you are doing as you compare the word or picture to the key words or pictures.

- **Sort and check.** Students sort individually or with a partner. Students read the words aloud as they sort and compare the words to the key words.

- **Reflect.** Ask students to explain to each other why they sorted the way they did. Guide students through a discussion of the principle and generalizations that underlie the sort.

- **Extend.** Repeated practice with the sort over several days is essential. Students enter the sort into their three-ring word study notebooks. They leave enough space to add related words that they find in Word Hunts when they go through the stories they have read. Students sort daily by themselves or with a partner. In their station activities they sort the words as part of a word study game.

3) **Monitor and assess.** To know when to go on or to continue studying the principle that underlies the sort, look for these aspects as students sort with you in small group.

- **Accuracy in sorting.** See if students sort the words in the correct columns.

- **Fluency and speed in sorting.** If students sort quickly and accurately, they are probably ready to move on to the next sort. Students who sort accurately and slowly benefit from more practice. They can continue to practice the sort. Set up a sorting station that contains sorts from the last three weeks.

- **Reflection and use.** See if students can explain the sort: “Why did you sort the way you did?” Look in students’ first-draft writing to see if they spell the sound or spelling pattern correctly in related words.

### Sorting at Different Instructional Levels

There are several considerations when sorting across instructional levels and grades.

- Students in the emergent and beginning stages of reading benefit from sorting by sound with pictures to focus on the way words sound alike at the beginning, middle, or end. For example, students consider how pairs of words sound alike: “I am going to say two words, tell me if they sound alike in the middle.”

- Students in the beginning and the transitional levels sort by patterns in words. Begin to explain how patterns are related to sound. Look across vowels to find patterns. For example, ask students: “Look for long a and long o words that have the CVVC pattern as in nail and coat.”

- Students in the intermediate levels study the meaning patterns within words. They study the meaning and spelling of prefixes, suffixes, and roots. Grammar ties in here as different suffixes are often related to grammatical functions; e.g., the -tion suffix turns a verb into a noun. Word histories and word roots are an important focus. Students study words deeply using paperback etymologies such as these two favorites:
  
  