



# Introduction to Phonics

\_\_\_\_\_ for Parents \_\_\_\_\_

# Contents

1

**What Is  
Phonics?**

2

**Background  
to Phonics**

3

**Phonics in  
Practice**

4

**What Each  
Phase  
Involves**

5

**Glossary of  
Terms Used  
in Phonics**

6

**How Can  
Parents Provide  
Support at  
Home?**

7

**Phonics  
Screening  
Check**

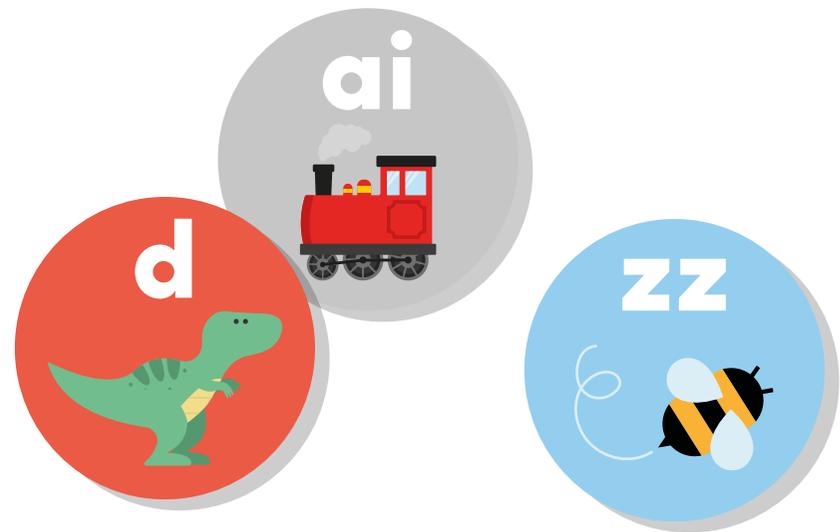
8

**Frequently  
Asked  
Questions**

# 1 What Is Phonics?

**Words are made up of small units of sound called phonemes.**

Synthetic phonics teaches children to listen carefully and identify the phonemes that make up each word. It teaches children to blend or 'synthesise' the sounds together to build words and break words down into their component sounds in order to write them and spell them correctly.



It's an approach, which in tests, has proven to help children develop reading and spelling skills at an earlier age.

English has around 44 phonemes and 120 graphemes, so essentially phonics is a more exact way of learning to read and spell than if you were to use the 26 letters of the alphabet.

## 2 Background to Phonics

**Phonics has been introduced across the board in primary schools throughout the UK.**



In England, this was as a result of The Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading, more commonly known as The Rose Review, which was published in March 2006.

Throughout the UK, it is recommended as the first strategy that children should be taught to help them learn to read, and runs alongside other teaching

methods such as Guided Reading and Shared Reading, to help children develop all the other vital reading skills, and instil a real love of reading in them.

It is also key to help children write, and studies have suggested that using phonics simplifies writing, enabling children to communicate in writing much more quickly.

### 3 Phonics in Practice

**All schools follow systematic phonics programmes.**

The three main programmes are:

**Letters  
and  
Sounds**

*(Published by the government  
and free to all schools.)*



**Jolly  
Phonics**

Each programme takes a slightly different approach but they generally follow the same phase structure. These phases, and their timing, are outlined in the following six slides...

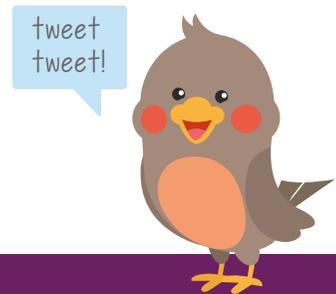
*EducationCity provides learning activities for all of these three programmes.*

## 4 Phase 1

**Early phonics teaching in pre-school, nursery and at the start of the Reception/ Foundation year focuses on developing children's listening skills.**

Phase 1 phonics teaches about:

- environmental sounds
- instrumental sounds
- body percussion
- rhythm and rhyme
- alliteration
- oral blending and segmenting



**Pre-School/  
Nursery Level/  
early Foundation  
Stage**

## 4 Phase 2

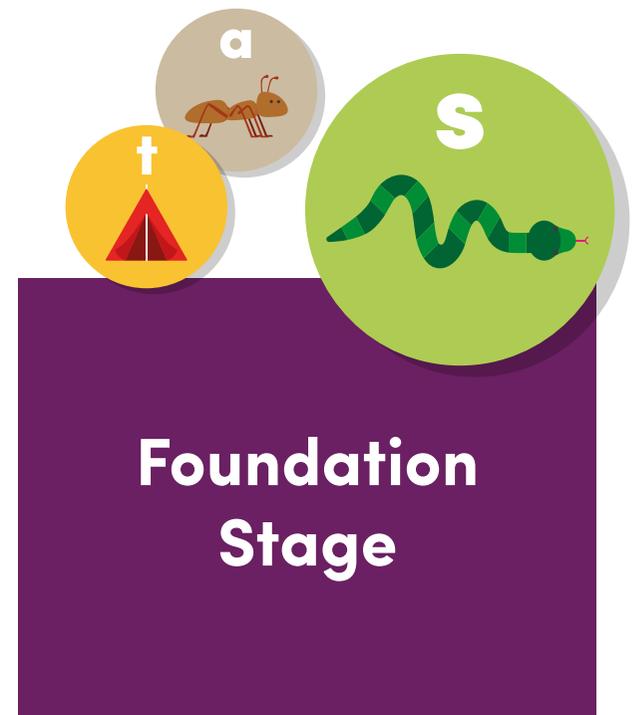
**In Phase 2, children begin to learn the sounds that letters make, starting with the 19 most common single letter sounds.**

The single letter sounds, /s/, /a/, /t/, /i/, /p/ and /n/ are usually the first phonemes to be taught.

Each sound is taught with an action which helps the children remember the grapheme that represents it. For the sound /s/ for instance, children may be told a story about a snake and weave their hands, pretending to be a snake, saying "ssss".

By the end of the phase, children should be able to read some vowel-consonant (VC) and consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words and spell them out. They will also learn some highly used tricky or red words, which don't follow the rules, like 'the' and 'go'.

**NOTE:** For all Phase 2 phonemes (Letters and Sounds), please refer to Appendix 1.



## 4 Phase 3

### Phase 3 introduces children to the remaining 25 phonemes.

Many of these are made up of two letters, such as /ch/, /ar/ and /ow/.

In addition to this, children are taught to recognise tricky words, such as 'me', 'was', 'my', 'you' and 'they'.

By the end of the phase, children should be able to say the sound made by most Phase 2 and 3 graphemes, blend and read CVC words made from these graphemes, read more tricky words, and write letters correctly when given an example to copy.

**NOTE:** For all Phase 3 phonemes (Letters and Sounds), please refer to Appendix 2.



**Foundation  
Stage**

## 4 Phase 4

**Phase 4 is about consolidating and refining the knowledge that the children have, and introducing more spelling patterns and tricky words.**

In this phase, the children will practise reading and spelling CVCC words, such as 'milk' and 'hand', practise reading and spelling high frequency words, practise reading and writing sentences and learn more tricky words including 'have', 'like', 'some' and 'little'.

Children should be blending confidently by this point so able to decode new words.

They should also be starting to read words straight away instead of sounding them out.

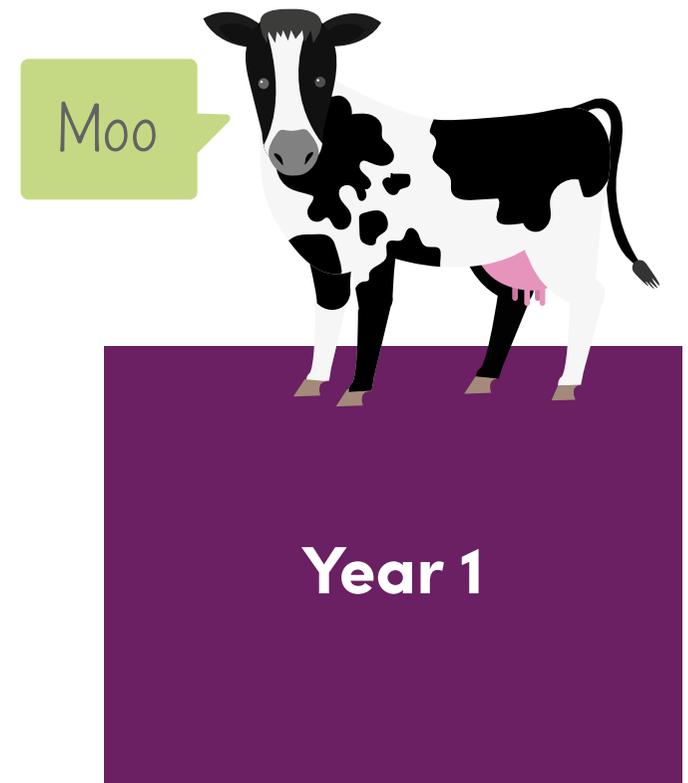


## 4 Phase 5

**Phase 5 introduces alternative spelling for sounds, which children master in their reading first, then in their writing.**

The children also learn new graphemes to help them understand that the same phoneme can be represented in more than one way, i.e., 'term', 'heard' and 'work', as well as alternative pronunciations for graphemes, as in 'low' and 'cow'.

It is at this stage too that they will encounter split digraphs, such as a-e in 'take'.



## 4 Phase 6

**In Phase 6, children are taught to recognise phonic irregularities and become more secure with less common grapheme-phoneme correspondences.**

In addition to this, they learn how to apply their phonics skills and knowledge to read and spell an increasing number of complex words.



# 4 A Typical Phonics Lesson

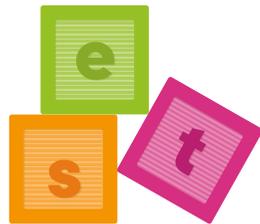
**Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 normally have 15-20 minute phonics sessions every day.**

These sessions are fast, fun and multi-sensory, and follow the sequence outlined below:



## Introduction

The teacher explains to the children what they will be covering during that session and gets them excited to learn.



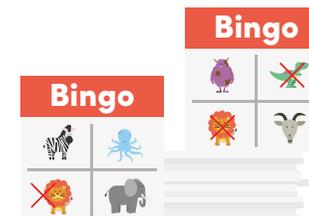
## Revisit & Review

The children play a quick-fire game to practise something they have already covered to help build their confidence.



## Teach

The children are taught a new phoneme/grapheme/skill in a fun, multi-sensory way, including songs, puppets, pictures, etc.



## Practice

The children play fun games to practise what they have just learnt.



## Apply

The children try to apply what they've learnt by reading or writing using those new skills.

# 5 Glossary of Terms Used in Phonics

## **Phoneme**

Phonemes are the sounds that can be heard in a word, so /h/-/a/-/t/.

## **Grapheme**

Graphemes are what the sounds look like written down.

## **GPCs**

GPCs stands for grapheme-phoneme correspondences. This simply means that children are taught how to write down every sound in the English language.

*NOTE: Some sounds are written down in a variety of ways.*

## **Digraph**

Digraphs are two letters that make one sound when read, i.e., 'ch' or 'ar'. You may also hear the term 'split digraph', which is where the two graphemes are separated within the word. An example of this would be 'take', which uses the a-e split digraph. The 'e' in this split digraph is sometimes referred to as the 'magic e' which changes the sound of the other element of the digraph.

## **Trigraph**

Trigraphs are three letters that make one sound when read, i.e., 'igh'.

## **Blending**

Blending is a skill used for reading. Children need to hear each separate sound in a word and then blend them together, so /h/-/a/-/t/ becomes hat, /c/-/oa/-/t/ becomes coat and /t/-/oy/ becomes toy.

## **Segmenting**

Segmenting is a key skill needed for spelling. Children need to be able to hear a whole word and say every sound within it, so that they can connect them to the phonemes, then subsequently the graphemes.

## **Syllables**

Syllables are the clusters of sounds that make up a word as we speak it. Sometimes they can be phonemes, but not all phonemes are syllables. Take the word 'light' for example. This is one syllable but three phonemes: l-igh-t. Words can be monosyllabic ('light') or polysyllabic ('insightful' which has 3 syllables).

## **CVC Words**

These are words that are made up of consonant-vowel-consonant, and are generally amongst the earlier words to be learnt. They include 'cat', 'for' and 'set'.

## **CCVC Words**

These are words that are formed from consonant-consonant-vowel-consonant and include words such as 'stop', 'flat' and 'drip'.

## **CVCC Words**

These are words that are created in a consonant-vowel-consonant-consonant formation such as 'milk' and 'hand'.

## **Tricky/ Red Words**

Tricky or red words are words that cannot be blended or segmented with the phonetic knowledge the children have. Some words are tricky to start with but become decodable once the children have learned more complex phonemes, for instance, 'out' and 'there'. Others can never be blended or segmented like 'the', 'was', 'said', 'you' and 'some'.

# 6 How Can Parents Provide Support at Home?

## Phases 2 & 3

Learn the sayings and actions with your child at home and practise them every day if possible. Let your child teach you – it's great for their confidence!

When reading or writing, ask your child which phoneme it is, doing the action to help them identify it if needed.

Play the robot game to help oral blending. For example, you could say "s-t-o-p" like a robot, to which your child should say "stop". This helps them hear a series of sounds and understand how they can be merged or 'blended' together to make a real word.

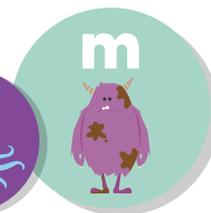
## All Phases

Reward the children with heaps of praise. There's nothing more motivating!

## Phases 4 & 5

Read at home as much as possible. Choose a quiet place away from distractions and a time when your child is not tired or intent on doing something else. Talk about the story as well as decoding the words, and just make it as relaxed and fun as possible.

Give your child time to decipher the words and be patient if they have to sound out the same word multiple times. It's not uncommon for children to read a word correctly and then 30 seconds later to be unable to read it. Go through the process from sounding it out to blending it together and in time, they will recognise high frequency words and not need the process any more.



## **7 Phonics Screening Check** (England Only)

**In the June of Year 1, all children in England are given a Phonics Screening Check to ensure that they have mastered the phonics knowledge as expected.**

The test is undertaken one-on-one with a teacher and is intended to show how well each child can use the phonics skills they've acquired, and identify any students who need extra help.

The test takes about 4-9 minutes for children to complete and consists of 20 real words and 20 made-up words. The non-words, such as 'spron' (also known as nonsense words, alien words or pseudo words), are a collection of letters that follow the phonics rules the children have learnt, but do not mean anything. These words always appear with a monster or alien to identify them, so

the children know that the word will not make sense, but are incorporated specifically to test a child's skill in phonetically decoding words and ensure they've not just memorised words.

The pass mark of the test varies each year as it is scored against the national standard, but in the years 2013-2017, the pass threshold was 32. You will be told your child's result but they are not published.

If children score below the standard, they will be given extra help with their phonics, and will re-take the check in Year 2.

## 8 Frequently Asked Questions

### **What are the tricky words by phase?**

These differ depending on the programme that your child's school is following. Your child's school should be able to provide you with details. For the Letters and Sounds scheme, they can be found here: <http://www.letters-and-sounds.com>

### **Does phonics stop after Year 2?**

Phonics sessions stop after Year 2, but teachers will apply and develop the children's knowledge of phonics to develop spelling and vocabulary acquisition skills in the wider curriculum in Key Stage 2.

They may do this by:

- using alphabetic code charts which show sounds/phonemes down the columns and the many spelling alternatives for the sounds (graphemes) across the rows;
- oral segmenting to spell out words correctly and/or;
- by continuing to encourage the children to decode new words phonetically in order to be able to pronounce them correctly.

## **Does everyone have to learn to read using phonics?**

Synthetic phonics is the first strategy that children should be taught to help them learn to read, but not the only one. If a child is seen to be struggling to learn to read using the phonics method, teachers can try a variety of other strategies, as no child learns in the same way. These alternatives may include the alphabetic method and the 'look and say' method.

## **Does learning by phonics negatively impact children's spelling?**

Whilst children may spell words during Phases 2-4 incorrectly because they are basing the spelling on their phonetic knowledge, as their grasp of the different grapheme-phoneme correspondences grows, this will improve. The key to good spelling here is in reading. By reading, the children will familiarise themselves with the correct spelling, understand which graphemes are at work, and so be able to replicate this themselves.

## **Is there a phonics test in other regions of the UK?**

Children are not tested on their knowledge or application of phonics via a specific phonics check in other parts of the UK, as they are in England. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the children's knowledge will be measured instead by teacher assessment.

# About The Author

**EducationCity is an award-winning online teaching, learning and assessment resource, used in schools in over 75 countries.**

It has over 10 years' experience of supporting teachers to teach synthetic phonics, and has developed a whole range of content to do this, which can be accessed here:

[www.EducationCity.com](http://www.EducationCity.com)



As a supplier to schools, it understands that parents play a vital role in teaching their children to read and write. It has created this pack to support them with this and give a much-needed insight into phonics, which may be new to them.

# Appendix 1:

## Letters and Sounds: Phase 2

s	a	t	p			
i	n	m	d			
g	o	c	k			
ck	e	u	r			
h	b	f	ff	l	ll	ss

This phoneme group has been taken from Phase 2 of the Letters and Sounds phonics programme.

Phonemes within Phase 2 of the other programmes may differ slightly.

# Appendix 2:

## Letters and Sounds: Phase 3

<b>j</b>	<b>v</b>	<b>w</b>	<b>x</b>			
<b>y</b>	<b>z</b>	<b>zz</b>	<b>qu</b>			
<b>ch</b>	<b>sh</b>	<b>th</b>	<b>ng</b>			
<b>ai</b>	<b>ee</b>	<b>igh</b>	<b>oa</b>	<b>oo</b>	<b>ar</b>	<b>or</b>
<b>ur</b>	<b>ow</b>	<b>oi</b>	<b>ear</b>	<b>air</b>	<b>ure</b>	<b>er</b>

This phoneme group has been taken from Phase 3 of the Letters and Sounds phonics programme.

Phonemes within Phase 3 of the other programmes may differ slightly.