

Three Period Lessons with the Cursive Symbols

Three-period lessons are the primary way Montessori teachers introduce children to new vocabulary. These lessons are given every day in the primary classroom. They are quick, simple, fun! And follow a simple formula that I will share with you today.

But first, allow me to share a bit of history. Three-period lessons were originally developed by the French physician Edouard Seguin. Seguin was a psychiatrist who developed methods for helping children with learning differences more easily associate objects and their names. Dr. Montessori was inspired by his work and adopted his approach for her classrooms.

The three-period lesson is comprised of three different stages:

1. Introduction
2. Practice with Recognition
3. The "Test"

In the classroom, we give three-period lessons to show a child what a particular sound looks like. We do our best to introduce three contrasting sounds to reduce the level of difficulty. In this example, we will introduce the sounds **/m/**, **/a/**, and **/c/**.

1st Period: Introduction

We begin by introducing one sound at a time. We also recall our work with sound games to help the child recall words that start with the letter we are introducing.

- "This is mmmm. Mmmm. MMMMM is the first sound in mouse, and marshmallow, and milk. Can you think of a word that starts with mmmmm?"
- "This is /a/. /a/ is the first sound in the word apricot or astronaut. Can you think of a word that starts with /a/?"
- "This is /c/. /c/ is the first sound in the word caterpillar, cookie, and cake. Can you think of a word that starts with /c/?"

Note: it is okay if the child cannot think of a word. However, lots of practice with sound games has prepared the child for this lesson.

2nd Period: Recognition

This phase helps the child better recognize the cursive symbol by its sound. Starting with the last sound introduced, we use active commands that require the child to physically manipulate the letter cards as a way to reinforce their association between the name and the shape. "Touch /c/. Pick up /a/. Hand me /m/. Put /m/ at the top of the table." Your children are smart, so after a few commands, rotate the order of the objects before continuing. Be careful not to use your eyes to give the child clues as you work through the second period. The second period is the longest stage of the game and

should be played until the child is readily identifying the shapes without needing verbal or non-verbal cues from the adult.

*****Only move to the third period when you know the child will answer correctly!*****

If the second period has gone on for a while, and the child does not appear confident with the sound-symbol association, smile and let your child know you will work with them again tomorrow. They mustn't feel as if they have failed in any way. Instead, they are having fun learning new symbols. If you are unable to move to the third period, try again on a different day.

3rd Period: The "Test."

During the third and last phase, we ask the child to recall the sound associated with each symbol. If the child does remember, the test should be short and sweet: "What is this?" The child should respond, "/c/"!

A few additional notes:

The sandpaper letters are introduced randomly in the classroom. We take care to introduce three sounds that are of high contrast. We would avoid, for example, introducing /g/, /d/, and /c/ in the same lesson. Sometimes we begin with the sounds in the child's name as well.

The "cursive letters for home" cards are arranged in groups of three to offer some guidance as to which sounds should be introduced together. Try to introduce the letters each day. After the first day, begin by reviewing the sounds/symbols that the child remembers. If there is one he or she has forgotten, simply review it again in the day's lesson.