

Introduction to Phonics

Words are made up from small units of sound called phonemes. Phonics teaches children to be able to listen carefully and identify the phonemes that make up each word. This helps children to learn to read words and to spell words.

In phonics lessons children are taught three main things:

GPCs

Blending

Segmenting

GPC

*This stands for grapheme phoneme correspondences. This simply means that they are taught all the phonemes (sounds) in the English language and ways of writing them down. These sounds are taught in a particular order. The first sounds to be taught are **s, a, t, p, i, n.***

Blending

Children are taught to be able to blend. This is when children say the sounds that make up a word and are able to merge the sounds together until they can hear what the word is. This skill is vital in learning to read.

c-a-t = cat

Segmenting

Children are also taught to segment. This is the opposite of blending. Children are able to say a word and then break it up into the phonemes that make it up. This skill is vital in being able to spell words.

cat = c-a-t

Glossary of Terms

CVC words: Words that consist of a consonant-vowel-consonant as in c-a-t and b-i-g.

Digraphs and trigraphs: A digraph is a two letter grapheme that represents one sound as 'sh' in ship. A trigraph is a three letter grapheme where they represent one phoneme such as 'igh' in night.

Consonant digraph: A phoneme that is made up of two graphemes, the first of which is a consonant as in 'wh' and 'ng'.

Adjacent consonants: Two or more consonants next to each other in a word – **stop list** – CAN PROVE TRICKY

Glossary of Terms...

***Phoneme:** The smallest unit of sound in a word.*

***Phonics:** Consists of the knowledge of the skills of segmenting and blending, knowledge of the alphabetic code and an understanding of the principles underpinning the way the code is used in reading and spelling.*

***Split digraphs:** A split digraph has a letter that splits, i.e. comes between, the two letters in the digraph. For example 'make', where 'k' splits the digraph 'ae' which represents the phoneme /ai/*

***Vowel digraph:** A phoneme that is made up of two graphemes, the first of which is a vowel as in 'ai' and 'oy'.*

Phonic Phases

Letters and sounds splits phonics teaching up into 6 distinct phases.

Phases 1 – 6

*Taught daily, a session of approx 15-20 mins.
Children are taught mainly through games,
songs and actions.*

Phase 1

Phonics starts in Phase 2. Phase 1 prepares children for Phase 2, and has activities designed to develop children's oral blending and segmenting of the sounds in spoken words, as well as speaking and listening skills. It is made clear in Letters and Sounds: Notes of Guidance that children do not need to complete all seven aspects of the Phase 1 programme before starting Phase 2, and indeed Phase 1 work can run alongside Phase 2 work.

This phase starts in nursery and continues throughout all phases 2-6. The activities are designed to get children to listen and to discriminate between sounds. The activities are arranged under seven aspects.

- 1. General sound discrimination – environmental sounds.*
- 2. General sound discrimination – instrumental sounds.*
- 3. General sound discrimination – body percussion.*
- 4. Rhythm and rhyme.*
- 5. Alliteration.*
- 6. Voice sounds.*
- 7. Oral blending and segmenting.*

Phase 2

This phase starts in Reception .

Duration = 6 weeks (approx)

The key idea here is that children understand that blending and segmenting are reversible processes. Using sounding and blending for reading, and segmenting for spelling, children soon read and spell simple VC and CVC words, such as 'at', 'sat' and 'pat'. The children read and spell more and more new words as each letter sound is taught.

Phase 3

Duration = 12 weeks (approx)

A major difference from Phase 2 is that the children now learn that some sounds in our language are spelt by more than one letter, e.g. the consonant digraph 'sh' as in 'shop', the vowel digraph 'oa' as in 'boat'.

Graphemes: ear (hear) , air (fair), ure (pure), er (hammer), ar (car), or (torn), ur (turn), ow (cow), oi (coin), ai (train), ee (sheep), igh (night), oa (boat), oo (boot/look)

Phase 4

Duration = 4-6 weeks (approx)

It is expected that Phase 4 teaching will be completed before the end of Reception.

No new phonemes or graphemes are introduced in this phase. Children consolidate their knowledge of graphemes in reading and spelling words containing adjacent consonants (e.g. went: w-e-n-t) and polysyllabic words (words with more than one syllable).

Phase 5

Duration = 1 year (approx)

A child making expected progress will be working on this phase during Year 1.

Up to this point, the children have generally learnt one grapheme for each of the sounds in spoken English. They will have read some words with more than one syllable, some words with vowel and consonant digraphs, and also words with adjacent consonants.

During Phase 5 they will start to learn that some spellings have alternative pronunciations, e.g. 'cow', 'blow', and some sounds have alternative spellings, e.g. 'jump', 'hedge'.

Examples: ph (photo)

o-e (home)

au (Paul)

ou (out)

Phase 6

Duration = 1 year (approx)

A child making expected progress will be working on this phase during Year 2.

By now most children should be able to recognise a large number of words without sounding and blending them. They should show fluency in reading familiar words. However, they will still need to sound and blend unfamiliar words.

During this phase children become fluent readers and increasingly accurate spellers. To become successful readers, children must understand what they read. They need to learn a range of comprehension strategies and should be encouraged to reflect upon what they are learning.

Example – children will learn about prefixes, e.g. ‘return’ and suffixes, e.g. ‘sitting.’

Useful links & websites

Letters & Sounds Document– available online

Phonics Play <http://www.phonicsplay.co.uk/>

Family Learning

http://www.familylearning.org.uk/phonics_games.html

Woodlands Literacy Zone

<http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/interactive/literacy.html>