

Phonics

In school, we follow the Letters and Sounds programme. Letters and Sounds is a phonics resource published by the Department for Education and Skills which consists of six phases.

The Terminology

Phoneme

A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a word. It is generally accepted that most varieties of spoken English use about 44 phonemes.

Graphemes

A grapheme is a symbol of a phoneme. It is a letter or group of letters representing a sound.

Segmenting and blending

Segmenting consists of breaking words down into phonemes to spell. Blending consists of building words from phonemes to read. Both skills are important.

Digraph

This is when two letters come together to make a phoneme. For example, /oa/ makes the sound in 'boat' and is also known as a vowel digraph. There are also consonant digraphs, for example, /sh/ and /ch/.

Trigraph

This is when three letters come together to make one phoneme, for example /igh/.

Split digraph

A digraph in which the two letters are not adjacent – e.g. make

Phase 1 (beginning of Foundation Stage)

Phase One 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)
- Talking about sounds (developing vocabulary and language comprehension)

Phase 2 (Foundation Stage)

In Phase 2, 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

The children will begin to learn to blend and segment to help begin reading and spelling. This will begin with simple words such as sat, tap, pat etc.

Alongside this, children are introduced to tricky words. These are the words that are irregular. This 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	I
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Ways you can support your child at home with Phase 2

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.

Don't forget the writing box!

Spelling is harder than reading words – praise, don't criticise. Little whiteboards and pens, and magic boards, are a good way for children to try out spellings and practise their handwriting. Children also love to use coloured gel pens – make writing fun!

Your child might be trying to use letters from their name to write; this shows that they know that writing needs real alphabet letters.

Make or buy an alphabet poster.

Phase 3 (Foundation Stage)

By the time children reach Phase 3, they will already be able to blend and segment words containing the 19 letters taught in Phase 2. Over the twelve weeks which Phase 3 is expected to last, 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

Sound	Word Example	Sound	Word Example	Sound	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

we	me	be	Was	no	go
my	you	they	Her	all	are

Ways you can support your child at home with Phase 3

- 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

Phase 4 (Foundation Stage/ Year 1)

By Phase 4, children will be able to represent each of 42 phonemes with a grapheme. They will blend phonemes to read CVC words and segment CVC 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

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

Ways you can support your child at home with Phase 4

- Make up captions and phrases for your child to read and write, for example, a silver star, clear the pond, crunch crisps. Write some simple sentences and leave them around the house for your child to find and read. After they have found and read three, give them a treat!
- Look out for words in the environment, such as on food packaging, which your child will find easy to read, for example, lunch, fresh milk, drink, fish and chips, jam.
- Work on reading words together, for example, a street name such as Park Road, captions on buses and lorries, street signs such as bus stop.

Phase 5 (Year 1- consolidated in Year 2)

Children will be taught new graphemes and alternative pronunciations for these graphemes, as well as graphemes they already know. They will begin to learn to choose the appropriate grapheme when spelling.

New graphemes for reading:

Sound	Word Example	Sound	Word Example	Sound	Word Example	Sound	Word Example
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

Tricky words

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					

Phase 6 (Year 2)

In phase 6, the focus is on learning spelling rules for word endings (these are known as suffixes). The children will learn how words change when you add certain letters. There are 12 different suffixes taught:

-s	-es	-ing	-ed	-er	-est
-y	-en	-ful	-ly	-ment	-ness

Example

Skate - skating (remove e) - skated/ skater (add d / r as the e is already there)

Happy – happiness – happier - happiest - happily etc.

Phonics at home

Tips for teaching your child the sounds:

- It is important for a child to learn lower case or small letters rather than capital letters at first. Most early books and games use lower case letters and your child will learn these first at school. Obviously you should use a capital letter when required, such as at the beginning of the child's name, eg. Paul.
- When saying the sounds of b, d, g, j and w you will notice the 'uh' sound which follows each, for example buh, duh... try to emphasise the main letter sound and reduce the 'uh' on the end as this gets in the way when blending and confuses spelling.
- By the time they get into Year 1 children should be using letter names (alphabet names) to talk about letters and clearly distinguish between letters and the sounds they make. Making sure children can say and write the alphabet is important. Playing games such as 'which letter comes after d ? or before g? will also help.
- Make sure you know whether the word your child is trying to read or spell is a phonically regular word or a 'tricky' word. Then you can help them to choose the most effective way of tackling the word.