

Phonics practice at home in Reception

This guide will explain some of the phonics teaching that your child will receive at school in Reception. It includes practical ideas for how you can help your child practise their phonics using some simple resources.

We hope this will help you support your child's phonics learning at home.

What is phonics?

Phonics is about knowing how letters in words link to sounds, for example, the letter 'b' in 'bat' makes a /b/ sound and the letters 'ee' in 'tree' make a long /ee/ sound.

At school, children learn to use this knowledge to help them read and write. They learn that by saying the sounds and running or blending them together, they can read the words on a page (b-a-t makes 'bat'; t-r-ee makes 'tree'). They also learn that if they break a spoken word up into separate sounds, they can start to spell it (the word 'cat' is spelt c-a-t).

Phonics has been shown to be a quick and effective way for young children to learn to read and start to spell words they want to write.

Phonics terms

Teachers use some special terms when teaching phonics. It will help your child if you can use the same terms at home. In Reception, your child will learn and use the following terms.

Blending

This is the process used to read a word. It involves 'saying the sounds' and then 'blending' or running them together to say the whole word. For example, the sounds /b/ /a/ /g/ blend together to make the word 'bag'.

Segmenting

This is the reverse process of **blending** and is used to spell a word. You segment or break a word into the separate sounds. For example, to spell the word 'dog', first you segment it, saying the sounds /d/ /o/ /g/, and then you write the letters for each of those sounds.

Tricky words

These are common words that children will meet a lot when reading, but they have a letter or letters that make an unusual or unfamiliar sound. For example, the word 'to' is a tricky word because the letter 'o' is not the /o/ sound (as in 'pot') that the children know. To read words like these, children need to remember the tricky part.

Sound buttons

These are marks (dots and lines) that are added under letters in words to help children to blend and read the words. A dot (round sound button) is placed under each letter in a word. A short line (long sound button) is used when two letters represent one sound, as in the word 'pick' below. Children are encouraged to touch each button in turn and 'say the sound', then blend the sounds together to say the word.



Phoneme

This is a sound within a word. For example, 'bag' has three separate phonemes /b/ /a/ /g/. In Reception, a phoneme is often just called a 'sound'.

Grapheme

This is a letter or group of letters that represents a sound when written down. For example: the letter 'b' is the grapheme for the /b/ sound; 'sh' is the grapheme for the /sh/ sound. In Reception, we just refer to a grapheme as 'the letter or letters that make the sound'.

Overview of Reception

Children start learning phonics soon after they enter Reception.

- ▶ First, children learn the sounds for 19 letters of the alphabet that are most commonly found in simple words they might read.
- ▶ Children learn to blend these letter sounds together to read words and start to segment words to spell them.
- ▶ Later in the year, children learn the remaining letter sounds. At this point they also learn all the letter names. Letter names are introduced after the sounds so that children focus on learning the sounds first.
- ▶ Children then start to learn new sounds that are made by two (or three) letters rather than one. For example: 'sh' as in 'shop'; 'th' as in 'thin'; 'ai' as in 'rain'; 'ee' as in 'see'; 'igh' as in 'right'.
- ▶ Children learn to blend to read words and segment to spell words with these new sounds. It is important that when children see these letters together in a word, they say the one sound and not the two or three separate letter sounds. For example, shop would be sounded as sh-o-p (three sounds) and light would be l-igh-t (three sounds).
- ▶ Children also learn to read and spell some longer (two-syllable) words. They learn to do this by breaking the word into two parts and then blending or segmenting each part separately before putting them together to make the complete word. For example, 'pop/corn' and 'duck/ling'.

- ▶ Towards the end of Reception, children learn to blend and read and segment and spell words with four sounds (such as b-l-a-ck ‘black’ and p-o-i-n-t ‘point’) or five sounds (such as g-r-u-n-t ‘grunt’ and s-c-r-ee-n ‘screen’).

Phonics practice at home in Reception

Children need lots of practice to learn the letters and their sounds and to make sure that they are stored in their memory. Children also need lots of practice to develop the skill of blending letter sounds to read words and segmenting words to spell them. Your child will practise phonics every day at school, but you can help your child by practising at home as well.

Your child may bring home some simple resources to help them practise phonics at home. This will include picture clues (called **Mnemonics**) to help children recognise the letters and remember their sounds, **Grapheme cards** for the letters and sounds they need to practise, and **Word cards** to practise blending to read words. They may also bring home **Tricky word cards** and **Sentences** to practise reading.

The following sections contain some ideas for how you can use these resources to support your child’s phonics learning at home. You will find practising for just a few minutes each day will really help your child. You should give lots of praise and encouragement and keep each session quite short.

Practising letters and their sounds

The first two activities use **Mnemonics**. These have a picture clue on one side to help your child remember the sound (for example, a picture of an apple for ‘a’ and a picture of a chick for ‘ch’), while the other side shows the letter or letters.

Say the sound 1

- ▶ Hold up each **Mnemonic** in turn, sometimes showing the picture side and sometimes the letter side.
- ▶ Ask your child to say the word if you show the picture (for example, ‘apple’) and the sound if you show the letter (for example, /a/).
- ▶ Gradually, show the picture side less and the letter side more to encourage your child to remember the sound made by the letter.

Say the sound 2

- ▶ When your child has learnt a few letters, put all the **Mnemonics** together.
- ▶ Show the letter side of each one in turn, asking your child to ‘say the sound’. If they are not sure, show the picture side to help them.
- ▶ Once you have shown all the letters, mix up the order and show them all again.

Note: The letter side of the **Mnemonic** has a starting dot and some arrows. These will help your child learn to write each letter correctly.

The following activities use a set of **Grapheme cards** for sounds that your child will be practising at school.

Your turn

- ▶ Place all the **Grapheme cards** face down on the table.
- ▶ Ask your child to turn over a card and say the sound.
- ▶ If your child says the sound correctly, they win the card. If not, it's your turn to say the sound.
- ▶ Put that card back on the table face down.
- ▶ Continue the game until your child wins all the cards.

Stepping stones game

This is a good activity once your child seems fairly good at recognising a set of letters.

- ▶ Set out the **Grapheme cards** in a line across the table or on the floor, with the letters showing. These are the stepping stones.
- ▶ Use your finger to 'jump' along the stepping stones, asking your child to say the sounds as soon as you land on them.

Finding letters

- ▶ Spread the **Grapheme cards** out on the table face up.
- ▶ Say the sound to go with one of the letters and ask your child to find the correct card.
- ▶ You could ask them to place the card in an appropriate place (for example, put the letter 'a' under an apple, the letter 'b' on a book).

Practising blending to read words

Your child may bring home some **Word cards** to practise blending to read words. These are not words for your child to read 'on sight' – they should read these words by 'saying the sounds' and then blending them together. Some of the words may have sound buttons under the letters. Encourage your child to touch each sound button in turn, 'saying the sound' and then blending the sounds together to say the word.

The following activities can be used with the **Word cards** for extra practice. Rereading the word cards in these activities mean that your child will blend the words a number of times. This will help them become more confident with blending and word reading. It may be that after blending a word a few times, your child begins to recognise it automatically without needing to blend it. This is a good thing; they don't need to go back and blend it.

In the pot

- ▶ Put all the **Word cards** in a pot (any sort of pot or tub will do).
- ▶ Ask your child to take out a card.
- ▶ If they read the word correctly, they keep it. If not, say the sounds and blend it for them and then put the word card back in the pot.
- ▶ Carry on until all the words have been read correctly.
- ▶ You could include a card with 'pot' written on it. If your child pulls out this card, all the cards must go back in the pot.

Against the clock

- ▶ Place the **Word cards** face down on the table.
- ▶ Ask your child to turn over the cards and read the words.
- ▶ Use a timer and see how many words the children can blend and read before the time runs out.

Count on it

- ▶ Give your child four **Word cards** and four counters (use bottle tops or any other small item if you don't have counters).
- ▶ Say a word and ask your child to see if it is written on any of their cards.
- ▶ If it is, they should sound and blend the word to show you.
- ▶ If they are correct, they can put a counter on the card.
- ▶ Continue until your child has counters on all their cards.

Practising segmenting to spell words

You can use **Grapheme cards** or plastic letters to help your child practise segmenting to spell words.

Build a word

- ▶ Give your child a selection of **Grapheme cards** showing letters that they know.
- ▶ Say a word that can be made out of the letters. It could be a word from the **Word cards** that your child has already practised reading.
- ▶ Ask your child to segment or break the word up into sounds.
- ▶ Then ask them to find each letter in turn, putting them in the correct order to make the word.
- ▶ Once the word is complete, ask your child to say the sounds and blend the letters to read the word. If it's on a word card, you can then show the word and your child can check each letter is correct.