

Phonics - A brief overview



Our Reading Sessions are about sharing the joy of books – sharing stories, wondering what will happen next, or learning facts about the solar system!

We are not teachers, so we don't set targets, or homework or teach phonics. However, the children you visit will be taught phonics at school – and it may be different than when you learned to read. So it's useful to know as you may find that if a 5-year-old is reading to you, they will sound out letters and sounds. Hopefully, the overview below will give you a better understanding of the process that children go through when learning to read, and help you feel comfortable with the terminology involved.

Before you start reading below, [watch this video](#).

Children will be taught:

1. How sounds are represented by written letters e.g. the letter 'L' represents an *l* sound.
2. How sounds can be blended together to make words

Some of the major advantages of phonics:

3. Better sound and symbol recognition. Children will know what sound should be produced for each letter or letter group, making reading easier in the future.
4. Long words are easier to read. Children will find it easier to break down long words into its sounds, rather than having to memorise them.
5. Secondary skills such as logic and writing skills are supported.

When children are learning to read and spell they go through five main steps, which are identified as phases:

- **Phase 1:**

Children learn to listen to sounds in words. In this phase children do not necessarily need to be exposed to print. However, this phase also continues through all the other phonic phases.

Children are taught to read letters or groups of letters by saying the sound(s) they represent – so, they are taught that the letter *l* sounds like *l* when we say it. Children can then start to read words by blending (synthesising) the sounds together to make a word.

The order in which the sounds are taught will vary depending on which scheme is used at school, but it won't be alphabetical order because that's not the best

order to allow a child to start blending the sounds for reading.

Many children find the difference between letter sounds and names confusing so, instead of trying to teach the two at the same time, it is considered helpful to focus on teaching the letter sound first.

It is vital that sounds are pronounced correctly; try not to add 'uh' onto sounds! For example, m is continuous, pronounced as *mmmmm* rather than *muh*. The correct pronunciation of each sound is important for later sounding out skills.

- **Phase 2:**

When a child knows their first individual letters and sounds, they are ready to read simple words. This involves the key skills of **sounding out** and **blending**: pointing to each letter in turn to say its sound, then saying the sounds together to make the word. This way, children learn to read and spell CVC words such as cat and sheep. A CVC word is a word that is made up of a consonant, vowel and consonant sound. Cat, hot, tip, man and hut are all CVC words.

- **Phase 3:**

Children learn to read and spell words containing long vowels such as *ai* in *I* and *paint*. Children will learn individual letter sounds first, then **digraphs** where two letters make one sound e.g. **ch, sh, ee, or**. This will lead to **trigraphs**: three letters that make one sound e.g. *igh, ear, air*.

- **Phase 4:**

Children learn to read and spell words with **blends** also known as **clusters**. Children in this phase work to identify the second sound and penultimate sound in words. For example, the *r* in *train*, or the *s* in *crisp*. **Blends** or **consonant clusters** are where letters blend their individual sounds together. The word *stop* starts with the two sounds *s* and *t*, which blend together but don't make a new sound.