

Planning for Learning to use Phonics

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Introduction



Put simply, phonics involves knowing the sounds of the alphabetic code and being able to blend letters to read and to segment words to write. Quality work in phonics will be based upon early opportunities to explore and discriminate sounds. It is for this reason that throughout the EYFS quality time is given to developing speaking and listening skills.

To teach phonics it is useful for practitioners to be aware of the following technical vocabulary. It describes the building blocks and skills used within phonics.

- Alphabetic code – the representation of sounds by letters. In English there are 26 letters.
- Phonemes – the smallest unit of sound in a word that can change its meaning. For example, b and c in cat and bat. In spoken English there are about 44 phonemes.
- Graphemes – the letter or group of letters that represents the phoneme. For example, in the word ‘light’ there are three sounds (phonemes) represented by the graphemes ‘l’, ‘igh’ and ‘t’.
- GPC – Grapheme Phoneme Correspondence. This describes how sounds (phonemes) map to different individual letters (graphemes) or groups of letters and vice versa.
- Vowels – the vowel letters are a, e, i, o and u. Most written words will include at least one vowel.
- In spoken English there are as many as 20 vowel sounds. The precise number depends upon the accent.
- Consonants – all the letters of the alphabet except a, e, i, o and u. (Note: For some words ‘y’ acts as a consonant such as in ‘you’ and ‘yes’. At other times it is a vowel, for example, in ‘by’ and ‘hymn’.)
- Digraph – the representation of one sound (phoneme) with two letters. E.g. ‘ee’ in ‘seed’, ‘ch’ in ‘chin’.
- Trigraph – the representation of one sound (phoneme) with three letters. For example, ‘igh’ in ‘right’. A four-letter grapheme can also represent one sound (phoneme), for example, ‘eigh’ in ‘weight’
- Consonant digraph – contains two consonants, for example, ‘sh’ in ‘ship’ or ‘ch’ and ‘ck’ in ‘chick’.
- Vowel digraph – contains at least one vowel, for example, ‘ai’ in ‘wait’ or ‘oy’ in ‘boy’.
- Split vowel digraph – is where the vowel letters are separated by a consonant, for example, in ‘cake’ or ‘make’, the ‘k’ separates the vowel digraph /ae/.
- Oral blending – hearing a series of spoken sounds and merging them together to make a spoken word. For example, when you sound out ‘c-a-t’, the children say ‘cat’. (This skill is usually taught before blending and reading printed words.)
- Blending – building words from their constituent phonemes to read, left to right across the word. Blending and segmenting are reversible processes.
- Segmenting – the breaking down of words into individual phonemes for spelling, left to right across the word. Segmenting and blending are reversible processes.
- Sounding out – this is a commonly used phrase that describes the spoken decoding of a word by enunciating each component sound, left to right across a word. When sounding out words, care needs to be taken not to over-exaggerate the sound. For example ‘c’ should be said softly rather than letting it become ‘c-uh’.
- Abbreviations – VC, CVC and CCVC describe the order of phonemes (sounds) in words represented by

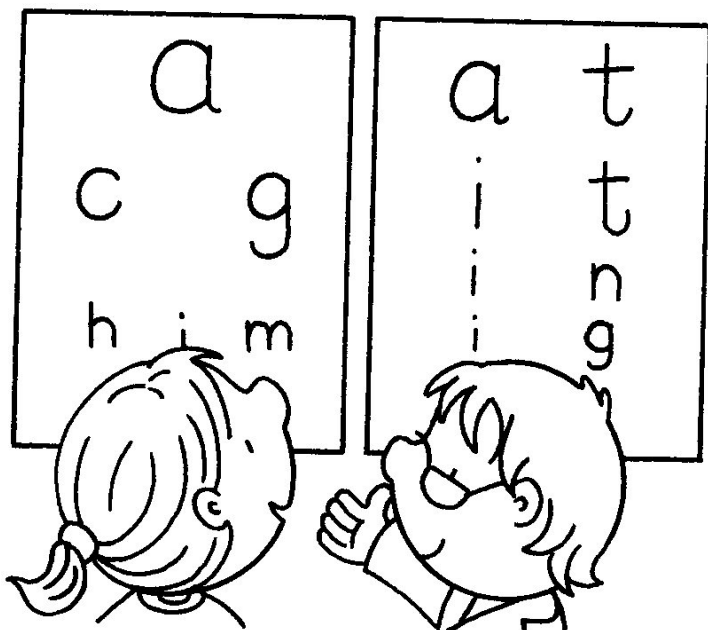
Using role-play areas

Role-play areas can offer valuable opportunities for the children to practise using their phonic skills. In particular, they give scope for the children to read simple words and to write lists, messages, labels, cards and letters in a stimulating, safe environment.

Although it is likely that the children's spellings of some words in role-play areas will be inaccurate, the value of the writing is in the opportunity it gives the children to segment words and, also, for the children to view themselves as writers. It is though, important not to let errors become ingrained. Children's attempts to spell should be valued but some words should be selected with sensitivity and the correct spelling shown.

The size and layout of the role-play areas will vary dependent upon the settings' available space. This though is unimportant. What matters is that role-play areas are created with defined boundaries such that the children can truly believe that they are in a given environment. Inside use safe shelves, cupboards, tables, cushions and boxes to give the desired impression. Outside, skittles, boxes and chalked lines can provide a defined space.

It is always useful if the area can include a display board. Sometimes this will be a resource for the children. At other times it can be used to display pictures and labels to create a



wanted effect such as a weather map for a weather station or eye charts in the health centre.

Dependent upon the interests and abilities of the children and the time-scale for which the role-play area will be used it is best, initially, if the areas have a limited number of resources. In subsequent weeks additional resources and small surprises can then be added to sustain the children's interest and motivation. The following descriptions for each role-play area give a range of possible activities. It is up to individual early years settings to choose the parts that suit their children's needs. For example, the health centre could do separate weeks of eye testing, baby clinics and doctors' surgeries.

Introduce role-play areas to the children, by explaining the possible activities and demonstrate the use of any special resources. Ensure that the children are aware of how many of them may visit the area at a given time. Sometimes invite small groups to join you in the area and be a role-model for one of the characters.

Health centre

Ask carers for donations of toy doctors and nurses sets; plastic tubs and bottles with lids and plastic sun glasses. On a board make a simple eye chart with lower case letters of different sizes. Prepare other charts with letter blends and words that are being used within the group. On a work surface, at a height where children can write comfortably put out an appointments diary, a calendar, a telephone, small cards for writing times and dates of appointments and postcard sized paper for making recording charts and prescriptions. Place a small notepad, of easy to tear off paper, near the till for making receipts for medicines. Make a baby clinic area with baby dolls to weigh, bath, change nappies, dress and generally monitor. Also have a box of simple books for the children to read to the babies whilst waiting for an appointment.

Encourage the children to take turns at being a receptionist, a nurse, a doctor, a patient or a parent with a baby.

Library

Make a role-play library complete with posters about books, a desk for borrowing and returning books and a table with paper and pens so that the children can make displays of books with labels. Put out a date stamp with washable ink

Playing word and letter games



The following games encourage the children to use the alphabet and to develop knowledge of the names and sounds for letters. Parents often wonder when the names for letters should be introduced. One response is that it is useful to know the names of letters, when learning about two and three letter graphemes (e.g. 'th' and 'thr').

I spy

Play I spy with a variety of clues e.g. I spy something that begins with/ends with/rhymes with... Sometimes give clues by showing the written letters.

Alphabet soup

Place a range of lower case letters, known to the children, in a saucepan. Invite the children to select a letter and suggest a food that begins with that sound.

Letter treasure hunt

Hide a selection of lowercase letters in a safe area – inside or outside. Give each child copies of three letters and challenge them to find the hidden letters as quickly as possible. On future occasions, when children can recognise both lower and uppercase letters, hide the lowercase letters and ask the children to find ones to match given uppercase letters.

Animal hunt

Outside hide about ten laminated pictures of animals such as a snail, snake, worm, tortoise, robin, butterfly ... Give children the initial sound for the animal and challenge them to find it/them. Back inside encourage children to write the names of animals that they found. The writing could be in a sand tray, on a whiteboard, word processed or on paper. On further occasions encourage children to hide their own pictures of animals and provide their own sound clues.

Singing alphabets

Sing the alphabet to well known tunes such as 'I hear thunder', 'Twinkle, twinkle little star' and nursery rhymes. Investigate which tunes work the best.

Letter sandwiches

Talk about sandwiches that are made from two pieces of bread and a filling. Ask children to find the filling for a letter sandwich. For example, if 'A' and 'C' are the bread, 'B' would be the filling; for 'S' and 'U', 'T' is the filling.

Jumping spelling

Outside chalk a range of letters on the ground to spell simple CVC words. Call out a word like 'cat' and invite a child to jump from letter to letter to spell the word.

Word builders

Prepare a set of vowel cards and also one of consonants. Place the cards, letter side down on a table. Invite children to select two consonants and one vowel. Challenge them to build a word.

Help the children to realise that words cannot always be made but that sometimes the letters can be used to make more than one word such as in act/cat or net/ten. Where words cannot be made, encourage the children, to suggest