

Mrs Wordsmith®

# PHONICS DEEP DIVE

An easy-to-understand manual  
based on national curricula

Compliant with the following standards:

US Common Core



UK Department for Education



Department  
for Education

Australian ACARA

The logo for the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). It features the word "acara" in a lowercase, blue, sans-serif font. To the right of "acara", the full name "AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING AUTHORITY" is written in a smaller, blue, uppercase, sans-serif font.

acara AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM,  
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# A DEEP DIVE INTO PHONICS

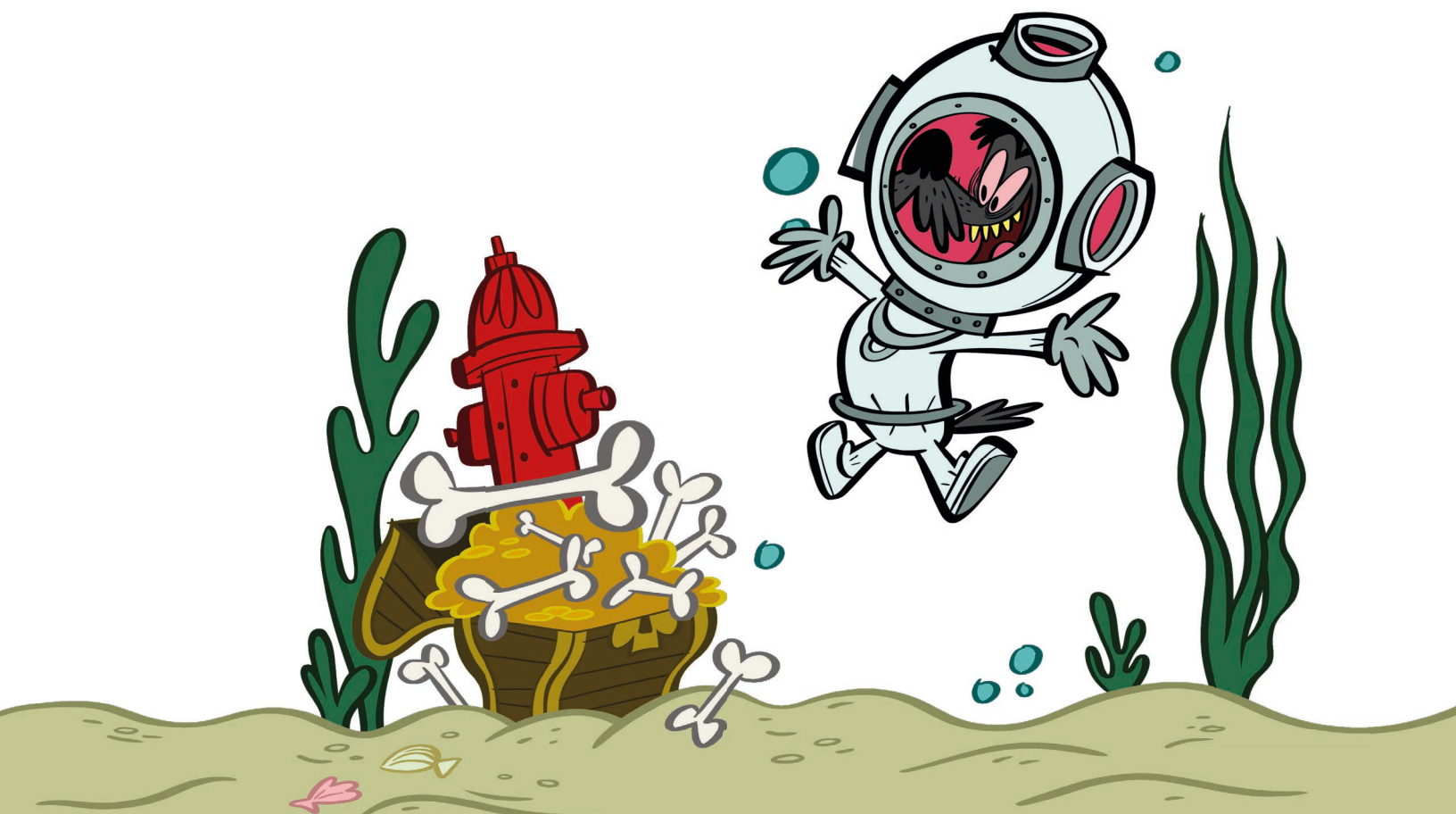
In recent years, science-based approaches to reading instruction have been widely adopted in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia.

In the last decade, the governments of all three countries have published major studies defining science-based reading instruction (National Reading Panel US, Letters and Sounds UK, National Inquiry in the Teaching of Literacy AU).[1], [2], [3]

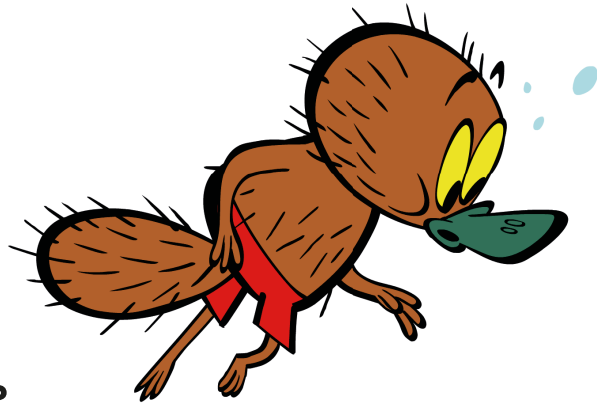
The reports conducted by independent panels of reading experts all reached a common conclusion — that early reading instruction must teach systematic synthetic phonics.

Teaching systematic synthetic phonics has a better impact on children's reading ability than any other type of reading program. Systematic phonics has also been shown to improve spelling, particularly among Kindergarteners and First Graders.

All Mrs Wordsmith phonics programs are based on systematic synthetic phonics and are compliant with US Common Core State Standards, UK National Curriculum, and Australian ACARA.



# SYSTEMATIC SYNTHETIC PHONICS



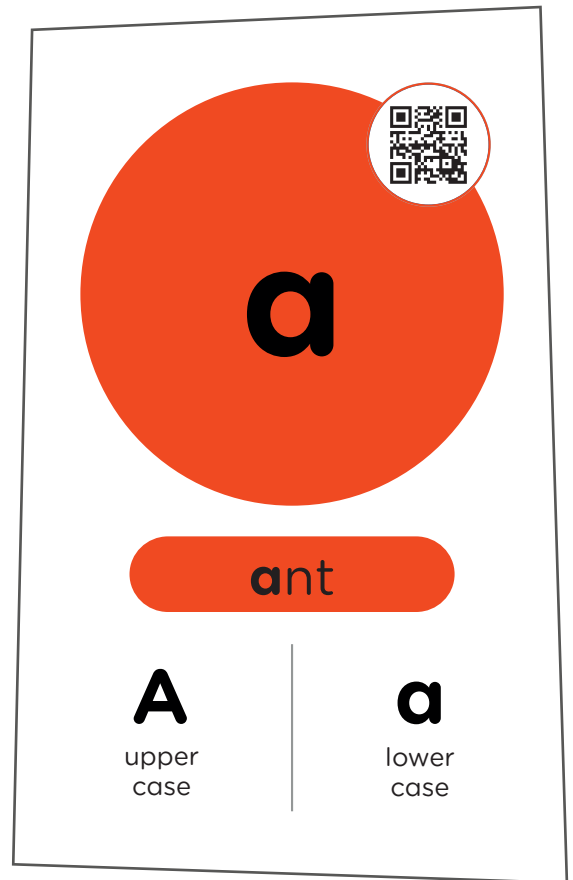
## What is systematic synthetic phonics?

National guidance in the US (Common Core ELA State Standards), the UK (National Curriculum, Letters and Sounds) and Australia (ACARA) promotes an integrated literacy approach using systematic synthetic phonics.

This approach is taught using a systematic and orderly teaching framework, enabling teachers to support children in developing their phonological awareness and phonics knowledge skills. These elements will be described in greater detail below.

A systematic approach to learning is crucial for successful phonics instruction. You may think that a student can learn phonics skills in isolation – there are many apps and worksheets that provide ‘bitty’ or fragmented exercises – but in order to ensure that children develop word-recognition skills and reading fluency, children need a structured (or systematic) and holistic program.

Systematic phonics instruction is most effective when provided within the context of a comprehensive reading program which also addresses phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.



### Foolproof Phonics: Part 2

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/products/phonics-part-2-for-reception-worksheets-and-year-1-worksheets>

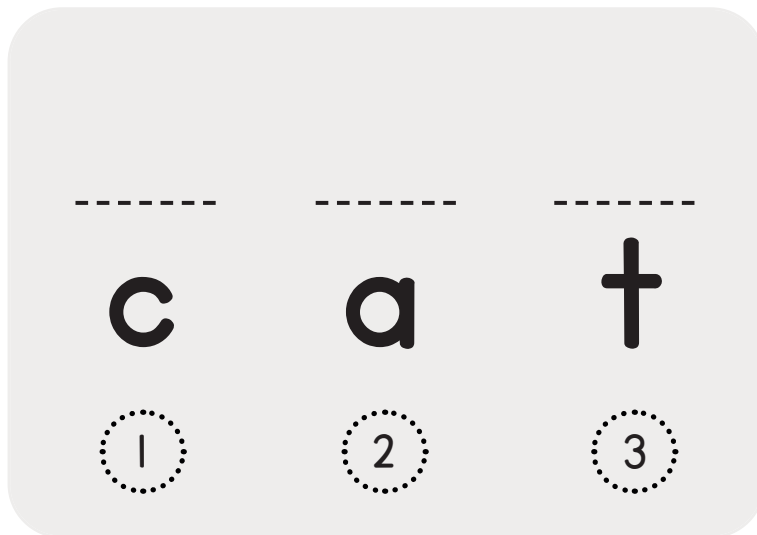
### Foolproof Phonics: Part 1

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/products/phonics-part-1-for-reception-worksheets>

# WHAT IS PHONICS?

Phonics in English is a coding system for language that goes beyond the 26 letters of the alphabet. It teaches children around 44\* phonemes (sounds such as the /f/ in funny) and around 200 graphemes (different letter combinations that correspond to the sounds, such as **f**, **ff**, or **ph**).

The phonemes (sounds) and 200+ graphemes (letters or groups of letters) make up all the words in the English language.



- In phonics instruction, children learn how letters correspond to sounds and sounds correspond to letters in a process called **decoding and encoding**.
- The better children become at **decoding** letter-sound combinations, the better they are at reading, spelling, and writing.

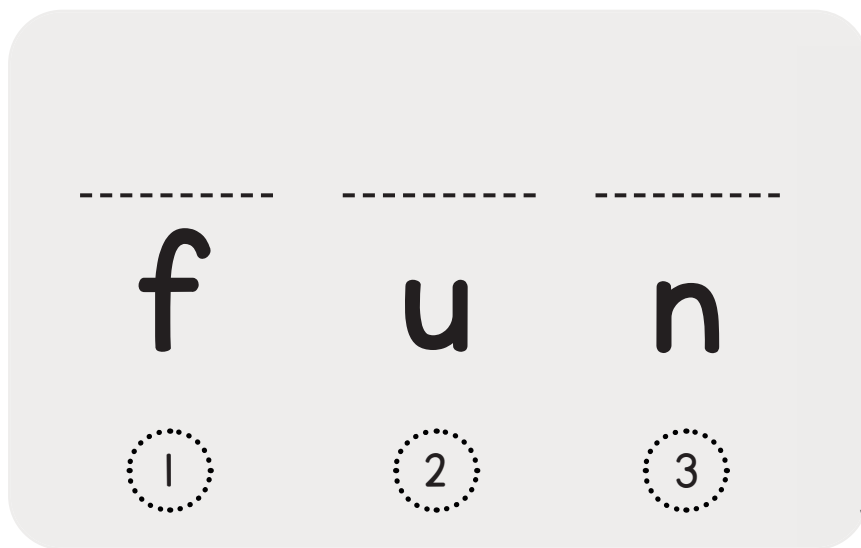
**Decoding** involves translating printed words to sounds. It is literally the process of reading words in text. When a child reads the words “the ball is big”, for example, it is necessary to understand what the letters are, the sounds made by each letter and how they blend together to create words.

**Encoding** is the opposite. It is the process of using letters to represent individual sounds in order to write words.

\* English is often described as having 44 phonemes but depending on analysis there can be more.

Children must learn two important skills in order to **decode** text fluently — **blending** and **segmenting**.

- Just like building fortresses out of Lego blocks, blending and segmenting encourage children to break down words into their individual phonemes (segmenting) and then put the phonemes back together again to form words (blending).
- The more adept children become at manipulating the blocks, the bigger the structures they can construct. The more comfortable they become at segmenting and blending phonemes, the more challenging the words they will learn to read and write.
- Of course, some irregular and high frequency words can't be decoded using phonics. Thus, a small number of such common words must be learned by memory (sight words).



Use **blending** and **segmenting** to decode text



For example, learning which sound (phoneme) the letters **c**, **a** and **t** usually make enables a child to read the word **cat**. Change the first letter from **c** to **h** and the child should be able to read **hat**.

Words like **cat** and **hat** are the first ones that children learn to read because they are short and consist of a vowel connecting two consonants; other similar examples are **sad**, **fun**, **mat**.

Such simple words are referred to as **CVC** (**Consonant-Vowel-Consonant**) words.

**c**at

**h**at

**m**at

Phonics instruction then gradually moves onto **CVC words** in which one sound is made up of two consonants, such as **kick**, **duck**, and **thin**.

The sound /c/  
can be spelled  
**c**, **k** and **ck**



The word **kick** has the grapheme **ck** which is associated with the sound or phoneme /k/ – so there are two letters making one sound.

- Notice that **cat**, **kite**, and **duck** all contain the same /k/ sound, but in each of these cases this sound is represented by different graphemes: **c**, **k**, and **ck**. They make the same sound but have a different spelling.

**cat**

**kick**

**duck**

- The reverse is also possible in that the same letter or combination of letters (graphemes) corresponds to different sounds (phonemes) in different words; the digraph **ow** corresponds to two different sounds in **owl** and **town**.

**owl**

**snow**

**town**

**cow**

In general, in English there is no simple one-to-one correspondence between letters or letter combinations and sounds.

Often the same letters are pronounced differently in different words. But these complexities don't mean that words are spelled and pronounced in an arbitrary way. Learning phonics in a systematic way will help children understand the regularities that do exist and will ensure their success in learning to decode.

Overall, even though the same sound can be represented by different letters or combinations of letters, not all possible representations of a sound are equally common.

**Systematic Phonics** introduces children to letter-sound correspondences, starting with the most common ones and ranging through to the least common.

- For example, the sound /f/ can be written as **f** (*funny*), **ff** (*bluff*), **ph** (*phone*), or **gh** (*laugh*). But **ph** and **gh** are less common than **f** and **ff**.



After CVC words, phonics instruction then moves on to CVCC words and CCVC words.

- CVCC words follow the pattern of consonant-vowel-consonant-consonant.



- CCVC words follow the pattern of consonant-consonant-vowel-consonant.





# IT IS IMPORTANT TO LEARN PHONICS IN THE RIGHT ORDER

Synthetic phonics practice is systematic. Why? Children must become fluent with the letter-sound correspondences in English. A high-quality phonics program starts with the most common sounds in the English language, gradually progressing to less common ones.

Children master **grapheme-phoneme-correspondences** (or **GPCs**) in order to learn how letters and sounds form words.



## Level 1: S-A-T-P-I-N

Consonant and vowel phonemes, CVC words.

letter <b>s</b>	<b>sat</b>
short <b>a</b>	<b>ant</b>
letter <b>t</b>	<b>tap</b>
letter <b>p</b>	<b>pat</b>
short <b>i</b>	<b>sip</b>
letter <b>n</b>	<b>nap</b>



## Level 3: E-U-R-H-B-F-FF-L-LL-SS

Consonant and vowel phonemes, double consonants, CVC, CVCC, and CCVCC words.

short <b>e</b>	<b>net</b>
short <b>u</b>	<b>mud</b>
letter <b>r</b>	<b>rock</b>
letter <b>h</b>	<b>hat</b>
letter <b>b</b>	<b>rub</b>
letter <b>f</b>	<b>fib</b>
double consonant <b>ff</b>	<b>puff</b>
letter <b>l</b>	<b>lift</b>
double consonant <b>ll</b>	<b>smell</b>
double consonant <b>ss</b>	<b>mess</b>



## Level 2: M-D-O-G-C-K-CK

Consonant and vowel phonemes, consonant digraph, CVC and CVCC words.

letter <b>m</b>	<b>map</b>
letter <b>d</b>	<b>sad</b>
short <b>o</b>	<b>pot</b>
hard <b>g</b>	<b>dog</b>
hard <b>c</b>	<b>cat</b>
letter <b>k</b>	<b>kit</b>
consonant digraph <b>ck</b>	<b>kick</b>



## Level 4: J-V-W-X-Y-Z-ZZ-Q-CH-CH-TH-NG

Consonant phonemes, consonant digraphs and double consonants, CVC, CVCC, CCVC, and CCVCC words.

letter <b>j</b>	<b>jump</b>
letter <b>v</b>	<b>van</b>
letter <b>w</b>	<b>wet</b>
letter <b>x</b>	<b>fix</b>
letter <b>y</b>	<b>yell</b>
letter <b>z</b>	<b>zip</b>
double consonant <b>zz</b>	<b>buzz</b>
consonant digraph <b>qu</b>	<b>quit</b>
consonant digraph <b>ch</b>	<b>chat</b>
consonant digraph <b>sh</b>	<b>flush</b>
consonant digraph <b>th</b>	<b>thick</b>
consonant digraph <b>ng</b>	<b>swing</b>

**Level 5: AI-EE-IGH-OA-OO-OO-AR-OR-UR-OW-OI-EAR-AIR-URE-ER**



Vowel digraphs and trigraphs, CVCC, CVVC, CVVCC, CCVCC, and CVCCC words (and more!).

vowel digraph <b>ai</b>	paint
vowel digraph <b>ee</b>	seek
vowel digraph <b>igh</b>	fight
vowel digraph <b>oa</b>	soak
vowel digraph <b>oo</b> (long)	shampoo
vowel digraph <b>oo</b> (short)	book
vowel digraph <b>ar</b>	alarm
vowel digraph <b>or</b>	sport
vowel digraph <b>ur</b>	surf
vowel digraph <b>ow</b>	howl
vowel digraph <b>oi</b>	coin
vowel-consonant trigraph <b>ear</b>	fear
vowel-consonant trigraph <b>air</b>	hair
vowel-consonant trigraph <b>ure</b>	cure
vowel digraph <b>er</b>	mermaid



**Level 7: WH-PH-EW-EY-OE-OW-AU- A-E - E-E - O-E - U-E**

Consonant digraphs, vowel digraphs, and split digraphs.

consonant digraph <b>wh</b>	wheel
consonant digraph <b>ph</b>	photo
vowel digraph <b>ew</b>	chew
vowel digraph <b>ey</b>	key
vowel digraph <b>oe</b>	toe
vowel digraph <b>ow</b>	throw
vowel digraph <b>au</b>	launch
split digraph <b>a-e</b>	shake
split digraph <b>e-e</b>	athlete
split digraph <b>i-e</b>	bite
split digraph <b>o-e</b>	doze
split digraph <b>u-e</b>	cube



**Level 6: AY-OU-IE-EA-OY IR-UE-AW**

Vowel digraphs, r-controlled vowels.

vowel digraph <b>ay</b>	spray
vowel digraph <b>ou</b>	loud
vowel digraph <b>ie</b>	pie
vowel digraph <b>ea</b>	dream
vowel digraph <b>oy</b>	toy
r-controlled vowel <b>ir</b>	first
vowel digraph <b>ue</b>	glue
vowel digraph <b>aw</b>	yawn



**Level 8: Y-Y-Y-I-O-C-G-U-IE-EA**

“Y” as a vowel (middle “y” and end “y”), long vowels, vowel digraphs, “soft” consonants.

<b>y</b> (end y)	dirty
<b>y</b> (end y)	fly
<b>y</b> (middle y)	gym
long <b>i</b>	kind
long <b>o</b>	over
soft <b>c</b>	slice
soft <b>g</b>	cage
long <b>u</b>	pull
vowel digraph <b>ie</b>	cookie
vowel digraph <b>ea</b>	sweat



### Level 9: NK-TCH-DGE-TH-LE-OU-UI-EIGH

Consonant digraphs, vowel digraphs,  
and final stable syllable.

consonant digraph **nk**

**sink**

consonant trigraph **tch**

**sketch**

consonant trigraph **dge**

**fridge**

consonant digraph **th**

**feather**

consonant + **le**

**gargle**

vowel digraph **ou**

**soup**

vowel digraph **ui**

**fruit**

vowel team **eigh** (long a)

**weights**



### Level 10: OR-EAR-ARE-OOR-ORE-GN-KN-MB-WR-RH

R-controlled vowels and consonant digraphs.

r-controlled vowel **or**

**workout**

r-controlled vowel **ear**

**pearl**

r-controlled vowel **are**

**care**

r-controlled vowel **oor**

**door**

r-controlled vowel **ore**

**snore**

consonant digraph **gn**

**gnaw**

consonant digraph **kn**

**knight**

consonant digraph **mb**

**comb**

consonant digraph **wr**

**wring**

consonant digraph **rh**

**rhombus**

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#### GPC Chart

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/blogs/educational-resources/44-phonemes-chart>

# WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LEARNING THE ALPHABET AND LEARNING PHONICS?

For example; the **names** of the letters **a** and **o** are different to the letter **sounds** in words like:



The alphabet teaches children the names of letters but not their sounds (phonemes).

Often, the name of the letter is not the same as the sound (phoneme) that it makes in most words. For example, the name of the letter **a** does not sound like the short /a/ phoneme in **cat**.

cat

do

bath

stop

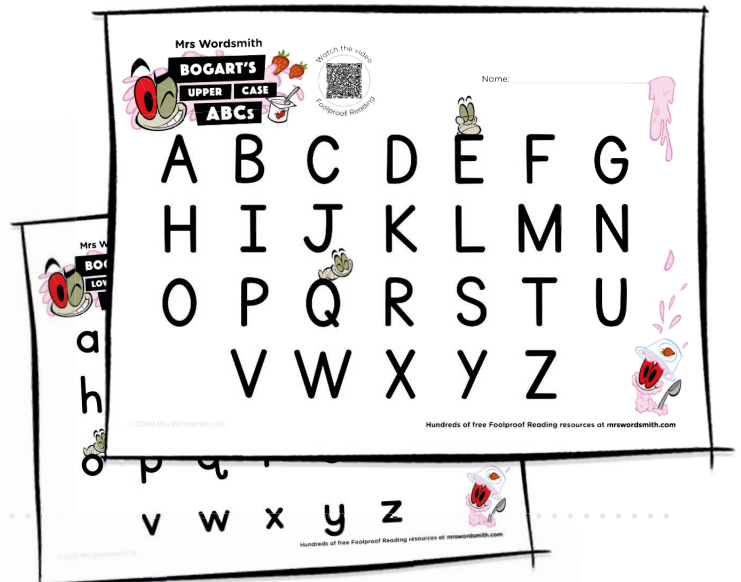
hat

mop

Learning the alphabet as well as the difference between upper and lower case letters is important.

For most children, learning the alphabet is a fun experience, especially when letters are introduced in a relaxed and playful way.

But learning the alphabet alone is not enough to be able to read. For this, children need phonics instruction.



## Free Resource - Alphabet Order

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/blogs/educational-resources/alphabet-ordering>

# WHY DON'T CHILDREN JUST LEARN WHOLE WORDS?

The whole word approach is inefficient. Children cannot store tens of thousands of words in their memory.

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Eye movement research has shown that, when reading, both children and adults rapidly read through the letters of words, looking at every single letter for even milliseconds. Importantly, the whole word method does not give children the tools to sound out new words on their own.

**170,000+**  
words in the English language

**30,000**  
words in an adult's vocabulary



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There are over 170,000 words in use in the English language. The average adult has a vocabulary of about 30,000 words. Our brains are programmed to hold between 30,000-40,000 words in memory.

All other words have to be rapidly decoded in order for us to access them. If we had to learn to read every word by remembering how it looks on the page, even adults wouldn't be able to read! It would be like learning the sum of every combination of numbers to 1 million by heart, instead of learning how addition works.

By contrast, learning how to read through phonics is extremely efficient and effective. There are around **44 phonemes** and **200 graphemes** which make up words.

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While it may sound like a lot, it is easier to learn the phonemes (sounds) and graphemes (letters or letter groups) and the correspondences between them than it is to learn 170,000 unique words.

By mastering the phoneme-grapheme correspondences, phonics instruction builds on itself.

A child who can read **pet** and **rat** can also read words like **trap** and **rapt** even if they do not know the meaning of the words.

Efficient decoding frees up a child's brain to focus on learning the meaning of unfamiliar words or comprehending the text they are reading.

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Ultimately, children who learn to read using phonics are better prepared to read and spell unfamiliar or tricky words.

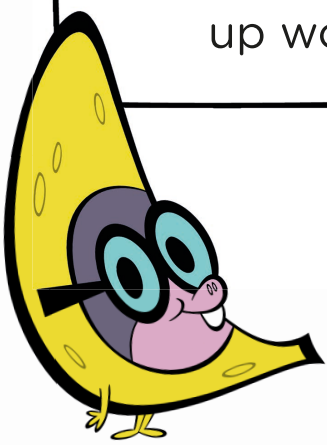
pet

rat

trap

rapt

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There are around 44 phonemes and 200 graphemes which make up words.



# WHAT ARE HIGH-FREQUENCY WORDS?

(Some people call them *sight words*).

As we have seen, the ability to decode words is crucial to reading, but there are still some words that are worth learning whole because of how common they are and because of their occasionally tricky spelling.

Some high-frequency words are tricky in that they cannot be “sounded out” in the usual way using phoneme-grapheme correspondences.

In these cases, what you see is not what you hear — so knowledge of letter-to-sound correspondences (phonics) will not be enough for you to decode the word.

For example, in **put**, **u** doesn't make the more common sound that it makes in **cut** and **mud**, which children will learn to associate with the letter **u** first.

put

she

you



## Free Resource - Sight Words: Kindergarten

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/blogs/educational-resources/sight-words-activities-kindergarten>

## Free Resource - Sight Words: Grade 1

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/blogs/educational-resources/sight-words-activities-1st-grade>

Literacy experts recommend that children learn to identify automatically a small number of high-frequency words, especially those with tricky spelling.

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Children should learn these words to automaticity, and they should be able to discuss which letters are “not doing what they should be doing”. In other words, children should still employ their knowledge of phoneme-grapheme correspondences even when they are learning to identify common tricky words.

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But the number of high-frequency words a child learns by sight should not exceed 200-300, as decoding using phoneme-grapheme correspondences should always be the primary tool children employ for reading.

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Words are divided into three categories: **regular**, **temporarily irregular**, and **permanently irregular**.

In **regular words**, such as *cup* or *napkin*, all the letters make their most basic and common sound and can be sounded out easily.

cup                  napkin

**Temporarily irregular** words are words that seem irregular until children have been taught the relevant letter-sound correspondences; for example *push* may seem irregular at first glance, but as soon as a child learns that **u** can also make a short ‘oo’ sound, it becomes regular.

push

A word that is **permanently irregular**, such as *laugh*, will never have a one-to-one correspondence between the letters and sounds, because the sound that ‘au’ makes in this case is not a regular one. Such words are therefore worth learning to identify automatically.

laugh



# WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIGH-FREQUENCY WORDS AND TRICKY WORDS?

High-frequency words are words that appear commonly in children's books.

These are sometimes tricky and sometimes decodable, but are still worth learning to identify automatically because of how common they are.

Learning to automatically identify a few high-frequency words will leave the brain free to decode less frequent words and focus on the comprehension of the text.

Examples of high-frequency words include

are

she

was

put

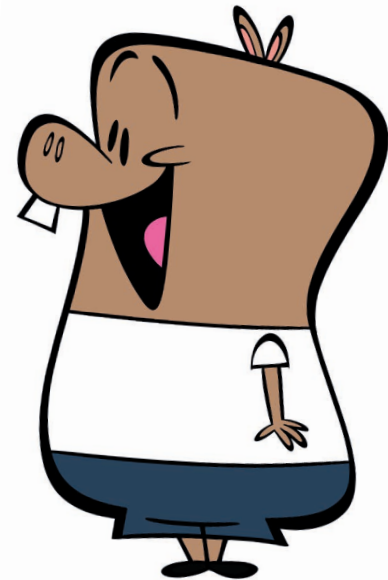
words such as **are** and **she**. As mentioned, many high-frequency words are tricky in that their spelling is irregular.

Examples of such tricky high-frequency words are **put** and **was**; in **put**, the **u** doesn't make its usual short sound (as in **fun**) and in **was** the **s** makes a /z/ sound which children learn about later.

Most popular wordlists of so-called 'sight words' consist of both high-frequency decodable words and high-frequency tricky words.

The two most common high-frequency word lists teachers use are the **Dolch list** and the **Fry list**.

Both the Dolch and Fry word lists are based on reviews of the most frequently occurring words in the English language. They include words that are both irregular and words that can be sounded out.



## Free Resource - Dolch List: Kindergarten

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/blogs/educational-resources/dolch-sight-words-list-kindergarten>

## Free Resource - Fry List

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/blogs/educational-resources/fry-sight-words-list>

## Free Resource - Dolch List: Grade 1

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/blogs/educational-resources/dolch-sight-words-list-1st-grade>

his

had

him

as

then

could

them

ask

an

from

any

how

### The Dolch list contains 315 high-frequency words.

Dolch sight words are based on high-frequency words that students in Kindergarten, First Grade, and Second Grade encounter in children's books (grades equivalent to Reception, Year 1, and Year 2 in the UK).

this

an

would

have

each

make

from

which

like

or

she

him

one

do

into

had

how

time

by

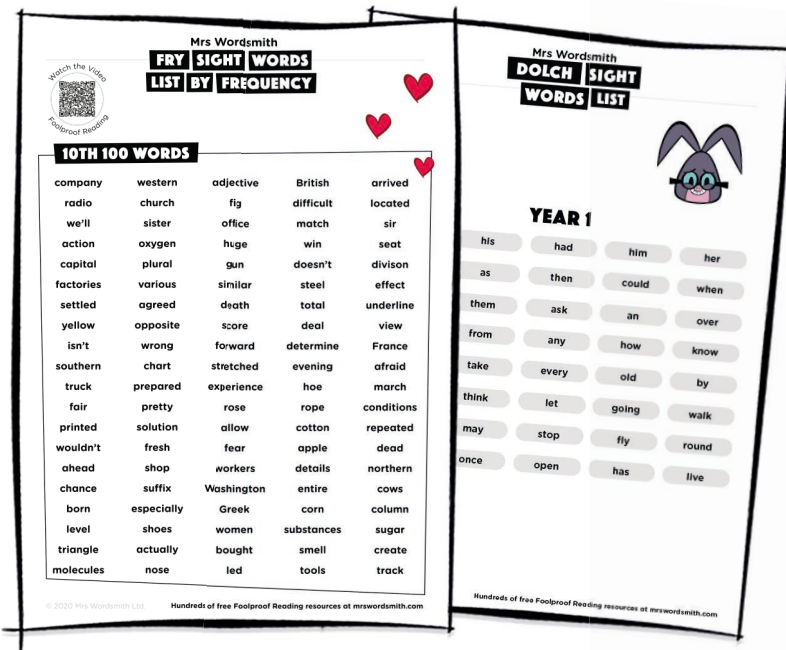
their

has

### The Fry list contains 1,000 high-frequency words ranked by order of frequency.

Dr. Edward Fry developed the larger Fry list in the 1950s and updated it in 1980. This list is based on the most common words to appear in reading materials used in Grades 3-9.

However, given the emphasis given on decoding words using phonics, contemporary literacy experts advise that not too many words are learned by sight.



A child only needs to learn the 200-300 high-frequency ones that would help them speed up their reading but the rest they should be able to sound out.

Generally, children are expected to master **around 50 high-frequency words** by the end of Kindergarten (US) / Reception (UK) and **100** by the end of First Grade (US) / Year 1 (UK).

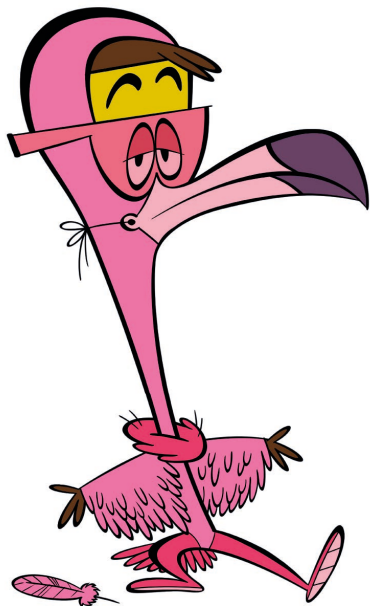
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Both Dolch and Fry words can be taught in any order (within their respective age or level categories). The Dolch list comprises words that are suitable for Kindergarten and First Grade, while only the first 100 Fry words are suitable for Kindergarten and First Grade.

For younger students, instruction generally starts with short words that appear frequently in the texts they are reading, such as **a, the, an, can, is, of, you, he, and I.**

These **high-frequency** words are some of the first words that children learn to identify automatically.

a the an can I  
is of you he



The **Dolch** list contains **315** high-frequency words, and the **Fry** list contains **1,000** high-frequency words.

# LEARNING BLENDS

A consonant blend is a group of two or three consonants that appear together in a word. Blends can be found at the beginning or the end of a word.

To read these words, children are required to blend two or three letters together, like the blend of **s** and **n** in **snack**, or the blend of **s**, **p**, and **l** in **splash**.



Many common words include blends, so it's important for children to learn how to master them. **Blends** are not to be confused with **digraphs** and **trigraphs**, where a group of two or three letters respectively corresponds to a single sound.

Two-consonant blends	Two-consonant blends within words
bl	blend, bland, blue, black, blanket, bleach, blast, blatant, blame
cl	click, clam, clean, class, clap, clay, close, clash, clothes, climb, cling
fl	flat, flower, flame, flimsy, flute, fling, float, fluffy, flit
gl	glad, glasses, glass, glaze, glee, glitter, globe, glove, glue
pl	place, plan, play, plant, please, plenty, plus, plate, plum, plumber
sl	slick, slack, sleeve, sleek, sled, slot, slice, slim, slime, slow, sleep
br	brain, brown, bright, brim, broke, broom
cr	crab, crumb, crib, cry, crank, crow, crew, create, credit, creature
dr	draw, dream, drain, dress, drone, drink, drag, dragon, drop, drawer, dry
fr	from, freezer, free, freedom, frozen, frighten, friend, fruit
gr	grade, great, grocery, grape, grass, grandparent, grapefruit, grease
pr	prove, pretzel, prevent, private, press, price, pride, promise

tr	truck, try, trust, tray, tree, trail, train, track, traffic, trade, travel, treat
sc	school, scribble, scale, score, scrap, scratch, schedule
sk	skunk, skate, skeleton, skill, skin, sketch, sky, ask, mask
sm	small, smart, smear, smash, smell, smitten, smog, schism
sn	snack, snail, snare, sneak, snore, snake, snob, snow, sneeze, snap
sp	space, spot, splash, speak, spend, splurge, sport, special, wasp, clasp
st	stair, step, stop, stare, store, stage, story, steak, stand, star, list, last
sw	sweet, swan, swallow, sweat, swing, swim, swamp, sweater, swollen
tw	twinkle, tweet, tweezers, twelve, twice, twenty, twirl, twist, twine

Three-consonant blends	Three-consonant blends within words
scr	scrape, scrap, scream, screech
spl	splash, spleen, splendid, splint
spr	sprain, spray, sprint
str	strain, strap, strobe, streak

# BLENDS AND DIGRAPHS

What is the difference between a blend and a digraph?

A **digraph** contains two consonants and only makes one sound: the digraph **sh** makes the sound /sh/. Other common consonant digraphs are **sh, ch, wh, th, ck**.

A **blend** contains two or three consonants that each make their own sound: in the word **sleep**, the letters **s** and **l** form **sl**. Other common blends are **st, fl, sk, gr** and **sw**.

**tr**    **ee**

The word **tree** contains a **two-consonant blend** of **t** and **r**. Each letter makes its own sound and these sounds are blended together into **tree**.

**spl**    **ash**

The word **splash** contains a **three-consonant blend** of **s, p,** and **l**. Each letter makes its own sound and these sounds are blended together into **spl**, whereas the **sh** in **ash** is a digraph because **s** and **h** make a single sound.

**ch**    **op**

But in **chop**, the **digraph ch** corresponds to a single sound, so **ch** is not a blend.

The five common consonant digraphs:

**sh**

**ch**

**wh**

**th**

**ck**

# PHONICS AT SCHOOL

## When do children learn phonics at school?

Phonics instruction is recommended for beginner readers. While different schools take varying approaches to teaching phonics, in the US phonics instruction follows a strict sequence of phases during Pre-K, Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2.

Below is a synopsis of the six phases in which children learn phonics in school.

## PHASE 1

### Phase One: Listening, Vocabulary, and Speaking Skills

Phonics instruction traditionally begins in PreK (US) / Nursery (UK) or the start of Kindergarten (US) / Reception (UK).

Phase One focuses on developing children's listening, vocabulary, and speaking skills. This phase also focuses on developing phonemic awareness, the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. Phonemic awareness is the foundation for later phonics work.

In Phase One, children learn about environmental and instrumental sounds; body percussion (snapping, clapping, stomping); rhythm and rhyme; alliteration; and oral blending and segmenting.

The goal of Phase One is to help children identify and understand different sounds.

During this phase, children also begin oral segmenting and blending, a technique that allows them to break down or 'decode' words.

It is important that children finish Phase One with strong phonemic awareness, as this skill is crucial to later phonics success.



# PHASE 2

## Phase Two: Phonics

In Phase Two (typically in Kindergarten/Reception), children start to learn the sounds (phonemes) that letters (graphemes) make. There are around 44 sounds (phonemes).

Most teachers begin with a sequence of the most commonly used phonemes:

/s/

/a/

/t/

/p/

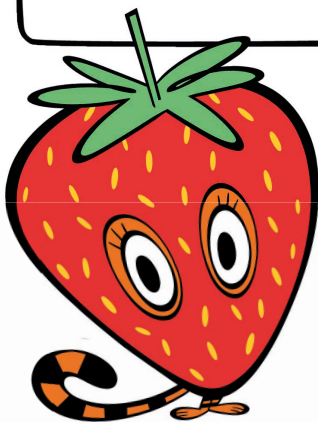
/i/

/n/

Some of these sounds correspond to more than one letter combination (graphemes).

In Phase Two, children focus on learning the 19 most common phonemes that correspond to single letter graphemes, generally taught in smaller groups of 6.

It generally takes children about **6-8 weeks** to master the first 19 phonemes-graphemes.



At the end of Phase Two, children can read and spell several short vowel-consonant (VC) words like it and consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words like pin.

They also learn some high-frequency words, such as: **a, the, an, can, is, of, you, and he.**

Different strategies for teaching sight words are discussed later in this paper.

# PHASE 3

## Phase Three: More Phonics

In Phase Three (typically the end of Kindergarten/Reception), children learn the remaining 25 phonemes.

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These phonemes are more difficult and/or less frequently used. Some of these 25 phonemes correspond to digraphs, meaning they are represented by graphemes with two letters that make one sound (e.g. /sh/ and /ee/). Learning these patterns helps children read and spell more words.

During this phase, children master the association between more phonemes and new graphemes, which helps them sound out new words. Learning more sight words also improves reading, helping build fluency and comprehension.

---

It takes most children about three to six months to master the material in Phase Three. By the end of this phase, children know most of the phonemes and the most common graphemes that correspond to them.

They are also able to say the sounds of the graphemes in Phase Two and Three. They blend and read CVC words made from these graphemes and can comfortably read some sight words.

It takes most children about **3-6 months** to master the material in Phase Three.





# PHASE 4

## Phase Four: Blending and Segmenting

In Phase Four (typically at the end of Kindergarten into First Grade/Reception into Year 1), children begin blending sounds to create new words.

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They can confidently read and write the letters of the alphabet. They may also rely less on sounding out words they have seen frequently like **sat** or **pot**, as they begin to learn and read some words automatically.

Children learn to read and spell more challenging CVCC words, as well as new high frequency sight words.

As they progress, children also begin to write short sentences. The goal of this stage is consolidation and reinforcement — ensuring children are confident in beginning phonics so they can succeed in Phases Five and Six.

This phase usually takes four to six weeks but can last for several more weeks, depending on the child. Most children will complete it at some time around the end of Kindergarten or Reception, but this may vary.



This phase usually takes **4-6 weeks** but can last for several more weeks, depending on the child.

# PHASE 5

## Phase Five: GPC Grapheme Phoneme Correspondence

In Phase Five (typically in First Grade or Year 1), children learn the range of different graphemes (spellings) used to represent key phonemes (sounds). E.g. long vowel spellings and alternative graphemes for some consonant sounds.

They also learn trigraphs like **tch**.

Spelling also becomes integrated into instruction where children learn rules for various spelling patterns, such as magic **e**, the **e** at the end of a word that makes the sound of the previous vowel longer, as in **cake, kite, bone**.

Most children master these in reading first, and it can take longer to apply them correctly in spelling. Children should become quicker at blending and start to do it silently

Phase Five generally takes children the whole of First Grade or Year 1. By the end of the school year, children should be able to:

- Say the sound for all graphemes
- 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 and spell 100 high frequency words

and automatically. They will start to choose the correct graphemes when they spell, and will learn more complex sight words, including **people, water,** and **friend**.

**People, water,**  
and **friend** are  
more complex  
sight words



In the UK, by the end of Year One all children are given a **Phonics Screening Check** to ensure they have mastered the appropriate knowledge.

It should be noted that some children will not master all of these skills and may need an additional year of practice in order to fully master the complete phonics sequence. In the US, phonics is assessed by most districts, but the screening varies by state.

# PHASE 6

## Phase Six: Reading Fluency, Comprehension, and Spelling

Phase Six (typically in Second Grade or Year 2) is the final phase of formal phonics instruction. At this point teachers and parents focus on supporting children as they use their phonics knowledge to become fluent readers and accurate spellers.

This is the practice stage in which they apply their skills to new content. In Phase Six, children can read hundreds of words using the strategies they have learned in the previous six phases:

- Reading with automaticity
- Decoding quickly and silently
- Decoding aloud (e.g. sounding words out)

Children can also spell or encode most of the words they have learned with speed and accuracy. Proficiency with encoding (writing) is slower than decoding (reading). But with repetition and instruction, and as their reading improves, children's spelling should also improve.

In Phase Six children also learn about topics and resources more widely related to reading and spelling. They learn spelling rules and introductory grammar concepts like tenses and punctuation.

They also learn how to work more independently, how to proofread their writing, and how to use resources like dictionaries. From this point on, children will learn more sight words as well as reading and spelling more challenging words. They will also focus on building reading comprehension.

Phase Six takes place over the course of Second Grade or Year 2. While systematic synthetic phonics instruction is usually complete by the end of Second Grade or Year 2, children continue to use this knowledge in schooling.



# PHASES OF PHONICS INTRODUCTION

## PHASE ONE

Pre-K/Nursery

- Build phonemic awareness (awareness of sounds)
- Learn and distinguish different kinds of sounds (e.g. environmental, instrumental)
- Develop listening, vocabulary, and speaking skills
- Learn oral segmenting and blending of CVC words such as **sat**, **cat**, **bed** and **hen**, and CVC phrases such as “rub a dub dub”

## PHASE TWO

Kindergarten/Reception

- Learn the first 19 phonemes (single letter, most common)
- Read and spell some short VC and CVC words
- Begin learning high frequency sight words from Dolch and/or Fry lists (e.g. a, the, an, can, is, of, you, he, and I)

## PHASE THREE

Kindergarten/Reception

- Learn the remaining 25 phonemes
- Introduce digraphs and more complex graphemes
- Read and spell CVC words (e.g. cup, log)
- Continue learning grade-appropriate sight words
- Gain confidence with all phonemes

## PHASE FOUR

Kindergarten/Reception

- Read and spell CVCC words (e.g. back)
- Read and spell high frequency words
- Read and write sentences
- Confidently read and write alphabet letters
- Learn more sight words, including **have**, **like**, **some**, **little**

## PHASE FIVE

Grade 1 / Year 1

- Master Fry 100/Dolch Pre-K, K, Grade 1
- Learn alternative spellings for known phonemes
- Learn alternative pronunciations for known graphemes
- Gain comfort with reading unfamiliar words

## PHASE SIX

Grade 2 / Year 2

- Use phonics to read and spell with confidence
- Increased writing production

# READING ASSESSMENT

## How is my child assessed at school in reading?

### In the **US**:

In the US, phonics is assessed by most districts, but the screening varies by state. As children progress through phonics instruction, they move onto reading graded books and eventually chapter books of their own choice.

At that stage, children will usually read books labelled according to the **Fountas and Pinnell** (2016) system of books. These levelled readers are classified by characteristics and labelled from A-Z. (Note: many of these books are NOT phonetically regular, often leading to children having difficulty reading them).<sup>1</sup>

### In the **UK**:

In the UK, at the end of Year 1, students take a Phonics Screening Test at school to test their ability to read phonetically. This is a straightforward test (see an example [here](#)).

In 2018, 82% of students met the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 and 92% met the standard at the end of Year 2.

In other words, most children without specific additional needs should be able to pass this test with proper phonics instruction.

As children progress through phonics instruction, they move onto reading graded books and eventually chapter books of their own choice. In the UK, reading graded books are divided into levels called “Book Bands”. These book bands are assigned a ‘reading age’.



[1] For a review on levelled readers see: <https://shanahanonliteracy.com/blog/rejecting-instructional-leveltheory>

### Phonics Screening Test Example

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/299972/phonics\\_screening\\_check\\_sample\\_materials\\_-\\_children\\_s\\_materials.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/299972/phonics_screening_check_sample_materials_-_children_s_materials.pdf)

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The more fluent your child is in reading aloud phonetically, the faster they will progress to higher-level reading books. If your child struggles to “decode” words (using phonics), they will not be able to progress as quickly to more challenging book levels. Progress in reading is ultimately crucial to your child’s success across multiple subjects that require reading and writing comprehension and fluency.

Once a child decodes with fluency, teachers begin to focus more on the meaning of texts. They will increasingly ask questions about the text to assess vocabulary knowledge, comprehension, and enjoyment of the book.

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When children cannot read fluently (i.e. decode phonetically), they will often struggle with developing vocabulary, comprehending text, and learning to enjoy reading. Struggles with reading often lead to struggles in other areas of schooling.

You can support your child with his or her reading development with our **Foolproof Reading app**.

If you prefer hands-on work with your child, try our fun and easy-to-use **Foolproof Phonics** and **Sight Words Worksheets**.

We recommend that you also read aloud to your child as much as possible. Here is a link to our blog on **Making the Most of Reading Time** and a link to our blog on the **Benefits of Shared Reading according to Neuroscience**.

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#### **Foolproof Reading App**

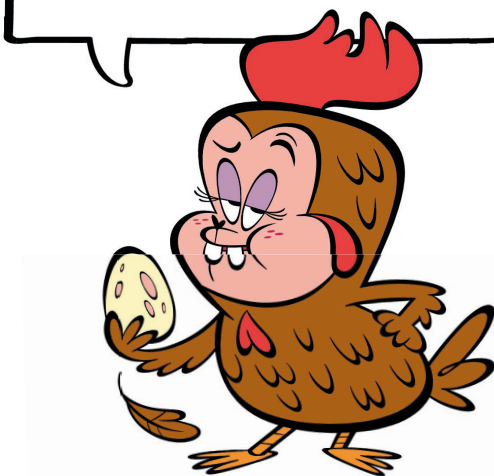
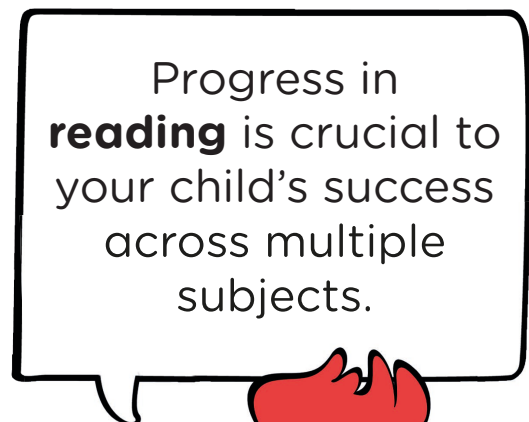
<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/pages/foolproof-reading>

#### **Foolproof Sight Words Printables**

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/products/mrs-wordsmith-s-foolproof-sight-words-for-reception-and-year-1-worksheets>

#### **Blog: Benefits of Shared Reading According to Neuroscience**

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/blogs/blog/benefits-of-shared-reading-according-to-neuroscience>



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#### **Foolproof Phonics Part 1**

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/products/phonics-part-1-for-reception-worksheets>

#### **Foolproof Phonics Part 2**

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/products/phonics-part-2-for-reception-worksheets-and-year-1-worksheets>

#### **Blog: Making the Most of Reading Time**

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/blogs/blog/make-the-most-of-reading-time>

# PHONICS GLOSSARY

## What are **decoding** and **encoding**?

Decoding involves translating printed words to sounds. It is literally the process of reading words in text. When a child reads the words “the ball is big”, for example, they need to understand what the letters are, what sound each letter makes, and how the letters blend together to create words.

Encoding is the opposite. It is the process of using individual sounds and letters to build and write words. Both processes require an understanding of what these individual sounds are.

## What is **phonological awareness**?

Phonological awareness is the awareness of the sounds in spoken words, as well as the ability to manipulate those sounds.

Phonological awareness describes the set of skills involved in identifying and using different parts of oral language (e.g. onset-rime, syllables, words).

This skill set allows us to understand, recall, and employ sounds at the sentence, word, syllable, and phoneme level.

Children with strong phonological awareness can differentiate the sound structures of speech and use those structures. Phonological awareness is an umbrella term that encompasses both basic levels of awareness of speech

sounds, such as rhyming, alliteration, the number of words in a sentence, and the syllables within words, as well as more advanced levels of awareness such as onset-rime awareness and full phonemic awareness.

Phonological awareness develops over time, but it is especially important at the earliest stages of reading development. Explicit teaching of phonological awareness is part of systematic synthetic phonics instruction.

This skill set is crucial for reading and spelling success, because these skills are central to learning to decode and encode printed words.

## What is **phonemic awareness**?

Phonemic awareness refers to the specific ability to focus on and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.

Phonemic awareness is the most advanced level of phonological awareness. It refers to a child’s awareness of the individual phonemes — the smallest units of sound — in spoken words, as well as the ability to manipulate those sounds.

Phonics instruction generally focuses on teaching children letter-sound correspondences.

Since letters are not something that our brain can process automatically, phonics has to start by helping children identify sounds (called phonemes) in spoken language first. This is called **phonemic awareness**.

## What are **blending** and **segmenting**?

After establishing phonemic awareness, phonics programs progress to a systematic introduction of the

correspondences between sounds (phonemes) in oral language and letters (graphemes) in written language.

The process of segmenting involves breaking words down into individual sounds (c-a-t) and the process of blending involves putting phonemes together to make up words (c-a-t is blended to form **cat**).

The word **clock** can be **segmented** into /k/, /l/, /o/, /k/.

**c l o c k**

The word **bluff** can be sounded out as /b/, /l/, /u/, /f/ and then blended into **bluff**

**b l u f f**

## What are **blends**?

Blends are clusters of two or three consonants which appear together in a word.

Each letter in a blend makes a sound and these sounds are then blended together. For example, in the word play, the p and the l must be blended together to read the full word. In the word scrape, three consonants make up the blend: s, c, and r.

The word **splash** contains a three-consonant blend of **s**, **p**, and **l**.

Each letter makes its own sound. These sounds are **blended** together into **splash**.

**spl ash**

## What is a **phoneme**?

A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound. A phoneme is the sound associated with a letter or group of letters. Each different sound in a word is a phoneme. For example, the letter **t** makes the sound /t/ as in **tap**.

Phonemes are often represented by more than one letter or combination of letters. For example, in **ship**, sh makes a single sound that corresponds to two letters (grapheme).

English consists of around 44 phonemes (sounds), but more than 200 graphemes (different written representations for these sounds). E.g. the /f/ sound is represented by the letter f in the word fly, but by ff in the word bluff. However, English is not entirely irregular. It involves numerous patterns and regularities. Phonics is the method that helps children become aware of these rules.

In the word **fly**, the /f/ sound is represented by the letter **f**.

**f**ly

In the word **bluff**, the /f/ sound is represented by the **ff**.

**bluff**



## Phoneme Examples

The word **tap** has three phonemes /t/ /a/ and /p/. They are all represented by a simple grapheme or letter.

**tap**

/t/ /a/ /p/

The word **trap** has four phonemes /t/ /r/ /a/ and /p/. But the word **trapped** has five phonemes, each of which make one sound. The grapheme **ed** in trapped sounds like a /t/.

**trap**

/t/ /r/ /a/ /p/

**tap** has three phonemes /t/ /a/ /p/  
**trap** has four phonemes /t/ /r/ /a/ /p/  
**trapped** has five phonemes: /t/ /r/ /a/ /p/ /t/

**trapped**

/t/ /r/ /a/ /p/ /t/

## What are the phonemes?

The chart below provides a complete overview of the phonemes and their corresponding graphemes.

Many phonemes have more than one grapheme. In Kindergarten and First Grade, children will encounter phonemes and begin matching them to the different graphemes that represent them.

/s/ sit	/t/ ten	/p/ pen	/n/ net	/m/ mop	/d/ dog	/g/ get	/k/ cat	/r/ rat	/h/ hat
/b/ bat	/j/ jam	/l/ lips	/f/ fun	/v/ van	/w/ wet	/ks/ fix	/y/ yes	/kw/ quit	
/z/ zip	/ch/ chat	/sh/ ship	(soft) /th/ thin	/ng/ song	(hard) /th/ this	/zh/ vision	/a/ ant	/i/ pin	/o/ hot
/e/ pen	/u/ mud	/ai/ paint	/ee/ feel	/igh/ night	/oa/ soak	(long) /oo/ moon	(short) /oo/ look	/ow/ cow	
/oi/ coin	/ar/ car	/er/ term	/or/ for	/ear/ hear	/air/ air	/ire/ fire	/ure/ pure		

### Free Resource - Phonemes Chart

<https://www.mrswordsmith.com/blogs/educational-resources/44-phonemes-chart>

## What is a **grapheme**?

A grapheme is a letter or a group of letters that make up a single sound. Graphemes are units of writing corresponding to a single sound.

A grapheme (letter) is used to represent a phoneme (sound). In other words, a grapheme is the written form of a sound. For example, the word **tap** consists of three graphemes t, a, and p.

the letter **t** is a grapheme  
**tap** has three graphemes

**t**-a-p

The word **trap** consists of four graphemes t, r, a, and p. A grapheme can also consist of more than one letter; for example, **tch** in **catch** is a single grapheme because it corresponds to a single sound.

## How many **graphemes** are there?

Most phonemes have more than one grapheme corresponding to them.

The /t/ phoneme is represented by the **t** grapheme in **tie**

**t**ie

The /t/ phoneme is represented by the **tt** grapheme (**digraph**) in **pretty**

**pre**tt**y**

**trap** has four graphemes

**t**-r-a-p

**trapped** has five graphemes

**t**-r-a-pp-ed

A grapheme (letter or group of letters) can represent more than one phoneme (sound).

For example, the letter g has a soft and hard sound as in **giraffe** and **get**. In each of these words, the letter g is pronounced differently.

Further, there are even more ways to spell the soft /g/ phoneme, including **j** and **dge**. One sound can have many different spellings or graphemes.

The /t/ phoneme is represented by the **ed** grapheme (**digraph**) in **trapped**

**trapp**ed

There are over 200 graphemes in English. The phoneme /f/ has four graphemes: **f**, **ff**, **gh**, and **ph**.

Below is a chart with all the graphemes children are taught in school.

# PHONEMES AND GRAPHEMES CHART

## Consonants

Phoneme	Graphemes	Words
/s/	s, ss, c	sat, mess, slice
/t/	t	tap
/p/	p	pat
/n/	n, gn, kn	nap, gnaw, knight
/m/	m, mb	map, comb
/d/	d	sad
/g/	g	dog
/c/	c, k, ck	cat, kit, kick
/r/	r, rh, wr	rock, rhombus, wring
/h/	h	hat
/b/	b	rub
/f/	f, ff, ph	fib, puff, elephant
/l/	l, ll, le	lift, smell, gargle
/j/	j, g, dge	jump, cage, fridge
/v/	v	van
/w/	w, wh	wet, wheel
/x/	x	fix
/y/	y	yell
/z/	z, zz	zip, buzz
/qu/	qu	quit
/ch/	ch, tch	chat, sketch
/sh/	sh	flush
/th/ (soft)	th	thick
/th/ (hard)	th	feather
/ng/	ng	swing
/nk/	nk	sink

## Short vowels

Phoneme	Graphemes	Words
/a/	a	ant
/i/	i, y	sip, gym
/o/	o	pot
/oo/	oo, u	book, pull
/e/	e, ea	net, sweat
/u/	u	mud

## Long vowels

Phoneme	Graphemes	Words
/ai/	ai, ay, a-e, eigh	paint, spray, shake, weights
/ee/	ee, ea, ey, e-e, ie, y	seek, dream, key, athlete, cookie, dirty
/igh/	igh, ie, i-e, y, i	fight, pie, bite, fly, kind
/oa/	oa, oe, ow, o-e, o	soak, toe, throw, doze, over
/oo/	oo, ue, ew, u-e, ou, ui	shampoo, glue, chew, cube, soup, fruit
/ar/	ar	alarm
/or/	or, aw, au, ore, oo	sport, yawn, launch, snore, door
/ur/	ur, er, ir, or, ear	surf, mermaid, first, workout, pearl
/ow/	ow, ou	howl, loud
/oi/	oi, oy	coin, toy
/ear/	ear	fear
/air/	air, are	hair, care
/ure/	ure	cure

## What are **digraphs** and **trigraphs**?

Graphemes can be made up of more than one letter. A digraph is a two-letter grapheme, a combination of two letters representing only one sound.

**trap** has four graphemes t-r-a-p  
**trapped** has five graphemes  
Of those graphemes, **pp** and **ed**  
are **digraphs**

t-r-a-pp-ed

A trigraph is a three-letter grapheme, a combination of three letters representing one sound, such as **igh** in the word **sigh**.

The word **hop** has three graphemes h-o-p.  
The word **shop** also has three graphemes, sh-o-p. The first of the three is a digraph.

**shop** has three graphemes sh-o-p  
the first grapheme **sh** is a **digraph** in  
that two letters correspond to one  
sound

sh-o-p

## The easy way to remember the difference between a **phoneme** and a **grapheme**?

Graphemes are written letters or combinations of letters. When you forget, think of drawing a graph.

Phonemes are sounds.  
When you forget, think of speaking on a telephone.

## What are **CVC Words**?

**CVC words** are words that consist of three sounds that follow a consonant/vowel/consonant pattern.

CVC words are considered the simplest words for emerging readers to decode by blending the three sounds together. Examples of CVC words are **cup**, **cat**, **log**, and **shop**.

## What are **onset** and **rime**?

The onset of a word is its initial sound and the rime is the string of letters that follows, as in **milk**, where **m** is the onset and **ilk** is the rime.

Words can either be segmented into their constituent syllables, or they can be segmented into onset and rime. Teaching children to blend onsets with rimes to form words builds their phonological awareness.

In **shop**, the onset is **sh** and the rime is **op**: sh-op

sh-op

**Shop** has the same onset as **ship**, but it has a different rime: sh-ip

sh-ip

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