

Phonics Information for Parents

Letters and Sounds aims to build children's speaking and listening skills in their own right as well as to prepare children for learning to read by developing their phonic knowledge and skills. It sets out a detailed and systematic programme for teaching phonic skills for children starting by the age of five, with the aim of them becoming fluent readers by age seven.

What Are Phonics Phases?

Phases are the way the Letters and Sounds Programme is broken down to teach sounds in a certain order.

At the same time whole words that cannot be broken down easily, (we call them "tricky words") are taught to the children.

Phase One (Nursery)

Activities are divided into seven aspects, including environmental sounds, instrumental sounds, body sounds, rhythm and rhyme, alliteration, voice sounds and finally oral blending and segmenting.

Typical activities for teaching Phase 1 phonics include 'listening' walks, playing and identifying instruments, action songs, learning rhymes and playing games like I Spy.

This phase is intended to develop children's listening, vocabulary and speaking skills.

Phase Two (Reception) up to 6 weeks

In Phase 2, children begin to learn the sounds that letters make – 'phonemes'. There are 44 sounds in all. Some are made with two letters, but in Phase 2, children focus on learning the 19 most common single letter sounds.

Children learn the most commonly used phonemes first, starting with: /s/, /a/, /t/, /i/, /p/, /n/.

By the end of Phase 2 children should be able to read some vowel-consonant (vc) and consonant-vowel-consonant (cvc) words, and to spell them out. They also learn some high frequency 'tricky words' like 'the' and 'go.' This phase usually lasts about six weeks.



Phase Three (Reception) up to 12 weeks

Phase 3 introduces children to the remaining, more difficult and/or less commonly used phonemes. There are around 25 of these mainly made up of two letters such as /ch/, /ar/, /ow/ and /ee/. These are called 'digraphs'.

Alongside this, children are taught to recognise more tricky words, including 'me,' 'was,' 'my,' 'you' and 'they'. They learn the names of the letters, as well as the sounds they make. Activities might include learning mnemonics (memory aids) for tricky words, practising writing letters on mini whiteboards, using word cards and singing songs like the Alphabet Song.

Phase 3 takes most children around 12 weeks. By the end, they should be able to say the sound made by most, or all, Phase 2 and 3 graphemes, blend and read CVC words made from these graphemes, read 12 new tricky words and form letters correctly when given an example to copy.



Phase Four (Reception) 4 to 6 weeks

No new grapheme-phoneme correspondences are taught in this phase. Children learn to blend and segment longer words with adjacent consonants (ccvc, cvcc, ccvcc) words e.g. swim, clap, jump.

Practise reading and spelling high frequency words

Practise reading and writing sentences

Learn more tricky words, including 'have,' 'like,' 'some,' 'little'

Children should now be blending confidently to work out new words. They should be starting to be able to read words straight off, rather than having to sound them out. They should also be able to write every letter, mostly correctly. This phase usually takes four to six weeks, and most children will complete it around the end of Reception.

Phase Five (Throughout Year 1 although some children will start it in Reception)

Phase 5 generally takes children the whole of Year 1.

Children learn new graphemes (different ways of spelling each sound) and alternative pronunciations for these: for example, learning that the grapheme 'ow' makes a different sound in 'snow' and 'cow'.

They should become quicker at blending, and start to do it silently.

They learn about split digraphs such as the a-e in 'name.'

They'll start to choose the right graphemes when spelling, and will learn more tricky words, including 'people,' 'water' and 'friend'. They also learn one new phoneme: /zh/, as in 'treasure.'

By the end of Year 1, children should be able to:

Say the sound for any grapheme they are shown

Write the common graphemes for any given sound (e.g. 'e,' 'ee,' 'ie,' 'ea')

Use their phonics knowledge to read and spell unfamiliar words of up to three syllables

Read all of the 100 high frequency words, and be able to spell most of them

Form letters correctly

At the end of Year 1, all children are given a Phonics Screening Check to ensure they have mastered the appropriate knowledge.

Phase Six (Throughout Year 2 and beyond)

Working on spelling, including prefixes and suffixes, doubling and dropping letters etc.

What are "Tricky words"?

Tricky words are words that cannot be 'sounded-out' but need to be learned by heart. They don't fit into the usual spelling patterns. In order to read simple sentences, it is necessary for children to know some words that have unusual or untaught spellings and to be able to read them on sight. Children also need to be able to spell them.

What are High Frequency words?

High frequency (common) are words that recur frequently in much of the written material young children read and that they need when they write.

What do the Phonics terms mean?

Phoneme: The smallest unit of sound in a word, e.g. c/a/t, sh/o/p, t/ea/ch/er.

Grapheme: A letter or group of letters representing one sound, e.g. sh, igh, t.

Clip Phonemes: when saying sounds, always clip them short 'mhhh' not 'muh'

Digraph: Two letters which together make one sound, e.g. sh, ch, ee, ph, oa.

Split digraph: Two letters, which work as a pair, split, to represent one sound, e.g. a-e as in cake, or i-e as in kite.

Trigraph: three letters which together make one sound but cannot be separated into smaller phonemes, e.g. igh as in light, ear as in fear, tch as in watch.

Segmentation: means hearing the individual phonemes within a word – for instance the word 'crash' consists of four phonemes: 'c – r – a – sh'. In order to spell this word, a child must segment it into its component phonemes and choose a grapheme to represent each phoneme. We use segmenting in order to spell words.

Blending: means merging the individual phonemes together to pronounce a word. In order to read an unfamiliar word, a child must recognise ('sound out') each grapheme, not each letter (e.g. 'th-i-n' not 't-h-i-n'), and then merge the phonemes together to make the word. We use blending to be able to read words.

Mnemonics: a device for memorising and recalling something, such as a hand action of a snake to remember the phoneme /s/.

Adjacent consonants: two or three letters (consonants) with discrete sounds, which are blended together e.g. str, cr, tr, gr.

Comprehension: understanding of language whether it is spoken or written.