



# Parents' Guide to Phonics and Early Reading

How to support your child's learning at home



We're teaching  
every child to  
read with



Little Wandle  
**LETTERS AND  
SOUNDS**  
\*\*\*  
**REVISED**

TM

A complete SSP validated by  
the Department for Education

**Perseverance    Enjoyment    Awe & Wonder    Compassion    Excellence**

# Introduction

Being able to read is a fundamental life skill, which we use every single day. 85% of the National Curriculum requires children to be able to read. Whether it is reading for pleasure, reading to understand instructions, road signs, a letter, or even reading a text message from a friend - it is used in our everyday activities. Without this skill, it will certainly make life more challenging. Research shows that behaviour at KS3 declines when children can't read.



One of the foundation blocks of learning to read is phonics. Phonics works by segmenting each word up into its individual sounds before blending those sounds back together to make the word. Children learn to 'decode' words by blending sounds rather than having to memorise 1,000's of words individually.

## What is Phonics?

Each one of the 26 letters in the alphabet has its own 'sound'. This is very different to how a letter is 'said' in the alphabet. For example:

'a' as in arrow



'b' as in bat



Of course phonics is not that simple! There are more than 26 sounds in English language, in fact there are 44 sounds in total. Some of these sounds are made up of 2 or 3 letters. 2-letter sounds are called digraphs and 3-letter sounds are called trigraphs.

digraph



trigraph



It gets a bit more complicated than that too! For example the 'n' sound, like in 'nail' is also spelt 'kn' like in 'knot' or 'gn' like in 'gnome'.



The sound that children struggle to spot the most when breaking down words into its individual sounds is the 'split digraph'. Like a normal digraph, this is when two letters work together to make one sound, however with a split digraph, they are separated and have a letter in the middle.

Fortunately 'split digraphs' always end with an 'e' which does make them a little easier to spot! Examples of **split digraphs** include:
























There are so many more terms which are used when we learn / teach phonics, which can be a little overwhelming to start with. Therefore we have summarised below the five terms you are likely to use at home when supporting your child's learning:















phoneme	a sound as it is said
grapheme	a sound that is written
digraph	two letters that work together to make the same sound
trigraph	three letters that work together to make the same sound
split digraph	two letters that work together to make the same sound, separated by another letter













The Phonics Scheme we use, here at Coton-in-the-Elms Primary School, is the DfE approved **Little Wandle Letters and Sounds**. Overleaf, you will find some useful information from Little Wandle to assist with pronunciation of letters and sounds, together with the formation we use for each letter when writing.

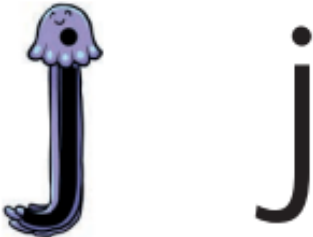
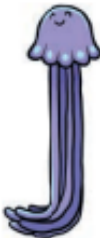










Every member of teaching staff is trained in the teaching of Phonics and Early Reading at least annually.













# Phase 2 grapheme information

Grapheme and mnemonic	Picture card	Pronunciation phrase	Formation phrase
 	 snake	Show your teeth and and let the s hiss out <b>sssss sssss</b>	Under the snake's chin, slide down and round its tail.
 	 astronaut	Open your mouth wide and make the <b>a</b> sound at the back of your mouth <b>a a a</b>	Around the astronaut's helmet and down into space.
 	 tiger	Open your lips; put the tip of your tongue behind your teeth and press <b>t t t</b>	From the tiger's nose to its tail, then follow the stripe across the tiger.
 	 penguin	Bring your lips together, push them open and say <b>p p p</b>	Down the penguin's back, up and around its head.
 	 iguana	Pull your lips back and make the <b>i</b> sound at the back of your mouth <b>i i i</b>	Down the iguana's body, then draw a dot [on the leaf] at the top.
 	 net	Open your lips a bit, put your tongue behind your teeth and make the <b>nnnnn</b> sound <b>nnnnn</b>	Down the stick, up and over the net.
 	 mouse	Put your lips together and make the <b>mmmmm</b> sound <b>mmmmm</b>	Down, up and over the mouse's ears, then add a flick on the nose.









Grapheme and mnemonic	Picture card	Pronunciation phrase	Formation phrase
 d	 duck	Put your tongue to the top and front of your mouth and make a quick <b>d</b> sound <b>d d d</b>	Round the duck's body, up to its head and down to its feet.
 g	 goat	Give me a big smile that shows your teeth; press the middle of your tongue to the top and back of your mouth; push your tongue down and forward to make the <b>g</b> sound <b>g g g</b>	Round the goat's face, up to his ear; down and curl under his chin.
 o	 octopus	Make your mouth into round shape and say <b>o o o</b>	All around the octopus.
 c	 cat	Open your mouth into a little smile; make your tongue flat and move it up towards the top of your mouth to say <b>c c c</b>	Curl around the cat.
 k	 kite	Open your mouth into a little smile; make your tongue flat and move it up towards the top of your mouth to say <b>k k k</b>	Down the kite, up and across, back and down to the corner.
 ck	 sock	Open your mouth into a little smile, make your tongue flat and move it up towards the top of your mouth to say <b>ck ck ck</b>	c Curl round the heel of the sock. k Down the sock, up and across, back and down and to the corner. <b>Catchphrase:</b> Rock that sock!
 e	 elephant	Open your mouth wide and say <b>e e e</b>	Around the elephant's eye and down its trunk.





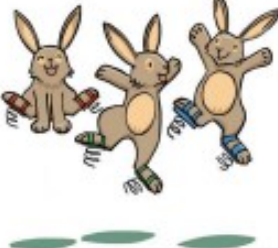

Grapheme and mnemonic	Picture card	Pronunciation phrase	Formation phrase
 <span style="font-size: 2em; margin-left: 100px;">u</span>	 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">umbrella</p>	<p>Open your mouth wide and say <b>u u u</b></p>	<p>Down and around the umbrella, stop at the top and down to the bottom and flick</p>
 <span style="font-size: 2em; margin-left: 100px;">r</span>	 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">rainbow</p>	<p>Show me your teeth to make a <b>rrrrr</b> sound <b>rrrrr rrrrr</b></p>	<p>From the cloud to the ground, up the arch and over the rainbow.</p>
 <span style="font-size: 2em; margin-left: 100px;">h</span>	 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">helicopter</p>	<p>Open your mouth and breathe out sharply <b>h h h</b></p>	<p>Down, up and over the helicopter</p>
 <span style="font-size: 2em; margin-left: 100px;">b</span>	 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">bear</p>	<p>Put your lips together and say <b>b</b> as you open them <b>b b b</b></p>	<p>Down bear's back, up and round his big tummy.</p>
 <span style="font-size: 2em; margin-left: 100px;">f</span>	 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">flamingo</p>	<p>Open your lips a little; put your teeth on your bottom lip and push the air out to make the sound <b>fffff</b> <b>fffff</b></p>	<p>Down the flamingo's neck, all the way to its foot, then across its wings.</p>
 <span style="font-size: 2em; margin-left: 100px;">l</span>	 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">lollipop</p>	<p>Open your mouth a little; put your tongue up to the top of your mouth, behind your teeth, and press <b>lllll lllll</b></p>	<p>All the way down the lollipop.</p>

Grapheme and mnemonic	Picture card	Pronunciation phrase	Formation phrase
	 jellyfish	Pucker your lips and show your teeth use your tongue as you say <b>j j j</b>	All the way down the jellyfish. Dot on its head.
	 volcano	Put your teeth against your bottom lip and make a buzzing <b>v v v v v v v v v v</b>	Down to the bottom of the volcano and back up to the top.
	 wave	Pucker your lips and keep them small as you say <b>w w w</b>	From the top of the wave to the bottom, up the wave, down the wave, then up again.
	 box	Mouth open, then push the <b>cs/x</b> sound through as you close your mouth <b>cs cs cs (x x x)</b>	Start at the top, then across to the bottom of the box. Start at the top, then across to the bottom of the box.
	 yo-yo	Smile, tongue to the top of your mouth, say <b>y</b> without opening your mouth <b>yyy</b>	Down and round the yo-yo, then follow the string round.
	 zebra	Show me your teeth and buzz the <b>z</b> sound <b>zzzzz zzzzz</b>	Zip across, zag down and across the zebra.

Grapheme and mnemonic	Picture card	Pronunciation phrase	Formation phrase Catchphrase
 qu qu	 queen	Pucker your mouth, then open it as you say <b>qu qu qu</b>	Round the queen's face, up to her crown, down her robe with a flick at the end.  qu Quick, it's the queen!
 ch ch	 cherries	Pucker your lips and show your teeth; use your tongue as you say <b>ch ch ch</b>	ch Chew the cherries, children.
 sh sh	 shells	Show me your teeth and push the air out <b>shshshshsh shshshshsh</b>	sh Share the shells.
 th th	 thumb	<b>Voiced:</b> Tongue on your teeth, teeth almost closed to make a 'buzzing' <b>th th th</b> <b>Unvoiced:</b> Tongue on your teeth; push the air out <b>th th th</b>	th Thumbs up, we're having fun.
 ng ng	 ring	Open your mouth a bit and then use your tongue at the back of your mouth to say <b>ng ng ng</b>	ng Bling on a ring.
 nk nk	 pink panda	Open your mouth a bit and then use your tongue at the back of your mouth to say <b>ngk ngk ngk</b>	nk I think I am pink.

# How to say the Phase 3 sounds










Grapheme	Catchphrase	Pronunciation phrase	Grapheme	Catchphrase	Pronunciation phrase
ai	 tail in the rain	Open your mouth wide and say <b>ai ai ai</b>	oo	 hook a book	Pucker your lips and keep them small as you say <b>oo oo oo</b>
ee	 sheep in a jeep	Smile with your lips apart and say <b>ee ee ee</b>	oo	 zoom to the moon	Open your mouth just a bit, put your hand on your tummy, pull your tummy in and say <b>oo oo oo</b>
igh	 a light in the night	Open your mouth in a relaxed way and say <b>igh igh igh</b>	ar	 march in the dark	Open your mouth wide, push your tongue down and say <b>ar ar ar</b>
oa	 soap that goat	Make an 'o' with your mouth and say <b>oa oa oa</b>	or	 born with a horn	Make an 'o' with your mouth, push your tongue down and say <b>or or or</b>









Grapheme	Catchphrase	Pronunciation phrase	Grapheme	Catchphrase	Pronunciation phrase
ur	 <p>curl the fur</p>	Open your mouth in a relaxed way, push your tongue down and say <b>ur ur ur</b>	ear	 <p>get near to hear</p>	Smile with your lips apart, push your tongue to your teeth as you say <b>ear ear ear</b>
ow	 <p>wow owl</p>	Open your mouth wide then move your lips together as you say <b>ow ow ow</b>	air	 <p>chair in the air</p>	Open your mouth wide, push your tongue down as you say <b>air air air</b>
oi	 <p>boing boing</p>	Make an 'o' with your mouth then move your lips out as you say <b>oi oi oi</b>	er	 <p>a bigger digger</p>	Open your mouth in a relaxed way, push your tongue down and say <b>ur ur ur</b>

# How to say the Phase 5 sounds

At Phase 5, children learn alternative graphemes for sounds introduced in Phases 2 and 3.





## Sounds introduced in Phase 2




Grapheme and mnemonic	Pronunciation phrase	Phase 5 Graphemes
	Show your teeth and let the <b>s</b> hiss out <b>ssssss ssssss</b>	<b>c se ce st sc</b>
	Open your lips a bit; put your tongue behind your teeth and make the <b>nnnnn</b> sound <b>nnnnn</b>	<b>kn gn</b>
	Put your lips together and make the <b>mmmmm</b> sound <b>mmmmm</b>	<b>mb</b>
	Open your mouth into a little smile; make your tongue flat and move it up towards the top of your mouth to say <b>c c c</b>	<b>ch</b>
	Show me your teeth to make a <b>rrrrr</b> sound <b>rrrrr</b>	<b>wr</b>
	Open your lips a little; put your teeth on your bottom lip and push the air out to make the sound <b>fffff fffff</b>	<b>ph</b>
	Open your mouth a little; put your tongue up to the top of your mouth, behind your teeth, and press <b>ttttt ttttt</b>	<b>le al</b>
	Pucker your lips and show your teeth; use your tongue as you say <b>jjj</b>	<b>g dge ge</b>
	Put your teeth against your bottom lip and make a buzzing sound <b>vvvvv vvvvv</b>	<b>ve</b>




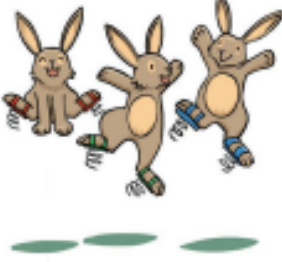
Grapheme and mnemonic	Pronunciation phrase	Phase 5 Graphemes
	Pucker your lips and keep them small as you say <b>w w w</b>	<b>wh</b>
	Show me your teeth and buzz the <b>z</b> sound <b>zzzzz zzzzz</b>	<b>se ze</b>
	Pucker your lips and show your teeth; use your tongue as you say <b>ch ch ch</b>	<b>tch ture*</b>
	Show me your teeth and push the air out <b>shshshshshsh</b>	<b>ch ti ssi si ci</b>
	Open your mouth wide and say <b>e e e</b>	<b>ea</b>
	Pull your lips back and make the <b>l</b> sound at the back of your mouth <b>lll</b>	<b>y</b>
	Make your mouth into a round shape and say <b>o o o</b>	<b>a</b>
	Open your mouth wide and say <b>u u u</b>	<b>o-e o ou</b>



\*Note that the pronunciation of 'ture' has a slight schwa sound at the end.

### Sounds introduced in Phase 3

Grapheme	Catchphrase	Pronunciation phrase	Phase 5 Graphemes
ai	 <p>tail in the rain</p>	Open your mouth wide and say <b>ai ai ai</b>	ay a a-e eigh aligh ey ea
ee	 <p>sheep in a jeep</p>	Smile with your lips apart and say <b>ee ee ee</b>	ea e e-e ie y ey
igh	 <p>a light in the night</p>	Open your mouth in a relaxed way and say <b>igh igh igh</b>	ie i i-e y
oa	 <p>soap that goat</p>	Make an 'o' with your mouth and say <b>oa oa oa</b>	o o-e ou oe ow

Grapheme	Catchphrase	Pronunciation phrase	Phase 5 Graphemes
oo	 <p>zoom to the moon</p>	<p>Open your mouth just a bit, put your hand on your tummy, pull your tummy in and say <b>oo oo oo</b></p>	<p><b>ue</b> <b>u-e</b> <b>ew</b> <b>ou</b> <b>ui</b></p>
yoo		<p>Pucker your lips and keep them small as you say <b>yoo yoo yoo</b></p>	<p><b>ue</b> <b>u</b> <b>u-e</b> <b>ew</b></p>
oo	 <p>hook a book</p>	<p>Open your mouth just a bit, put your hand on your tummy, pull your tummy in and say <b>oo oo oo</b></p>	<p><b>u*</b> <b>oul</b></p>
ar	 <p>march in the dark</p>	<p>Open your mouth wide, push your tongue down and say <b>ar ar ar</b></p>	<p><b>a*</b> <b>al*</b></p>

Grapheme	Catchphrase	Pronunciation phrase	Phase 5 Graphemes
or	 <p data-bbox="379 562 628 600">born with a horn</p>	<p data-bbox="679 210 1059 300">Make an 'o' with your mouth, push your tongue down and say <b>or or or</b></p>	<p data-bbox="1086 210 1139 456"><b>aw</b> <b>au</b> <b>aur</b> <b>oor</b> <b>al</b> <b>a</b> <b>oar</b> <b>ore</b></p>
ur	 <p data-bbox="424 994 580 1032">curl the fur</p>	<p data-bbox="679 636 979 763">Open your mouth in a relaxed way, push your tongue down and say <b>ur ur ur</b></p>	<p data-bbox="1086 636 1123 725"><b>er</b> <b>ir</b> <b>or</b></p>
ow	 <p data-bbox="440 1420 572 1458">wow owl</p>	<p data-bbox="679 1061 1054 1151">Open your mouth wide then move your lips together as you say <b>ow ow ow</b></p>	<p data-bbox="1086 1061 1123 1084"><b>ou</b></p>
oi	 <p data-bbox="421 1845 592 1883">boing boing</p>	<p data-bbox="679 1487 1054 1576">Make an 'o' with your mouth then move your lips out as you say <b>oi oi oi</b></p>	<p data-bbox="1086 1487 1123 1509"><b>oy</b></p>

Grapheme	Catchphrase	Pronunciation phrase	Phase 5 Graphemes
ear	 <p data-bbox="397 573 635 613">get near to hear</p>	<p data-bbox="699 208 1075 300">Smile with your lips apart, push your tongue to your teeth as you say <b>ear ear ear</b></p>	<p data-bbox="1114 208 1161 264"><b>ere</b> <b>ear</b></p>
air	 <p data-bbox="408 1010 627 1050">chair in the air</p>	<p data-bbox="699 645 1091 736">Open your mouth wide, push your tongue down as you say <b>air air air</b></p>	<p data-bbox="1114 645 1161 736"><b>are</b> <b>ere</b> <b>ear</b></p>
zh		<p data-bbox="699 1081 1091 1173">Pucker your lips and show your teeth; push the air over your tongue as you say <b>zh zh</b></p>	<p data-bbox="1114 1081 1150 1137"><b>su</b> <b>si</b></p>

# How to write capital letters

Use this phrase guide to assist with correct letter formation when you are supporting your child to write capital letters.

Letter	Capital letter formation phrase
A	From the top, diagonally down to the left, up to the top, diagonally down to the right. Lift up and across.
B	From the top, down, back to the top. Round to the middle, round to the bottom.
C	From the top, curl around to the left to sit on the line.
D	From the top, down, back to the top. Curve right, down to the bottom.
E	From the top, down, back to the top. Across, back. Lift up and across the middle. Lift up and across the bottom line.
F	From the top, down, back to the top. Across, back. Lift up and across the middle.
G	From the top, curl around to the line, carry on up, then straight down. Lift up and across.
H	From the top and down. Space. From the top and down. Lift up and join the lines across the middle.
I	From the top to the bottom and stop.
J	From the top, all the way down, then short curl to the left.
K	From the top, down, up to the middle. Diagonally up, back and diagonally down to the line.
L	From the top, down and across the line.
M	From the top, down, back to the top. Diagonally down, diagonally up. Straight down to the line.
N	From the top, down, back to the top. Diagonally down, then straight up to the top.
O	From the top – all around the o.
P	From the top, down then back up. Curve right to halfway down.
Q	From the top – all around the o. Lift off. Short line diagonally down.
R	From the top, down, then back up. Curve right to halfway down. Diagonally down to the line.
S	From the top, under the snake's chin, slide down and round its tail.
T	From the top, down and stop. Lift up and from the left, make a line across the top.
U	From the top, down and curve right, then straight up to the top.
V	From the top diagonally right to the bottom, then diagonally up to the top.
W	From the top diagonally right to the bottom, diagonally up to the top, diagonally down to the line, then diagonally up again.
X	From the top, diagonally right to the bottom. Space. Start at the top, then diagonally left to the bottom.
Y	From the top diagonally right to the middle. Space. From the top diagonally left to the middle. Straight down to the bottom.
Z	From the top go across, diagonally down to the left and across the bottom.

# Reading: The Question Matrix

Learning to read is so much more than decoding the text on the page, it's the understanding of what is happening in the story.

Below is a question matrix which you can use as a starting point to ask questions when sharing a book with your child at home.

QUESTION MATRIX	Ask better questions...						
	IS? DOES? PRESENT	HAS? DID? WAS? PAST	CAN? POSSIBILITY	SHOULD? OPINION	WOULD? COULD? PROBABILITY	WILL? PREDICTION	MIGHT? IMAGINATION
WHAT? EVENT							
WHERE? PLACE							
WHEN? TIME							
WHICH? CHOICE							
WHO? PERSON							
WHY? REASON							
HOW? MEANING							

The general level of difficulty of question increases... A "What is?" question is normally easier to create and answer than a "How might?" question.

Why not give the question matrix a go using the images on the next page, taken from Julia Donaldson's book *The Scarecrow's Wedding*, with your child. For example:



- Looking at the pictures, what time of day do you think it is?
- Where are the scarecrows?
- How do you think they got there?
- What do you think the scarecrow's are feeling?
- Why do you think that?



## Parent Resources

Little Wandle have more great resources and videos that you can link into to help with learning at home, please visit:

<https://www.littlewandlelettersandsounds.org.uk/resources/for-parents/>

# Glossary of *Little Wandle Letters and Sounds*

## **Revised terminology**

When teaching phonics, there are a variety of terms used, which you may or may not be familiar with. Therefore, please find below a glossary of terminology used, which we hope will serve as a useful reference tool.

### **Adjacent consonants**

Two or more consonants that come together in a word without any intervening vowel or vowels (for example, 'd-r' in 'drop', 's-t-r' in 'strap'). Adjacent consonants do not constitute a discrete unit of sound and are read by blending the individual consonant phonemes involved.

### **Alien words**

A child-friendly term for 'pseudo-words'.

### **Alphabetic code**

The relationship between the sounds that can be identified in speech (phonemes) and the letters used to represent them in writing (graphemes). Alternative pronunciation A different way of pronouncing a grapheme. For example, the letters 'ow' can represent the sounds /ow/ as in 'crown' and /oa/ as in 'snow'.

### **Alternative spelling**

A different way of spelling a phoneme. For example, the sound /w/ can be represented in writing by 'w' as in 'wave' and 'wh' as in 'what'.

### **Blend**

To combine individual phonemes into a whole word, working all the way through from left to right. Once the GPCs involved have been learned, blending is the key process involved in reading words effectively. It is a skill that needs extensive practice. Practice in oral blending is very helpful, both before and during the process of learning to read. It is important to understand that blending sounds into a word is not simply a matter of saying them more quickly, nor of mixing them together like paint. Phonemes need to be joined into one continuous stream of sound to make a spoken word. Extensive practice, following teacher modelling, is the key.

## **Catchphrase**

A type of mnemonic in the form of a memorable (often funny) phrase. Catchphrases are generally used in this programme to help children remember some of the later GPCs learned, where a picture alone might not give enough of a 'hook'.

## **Chunk it up**

To break up a longer word and read it one part (chunk) at a time, to avoid being overwhelmed and to ease the process of blending.

## **Compound word**

A word made by joining two individual words together, for example, 'houseboat' is 'house' + 'boat'.

## **Digraph**

A grapheme using two letters to represent one phoneme. With children, we frequently reinforce it with the mantra 'two letters, one sound'. At the appropriate stage, it is useful for children to learn to use the term and to understand what it means.

## **Fluency**

The ability to read accurately with speed and expression. Fluent readers read words automatically without needing to decode. It is at this point that we see them able to focus on comprehension and make sense of what is being read.

## **Formation phrase**

A memorable phrase used to support the children in forming the letter correctly using directional vocabulary, such as 'down', 'up', 'across' and 'over'.



**Under the snake's chin, slide down and round its tail.**

## **GPC**

This stands for grapheme–phoneme correspondence, the sound–letter relationship between each element of the alphabetic code. Written English is quite complex and does not have one-to-one grapheme–phoneme correspondence. The same phoneme can be represented by different graphemes in different words, and the same grapheme can represent different phonemes in different words. To ensure learning is systematic, and to avoid cognitive overload, this programme generally teaches one fairly common grapheme representation of each phoneme first. Alternative spellings of the same phoneme, and alternative pronunciation of the same grapheme are usually taught later, mostly in Phase 5.

## **Grapheme**

A letter or group of letters used to represent a particular phoneme when writing. With children, we sometimes call this ‘a sound written down’, although, as with ‘phoneme’, it is helpful for children to learn to use the correct term from the beginning. The way graphemes are used to represent phonemes in our written language is known as the ‘alphabetic code’.

## **Group reading practice**

A group reading session where the children read alongside an adult from books containing known GPCs and tricky words, and have the opportunity to apply and practise their knowledge. The children should be able to access these books with 90% accuracy. (Also known as ‘teaching reading with books’.)

## **Grow the code**

To systematically and incrementally teach additional GPCs so that the range of words children can read continually extends.

## **Homograph**

Homographs are words that have the same spelling but different meanings, for example, ‘pen’ (writing implement) and ‘pen’ (animal enclosure).

## **Homophone**

Homophones are words that have the same pronunciation but different spellings or meanings, for example, ‘prey’ and ‘pray’.

## **Mnemonic**

Any simple device used to assist memory. In this programme, it is a combination of an engaging picture with a letter and is used as a ‘hook’ to help children remember a particular GPC when they first learn it.

## **Multi-syllable word**

A word with more than one syllable. Syllables are easy to recognise when words are spoken, but hard to distinguish in printed words until you know how to say them. The best way for children to learn to recognise syllables is to count (or clap) them when reciting known rhymes, songs, and so on.

## **Oral blending**

A technique for the early practice of blending. The teacher articulates each phoneme in a word separately, in order, and children respond by saying the whole word aloud. Alternatively, they can be asked to blend the word silently and show they have done so by responding with some action, for example, touching their head, after the teacher has pronounced the separate phonemes in the word 'head'. Such practice is valuable both before and during the early stages of learning to read. (Also known as 'sound-talk'.)

## **Orthographic store**

Children learn to read by first sounding and blending words, and then reading them 'straight off', without overt sounding and blending. Once this has been practised sufficiently, recognition of these words becomes automatic and they are held as an orthographic store in a highly specialised area of the brain that expert neurologist Stanislas Dehaene calls 'the brain's letterbox'. This orthographic store, and the instantaneous recall it enables, is the basis of fluent reading. It is important to remember that the orthographic store is most effectively built up through extensive practice of the sounding–blending–reading process, which establishes the necessary neural pathways, not through trying to memorise countless whole words.

## **Overt blending aloud**

Sound-talking aloud every phoneme in turn before blending them together to form the word.

## **Phoneme**

The smallest unit of sound that can be identified in words. We sometimes simply call this a 'sound', although it is helpful for children to use the term 'phoneme' from the beginning of our programme. (Note: We do not usually notice discrete sounds in words. We deliberately separate them out so that children can learn how our writing–reading system works. Children are first helped to identify the separate sounds in words through oral blending and segmenting, and this is reinforced as they begin to work through our systematic synthetic phonics programme.)

## **Phonetically plausible**

Comprising grapheme–phoneme correspondences that can be found in English words, even if they are not correct spellings of the (or any) actual word, for example, 'thor' instead of 'thaw'.

## **Phonics screening check**

A statutory national assessment in England, conducted internally by schools towards the end of Year 1. Its sole purpose is to determine whether a child can phonically decode single words to an annually predetermined national standard.

## **Phonics**

The method by which we teach children to read by recognising the connections between the sounds of spoken words (phonemes) and the letters that are used to write them down (graphemes).

## **Point and sweep**

A technique for reinforcing the process of sounding and blending involving the teacher pointing to each phoneme in a word, in sequence from left to right, and then sweeping a finger below the word, again from left to right, to indicate the blending. It can be used with the teacher and/or children vocalising each stage, or as a reinforcement to silent sounding and blending as children become more confident.

## **Prefix**

A recognisable unit of language added to the beginning of a word to change its meaning. For example, 'rewrite' is 'write' with 're-' added at the beginning, so 're-' is the prefix. Examples of other common prefixes are 'un-', 'dis-', 'sub-'. Prefixes usually carry a particular meaning, whatever word they are applied to.

## **Prosody**

The rhythmic and intonational aspect of speech that manifests as expressive reading. It comprises timing, phrasing and intonation, and helps to convey meaning and add 'life' to reading.

## **Pseudo-words**

Simple, phonetically plausible 'words' that don't actually occur in the English language; used (as in the Phonics screening check) to assess whether a child can correctly read a word they haven't seen before, using phonic decoding; use should be confined to assessment.

## **Reading**

The process of looking at written symbols and getting meaning from them – making meaning from print. Regional pronunciation In a few instances, regional accents result in a noticeably different pronunciation of a phoneme in some words. It is recommended that teaching is adapted to suit this. For example, whereas in southern areas it will be necessary to teach an /ah/ sound as an alternative pronunciation for the vowel in words like 'bath', in some northern regions, where such words are consistently pronounced

with a short form of the vowel, this will not be necessary. In this programme, the progression chart indicates where this is most likely to apply.

## **Revisit and review**

The first part of the lesson where the core purpose is to activate prior knowledge – bringing prior learning to the forefront of the children’s minds and promoting the transference of working memory into long-term memory.

## **Segment**

To identify each of the individual phonemes in a word, working all the way through from left to right. This is an important first stage of writing (spelling) a word but needs to be practised orally first. Counting the phonemes is often helpful in reinforcing this process.

## **Sound button**

A graphic device to help children recognise the separate phonemes in a printed word. Sound buttons can be used as a support in the early stages of learning. For each word, a dot is placed under any single-letter grapheme and a short horizontal line under the group of letters that form a digraph or trigraph, as shown below.

bird  
· — ·

## **Sound talk**

See ‘Oral blending’, above.

## **Speedy sounds**

The rapid recall of previously taught GPCs.

## **Speedy words**

Fluent reading of previously read words containing known GPCs that are read without blending.

## Split vowel digraph

A digraph representing a vowel sound where its two letters are split by an intervening consonant (for example, 'a\_e' in 'take'). Despite having a consonant in between them, the two letters involved (here 'a' and 'e') still count as one digraph, making one sound. The vowel sound is pronounced at the position of the first of the two letters of the digraph (that is, in the middle of 'take'). At early learning stages, a split digraph is often highlighted with a short line joining the two halves of the digraph above the intervening consonant, as shown below.



## Suffix A

recognisable unit of language added to the end of a word to change its form, such as the tense of a verb. For example, 'playing' is 'play' + '-ing', so '-ing' is the suffix. Examples of other common suffixes are '-er', '-ed', '-est'.

## Tap in/tapping in

The process by which the teacher listens in to individual children as they are engaged in reading their book during group reading practice.

## Teaching reading with books

See 'Group reading practice,' above.

## Tricky words

High-frequency words that, although decodable in themselves, cannot be decoded by children using the GPCs they have been taught up to that point. Not all high-frequency words are 'tricky words'. Many tricky words cease to be tricky in the later stages of our programme, as more GPCs are learned.

## Trigraph

A grapheme using three letters to represent one phoneme. With children, we frequently reinforce it with the mantra 'three letters, one sound'. At the appropriate stage, it is useful for children to learn to use the term and to understand what it means.

## **Vocabulary**

All of the words that a person knows and uses within their language.

## **Vowel sound**

Although we have five vowel letters in English, each one can be pronounced in different ways and there are, therefore, far more than five vowel phonemes (vowel sounds). Each one has a short vowel form, with a fairly staccato pronunciation; these are the vowel sounds heard, for example, in 'hat', 'bed', 'big', 'hot' and 'tub'. Each also has a more elongated pronunciation, the long vowel form heard, for example, in 'play', 'seed', 'high', 'blow' and 'tube'. There are, additionally, more complex vowel forms, for example, those heard in 'bear' and 'farm'. Graphemes for short vowel phonemes are the easiest to learn and are taught first. Most GPCs for long vowels involve digraphs or trigraphs and are taught later, generally in Phase 5.

## **Whisper blending**

An intermediary stage that can help children bridge the gap between sounding and blending aloud and doing the process silently 'in their head'.



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