



Parents' Guide to Phonics



What is phonics?

Phonics is a method of teaching children how spoken words are composed of sounds (phonemes) and how the letters in words correspond to those sounds. The process of reading involves decoding or 'breaking' words into separate sounds, so that meaning can be gained. On the other hand, the process of spelling requires the writer to identify all the sounds in a word and then use their knowledge of sound patterns to write or 'make' the word.

English is essentially a code that can be encoded (written) and decoded (read). We need to teach children this code with as much emphasis as possible on the rules of the written language.

Children are taught that we can make a word from the sounds and then break it apart again when we want to spell it. Spelling and reading are taught together but children may be better at reading before spelling or vice versa.

Written English is recognised as being a complex language. We have 26 letters but 44 phonemes in the spoken language. There are a huge number of letter combinations needed to make these 44 sounds.

Letters and Sounds

At LFPA, we follow Letters and Sounds, which is a government-produced phonic teaching programme. There are six phases in which the children are introduced to all 44 sounds and corresponding letter patterns (graphemes).

Phonics starts with children beginning to hear the different sounds in a word and the matching of these sounds to single letters. At the same time it shows how these sounds can be 'blended' to produce words and the words can be 'segmented' to write. Your child will learn simple letter to sound correspondence. This is when a sound is represented by a single letter as in the word cat - /c/ /a/ /t/. When that's mastered your child will learn that sometimes one sound is represented by two letters (digraph); as in the word chop - /ch/ /o/ /p/; where /ch/ is only one sound even though it is written as two letters.

Then after that, even though at first it may sound confusing, your child will learn that sometimes a single phoneme can be represented many different ways. Take the sound /ay/ in play; your child will eventually learn that this phoneme can be written:

- /ay/ as in the word play
- /a-e/ as in the word spade

- /ea/ as in the word break
- /ey/ as in the word hey
- /eigh/ as in the word eight
- /a/ as in the word later
- /ei/ as in the word vein

Finally your child will learn that sometimes a single (or more) letter may represent more than one sound; for example, the 'o' in /most/ and the 'o' in /hot/ or the 'ow' in /wow/ and the 'ow' in /tow/.

This can be confusing but with the structure and regularity of letters and sounds almost all children will pick this up.

What do all these technical words mean?

Phoneme: It is the smallest unit of sound. At first it will equate with a letter sound but later on will include combinations of letters.

Grapheme: The way a phoneme is written.

Digraph: This is when two or more letters come together to make a phoneme. /oa/ makes the sound in boat.

Blending: Blending is the process that is involved in bringing the sounds together to make a word or a syllable and is how /c/ /a/ /t/ becomes cat.

Segmenting: Segmenting is the process of breaking a word into its individual sounds.

- It is **not** important to know all the jargon.
- It is important to know how to pronounce each of the sounds correctly.

Phase 1

Phase One of Letters and Sounds concentrates on developing children's speaking and listening skills and lays the foundations for the phonic work which starts in Phase 2. The emphasis during Phase 1 is to help children develop an awareness to the sounds around them and ready to begin developing oral blending and segmenting skills.

Useful website for Phase 1 games:

<http://www.letters-and-sounds.com/phase-1-games.html>

Phase 2

At LFPA, children in Reception start from Phase 2. In Phase 2, letters and their sounds are introduced one at a time. A set of letters is taught each week, in the following sequence:

Set 1: s, a, t, p

Set 2: i, n, m, d

Set 3: g, o, c, k

Set 4: ck, e, u, r

Set 5: h, b, f, ff, l, ll, ss

The children will begin to learn to blend and segment to begin reading and spelling. This will begin with simple words. Children are also introduced to tricky words. These are irregular words because phonics cannot be applied to the reading and spelling of these words:

Tricky Words: to, the, no, go, l

Useful website for phase 2 games:

<http://www.letters-and-sounds.com/phase-2.html>

<http://www.nessy.com>

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/wordsandpictures

Phase 3

By the time they reach Phase 3, children will be gaining in confidence to blend and segment words using the letters sounds taught in Phase 2.

Set 6: j, v, w, x

Set 7: y, z, zz, qu

Consonant digraphs (no vowels): ch, sh, th, ng

Vowel digraphs: ai, ee, igh, oa, oo, ar, or, ur, ow, oi, ear, air, ure, er

Tricky Words: we, me, be, was, no, go, my, you, they, her, all, are

Using the Letter Cards

Below is a list of simple words that can be 'sounded out'. You can use the letter cards to:

- Blend sounds: make a word with the letter cards (don't say what the word says) and ask your child to say each sound in order. Ask them to say the sounds quickly as this will help them to hear the word.
- Segment Sounds - say a word and ask your child to break it up into sounds.

Words to use:

cat, bat, rat, sat, mat, pat, hat,

pig, fig, wig, big, dig, jig

cot, dot, pot, lot, not, got, rot

jog, cog, dog, log, fog

man, can, fan, pan, ran, tan, ban, van

fin, din, bin, tin, pin

bit, kit, hit, pit, fit

get, met, bet, set, net, yet, pet, vet, jet

zap, map, nap, lap, gap, yap,

fun, bun, sun, run

pen, men, hen, ten, den