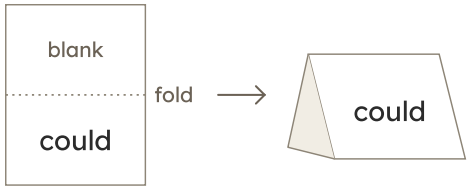
Operator cards

Tent cards for the nine modals, the operators that turn a statement into a question, plus three blank ones.

Make the cards

1. Print the card pages in colour on card stock, single-sided, at actual size.
2. Cut along the solid lines. Each page gives four cards.
3. Fold each card in half on the dotted line, so its top and bottom edges meet. Stand it up as a tent.
4. Three cards are blank on both faces, for other words your group is working on.



Run a loop

1. Pick a card, stand it up and build a sentence around it: *We could go.*
2. Make a clean pass through each mode: see it, hear it, say it, read it, write it.
3. Swap a part: the actor, the action or the operator. *She should run.*
4. Tip it into a question, then say both: *Should she run?*
5. Loop back to whichever mode needs another pass.

Point to the word, or the part of the word, as you say it and as the learner says it. That pointing is the feedback.

Mark it by hand

Look at the printed word and say it. Then lay the card flat, printed face down, with the fold away from you.

1. Write the word on the blank face, and say it slowly.
2. Put a circle under each sound, and a swoop under the syllable.
3. Draw a bar under letters that spell a sound together, like *sh*, *oul* and the *ll* of *will*. Add a box only when a vowel follows, as in *filling*, and keep the bar.
4. Go over each vowel in red, with any letters that share its bar, and *sh* in green.
5. Add a cup over a short vowel.
6. Turn the card over and check it against the printed face.

Why mark by hand

Marking makes the learner decide how many sounds a word has and which letters spell each one. On the printed face those decisions are already made.

Elkonin boxes ask for the same two decisions, and a 2019 review of small studies found that they help with phonemic awareness, letter sounds and spelling.

Handwriting has support while letters are still new: across 50 experiments, learners who wrote new letters or symbols by hand recognised them better than learners who typed them or only looked. In a kindergarten study, the learners who wrote also read the new words better.

Once letters are known, studies of spelling mostly find no difference between pencil and keyboard. In one small study of Italian middle-school students, those with dyslexia learned new words better on a keyboard. Where forming letters is the hard part, write the word for the learner to mark.

These marks themselves have not been tested.

Boxes: Lane (2021), *Using Elkonin Boxes*, University of Florida Literacy Institute; Ross & Joseph (2019), *Preventing School Failure* 63, 43–51. New letters: Araújo, Domingues & Fernandes (2022), *Educational Psychology Review* 34, 1577–1612; Ibaibarriaga, Acha & Perea (2026), *Reading and Writing* 39, 2389–2411. Spelling: Cunningham & Stanovich (1990), *Journal of Educational Psychology* 82, 159–162; Vaughn, Schumm & Gordon (1993), *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 26, 191–198; Ouellette & Tims (2014), *Frontiers in Psychology* 5, 117. Dyslexia: Cerni, Lonciari & Job (2025), *Learning and Instruction* 98, 102119.