

Supporting phonics at home

What is phonics?

Phonics is one method of teaching children how to read and write. It is all about sounds. There are 44 sounds in the English language, which we put together to form words. Some of these sounds are represented by one letter, like 't', and some by two or more, such as 'ck' in duck and 'air' in chair.

Children are taught the sounds first, how to match them to letters, and then how to use the letter sounds for reading and spelling.

Synthetic phonics refers to 'synthesising', or blending, the sounds to read words. It is based on the idea that children should sound out unknown words and not rely on the context in which the word is used.

Supporting your child with learning to read at home

Every child is individual and they will all be at different stages in their reading journey depending on their age and ability. Here are some ways that you can help support your child learn and master new phonic sounds based on the way phonics is taught in many schools in the United Kingdom.

The 44 sounds (phonemes) of the English language, and the way they are written down, are taught one by one. The order of teaching these sounds has been specially developed so that children can start reading complete words as soon as possible. So this does not mean starting at 'a' and ending at 'z'.

What are the 44 sounds?

The 44 sounds are usually taught in this order:

s a t p i n m d
g o c k
c k e u r
h b f f l l s s
j v w x
y z z z q u
c h s h t h n g
a i e e i g h / i e o a o o (short) o o (long)
a r o r u r / e r o w / o u o i
a i r e a r u r e

Different (or alternative) spellings of these sounds are taught once all 44 sounds have been learned. For example, the 'ay' spelling of the long 'a' sound is taught once children have learned /ai/.

Children are then taught specific 'tricky' words (words containing letters which don't represent their normal sounds, for example 'the') at particular points in their reading journey so that they do not become too overwhelmed.

Here is an example of the progression in phonics and tricky word learning. This example is based on the government document *Letters and Sounds* which outlines how phonics should be taught in schools.

This chart shows you the order in which phonic sounds are taught in school.

What does a phonics lesson look like?

Any phonics lesson begins with revising sounds your child has already been taught. Then a new sound and its spelling can be introduced.

When learning new sounds at school, your child's teacher might use the sound in a word, clearly pronouncing the sound. Children then practise repeating the sound back to their teacher. Try this with your child at home.

The teacher will also show children how to blend, or sound out words which use the new sound. This might be followed up by guided and independent reading that includes words with the new sound.

Children will also practise writing down the sound, i.e. the letter(s) – otherwise known as segmenting.

Sound out a word, breaking it down into its individual sounds. Children listen and write down each letter(s) until the word is complete.

It is helpful for children to say and tap out the sounds in a word to themselves before writing it down.

Letter formation can also be practised. You can demonstrate how a sound is written and then your child can practise this again and again.

So, you can:

- Revise sounds your child already knows.
- Introduce a new sound along with its spelling.
- Use the new sound in a word and ask your child to repeat the sound back to you.
- Show your child how to blend, or sound out, words which use the new sound. For example, if your new sound is long i spelled 'igh', you would sound out the separate sounds, and then blend the sounds together to form the word, like this: 'n – igh – t' ... 'night'.
- Follow up by reading books which practise the new sound.



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- Practise writing down the new sound, encourage children to segment words into their individual sounds, and then ask them to write down each sound to form the word, for example 'c – a – t' becomes 'cat'.
- Practise letter formation.

What else can I do?

Phonics flashcards

Evaluate what your child already knows. Using phonics flashcards, ask your child to identify each letter sound. Then you can practise the letter sounds that your child finds difficult or doesn't yet know.

You could also have some tricky word flashcards around and use them to practise reading and word recognition.

Alphabet puzzles

One fun way to do this is by using an alphabet floor puzzle. Each puzzle piece contains a letter and sometimes a picture of an item that begins with that letter.

Point to each puzzle piece and ask your child to tell you the sound that the letter makes. Remember that some sounds are harder to produce, so be patient with your child's efforts. The hardest letters for children to learn are vowels, letters that have two sounds (e.g. c, g) and letters that don't sound like their names (e.g. y, w, x).

Word games

Once your child is fairly confident with the letter sounds, you can try playing word games. Use alphabet fridge magnets to create simple words like 'cat'. Ask your child to make the word 'cat' into the word 'hat'.

You could also make collections of objects that contain the same letter sounds at either the beginning, middle or end.

Decodable books

Read decodable books with your child. Decodable books are designed to help children learn to read using phonics. They contain words that are easily broken down into their component sounds.

Phonics with the Alphablocks decodable books are available to purchase on Amazon:

[Pack 1](#)

[Pack 2](#)

[Pack 3](#)



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Supporting reading

If your child is not making progress with reading it could be for a variety of reasons. Perhaps he/she does not enjoy reading yet. Reading aloud to children can help them to enjoy stories they might struggle to read themselves. This helps reluctant readers by removing the pressure.

You can try sharing the reading, e.g. you read one line and then they read the next. Once your child's confidence has begun to increase you could perhaps take turns at reading a page each.

Research shows that reading with your child is the most important thing you can do to help your child's education. Try to put aside some time every day as it is best to read little and often, i.e. just read a few pages rather than a whole book.

Supporting your child

Any support you give to your child should be in a relaxed atmosphere. Try to ensure that you remain positive and praise your child for any attempts they make. It is important that it does not become a battle or both of you will be unhappy. If your child gets upset or is just not in the mood then leave it until another day when they are less tired and you are less stressed. The experience of reading should be an enjoyable one!



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Phonics glossary

Your child's school may have given you lots of information about helping your child progress on their reading journey at home. Here are some definitions of words your child's teacher may have used.

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 Other similar abbreviations include: - VC words e.g. on, is, it. - CCVC words e.g. trip and flat. - CVCC words e.g. milk and fast.
digraph	Two letters which together make one sound, e.g. ee, oa, ea, ch, ay. There are several 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, such as a-e, e-e, i-e, o-e, u-e. For example, cake or line .
grapheme	Written letters or a group of letters which represent one single sound (phoneme), e.g. a, l, sh, air, ck.
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.



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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Phase 6: Learning longer words and spelling rules.</p>
phoneme	A single sound that can be made by one or more letters (graphemes), e.g. s, k, z, oo, ph, igh.
pure sound	Pronouncing each letter sound clearly and distinctly without adding additional sounds to the end, e.g. 'ffff' not 'fuh.
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.