

# Introducing Color Encoding (B L O C K S)

Materials needed: multi-colored blocks  
student block mat (if working with a group)  
block movements card  
block job card  
list of sound patterns for student to track with blocks  
(begin with simple two sound patterns and advance to five  
sound complex patterns)  
recording sheet (to note student progress)  
writing utensil

The introduction of consonant and vowel sounds and labels equips students with a tool—the awareness of how sounds feel—to enable them to think about and represent a sequence of speech sounds. In working with colored blocks, the students’ own ability to think about and represent sequences of sounds within syllables is developed.

While doing color encoding, students learn to represent the number, identity, and sequence of sounds within a syllable. They will also practice the comparison of one syllable with another and the representation of how they differ. This comparative function is crucial to the overall goal of student independence and self-correction. To detect and correct a spelling or reading error, one must be able to hold an oral word and compare it to a written word. It must be determined if the two words match and, if they don’t match, to figure out exactly where and how they differ. Tracking contrasts between syllables further develops the basis for self-correction by students.

**T:** *“We are going to do something new, but it still has to do with thinking about and feeling sounds. We will use blocks to represent sounds. One block represents one sound. When we put a group of blocks together, we’ll have a group of sounds that we can use to make words. By doing this, it will help you to follow the individual sounds in words.”*

*“No color is assigned to any certain sound. That means if I use a blue block for a lip popper in one word, I don’t have to use a blue block to show a lip popper in another word.”*

*“When we are working with blocks, only one move will be made at a time. However, there are five different moves that can be made. I am going to teach you those moves right now.”*

## **Block Movements**

Use the premade Block Movements card as you cover the following information.

**T:** *“Every word has to have a vowel, so I’ll start with a vowel sound. I will put down one block to show /i/.”*

- Put one block out on the table.
- Put your finger on the block and repeat the sound, /i/.

*“Then, to make it seem more like a word, I’m going to put a consonant next to that vowel. I’ll add a popper, /p/, to make it say, ip.”*

- Put a different colored block to the right of the one previously placed on the table.
- Put your finger on the first block and say, /i/.
- Put your finger on the second block and say, /p/.
- Slide your finger under both blocks while blending the two sounds together, “ip.”

The student can label the sounds if they want. However, it is not necessary. Don’t ask for labels at this point.

**T:** *“Let’s talk about the moves that can be made now.”*

### **1. Add**

**T:** *“If that says ip and I want it to say mip, I will **add** an /m/ here at the front. We call this movement an **add**.”*

- Put your finger on the first block and say, /m/.
- Put your finger on the second block and say, /i/.
- Put your finger on the last block and say, /p/.
- Slide your finger under all three blocks while blending the three sounds together, “mip.”

### **2. Substitute**

**T:** *“Have you ever had a substitute teacher? What do they do? (Allow response.) Basically, a substitute teacher comes in to be the teacher when your regular teacher is not there.”*

*“Our next move is called a substitute. If that says mip and I want it to say mif, I take out the /p/ and put a substitute, /f/, in its place.”*

- Put your finger on each block individually, while making the sound the block is representing. (Finger, /m/. Finger, /i/. Finger, /f/.)
- Slide your finger under the blocks while blending the sounds together, “mif.”

### 3. Take away / omit

**T:** *“If that says mif and I want it to say mi, I **take away** the /f/.”*

- Touch each block and say the sound it represents.
- Slide your finger under the blocks while blending the sounds together, “mi.”

### 4. Switch

**T:** *“If that says mi and I want it to say im, I **switch** the /i/ block with the /m/ block. I **switch** their places. That movement is called a **switch**.”*

- Touch and say the sound for each block, then blend the sounds together while sliding your finger under the word.

### 5. Repeat

**T:** *“If that says im and I want it to say mim, I add the sound, /m/, at the beginning of the word. Since /m/ is the same sound that I feel at the end of the word, im, I have to add a block that is the same color as the block I already have at the end of im. This move is called a **repeat**. You show a sound is **repeated** by using the same color of block.”*

*“These five changes represent how sounds usually change in words. They also represent the most common errors we make when reading and spelling. Working with blocks helps us to sequence the sounds in words better. It also helps us to learn to blend them together easier. This will improve reading and spelling skills.”*

### Block Jobs

**T:** *“Now that you have learned the moves we will be doing when working with blocks, let’s talk about the jobs that you and I will have to do.”*

Show the Block Jobs card to the student. While following along on the card, explain the following steps:

(1a. First pattern only)

**T:** *“With the first pattern I give you, you need to match my word. That just means to repeat it back to me. Then, you put down a block to represent each sound in the word you matched. After that, you start at the beginning of the word and, with one hand up to feel your mouth, you will touch each block with the other hand and tell me the sound and label that each block is representing.”*

1. Match the old word to the new word

**T:** *“With every pattern after the first one, you will need to match the old word and the new word that I give you. With your hand on your mouth so to help you feel how it moves, you just say the two words back to me.”*

2. Touch and feel the old word and the new word (one sound at a time.)

**T:** *“With one hand feeling your mouth, you will touch each block, one at a time, in the old pattern while you are saying the sound it represents. Then, go back to the beginning of the blocks, and you’ll pretend it is the new pattern. You will touch each block, one at a time, in the new pattern while saying the sound it should represent.”*

3. Make and label the change.

**T:** *“By saying the sounds while feeling your mouth and touching each block, you will be able to tell where the difference is in the old and new patterns. Still keeping your hand up to feel your mouth, you will change the old pattern to the new pattern while saying,*

*“I’m taking out my (old sound), and putting in my (new sound ).”*

After going over the student’s jobs, proceed to work with blocks using some simple one syllable word sets. **Insist that all jobs be done properly, clearly and completely.** Help the student to fulfill their responsibilities by pointing them out on the job card as they work through each pattern. It is also helpful if you do the jobs, step-by-step, with the student until he/she is able to do them independently. At first you may be reminding the student of what to do every step of the way. With repeated practice, your students will pick up the good habits that you teach them now and working with blocks will become a simple and routine task.

Teacher language is:

**T:** (First pattern:) *“Show me \_\_\_\_.”*

(Subsequent patterns:) *“If that says \_\_\_\_, show me \_\_\_\_.”*