

PHASE 01 · GARDEN OF SOUND · STARTER SET

01 Letter Sounds

Clean, reliable sound recall, one letter at a time. The foundation everything else stands on.

TOOL: SINGLE-LETTER FLASH CARDS (CYAN CONSONANTS, CLEAR VOWELS)

Before a single nut goes on the bolt, your child works with the flash cards. They are plain on purpose. No pictures, because a picture invites a guess, and guessing is the exact habit this system exists to replace. You hold up a card, your child gives the sound. Not the letter name, the sound. That is the whole exercise, and done patiently it is enough.

Sort the cards every couple of weeks

On day one, and then about every two weeks, sort the cards into three piles as you go. **Full Command** for the sounds that come quickly and surely. **Developing** for the ones that are familiar but still wobble. **Still Learning** for the ones that are not there yet. The sort is not a test either. It simply tells you where to spend your minutes. In a five-minute session, most of the time goes to the Developing pile, a quick warm pass over Full Command, and barely a touch on Still Learning.

Work in small groups

Do not run all twenty-six cards at once. Take four or five at a time and let them settle before adding more. A good first handful is the stretchy sounds, **m, s, f, l, n, r**, the ones you can hold and draw out. These are your child's best friends on the bolt, because a sound you can stretch slides smoothly into the next one when blending starts. Tie each sound to a word your child knows: "c, as in cat. What else starts with c? Car. Can." Keep it upbeat, and keep it moving.

Let them trace the shape

While your child says a sound, have them run a finger over the letter on the card, following its shape, a few times in a row. The hand and the voice learning the same letter together makes it hold better than either does on its own. That motion carries straight onto the block later: the finger that traces the c on a card is the finger that finds it on the nut. The tracing now is quietly preparing them for the turning to come.

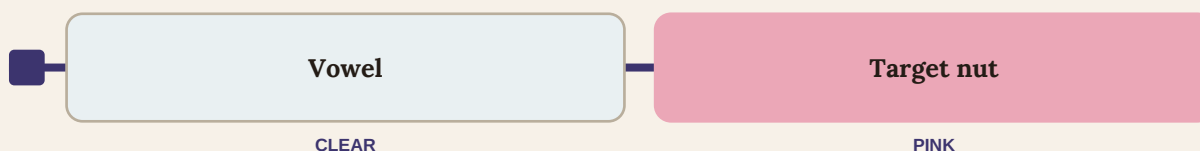
FROM THE SUMMER PILOT

Get to the bolt sooner than you would think

Here is the move that did the most for the children in our summer pilot who started out knowing few sounds or none at all. Pick one nut and look at its four faces. Drill just those four sounds on the flash cards. The moment those four reach Developing, not mastery, just Developing, put that nut on the bolt and start building two-letter words.

The bolt is usually thought of as a blending device for children who already know their sounds. It turns out to be a remarkably good way to learn the sounds in the first place. The turning, the repetition, and seeing the same few letters land inside real words over and over drive them into memory faster than the cards manage on their own.

Here is the setup. Normally the vowel sits in the middle, but for these first two-letter words you move a clear vowel nut to the front and pair it with your one target nut behind it.



Then rotate. Say the four faces on your target nut are t, p, d, and n. Hold the vowel still and turn the target nut through its faces: **at** · **ap** · **ad** · **an**. Each turn is another clean rep on one of your four sounds, now sitting inside a word your child is actually reading. You can also hold the consonant and turn the vowel (a · e · i · o · u) to fold the vowel sounds in too. When those four feel solid, pick the next nut and run it again.

One distinction, so the early bolt and the next phase do not seem to disagree. The two-letter move above is really sound practice wearing the shape of reading, and it can start as soon as a few sounds are familiar. Full three-nut blending is the milestone, and it lands more easily once enough sounds are in place that the bolt never feels like too much at once.

MOVE ON WHEN

Move toward Phase 02 when about sixteen sounds are solid, with at least three of them vowels. You do not need all twenty-six first, but a child who starts blending with only a handful tends to find the full bolt overwhelming.