

Parents' Guide to Phonics

From a very early stage, children develop an awareness of different sounds in spoken language. They develop an 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), e.g. c as in 'cat', ll as in 'fell', ee as in 'sheep'. Children use this phonics knowledge when they are reading and writing. This system has been shown to be a quicker and more efficient way for children to learn to read the words on a page fluently and accurately. It also gives them essential skills for spelling.

At West Oxford Primary School we use the Gov.uk *Letters and Sounds* document to support the teaching of phonics. Letters and Sounds is divided into six phases with each phase following closely from the last. Phase 1 begins in Nursery and phases 2, 3, 4 and 5 are taught in Reception and Year 1. Phase 6 is taught in Year 2. The time taken to complete each phase is dependent on the children's understanding. The children's phonics knowledge is regularly assessed and a new phase is only introduced when children are secure in the current phase. A programme called *Jolly Phonics* is also used in Foundation and Reception. Here the children are taught an action for each sound, which helps them to remember the sounds more easily. The children take part in high-quality daily phonics sessions. These are fun sessions involving lots of speaking, listening and games, where the emphasis is on children's active participation. They learn to apply their phonic knowledge in reading and writing activities and in their independent play and work.

What do all the technical words mean?

What is a phoneme?

It is the smallest unit of sound and a piece of terminology that children like to use and should be taught. At first it will equate with a letter sound but later on will include the digraphs. For example 'rain' has three phonemes, / r / ai / n.

What is a grapheme?

A grapheme is a letter or a number of letters that represent a sound (phoneme) in a word. Another way to explain it is to say that a grapheme is a letter or letters that spell a sound in a word. E.g. /ee/, /ea/, /ey/ all make the same phoneme but are spelt differently.

What is a digraph?

This is when two or more letters come together to make a phoneme. /oa/ makes the sound in boat.

What is blending?

Blending is the process that is involved in bringing the sounds together to make a word or a syllable and is how /c/ /a/ /t/ becomes cat.

To learn to read well children must be able to smoothly blend sounds together. Blending sounds fluidly helps to improve fluency when reading. Blending is more difficult to do with longer words so learning how to blend accurately from an early age is imperative.

Showing your child how to blend is important. Model how to 'push' sounds smoothly together without stopping at each individual sound.

What is segmenting?

Segmenting is a skill used in spelling. In order to spell the word cat, it is necessary to segment the word into its constituent sounds; c-a-t.

Children often understand segmenting as 'chopping' a word. Before writing a word young children need time to think about it, say the word several times, 'chop' the word and then write it. Once children have written the same word several times they won't need to use these four steps as frequently.

Children will enjoy spelling if it feels like fun and if they feel good about themselves as spellers. We need, therefore, to be playful and positive in our approach – noticing and praising what children **can** do as well as helping them to correct their mistakes.

What are tricky words?

Tricky words (sometimes known as *common exception words*) are words that cannot be 'sounded-out' but need to be learned by heart. They don't fit into the usual spelling patterns. Examples of these words are attached under each phase. In order to read simple sentences, it is necessary for children to know some words that have unusual or untaught spellings. It should be noted that, when teaching these words, it is important to always start with sounds already known in the word, then focus on the 'tricky' part.

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 are CVC words?

CVC stands for consonant- vowel- consonant, so a word such as map, cat is CVC. In phase 4 we talk about CCVC words such as clip, stop.

Letters and Sounds Phases

Phase 1

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 2

In Phase 2, letters and their sounds are introduced one at a time. The letters are taught 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

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

Tricky words introduced in Phase 2:

the	to	l
go	into	no

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.

During Phase 3, twenty-five new graphemes are introduced (one at a time).

Set 6 : j,v,w,x

Set 7: y,z,zz,qu

Consonant digraphs: ch, sh, th, ng

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

Sounds	Word example	Sounds	Word example	Sounds	Word example
j	jam	sh	shin	oo (short)	cook
v	vet	th	thick	ow	now
w	win	ng	song	ar	star
x	box	ai	train	air	hair
y	yes	igh	sight	ear	hear
z	zip	oa	boat	er	term
zz	buzz	oi	coil	ur	curl
qu	quick	oo (long)	boot	or	fork
ch	chop	ee	tree	ure	pure

Tricky words introduced in Phase 3:

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

Phase 4

By Phase 4 children will be able to represent each of 42 phonemes with a grapheme. They will blend phonemes to read CCVC and CVCC words and segment these words for spelling. They will also be able to read two syllable words that are simple. They will be able to read all the tricky words learnt so far and will be able to spell some of them.

This phase consolidates all the children have learnt in the previous phases.

Tricky words introduced in Phase 4:

said	so	she	he	have	like
some	come	were	there	little	one
they	all	are	do	when	out

what	my	her			
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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.

Phase 5

Children will be taught new graphemes and alternative pronunciations for these graphemes and graphemes they already know. They will begin to learn to choose the appropriate grapheme when spelling. The children will be automatically decoding a large number of words for reading by this point.

Tricky words introduced in Phase 5:

oh	their	people	Mr	Mrs	looked
called	asked				
water	where	who	again	thought	through
work	mouse	many	laughed	because	different
any	eyes	friends	once	please	

New graphemes for reading:

ay day	oy boy	wh when	a-e make
ou out	ir girl	ph photo	e-e these
ie tie	ue blue	ew new	i-e like
ea eat	aw saw	oe toe	o-e home
		au Paul	u-e rule

During this phase children will begin reading words fluently and no longer be blending and segmenting familiar words.

They will also begin learning to add prefixes (un) and suffixes (s, es, er, est, ing, er) to root words.

Phase 6

In phase 6 children will be reading longer and less familiar texts independently and fluently. It is crucial that at this point children are now reading to learn and reading for **pleasure**.

Children should be able to read the 300 high frequency words. At this point it is important that comprehension strategies are developed so that children clarify meaning, ask and answer questions about the texts they are reading, construct mental images during reading and summarise what they have read.

In spelling children are introduced to the adding of more prefixes and suffixes and how to spell longer words. Throughout the phase children are encouraged to develop strategies for learning spellings.

What can I do at home?

Useful website letters and sounds games:

- <http://www.letters-and-sounds.com>
- <http://www.phonicsplay.co.uk/>
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/wordsandpictures/>
- http://www.ictgames.com/phonemeFlop_v4.html
- <http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/welcome/home/reading-owl/fun-ideas>
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks1/literacy/phonics/play/popup.shtml>

Phonics games that can be played at home

1. Mood Sounds

Say a letter sound and ask the children to repeat it. Ask the children to say the sound as if they were angry, happy, frightened etc.

2. Gobbler/Muncher Game

Use a cereal box to make a person. E.g. Gordon the gobbler. Have a large hole for the mouth. Collect a variety of objects beginning with 2 different sounds. Ask your child to select an object from your tray that begins with a certain sound. Children feed the object to the gobbler with replies with an mmmm sound if they are correct.

3. Hoop game

Get 2 hoops, trays or plates and place a letter card on each of them e.g. s and a. Have a variety of objects beginning with these 2 sounds. Ask your child to select an object and say the name of it. Repeat it several times and then ask your child to place it on the correct letter tray.

4. Croaker

Introduce a puppet to your child. Explain that it is finding it hard to say some words. Ask your to select an object out of a bag. The puppet pronounces it incorrectly – maybe missing off the initial or end sound. The children help the puppet say the word correctly emphasising the part of the word that was missing. E.g. The puppet says 'encil' the child can say the word correctly 'pencil' and then the adult can emphasise the 'p' sound that was missing.

5. Rogue Sound Game

Show a variety of objects to your child. All of the objects to have the same initial sound except for one item. Children to identify which is the rogue item. E.g. sun, sausages, cup, scissors.

6. Bingo

Bingo boards can easily be made to suit the ability of your child. You can use them in a variety of different ways to help your child learn the letters of the alphabet. Make a board containing 6 letters of the alphabet. Then make a set of 6 letter cards that match the

board. You can make 2 boards to play a matching game with your child or one of you could be the bingo caller and say the letter on the cards and the other person finds the letter on their board and puts a counter or toy on it. You can just match the letters or you could have some objects to match to the letter boards. Your child can then pick an object and place it on the correct letter to show what sound the object begins with.

Ways you can support your children at home: reading together

Teach lots of nursery rhymes – each one tells a different story. Enjoy and share books together – buy or borrow books that will fire their imagination and interest. Read and reread those they love best.

Make time to read with your child throughout their time in school – PLEASE continue reading to your child, even when they are reading independently. This is very important – your child needs to practise their reading skills every day, and needs the support of an interested adult. Grandparents, older brothers or sisters can help, too.

Let them see you reading – grown-ups can share their magazines about their favourite sport or hobby. Read with your child – ask your child to attempt unknown words, using their phonic skills and knowledge. Make sure they blend all through the word.

Talk about the meaning of the book, too – take time to talk about what is happening in the book, or things that they found really interesting in an information book. Discuss the characters and important events. Ask them their views. Provide toys, puppets and dressing-up clothes that will help them to act out stories. Explain the meaning of words (*vocabulary*) that your child can read but may not understand, for example, *flapped, roared*.

Listen to story tapes.

Teach your child some action rhymes – ‘Heads, shoulders, knees and toes’, ‘Here we go round the mulberry bush’, ‘We all clap hands together’. Use tapes and CD-ROMs of nursery rhymes to sing along to. Read simple rhyming books together – leave out a rhyming word now and then, and see if your child can work out the missing word. If not, you say it.

Borrow or buy the best books you can to share with your child. Libraries and bookshops can advise you of the most popular books.

Add sound effects when reading a story and encourage your child to join in.

A quiet area with some cushions and toys is a comfortable place where you and your child can go to look at a book together.

Ways you can support your children at home: writing together

Ways you can support your children at home: what to do if your child is reluctant to read or write at home
Magic writing boards are great fun for children, both little and larger versions. It won't be long before they will be trying to write their names!

Write with your child – ‘think aloud’ so they can hear the decisions you are making as you write. Make sure the writing is for a purpose, for example, a birthday message, a shopping list, an address.

Talk about the words they see in everyday life – food packaging, signs in the supermarkets, captions on buses and lorries, messages on birthday cards and invitations.

Write a shopping list together.

Send an email to a family member or a friend – your child says the message, you write it!

Provide your child with a shoe box full of things to write with – writing tools of various sizes and thicknesses: gel pens, crayons, glitter pens, rainbow pencils, old birthday cards, coloured paper, sticky tape to make little books. Rolls of wallpaper can be attached to a table or wall to provide a large canvas for their writing and drawing.

Praise them for their play writing – those early squiggles and marks show that your child is beginning to understand writing.