



Phonics: A Guide for Parents

- Starting in Early Years, children are taught phonics; the journey of learning to read, write and spell. These vital skills are the beginning of a lifelong literacy journey. Phonics, which may also be referred to as 'Letters and Sounds', is the process of children learning to read.
- The process of learning to read and write begins from an early age, where children can learn and practise many skills. This can be done in a range of ways and settings, including home. Exposing children to conversation and books is essential.

Spoken Language

- Listening and talking to your child is essential. As part of everyday activities, talk to your child, explaining what you are doing. Speaking and listening are the building blocks for reading and writing. The more language your child is exposed to, the more they will understand and use for themselves.

Letters and Sounds

- The systematic phonics programme called 'Letters and Sounds' is divided into six phases. During the programme, new skills are taught, continually building on previous learning.

WORD

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Blend

Saying the individual sounds that make up a word and then merging or blending the sounds together to say the word – used when reading.

Consonant

Most letters of the alphabet (excluding the vowels: a,e,i,o,u).

CVC words

Abbreviation used for consonant-vowel-consonant words, used to describe the order of sounds. Some examples of CVC words are: cat, pen, top, chat (because ch makes one sound).

Other similar abbreviations include:

- VC words e.g. on, is, it.
- CCVC words e.g. trap and black.
- CVCC words e.g. milk and fast.

Digraph

Two letters which together make one sound e.g. ee, oa, ea, ch, ay.

There are different types of digraph:

- Vowel digraph: a digraph in which at least one of the letters is a vowel, for example; boat or day.
- Consonant digraph: two consonants which can go together, for example shop or thin.
- Split digraph (previously called magic e): two letters, which work as a pair to make one sound, but are separated within the word e.g. a-e, e-e, i-e, o-e, u-e. For example cake or pine.

Grapheme

Written letters or a group of letters which represent one single sound (phoneme) e.g. a, l, sh, air, ck.

WORD

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Letters and Sounds

A Government document detailing the teaching of phonics. There are 6 phases described:

- Phase 1: This is split into 7 aspects, which focus on hearing and talking about environmental sounds and letter sounds.
- Phase 2: Learning 19 letters of the alphabet, along with the first 5 'tricky words and using them to read and spell simple words and captions'.
- Phase 3: Learning the remaining letters of the alphabet, some 2 and 3 letter digraphs, along with the next set of 'tricky words'. Reading and writing captions and sentences.
- Phase 4: Learning to blend and segment longer words, including words with adjacent consonants and more than one syllable. Reading and writing using these and the next 'tricky words', within sentences.
- Phase 5: Learning alternative spellings and pronunciations for phonemes, including their common usage within words. Reading and writing using these and the next 'tricky words', within sentences.
- Phase 6: Learning longer words and spelling rules. Children may work from another document from this point, called 'Support for Spelling'.

Phoneme

A single sound that can be made by one or more letters – e.g. s, k, z, oo, ph, igh.

Phonics

Phonics teaches children to listen to and identify the sounds that make up words. This helps them to read and write words.

Pure Sound

Pronouncing each letter sound clearly and distinctly without adding additional sounds to the end e.g. 'f' not 'fuh'

WORD**WHAT DOES IT MEAN?****Segment**

This is the opposite of blending (see above).
Splitting a word up into individual sounds – used when spelling and writing.

Tricky Words

Words that are difficult to sound out e.g. said, the, because.

Trigraph

Three letters which go together make one sound e.g. ear, air, igh, dge, tch.

Vowel

The letters a, e, i, o, u.

Phase 1

This is the beginning of the systematic learning of phonics and takes place predominately in Nursery or Pre- School. It falls primarily within the Communication, Language and Literacy area of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum.

During this phase, children should be exposed to a language-rich environment. Activities are mainly adult led and build up to teaching children the important basic elements such as oral segmenting and blending.

Useful Tips

Sharing books from an early age is hugely beneficial for children. Enjoying and sharing books from being young, enables children to see reading as a source of pleasure. Through the sharing of good books, children's vocabulary increases which enables them to talk

This phase is divided into seven strands:

Aspect 1: Environmental Sounds

Children are exposed to a variety of sounds in the environment, being encouraged to copy them.

Aspect 2: Instrumental Sounds

Children are encouraged to listen to and make sounds using different instruments.

Aspect 3: Body Percussion

Children use their body to accompany songs and rhymes, for example, by clapping and tapping.

Aspect 4: Rhythm and Rhyme

Children are exposed to a range of books and rhymes. Children are encouraged to join in with repeated refrains and rhymes.

Aspect 5: Alliteration

Children are encouraged to listen to initial sounds within words. They are asked to think of other words beginning with the same sound.

Aspect 6: Voice Sounds

Children are asked to create different mouth movements and say a range of sounds.

Aspect 7: Oral Blending and Segmenting

This stage is vital before children are exposed to grapheme to phoneme correspondence (learning which letter represents each sound). It is all done orally and is to encourage children to hear the separate sounds within words.

Oral Blending

At first, the adult will show the children how this is done. The separate sounds (phonemes) are clearly spoken aloud, in order, fairly quickly and are then merged together into the whole word. For example:

M-a-n man

The merging together of the sounds is called blending. Initially, children may not be able to merge the sounds together independently and will need frequent practise which is highly beneficial.

Oral Segmenting

This is the opposite to oral blending. Here, children hear the whole word before it is then broken into separate sounds (phonemes). For example:

dog d-o-g

This skill is called segmenting and is vital in order for children be able to spell. Initially, children might only be able to hear the initial sound and will need frequent practise.

Ways You Can Support Your Child at Home

Share a range of rhymes.

Practise oral blending in and around the home. You can do this by talking in the following way:

- c-a-t, cat
- Can you put on your s-o-ck?

Initially, the children will just listen and then with time, they will be able to join in, hearing the words the sounds create.

Phase 2

This phase builds upon the oral blending and segmenting of the previous phase. Children must continue to practise what they have learnt. They will also then be taught the grapheme-phoneme representations (letters) for 19 letters. Additionally, they will be taught that phonemes (sounds) can be represented by more than one letter. For example: fin, huff

The suggested order for teaching the sounds, is as follows, with one set being taught each week:

Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Set 4	Set 5
s a t p	i n m d	g o c k	c k e u r	h b f,ff l,ll ss

The process of learning a sound, includes:

- Saying a number of words with the same initial sound, exaggerating it. E.g. ssssnake, ssssssun
- Showing the children the grapheme (letter) that represents the sound.
- Flashing a card with the grapheme on one side and a picture on the other. When the children see the grapheme side, they are to say the sound. When they see the picture sound, they are to say the word corresponding to the picture.

VC and CVC Words

During this phase, children will be taught to read different words using the sounds and letters they have been exposed to.

V = vowel

C = consonant

VC words are those that consist of a vowel and then a consonant (am, on, it). **CVC words** are those that consist of a consonant then a vowel and then a consonant (cat, dog, pen). Some words such as bell are also CVC words because they only have three sounds. **b-e-ll**

Useful Tip

Pure sounds should be used when children are saying sounds. This means, where possible, the 'uh' sounds after consonants should not be said. E.g. the sound 'f' should be pronounced **ffff** rather than fuh

Tricky Words

During this phase, the children will also be exposed to tricky words; words that cannot be sounded out. **the, to, I, go, no**

Ways You Can Support Your Child at Home

Using the sounds the children have been exposed to, the following games and activities can be done:

- Using flashcards, expose children regularly to the sounds they have learnt. Remember to use pure sounds.
- Magnetic letters - Using magnetic letters on the fridge or any type of magnetic surface, children can practise making words.
- Make words using letter cards or magnetic letters. Ask the children to blend the sounds together to make the words.
- Ask children to spell out CV and CVC words both orally and on paper.

Phase 3

The purpose of this phase is to:

- Teach more graphemes; the remaining letters of the alphabet and some sounds of which are made up of two or three letters, known as digraphs and trigraphs.

E.g. 'ee' as in bee

- Practise blending and segmenting a wider range of CVC words.
- Read more tricky words and begin to spell them.

Set 6	Set 7	Digraphs	Trigraphs
j v w x	y z, zz qu	ch sh th ng ai ee oa oo ar or ur ow oi er	igh ear air ure

CVC Words Containing Digraphs and Trigraphs

Below are some examples of the words your child will be reading in this phase:

ship cook fork high beard chair

Frequent practise allows your child to become more fluent.

Ways You Can Support Your Child at Home

Using the sounds the children have been exposed to, the following games and activities can be done.

Using flashcards, expose children regularly to the sounds they have learnt. Remember to use pure sounds. Try to increase the speed at which children are shown the sounds

Phase 4

The purpose of this phase is to consolidate the sounds already taught. Children are also exposed to adjacent consonants (consonant blends and consonant clusters) and multisyllabic words.

Useful Tip

It is important children learn to read words without blending as soon as possible. Children progress from blending out loud, to blending in their head before reading on sight. The sooner they can read on sight, the quicker their fluency will improve.

CVCC and CCVC Words

Blends and clusters such as the following are taught:

'nt' as in tent

'st' as in toast

'pl' as in plum

'sp' as in spoon

Tricky Words

During this phase, the children will also be exposed to tricky words; words that cannot be sounded out.

For example:

said so do have like some come were there
little one when out

Ways You Can Support Your Child at Home

Using the sounds the children have been exposed to, the following games and activities can be done:

- Continue to use flashcards with the sounds already taught.
- Practise sounding out a range of CVCC and CCVC words.
- Ask your child to make a word using magnetic letters or to write it down.

Phase 5

Phase 5 is taught in Year One.

The purpose of this phase is to broaden a child's knowledge of graphemes and phonemes for use in reading and spelling. When spelling words, children will now need to choose the appropriate graphemes to represent phonemes.

New Graphemes for Reading

ay ou ie ea oy ir ue aw wh ph

ew oe au a-e e-e i-e o-e u-e

Useful Tip

Split digraphs are introduced in Phase 5.

a-e e- i- o- u-

Children will learn that the 'e' on the end causes the initial vowel to make the longer vowel sound rather than the shorter one.

E.g. ay ee igh ow oo

Ways You Can Support Your Child at Home

Using the sounds the children have been exposed to, the following games and activities can be done:

- Ask your child to make or spell words. Support them whilst they figure out how the sound needs to be represented.
- Focus on split digraphs using flashcards, try to increase the speed you show children.
- Encourage children to write as many sounds/words as possible in a set amount of time.
- Expose children to a wider range of stories which include longer texts.

Phase 6

When children enter this phase, they should know most of the common grapheme-phoneme correspondences. As a result of this, they should be able to read hundreds of words. This will be in one of three ways:

- Reading the word on sight when they are very familiar.
- Decoding the word quickly and/or silently.
- Decoding the word aloud.

During this phase, the aim is for children to become fluent readers and increasingly accurate spellers.

Ways You Can Support Your Child at Home

Using the sounds the children have been exposed to, the following games and activities can be done:

- Ask your child to make or spell words. Support them whilst they figure out how the sound needs to be represented.
- Focus on different suffixes, adding them to root words. Ask children to read and write the words.
- Encourage children to write as many sounds/words as possible in a set amount of time.
- Expose children to a wider range of stories which include longer texts.