



Phonics explained

How does your child master phonics, from learning letter sounds to reading fluently?

When your child starts school, phonics becomes a big part of everyday life, transforming them from a non-reader to a child who is capable of reading fluently and spelling (mostly!) accurately by the end of Year 2.

Primary schools follow different phonics schemes, and each takes a slightly different approach to teaching phonics, but it's common for your child to be taught in a series of phases throughout the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

Phase 1

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

In Phase 1 phonics, children are taught about:

- Environmental sounds
- Instrumental sounds
- Body percussion (e.g. clapping and stamping)
- Rhythm and rhyme
- Alliteration
- Voice sounds
- Oral blending and segmenting (e.g. hearing that d-o-g makes 'dog')

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 2

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.

Although the order in which sounds are taught will depend on which scheme your child's school follows, usually, they will 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.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a  A | b  B | c  C | d  D | e  E | |
| f  F | g  G | h  H | i  I | j  J | |
| k  K | l  L | m  M | n  N | o  O | |
| p  P | q  Q | r  R | s  S | t  T | |
| u  U | v  V | w  W | x  X | y  Y | z  Z |
| c  c | k  k | ck  ck | qu  qu | f  f | ff  ff |
| l  l | ll  ll | s  s | ss  ss | z  z | zz  zz |



















Phase 3

Phase 3 introduces children to the remaining, more difficult and/or less commonly used phonemes. There are around 25 of these, depending on which scheme is followed, mainly made up of two letters such as /ch/, /ar/, /ow/ and /ee/.

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.

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 write letters correctly when given an example to copy.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| th  Th | ch  Ch | sh  Sh |
| ng  ai |  ee |  |
| igh  oa |  oo |  |
| oo  ar |  or |  |
| ur  ow |  oi |  |
| ear  air |  er |  |

Phase 4

In Phase 4 phonics, children will, among other things:

- Practise reading and spelling CVCC words ('such,' 'belt,' 'milk' etc)
- 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.

Phase 4 Blends

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|-----|
| st | nd | mp | nt | nk | ft | sk | lt |
| lp | lf | lk | pt | xt | tr | dr | gr |
| cr | br | fr | bl | fl | gl | pl | cl |
| sl | sp | tw | sm | pr | sc | sn | nch |
| scr | shr | thr | str | spl | | | |

Phase 5

Phase 5 part 1-4 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.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| igh  | ie  | i-e  | i  | y  |  PHONICS | |
| oa  | oe  | o-e  | ow  | o  | | |
| oo  | ue  | u-e  | ew  | ou  | | |
| ai  | ay  | a-e  | a  | e  | | ea  |
| ee  | ea  | e-e  | e  | ie  | | y  |
| ue  | u-e  | ew  | u  | u  | | oo  |
| or  | aw  | au  | ur  | ir  | | er  |
| oi  | oy  | ow  | ou  | w  | | wh  |
| f  | ph  | s  | c  | j  | g  | |

Phase 5 continued

Phase 5 part 4-9 continues throughout Year 2 and into Year 3 with the aim of children becoming fluent readers and accurate spellers.

By Phase 5 part 4, children should be able to read hundreds of words using one of three strategies:

- Reading them automatically
- Decoding them quickly and silently
- Decoding them aloud

Children should now be spelling most words accurately (this is known as 'encoding'), although this usually lags behind reading.

They will also learn, among other things:

- Prefixes and suffixes, e.g. 'in-' and '-ed'
- The past tense

- Memory strategies for high frequency or topic words
- Proof-reading
- How to use a dictionary
- Where to put the apostrophe in words like 'I'm'
- Spelling rules

Although formal phonics teaching is usually complete by the end of Year 2, children continue to use their knowledge as they move up the school.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| ai rain | ay pay | a-e cake | a acorn | ey grey | ei veil | eigh eight | oa coat | oe toe | o-e mole | ow snow | o gold | air chair | are square | ear bear |
| ee sheep | ea leaf | e-e swede | ie shield | e secret | y baby | ey key | oo moon | ue blue | u-e flute | ew flew | ou soup | ui fruit | ow cow | ou shout |
| oi coin | oy boy | igh night | ie tie | i-e bike | i child | y cry | ur church | er mermaid | ir girl | ear Earth | or worm | i igloo | y pyramid | e rocket |
| e ten | ea head | or fork | aw saw | au haunt | al ball | our four | ore core | ue cue | u-e huge | ew newt | u unicorn | f fan | ff puff | ph phone |
| ar car | al palm | er ladder | ar polar | or mirror | our colour | a zebra | o parrot | e kitten | l leg | ll bell | le table | el camel | al medal | il pencil |
| j jam | g gel | ge gorge | dge bridge | c cat | k kit | ck sock | ch school | s sun | ss kiss | c ice | se house | ce prince | st castle | sc scissors |
| ch chick | tch witch | ture picture | wh white | w wig | sh shell | ch chef | r rock | wr wreath | u bug | ou touch | o oven | LOGO | | |
| n nest | gn gnome | kn knife | ear ear | eer meerkat | z zip | zz buzz | se cheese | ze freeze | m man | mb lamb | | | | |

