

Elkonin Boxes or "Sound Boxes"

Elkonin Boxes were originally pioneered by the Russian psychologist D. B. Elkonin, and so were named for him. They are also referred to as "Sound Boxes." The purpose of Elkonin Boxes is to teach children to segment words, which is what educators call it when children listen for and identify all of the sounds within a word. For example, the word "cat" has three sounds: /c/ /a/ /t/. However, the word "shop" also has three sounds: /sh/ /o/ /p/. Once children can identify all of the sounds within a given word and also know the sounds of the alphabet, they should be able to spell simple words such as "dog" and "cat." Once they know how to write these letters, they should be able to write these words as well!



Elkonin boxes for words with three sounds.

This document tells more about how they were originally designed to be used:
http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1200&context=reading_horizons

How to Use Elkonin Boxes

Preparation: Decide which boxes you are using, according to the number of phonemes (sounds) in each word your students are listening to. For example, if my students are listening to words like "chip" or "dog," I would print the pages with just three boxes on them, because there are only three sounds in each of these words. Note that even though the word "chip" has four letters, it only has three sounds.

There are two workmats on each page, so if you need a work mat for 12 students, just print six sheets and then cut them in half. I recommend printing on **card-stock**, since that way they are less likely to fold or wrinkle when kids move tokens around on them.



Elkonin boxes for words with four sounds.

Management Note: You are much more likely to get full cooperation with your chips or tokens as a learning tool if you give your little ones a chance to explore these items as toys **FIRST**. Just let them get it out of their system ahead of time, and you'll be far less frustrated with them, and they will be much happier. (And so will YOU!)

To Use:

Give each child in your group an Elkonin box work mat and enough tokens for each box. Have a list of words ready for kids to segment. (Remember, when kids segment a word, they are listening for all of the sounds in a word.) Get a workmat for yourself, too. I recommend having one on a magnetic board you can hold up for all to see, with magnetic tokens for yourself.

1. Call out a word.

You can get a word list here:

http://www.faribault.k12.mn.us/UserFiles/Servers/Server_3060715/File/Curriculum/Reading%20Interventions/Phoneme-Segmentation-Words.pdf

2. Model how you push up one token for each sound in the word.

3. Have the children segment the word with you, pushing up one token for each sound.

4. Continue in this manner. After you model a few of them, you should be able to let the children take the lead on doing some of these without you modeling each one and telling the answers.

5. If children are struggling, first show them how you do a word; then do the word *with* them; then have them show you how they do that *same word alone*.

The Next Step

Have kids push letter tiles, plastic letters, or even letters printed on squares of paper into the boxes as they say the sounds.

The Last Step

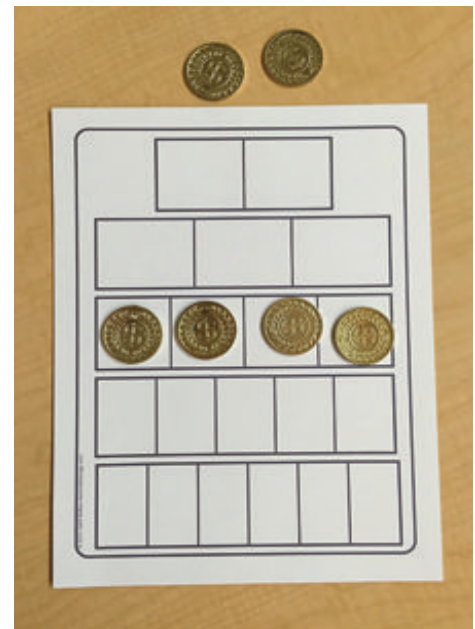
Put the papers into page protectors (or laminate them, etc.) so that students can **WRITE** the letters in the boxes as they segment them.

Something to Watch Out For:

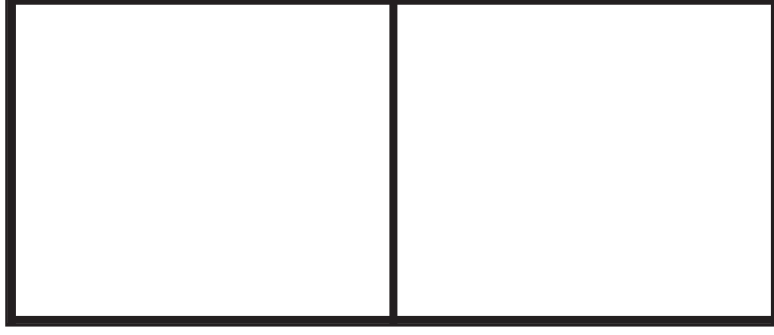
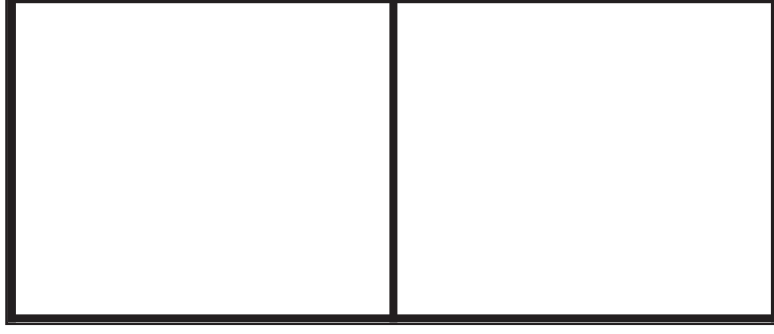
If you get in the habit of giving children **ONLY** words with three sounds and do this for several months, your students may start to expect that all words will have only three sounds! Don't forget to include words with both **LONG** and **SHORT** vowels, too- or your kids might be stumped when suddenly faced with long vowel words to segment on a **DIBELS** test, for example. A sheet with several different sizes of Elkonin Boxes is provided at the end of this file, but it is **FULL SIZE**, not half size- so each child would need one of their own.



Elkonin boxes for words with five sounds.



Elkonin boxes for practicing words with lots of different numbers of sounds.



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