the meanings of the smaller words, such as *butterfly*, *flapjack*, *honeymoon*, *brainstorm*. Explain that sometimes the smaller words in a compound word aren't helpful in figuring out the compound's meaning. Point out that if they come across a compound word like that as they read, they should use other words in the sentence or nearby pictures to figure out the compound's meaning.

Variation 1 Write compound words on paper strips. Make a fold between the two smaller words in each compound word so the two words are back-to-back. Show the first word. Have children read it. Do the same for the second word. Then unfold the strip and have children read the compound word, orally blending the two words quickly and smoothly. Or cut the compound words apart, show the two words with space between them, and have children read each word. Push the two words together and have them read the compound word.

Variation 2 Make sets of word cards that show related compound words. One of the smaller words in each compound should be the same for all the words in a set—for example, compound words formed with *sun*, *snow*, *bath*, *ball*, *home*, *sea*, *foot*, *hair*, *fire*, *eye*, and so on. Mix all the cards. Have children take turns reading the words and grouping the compounds with the same smaller word in them. Have them tell how the words in a group are alike and the meanings of the compound words.

TIP: Understanding closed, open, and hyphenated compound words Closed, or solid, compounds are written as single words, such as *backpack*. An open compound is spelled as two or more separate words, such as *post office*, *high school*, *living room*, *ice cream*, *no one*, *hot dog*. The words in hyphenated compounds are separated by hyphens, as in *merry-go-round*, *six-year-old*, *brother-in-law*. With frequent use, open and hyphenated compounds tend to become closed (*on line* to *on-line* to *online*). When choosing examples, use closed compounds. If children write an open or hyphenated compound as a single word, it isn't important to correct the spelling at this age unless the word is frequently used, such as *no one*.





2. Forming Compound Words

Purpose: Join smaller words to form compound words

Materials: Index cards

On separate index cards, write words that can be joined to form compound words children can read. Place several of these cards faceup on a table. Then say a compound word that uses two of the words shown and give a context sentence for the compound. Ask children which two words should be put together to make the compound word you said. Join those two words and have children read the compound word. Point out that when two words are joined in a compound, the spelling of the smaller words usually doesn't change. Then say other compound words, give context sentences for them, and have children take turns using the word cards to form the compounds you said. Give children practice forming sets of related words, such as *seashell*, *seashore*, *seaweed*, *seagull*, *seafood*. For spelling reinforcement, have them make a list of the words they formed.

Variation 1 Give clues about the meaning of a compound that includes words children can spell. Say, for example, "It's a little cake baked in a cup." Have everyone say the answer on your signal. Call on a child to write the word on the board.

Variation 2 Write compound words on index cards. Cut them apart, separating the two words that make up each compound. Mix the cards and distribute them to children. Have a child show and read his word. Tell the others that if they have a word that can be joined with this word to make a compound word, they should hold up that word. Ask each of these children to read their word and say the compound word it makes when joined with the first child's word. Discuss whether the compound word is a real word and if so, what it means. The child who said the compound word can write it on the board. Continue until all the words have been used at least once.

3. Forming and Reading Contractions

Purpose: Join two words to form contractions and read the contractions aloud

Materials: Index cards

On the board, write *is not* and use the words in a context sentence. Repeat the sentence, saying “isn’t” in place of “is not.” Say “isn’t” again and write the contraction under *is not*. Remind children that *isn’t* is called a *contraction*, and contractions are shorter ways of saying or writing two words. Tell them that *is not* and *isn’t* have the same meaning. Have children compare *is not* and *isn’t*. Point out that in the contraction, the two words are joined and an apostrophe takes the place of letter *o* in *not*. Cross out the *o* in *not* and place an apostrophe above it.

Remind children they can read contractions by saying the smaller word at the beginning of the contraction and then saying the sounds for the remaining letters. Cover *n’t* in *isn’t* and have children read the word *is*. Then uncover *n’t* and have children say the sounds for these letters. (/nt/) Point out that the apostrophe doesn’t stand for a sound.

Repeat these steps to have children form and read these contractions: *hasn’t*, *haven’t*, *aren’t*, *didn’t*, *wasn’t*, *weren’t*, *couldn’t*, *wouldn’t*. Point out the spelling pattern that occurs when forming these contractions—the first word stays as is and the *o* in *not* is replaced with an apostrophe.

Help children form and read the trickers *don’t*, *can’t*, *won’t*. Point out that *don’t* follows the same spelling pattern as the other contractions made with *not*, but the word *do* changes to /dō/. Have children read *don’t* with you. For *can’t* and *won’t*, point out that the spelling of *can* and *will* changes when these words are joined with *not*. Have children read *can’t* and *won’t* with you.

Use this same process to review contractions made from a personal pronoun and a verb. Show how different pronouns can be added to the same verb, so children see the same letter(s) are dropped from the verb each time and replaced by an apostrophe. For example, join *it*, *he*, *she* with *is*. Point out that the *i* in the verb *is* is replaced with an apostrophe each time. For *I’m*, explain that *I* is the only pronoun *am* joins with.

is n^ot
isn’t

has n ^o t	was n ^o t
hasn’t	wasn’t
have n ^o t	were n ^o t
haven’t	weren’t
are n ^o t	could n ^o t
aren’t	couldn’t
did n ^o t	would n ^o t
didn’t	wouldn’t

do not	cannot	will not
don’t	can’t	won’t

it ^{is}	he ^{is}	she ^{is}
it’s	he’s	she’s

isn't
is not

won't
will not

Here are some other ways to reinforce children's understanding of contractions:

- Create two sets of word cards: one set shows contractions and the other set shows pairs of words that correspond to the contractions. Mix the cards and spread them faceup on a table. Have children take turns matching each contraction with the pair of words it represents, reading the contraction, and using it in a sentence.
- Using the same set of word cards as above, play Contraction Concentration. Spread the cards with contractions facedown in one area of a table. Spread the cards with the corresponding pairs of words facedown in another area. Have children take turns choosing a card from each set and telling if the contraction and the pair of words match. If they do, the child reads the contraction and keeps the pair. If not, the child returns the cards facedown to their original places. Play until all cards have been matched.
- Give children decodable sentences that include pairs of words that can be joined to form taught contractions. Tell children to look for pairs of words they can replace with contractions. Have them cross out those pairs of words and write the contraction for the word pair above the crossed out words.
- Once children know both *you're* and *your*, write the words on the board far apart. Have them read the words. Point out that these words sound the same, but they have different meanings and spellings. Review the meaning of each word. Say context sentences that use either *you're* or *your*. After each sentence, have children point to the word that makes sense in the sentence you said. Repeat for *they're*, *there*, *their*.
- Give children practice distinguishing between taught contractions and look-alike words, such as *she'll* and *shell*, *I'll* and *ill*, *we're* and *were*, *we'll* and *well*. Write the words on index cards and have children read each word as you say it. Remind them to look for the apostrophe in the contractions.