

# Understanding the Difference Between Phonological Memory and Auditory Memory

## Parent Fact Sheet

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### Why does memory matter for reading?

Children use different types of memory when listening, speaking, reading, and spelling. Two terms that are often confused are **auditory memory** and **phonological memory**.

Although they sound similar, they are not the same skill.

Understanding the difference can help parents better understand their child's learning profile and reading development.

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## Auditory Memory

### What is auditory memory?

Auditory memory is the ability to **remember information that is heard**.

This includes:

- Spoken instructions
- Numbers
- Sentences
- Stories
- Sounds in the environment

Children use auditory memory throughout the day at home and school.

### Examples of auditory memory:

A child may use auditory memory when they:

- Follow 2–3 step instructions
- Remember a teacher's directions
- Recall information from a story

- Repeat a sequence of numbers
- Remember verbal information long enough to complete a task

### **Signs a child may struggle with auditory memory:**

- Forgetting spoken instructions
  - Frequently asking for repetition
  - Difficulty remembering sequences
  - Losing track of information during conversations
  - Trouble recalling information heard verbally
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## **Phonological Memory**

### **What is phonological memory?**

Phonological memory is a more specific skill.

It is the ability to **hold speech sounds in memory for a short period of time.**

This skill helps children work with the sounds in words while reading and spelling.

### **Phonological memory is important for:**

- Sounding out words
- Blending sounds together
- Spelling words
- Learning new vocabulary
- Remembering sound sequences
- Reading unfamiliar words

### **Examples of phonological memory:**

A child may use phonological memory when they:

- Repeat a nonsense word
- Blend sounds together to read a word
- Hold sounds in mind while spelling
- Remember the sounds in a long word

### **Signs a child may struggle with phonological memory:**

- Difficulty sounding out unfamiliar words
- Trouble remembering sound sequences
- Weak spelling skills
- Difficulty repeating longer words
- Problems learning new vocabulary

- Losing sounds while blending or spelling
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## What is the Difference?

### Auditory Memory

Broad listening memory

Includes all types of sounds

Helps remember verbal information

Used in everyday listening tasks

### Phonological Memory

Specific speech-sound memory

Focuses on speech sounds only

Helps process sounds in words

Strongly connected to reading and spelling

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## Why is Phonological Memory Important for Reading?

When children read, they must briefly hold sounds in their memory while blending them together.

For example, when reading the word:

**ship**

A child needs to hold:

- /sh/
- /i/
- /p/

in memory long enough to blend them into a word.

If phonological memory is weak, reading and spelling can become effortful and inconsistent.

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## Important to Remember

A child can have:

- Strong auditory memory but weak phonological memory
- Strong phonological memory but weaker broader listening memory
- Difficulties in both areas

These skills are related, but they are not interchangeable.

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# How Can Parents Support These Skills?

## Helpful activities may include:

- Reading aloud together
  - Practising oral instructions in small steps
  - Playing memory and sequencing games
  - Repeating sound sequences
  - Practising blending and segmenting sounds
  - Learning rhymes, songs, and rhythmic patterns
  - Structured literacy intervention where needed
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## Final Thought

A simple way to think about the difference is:

**Auditory memory is remembering what we hear.**

**Phonological memory is remembering the sounds inside words long enough to read or spell them.**

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*This fact sheet is designed for educational purposes and does not replace individual assessment or professional advice.*