

Parents Guide to Phonics in Reception

A guide to how phonics will help your child to read and spell.

Introduction

As you know, the ability to read and write well is a vital skill for all children, paving the way for an enjoyable and successful school experience. Children learn and practise many of the skills that they need for reading and writing from a very early age. They do this through a wide range of activities and experiences, at home, in settings and in school. They explore and learn through singing and saying rhymes, making and listening to music, talking with others, sharing books with adults and other children, dressing up, experimenting with writing and using puppets and toys to retell and make up stories.

Sounds in spoken language – the beginning of phonics

When children enter Reception they take part in high-quality phonics sessions every day. These are fun sessions involving lots of speaking, listening and games, where the emphasis is on children's active participation. They learn to use their phonic knowledge for reading and writing activities and in their independent play. The aim of this booklet is to give you a clear picture of how we approach the teaching of phonics and word recognition and how, as a parent or carer, you can support and encourage your child at home.

From a very early stage, children develop awareness of different sounds in spoken language. They develop understanding that spoken words are made up of different sounds (*phonemes*) and they learn to match these phonemes to letters (*graphemes*). Phonics is about children knowing how letters link to sounds (*graphemes* to *phonemes*), for example, **c** as in 'cat', **ll** as in 'fell', **ee** as in 'sheep'. Children use this phonic knowledge when they are reading and writing. This approach has been shown to provide a quick and efficient way for most young children to learn to read words on the page, fluently and accurately. We want children to develop this skill so that it becomes automatic. This also greatly helps them with their spelling. At school we use a systematic phonics programme called *Letters and Sounds*.

Letters and Sounds is divided into six phases, with each phase building on the skills and knowledge of previous learning. There are no big leaps in learning. Children have time to practise and rapidly expand their ability to read and spell words. They are also taught to read and spell 'tricky words', which are words with spellings that are unusual.

Terminology

Phoneme - The smallest unit of sound. Phonemes can be put together to make words.

Grapheme - A way of writing down a phoneme. Graphemes can be made up from 1 letter e.g. p, 2 letters e.g. sh, th, ng and 3 letters e.g. air, ear

Digraph - a grapheme containing two letters that make one sound, e.g. sh, ch, th, ng

Trigraph – a grapheme containing three letters that make one sound, eg. air, ear

Vowel digraph- a grapheme containing at least one vowel which, together, make one sound, e.g. ai, oo, ow

Consonant digraph – a grapheme containing two letters, both of which are consonants, eg. sh, ch, th, ng

Split digraph - Two letters, which work as a pair to make one sound, but are separated within the word. e.g. a-e as in make or late; i-e as in size or write.

Oral Blending - This involves hearing phonemes and being able to merge them together to make a word. Children need to develop this skill before they will be able to blend written words.

Blending- This involves looking at a written word, looking at each grapheme and using knowledge of GPCs to work out which phoneme each grapheme represents and then merging these phonemes together to make a word. This is the basis of reading.

Oral Segmenting - This is the act hearing a whole word and then splitting it up into the phonemes that make it. Children need to develop this skill before they will be able to segment words to spell them.

Segmenting - This involves hearing a word, splitting it up into the phonemes that make it, using knowledge of GPCs to work out which graphemes represent those phonemes and then writing those graphemes down in the right order. This is the basis of spelling.

VC, CVC, CCVC, CVCC — the abbreviations for vowel-consonant, consonant-vowel-consonant, consonant-consonant-vowel-consonant and consonant, consonant, vowel, consonant, which are used to describe the order of letters in words, e.g. am, ham, slam, just. Words such as *tick* and *bell* also count as CVC words – although they have four letters, they have only three sounds. For example, in the word *bell*, **b** = consonant, **e** = vowel, **ll** = consonant.

Phase 1

This paves the way for systematic learning of phonics and usually starts in nursery or playgroup. Phase 1 of Letters and Sounds concentrates on developing children's speaking and listening skills and lays the foundations for the phonic work which starts in Phase 2. The emphasis during Phase 1 is to get children attuned to the sounds around them and ready to begin developing oral blending and segmenting skills.

Phase 1 is divided into seven aspects. Each aspect contains three strands: Tuning in to sounds (auditory discrimination), Listening and remembering sounds (auditory memory and sequencing) and Talking about sounds (developing vocabulary and language comprehension).

Ways you can support your children at home

Play '**What do we have in here?**' Put some toys or objects in a bag and pull one out at a time.

Emphasise the first sound of the name of the toy or object by repeating it, for example, 'c c c c

car', 'b b b b – box', 'ch ch ch ch – chip'.

Say: 'A tall tin of tomatoes!' 'Tommy, the ticklish teddy!' 'A lovely little lemon!' This is called alliteration. Use names, for example, 'Gurpreet gets the giggles', 'Milo makes music', 'Naheema's nose'.

Teach them '**Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers**'.

Learning how to 'sound-talk'

The children will be shown how to do this – **c-a-t = cat**. The separate sounds (*phonemes*) are spoken aloud, in order, all through the word, and are then merged together into the whole word. The merging together is called *blending* and is a vital skill for reading.

Children will also learn to do this the other way around – **cat = c-a-t**. The whole word is spoken aloud and then broken up into its phonemes in order, all through the word. This is called *segmenting* and is a vital skill for spelling. This is all oral (*spoken*). Your child will not be expected to match the letter to the sound at this stage. The emphasis is on helping children to hear the separate sounds in words and to create spoken sounds.

Ways you can support your children at home with 'Sound-talking'

Find real objects around your home that have three phonemes (*sounds*) and practise 'sound talk'. First, just let them listen, then see if they will join in, for example, saying:

'I spy a p-e-g – peg.'

'I spy a c-u-p – cup.'

'Where's your other s-o-ck – sock?'

'Simon says – put your hands on your h-ea-d.'

'Simon says – touch your ch-i-n.'

Phase 2

In this phase children will continue practising what they have learned from Phase 1, including 'sound-talk'. They will also be taught the phonemes for a number of graphemes, which phoneme is represented by which grapheme and that a phoneme can be represented by **more than one letter**, for example, /ll/ as in **b-e-ll**. They will be using the Jolly Phonics pictures, hand movements and songs to help them remember these.

The letters and their sounds are introduced one at a time. A set of letters is taught each week, in the following sequence:

Set 1: s, a, t, p

Set 2: i, n, m, d

Set 3: g, o, c, k

Set 4: ck, e, u, r

Set 5: h, b, f, ff, l, ll, ss

Saying the sounds

Your child will be taught how to pronounce the sounds (*phonemes*) correctly to make blending easier. Sounds should be sustained where possible (e.g. sss, fff, mmm) and, where this is not possible, 'uh' sounds after consonants should be reduced as far as possible (e.g. try to avoid saying 'buh', 'cuh'). Teachers help children to look at different letters and say the right sounds for them. Contact your child's school for more information about this important aspect of phonics. If you are unsure of a pronunciation please do not hesitate to ask or look at the following: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-eTO8L3t40>

The children will begin to learn to blend and segment to begin reading and spelling. This will begin with simple VC and CVC words.

Words using set 1

| | | | | |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| at | sat | pat | tap | sap |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Words using set 1 and 2

| (+i) | (+n) | (+m) | (+d) |
|------|------|------|------|
| it | an | am | dad |
| is | in | man | sad |
| sit | nip | mat | dim |
| sat | pan | map | din |
| pit | pin | Pam | did |
| pip | tan | Tim | Sid |
| sip | nap | Sam | and |
| tip | tin | | dip |

Words using sets 1-3

| (+g) | (+o) | (+c) | (+k) |
|------|------|------|------|
| tag | got | can | kid |
| gag | on | cot | kit |
| gig | not | cop | Kim |
| gap | pot | cap | Ken |
| nag | top | cat | |
| sag | dog | cod | |
| gas | pop | | |
| pig | God | | |
| dig | Mog | | |

Words using set 1-4

| (+ck) | (+e) | (+u) | (+r) |
|--------|------|--------|--------|
| kick | get | up | rim |
| sock | pet | mum | rip |
| sack | ten | run | ram |
| dock | net | mug | rat |
| pick | pen | cup | rag |
| sick | peg | sun | rug |
| pack | met | tuck | rot |
| ticket | men | mud | rocket |
| pocket | neck | sunset | carrot |

Words using set 1-5

| (+h) | (+b) | (+f and ff) | (+l and ll) | (+ss) |
|------|--------|-------------|-------------|---------|
| had | but | of | lap | ass |
| him | big | if | let | less |
| his | back | off | leg | hiss |
| hot | bet | fit | lot | mass |
| hut | bad | fin | lit | mess |
| hop | bag | fun | bell | boss |
| hum | bed | fig | fill | fuss |
| hit | bud | fog | doll | hiss |
| hat | beg | puff | tell | pass |
| has | bug | huff | sell | kiss |
| hack | bun | cuff | Bill | Tess |
| hug | bus | fan | Nell | fusspot |
| | Ben | fat | dull | |
| | bat | | laptop | |
| | bit | | | |
| | bucket | | | |
| | beckon | | | |
| | rabbit | | | |

Alongside this children are introduced to tricky words. These are the words that are irregular words. That means that phonics cannot be applied to the reading and spelling of these words.

The tricky words introduced in phase 2 are:

| | | | | |
|----|-----|----|----|---|
| to | the | no | go | l |
|----|-----|----|----|---|

Ways you can support your children at home

Magnetic letters

Buy magnetic letters for your fridge, or for use with a tin tray. Find out which letters have been taught – have fun finding these with your child and place them on the magnetic surface.

Making little words together

Make little words together, for example, *it, up, am, and, top, dig, run, met, pick*. As you select the letters, say them aloud: ‘*a-m – am*’, ‘*m-e-t – met*’.

Breaking words up

Now do it the other way around: read the word, break the word up and move the letters away, saying: ‘*met – m-e-t*’.

Both these activities help children to see that reading and spelling are reversible processes.

Getting ready for writing

We will model how to form graphemes correctly, so that children can eventually acquire a fluent and legible handwriting style. These skills develop over a long period of time. A child’s ability to form a letter correctly is a separate skill from phonics. Holding a pen or pencil needs considerable co-ordination and practice in making small movements with hands and fingers. In the early phonic phases children can use letter cards or magnetic letters to demonstrate their knowledge of phonics.

Ways you can support your children at home

Using their whole body

For handwriting children need to be well co-ordinated through their whole body, not just their hands and fingers. Games that help co-ordination include throwing balls at a target, under-arm and over-arm, and bouncing balls – also skipping on the spot, throwing a Frisbee, picking up pebbles from the beach and throwing them into the sea. Have fun!

Hand and finger play

Action rhymes such as ‘*Incy wincy spider*’, ‘*One potato, two potato*’ and ‘*Tommy Thumb*’ are great fun and get their hands and fingers moving. Playing with salt dough or clay really helps strengthen little fingers, as does cookery and using simple toolkits.

Hand–eye co-ordination

Pouring water into jugs and cups of different sizes, sweeping up with a dustpan and brush, cutting, sticking, tracing, threading beads, completing puzzles, peeling off stickers and sticking them in the right place – these all help hand–eye co-ordination.

Pencil hold

The 'pincer' movement needs to be practised. This is important as it enables children to hold a pencil properly as they write. Provide them with kitchen tongs and see if they can pick up small objects. Move on to challenging them to pick up smaller things, for example, little cubes, sugar lumps, dried peas, lentils, first with chopsticks, then with tweezers. Ask children to peg objects to a washing line. Provide plenty of different types of pen and pencil; hold their hand to practise the correct grip.

Phase 3

By the time they reach Phase 3, children will already be able to blend and segment words containing the 19 letters taught in Phase 2.

The purpose of Phase 3 is to:

- teach more graphemes, most of which are made of two letters, for example, 'oa' as in **boat**
- practise blending and segmenting a wider set of CVC words, for example, **fizz, chip, sheep, light**
- learn all letter names and begin to form them correctly
- read more tricky words and begin to spell some of them
- read and write words in phrases and sentences.

The new phonemes and graphemes are introduced one at a time in the following order:

Set 6: j, v, w, x

Set 7: y, z, zz, qu

Consonant digraphs: ch, sh, th, ng

Vowel digraphs and trigraphs: ai, ee, igh, oa, oo, ar, or, ur, ow, oi, ear, air, ure, er

Tricky words:

| | | | | | |
|----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| we | me | be | was | no | go |
| my | you | they | her | all | are |

Ways you can support your children at home

- Sing an alphabet song together.
- Play 'I spy', using letter names as well as sounds.
- Continue to play with magnetic letters, using some of the two grapheme (*letter*) combinations:
 - r-ai-n = rain** blending for reading **rain = r-ai-n** – segmenting for spelling
 - b-oa-t = boat** blending for reading **boat = b-oa-t** – segmenting for spelling
 - h-ur-t = hurt** blending for reading **hurt = h-ur-t** – segmenting for spelling
- Praise your child for trying out words.
- Ask teachers for a list of the tricky words.
- Set a timer. Call out one word at a time and get your child to spell it on a magic board or a small whiteboard, against the timer – remember, they can use magnetic letters.
- Play 'Pairs', turning over two words at a time trying to find a matching pair. This is especially helpful with the tricky words: **the the, to to, no no, go go, I I**
- Don't worry if they get some wrong! These are hard to remember – they need plenty of practice.

Phase 4

Children continue to practise previously learned graphemes and phonemes and learn how to read and write:

CVCC words: **tent, damp, toast, chimp**

For example, in the word 'toast', **t = consonant, oa = vowel, s = consonant, t = consonant.**

CCVC words: **swim, plum, sport, cream, spoon**

For example, in the word 'cream', **c = consonant, r = consonant, ea = vowel, m = consonant.**

They will be learning more tricky words and continuing to read and write sentences together.

Tricky words:

| | | | | | |
|------|------|------|-------|--------|------|
| said | so | she | he | have | like |
| some | come | were | there | little | one |
| they | all | are | do | when | out |
| what | my | her | | | |

By this point children would be expected to be reading CVC words at speed along with the tricky words from the previous phases. It is important that children are taught that blending is only used when a word is unfamiliar.