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Phonics phases explained

How does your child master phonics, from learning letter sounds to reading fluently? We explain the phases they may follow in the primary-school classroom.

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When your child starts school, phonics becomes a big part of everyday life, transforming them from a non-reader to a child who is capable of reading fluently and spelling (mostly) accurately by the end of Year 2. Primary schools follow different phonics schemes, and each takes a slightly different approach to teaching phonics, but it's common for your child to be taught in a series of phases throughout the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

Phase 1

Early phonics teaching in pre-school, nursery and at the start of Reception focuses on developing children's listening skills. Early years environments do a lot of oral work at quite a slow pace, training children in awareness of sounds, explains Sara Weirham, a primary school teacher and one of the developers of the [Jolly Phonics](http://www.jollylearning.co.uk) (<http://www.jollylearning.co.uk>) scheme.

In Phase 1 phonics, children are taught about:

- Environmental sounds
- Instrumental sounds
- Body percussion (e.g. clapping and stamping)

- Rhythm and rhyme
- Alliteration (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/alliteration-asonance-consonance>)
- Voice sounds
- Oral blending (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-is-blending>) and segmenting (e.g. hearing that t-c-g makes 'dog')

Typical activities for teaching Phase 1 phonics include 'listening' walks, playing and identifying instruments, action songs, learning rhymes and playing games like I Spy.

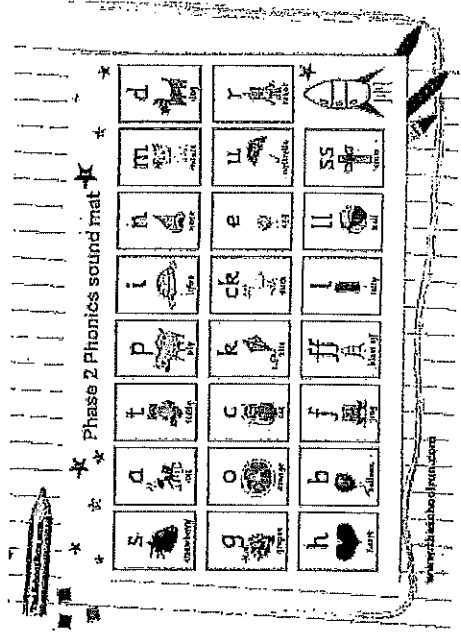
This phase is intended to develop children's listening, vocabulary and speaking skills.

Phase 2 phonics

In Phase 2, children begin to learn the sounds that letters make (phonemes) (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-is-a-phoneme>). There are 44 sounds in all. Some are made with two letters, but in Phase 2, children focus on learning the 19 most common single letter sounds. These are broken down into smaller sets of about six sounds to make them more achievable for children to learn, says Sara.

Although the order in which sounds are taught will depend on which scheme your child's school follows, usually, they will learn the most commonly used phonemes (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-is-a-phoneme>) first, starting with: /s/, /a/, /t/, /i/, /p/, /h/.

By the end of Phase 2, children should be able to read some vowel-consonant (VC) and consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/cvc-words>), and to spell them out. They also learn some high frequency 'sticky words' (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-are-high-frequency-words>) like 'the' and 'go'. This phase usually lasts about six weeks.



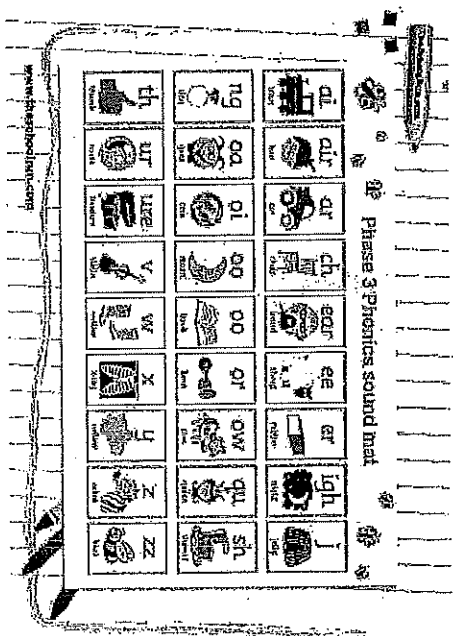
(<http://www.theschoolrun.com/phonics-sound-mats>)

Phase 3 phonics

Phase 3 introduces children to the remaining, more difficult and/or less commonly used phonemes. There are around 25 of these, depending on which scheme is followed, mainly made up of two letters such as /ch/, /ad/, /ow/ and /ee/. We need these sounds to be able to read and form useful words', says Sara.

Alongside this, children are taught to recognise more tricky words, including 'me', 'was', 'my', 'you' and 'they'. They learn the names of the letters, as well as the sounds they make. Activities might include learning mnemonics (memory aids) for tricky words, practising writing letters on mini whiteboards, using word cards and singing songs like the Alphabet Song.

Phase 3 takes most children around 12 weeks. By the end, they should be able to say the sound made by most, or all, Phase 2 and 3 graphemes (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-is-a-grapheme>), blend and read CVC words made from these graphemes, read 12 new tricky words and write letters correctly when given an example to copy.



(<http://www.theschoolrun.com/phonics-sound-mats>)

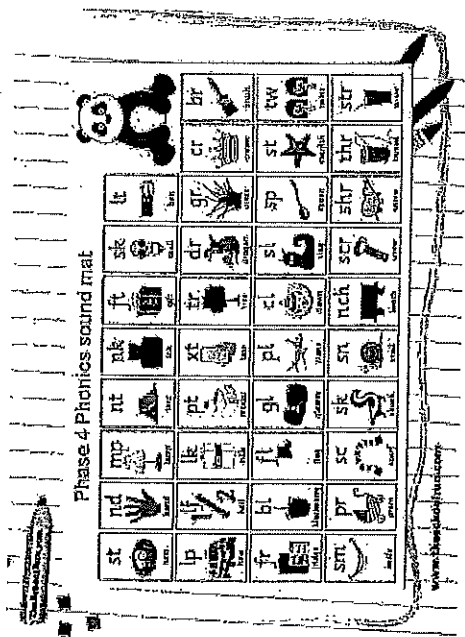
Phase 4 phonics

By now, children should be confident with each phoneme. 'From here on, phonics teaching is about consolidating and refining their knowledge, introducing more spelling patterns and tricky words, and increasing vocabulary', Sara says.

In Phase 4 phonics, children will, among other things:

- Practise reading and spelling CVCC words (such as 'bark', 'milk' etc)
- Practise reading and spelling high frequency words
- Practise reading and writing sentences
- Learn more tricky words, including 'have', 'like', 'some', 'little'

Children should now be blending confidently to work out new words. They should be starting to be able to read words straight off, rather than having to sound them out. They should also be able to write every letter, mostly correctly. This phase usually takes four to six weeks, and most children will complete it around the end of Reception.



<http://www.theschoolrun.com/phonics-sound-mats>

Phase 5 phonics

Phase 5 generally takes children the whole of Year 1. Here, we start introducing alternative spellings for sounds, like 'igh'. Says Sara, 'Children master these in reading first, and as their fluency develops, we begin to see them using them correctly in spelling.'

Children learn new graphemes (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-is-a-grapheme>), (different ways of spelling each sound) and alternative pronunciations for these: for example, learning that the grapheme 'ow' makes a different sound in 'snow' and 'cow'.

They should become quicker at blending, and start to do it silently.

They learn about split digraphs (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-is-a-digraph>) (the 'magic e') such as the a-e in 'name'.

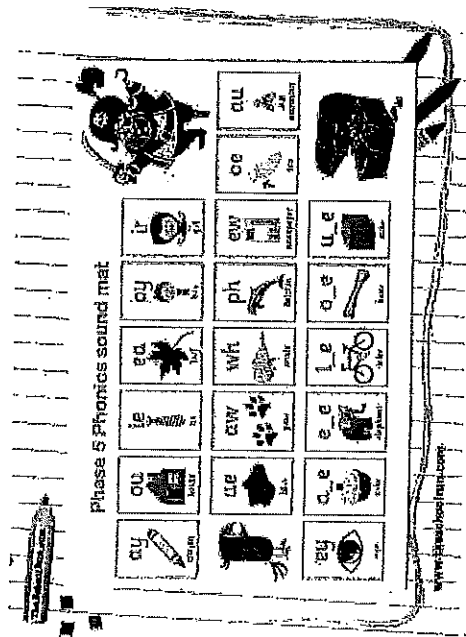
They'll start to choose the right graphemes when spelling, and will learn more tricky words, including 'people', 'water' and 'friend'. They also learn one new phoneme: /zh/, as in 'treasure'.

By the end of Year 1, children should be able to:

- Say the sound for any grapheme they are shown
- 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 (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-is-a-syllable>)

- Read all of the 100 high frequency words, and be able to spell most of them
- Form letters correctly

At the end of Year 1, all children are given a Phonics Screening Check (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/year-1-phonics-screening-check>) to ensure they have mastered the appropriate knowledge.



<http://www.theschoolrun.com/phonics-sound-mats>

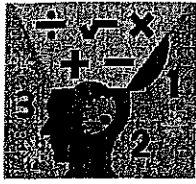
Phase 6 phonics

Phase 6 phonics takes place throughout Year 2, with the aim of children becoming fluent readers and accurate spellers.

By Phase 6, children should be able to read hundreds of words using one of three strategies:



- Reading them automatically
 - Decoding them quickly and silently
 - Decoding them aloud
- Children should now be spelling most words accurately (this is known as 'encoding' (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-is-encoding>)), although this usually lags behind reading. They will also learn, among other things:

- Prefixes (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-is-a-prefix>) and suffixes (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-is-a-suffix>), e.g. 'in-' and '-ed'
- The past tense (<http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-is-verb-tense>)



Maths activities that you could do at home

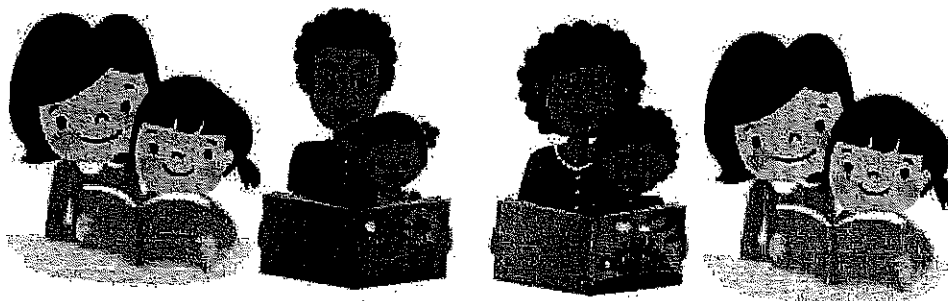
- ~ Practise reading, writing and ordering numbers - Which number is bigger or smaller than a given number? Say two numbers, which number is the biggest?
- ~ Practise counting forwards and backwards.
- ~ Practise starting on any number and counting forwards and backwards.
 - ~ Say 1 more or 1 less than a number.
- ~ Choose a number to 20, can you draw pictures to match that number in different ways.
- ~ Add two numbers by drawing a picture to represent each number and then count how many there are all together.
- ~ Number bonds to 10. Recognise all pairs of numbers that total 10 eg $1 + 9 =$, $2 + 8 =$

- ~ Recognise and name all coins including £2.
- ~ Identify 2D shapes including square, rectangle, circle, pentagon, triangle in their environment. 
- ~ Begin to name 3D shapes including cube, cuboid, cylinder, sphere, pyramid. 

- ~ Can they find objects longer or shorter / heavier or lighter/more of less than a given object? Can they also estimate the length/weight/capacity of an object before they measure it?

Questions to ask when reading a story with your child

- ❖ Where and when does the story take place? How do you know?
- ❖ What are the main events in the story?
- ❖ Can you think of a different ending to the story?
- ❖ Did the story end the way that you expected it to?
- ❖ Is this story like any other stories you have read? How?
- ❖ How does the story make you feel about the characters?
- ❖ Who is the main character of the story? What are they like? How do you know?
- ❖ Are there characters other than the main character that are important to the story? Who are they?



a b c d e

f g h i j k

l m n o p

q r s t u

v w x y z

Bear Word reading and spelling checklist

<u>1. Yellow words</u>	<u>Date achieved</u>	<u>5. Pink words</u>	<u>Date achieved</u>
I		are	
like		she	
mum		came	
dad		a	
ball		he	
my		away	
		you	
<u>2. Green words</u>		<u>6. Purple words</u>	
and		me	
house		they	
cat		it	
dog		for	
look		in	
at		get	
		said	
		go	
<u>3. Blue words</u>		<u>7. Grey words</u>	
to		of	
went		day	
with		was	
play		on	
big		up	
the		all	
can		yes	
		no	
<u>4. Red words</u>			
we			
is			
am			
see			
going			
this			
bus			
here			

P.T.O. for White Words

Bear Word – reading and spelling checklist

<u>White 1</u>	<u>Date achieved</u>	<u>White 4</u>	<u>Date achieved</u>	<u>White 6</u>	<u>Date achieved</u>
had		off		People	
as		got		many	
back		not		very	
last		from		every	
has		what		lady	
an		want		baby	
ran		us		only	
man		but		happy	
than		put		suddenly	
that					
<u>White 2</u>		<u>White 5</u>			
next		be			
help		we			
them		he			
then		three			
when		green			
bed		these			
ten		seen			
		been			
<u>White 3</u>		tree			
said					
dad					
dig					
six					
if					
him					
his					
will					