



Features of phonics for reading and spelling

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If your child attends a pre-school or school, you will already know how important 'phonics' is regarded to support the teaching of reading and spelling nowadays.

What you may not realise is that the English alphabetic code, with its 44 smallest sounds of speech and 200+ letters and letter groups is the most complex alphabetic code in the world. Historically, the teaching profession largely abandoned the teaching of phonics replacing it with other methods such as introducing children to 'real books' to enthuse children to pick up reading, or building-up recognition of individual words over time, word-by-word, through flash cards and reading scheme books. The problem with trying to 'pick up' reading through exposure to books, or whole-word learning, is that there are many thousands of English words in literature – and not all children can recall a growing bank of words well enough or at all. This has resulted in an alarming percentage of people who are weak in their literacy skills in English-speaking countries – higher than

in comparable countries which have much simpler alphabetic codes. Unpicking the complex English alphabetic code and teaching it step-by-step from the simplest letter-sound links, to the complex aspects of the code, soon empowers children to read and spell even new and unknown words independently. When we ask children to read books more or less by themselves, it is important that the words in the books consist of the letters and sounds that children have been taught already – otherwise they have to resort to guessing lots of words from picture clues or what seems to make sense to them. They may also feel unhappy to be struggling to read words by themselves that, in effect, they cannot read! Very often, children will guess the wrong words and this further confuses the reading process. Of course supporting adults can simply tell the children

any difficult or unusual words. It is essential that teachers and parents also discuss the contents of the books to build up 'language comprehension'. So, 'reading' consists of two main processes:

- 1 **ability to decode the word**
technically: **'WHAT IS THE WORD?'**
- 2 **thinking about meaning:**
'WHAT DOES THE WORD MEAN?'

For more detailed information about reading and spelling, literature and language comprehension, visit:

www.phonicsinternational.com

Many schools provide purpose-designed cumulative, decodable books for children to practise their phonics and to build up reading fluency, especially in the early years. Schools may also provide cumulative, word lists, sentences and texts for children to practise

their decoding skill (for reading) and their encoding skill (for spelling). Some teachers may refer to children needing a 'range of teaching methods', however, it is the same alphabetic code knowledge and the same phonics skills for reading and spelling that all learners need for literacy. Many adults simply don't realise that they have actually picked up phonics over the years and use it routinely and sub-consciously for their own reading and spelling purposes. This means that it is not uncommon for people to underestimate the fundamental importance of phonics teaching and learning not just for infant teaching – but for lifelong, adult literacy.

If your child's school does a good job of teaching Systematic Synthetic Phonics, this may be better than children have ever been taught reading and spelling in the past!

So, what are the features of the modern-day Systematic Synthetic Phonics approach to reading?

Knowledge:

Teach the KNOWLEDGE of the alphabetic code (the letters and sounds such as s as in snake, sh as in sheep, -ng as in ring, ee as in eel, -ay as in tray). There are 44 sounds but most have many spelling alternatives. At first mainly one spelling is taught for each sound ('ai') and further spellings will be taught later (ay, a-e, ey, eigh). Some letters and letter groups also have

alternative pronunciations which need to be taught – so, for example, the letter group ea is code for the /ee/ sound as in eat, the /e/ sound as in head, and the /ai/ sound as in break. The alphabetic code is reversible: from print-to-sound for reading purposes and from sound-to-print for spelling purposes.

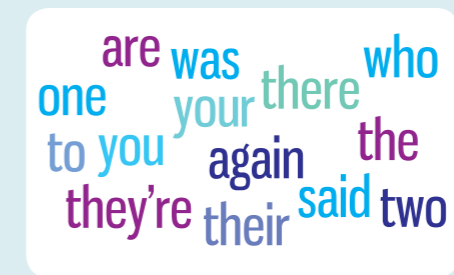
Free charts to assist with this can be found at www.alphabeticcodecharts.com

Apply and extend:

As the children build up their alphabetic code knowledge (the letters and corresponding sounds), they practise their basic skills of reading, spelling and handwriting.

Common words which are tricky, unusual or useful (but the code has not yet been taught) are introduced steadily and sensibly throughout a phonics programme and the tricky or unusual parts of the words are

pointed out specifically to the children (and often provided on posters for wall display). This includes words such as:



Three core skills:

- 1 **Teach the SKILL of 'sounding out and blending the sounds'.**

Read all-through the word, from left to right, to decode. The first step is to scan, or glance, through the printed word to recognise any letter groups in the word, such as 'sh' or 'ee'.

- 2 **Teach the SKILL of splitting up the spoken word from beginning to end to identify the sounds.**

Say the word very slowly and naturally and the sounds will 'pop out', then allot the letters or letter groups which are code for those sounds for encoding/spelling the word.

- 3 **Teach the SKILL of holding the pencil correctly with tripod grip and how to form the letters correctly (lower case and capital letters) on writing lines.**

With phonics, say the letter group as its 'sound' when handwriting, so sh is written whilst saying (or thinking) the sound /sh/ as in sheep.

Over time, children need to learn how to spell the common, tricky words as they occur so often, and they also need to build up knowledge of SPELLING WORD BANKS where words are spelt with the same letters and sound correspondences, such as:



To find more information visit our website at www.phonicsinternational.com

Three free posters with practical details of the Phonics Routines are available: www.phonicsinternational.com/FR_PI_Posters_for_phonics_routines.pdf