

Teaching synthetic phonics: a quick guide

Introduce a group of letter-sounds (grapheme-phoneme correspondences).

Practise blending.

Introduce another group of letter-sounds.

Practise blending and segmenting.

Once the 44 sounds have been taught, start teaching alternative spellings.

Less - more often - is better (short, sharp bursts daily)

Typical structure of a synthetic phonics session

10-15 minutes

Do one or more of the following:

- Teach a phoneme-grapheme correspondence.
- Practise the phoneme.
- Review previously taught phonemes.
- Practise blending.
- Learn or review a tricky word.
- Practise segmenting.
- Read a reader.

Evaluation Criteria

Identifies and pronounces the phoneme (sound) ... correctly.

Identifies and writes the grapheme (letter) ... correctly.

Progressively learns phoneme/grapheme correspondences.

Recalls previously taught phoneme/grapheme correspondences.

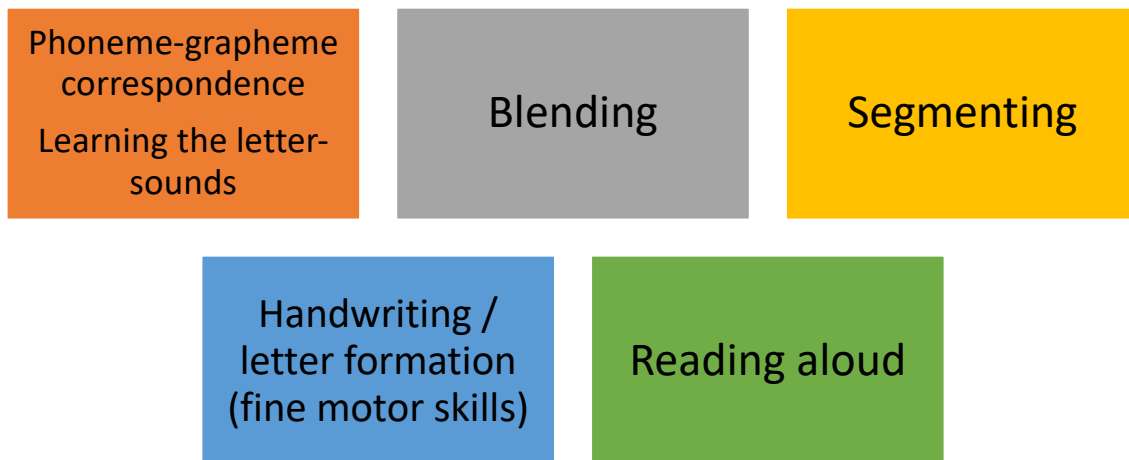
Blends phonemes to decode (read) words.

Applies phonic knowledge as an approach to reading.

Enjoys the sounds of English, and learns through play.

Segments words into phonemes in order to spell.

Direct phonics instruction (synthetic phonics) includes:



Top tips - what you can do as a teacher...

- Sing songs and nursery rhymes
- Read stories, especially rhyming stories
- Learn the letter sounds yourself
- Teach synthetic phonics regularly and systematically
- Encourage children to use their phonic knowledge to decode words (reading) and sound out words (writing)

Frequently asked questions

When should I start teaching phonics?

Consider the children's:

- **abilities**
- **interests**
- and **stage of development**

It is more efficient in the long run!



Recommendations



Start early: children's ears are open to all sounds



Phonological and **phonemic awareness** can be taught in a playful way from a very young age.

Young children can start here



Awareness of sounds in the environment, body percussion etc.



Phonological awareness (oral)



Phonemic awareness (oral)

Every child is different, but every child can learn something.

It's not a race - it's a jigsaw

- We sometimes make the mistake of thinking that if children aren't writing letters and words, then they aren't developing literacy.
- Children start their writing journey long before they write their first letter or word.
- Understanding how children learn to write can mean the difference between encouraging or frustrating a child's efforts.
- Using language is using abstract thinking.
- When we see **a fluffy thing with four legs**, we know that this is a cat, because we have learnt that the word 'cat' represents this thing with four legs.
- This ability to think in abstract ways allows us to communicate something even if we don't have the real thing in front of us.

Abstract thinking allows us to...

- **talk** about the cat when it isn't there any more
- **write** about what the cat did last week
- **read** a poster about a missing cat
- **listen** to our neighbour talk about what the cat did in their garden

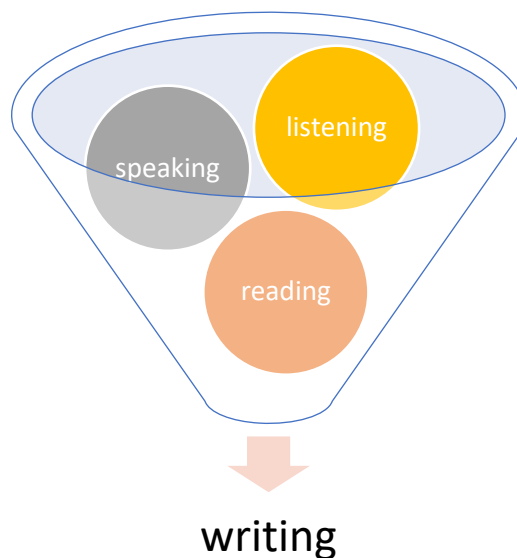
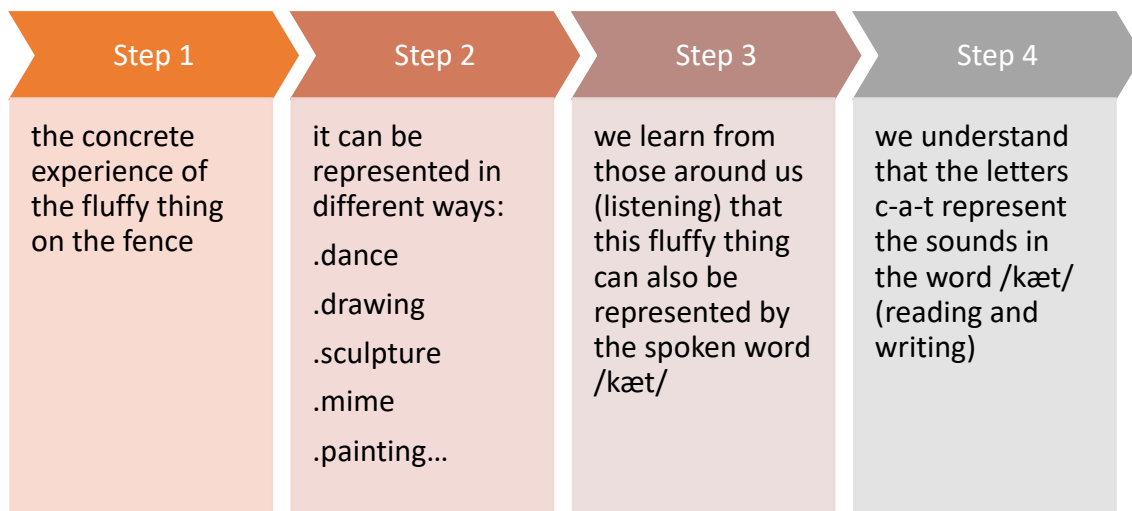
A child's drawing or sculpture may not actually look anything like the cat they saw that morning. The important thing is that *they* know what it is, and that they are trying to represent it. The child is making their thinking visible with 'symbolic representation'.

- If the child knows the word for this fluffy thing, they might say (or try to say) 'cat'.
- Children learning two languages may have two words for the fluffy thing, for example, 'gato' and 'cat'.
- The drawing/sculpture and the Spanish/English words are all the same thing – **using abstract thinking to represent something concrete.**

From abstract thinking to writing

- When children learn to write, they use letters to represent the sounds that they hear in a word.
- For writing in English to be meaningful, children need a strong foundation in oral language.
- They need to know how the spoken word sounds before writing it down.

Writing is the last step



Writing requires complex abstract thinking

- Are your children ready?
- Don't skip vital steps 2 and 3 in a race to demonstrate learning by writing words down.
- We need to respect the way children's thinking develops: **concrete -> abstract - > even more abstract.**

Teaching Phonics – planning and evaluating

It doesn't make sense to 'teach' children writing by copying and tracing letters if they:

- are still developing abstract thinking
- are still developing the fine motor skills needed to control a pencil
- are not interested (**but don't discourage those who are**)
- have only just started learning English

Remember: Learning to write doesn't mean doing worksheets. Letter formation can be taught through play-based activities.

How long does it take to teach phonics?

This will depend on...

- the number of lessons you have
- your students' prior exposure to English
- the age of your students
- the pace your students learn the phonemes and graphemes & their ability to blend and segment.

Should phonics be taught in infants or primary?

- There is no right or wrong place to start, but children will benefit from a coordinated approach and a consistent experience.
- Ideally, Infant and Primary stages should coordinate so that Primary teachers continue the work of the Infant teachers.
- Make sure the children are ready, then... get set... GO!
When you start explicit phonics instruction – don't stop.

How often should I teach phonics?

The Rose Report (2006) makes clear that 'high-quality phonic work' should be taught **systematically** and **discretely** as the prime approach used in the teaching of early reading.

<https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5551/2/report.pdf>

Why teach phonics?

- Phonics helps children to become **independent readers and writers** by using their phonic knowledge to decode words or parts of words.
- It's an **efficient** way of teaching children to read and write in English.
- While it can be useful, applying knowledge of **Spanish** reading and writing strategies to English leads to a lot of **L1 interference**.

Online Resources

- Starfall <https://www.starfall.com/h/>
- Phonics Bloom <https://www.phonicsbloom.com/>
- Oxford Owl readers <https://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/find-a-book/library-page/>
- 10 EYFS Literacy Activities to Make Development More Fun <https://family.co/blog/inspiration/10-eyfs-literacy-activities-to-make-development-more-fun/>

Evaluate your own phonics programme

What do you do well?

Share best practice with your colleagues.

When do you start teaching phonics?

Does your school have a clear plan?

Do you coordinate with other teachers? (infants & primary)

Do you teach phonics systematically?

Do your students respond well to their phonics instruction?

What changes could you make to improve your phonics programme?

Could you include more stories and rhymes?

Do you need to teach phonics more systematically?

Do you need to coordinate better with your colleagues?

Are there any small changes you could make that would have a big impact?

What questions do you have?

Is there anything you are still unsure of?

How has your understanding of phonics improved?

What areas do you feel you still need to develop?

If you don't use phonics at the moment, what are your next steps? How will you go about implementing a phonics programme at your school or with your classes?