

## Beginning reading

(Please read Background to Teaching Reading first where all these terms are explained)

Don't forget that *reading real books* to and with your child is the most crucial element in teaching him or her to read. If you read aloud a lot, pointing out letters and sounds as you go in all the printed words which surround you, and if you let your child see that YOU love reading, the chances are that he will be more than keen to become a reader himself and will simply pick it up. If he doesn't, and you want to use a more structured phonics approach, remember that you are only teaching phonics *to help your child to read*, not as an end in itself. Don't focus on the phonics and lose sight of the reading! What if your child 'gets' reading before you have taught many graphemes? That's fine; simply use the graphemes to help him decipher trickier words, and as the basis for your spelling programme. Here's an overview of the steps involved if you decide to follow a synthetic phonics approach:

- Teach graphemes in their most useful order (not letter names, not alphabetical order). Most schemes start by teaching **s a t p i n** because these letters allow a child to start reading quite a lot of simple words.
- At first, only teach one grapheme per phoneme (the most common). So, for the 's' sound only teach the letter 's' not **mouse**, **science** or **city**. Some programmes do teach double letters here as they are easy, so you could add in ss, ff, ll, zz and ck too.
- When your child can recognise the first set of graphemes, show him how to blend the sounds in simple words (s-a-t, pin, tap). Move on quickly (most courses recommend adding about 4 new 'core' graphemes per week). Your child will then have enough variety of words to read to keep him interested, including multi syllable words)
- Once the single letter graphemes are mastered, move onto the less common sounds, phonemes which are commonly represented by two letters (ch, th, sh and so on)
- As you go along, you'll need to introduce some 'tricky words', words which are very common but cannot easily be decoded. By the time your child has learned the first 42 graphemes, you should aim for him to be familiar with about 42 tricky words too. Suggestions for these can be found below.
- By this point (which could have taken anything from a few weeks to several months) your child knows a grapheme for each sound. From now on, consolidate reading with the graphemes he knows, but begin to teach alternative graphemes for sounds, starting with the most common (e.g. *ay* spelling for the *ai* sound).

## 1. Teaching the first set of sounds and their common graphemes

s a t p i n m d g o c k (and ck) e u r h b  
(and bb) f (and ff) l (and ll) ss j v w x y z (and zz) qu  
(NB different programmes teach these in slightly different orders)

### a) Introducing the first graphemes

You need a set of cards with one grapheme written on each. You can do this yourself, or print of the rainbow flashcards provided on the Letters and Sounds website linked to below. You can also make letters out of sandpaper and encourage your child to 'trace' the letter with his finger (a first start to writing, suggested by Maria Montessori). If you want a more fancy version of this, try the Jolly Phonics [Finger Phonics](#) series.

Simply point to the letter whilst saying the sound (not the name of the letter, and not a 'muh' or 'suh' sound, more like 'mmmm' and 'sss') until your child recognises it. Once you start, try to keep up a good pace, adding 4-5 new graphemes per week.

### b) Reading first easy words

Once you've taught just a few letters, it is a good idea to get your child **blending sounds into words** as soon as possible rather than waiting until he has learned each individual grapheme. This way he can match up words and pictures - much more memorable than single, isolated graphemes, and much closer to real reading!

**Matching game:** Make or print off two sets of cards - one with simple, readable words and another with matching pictures. Have your child match the word with the correct picture.

**Writing game:** Once this matching is easy, make some individual grapheme cards (three or four of each) and some picture cards representing easy words he can read with those graphemes (pig, dog, fox etc). Write the matching word clearly on the back of the picture card as a self-check. See if he can 'write' the word by choosing the correct graphemes and putting them in the correct order to make the word. When he's done, have him turn the picture over and see if his word matches the one on the card. This not only reinforces reading but also makes a start on the road to writing and spelling. You can carry on doing this for all the grapheme he learns at the different stages. Sets of letters like this are similar to Montessori's [moveable alphabet](#).

**Home-made books:** For a change, make a little book with one word on each page and its matching picture on the reverse as a self-check. This is a great way to help your child feel he is really reading, not just learning letters.

Here are some examples of [3 letter word flashcards](#) (e.g. cat, dog) [Double letter flashcards](#) (e.g. bell, duck) and a [3-4 letter word list](#) so you can make your own cards

### c) Reading words with blended consonants

Once your child knows all the single letter graphemes (alphabet letters), he can read not only easy three letter words but also words with blended consonants. When he is ready to start blending two consonant sounds together, start with words which blend at the end (such as t/e/n/ -t, l/a/m/-p) as this is slightly easier than having to deal with the blend at the beginning (such as 'p/- r/a/m/, 'd/-r/u/m/ etc.).

Use the same games as before. If your child struggles, try giving him a card with the first three letters - have him read this then add a final letter card (e.g. give him 'ten' then have him add the 't' to make tent). This is why blends at the end are easier to start with. Seeing the word make sense before his eyes can seem like magic to a small child.

Examples for [Ending blend flashcards](#) (endings, tent, pond) word [lists of letter blends](#)

### d) Reading multi-syllable words

Once your child knows all the single letter graphemes (alphabet letters) he can also read simple multi-syllable words such as c/a/m/e/r/a, r/a/bb/i/t.

Use the same games as before.

Examples of [Easy multi-syllable word flashcards](#) (rabbit, camera); [word lists for easy multi syllable words](#)

### e) Reading phrases as well as single words

One good way to progress from reading single words to reading several words together is this: write a phrase (not a full sentence) on a piece of paper and have the child read the phrase and draw a picture for it. Make sure you only use words the child can easily read at this point, and try not to choose something really difficult to draw! For example, you could start with very simple Level 1 phrases (e.g. 'a big red bus', 'a sad man'), then include some blends (e.g. 'six fat slugs', 'ten black dots') and then some two-syllable words (e.g. 'a black kitten', 'a pink rabbit'). These can be as silly as you like and can be great fun. They have the

advantage of getting your child used to reading more than just single words, which is a good preparation for moving onto easy books. Here are some examples: [Easy Phrases](#)

## 2. Teaching the rest of the phonemes ( with double or triple letter graphemes)

*Consonant digraphs:* ch sh th ng

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

*(NB different programmes teach these in slightly different orders)*

Teach these as you taught the first set of graphemes. Continue to practice the graphemes already learned as you go along.

Here are some extra resources to get you started:

[Flashcards for ch sh th, oo, ee, ar](#) ; [word list for these digraphs](#)

And some extra **phrase games** using the first set of digraphs [Extra phrases 1](#)

## 3. Teaching alternative but common graphemes

ai/ ay (day) ow/ou (out) long i/ ie (tie) ee/ ea (east) oi/oy (boy)  
er/ ir (girl) oo/ ue (blue) or/aw (saw) or/ au (Paul) w/ wh (when)  
f/ ph (photo) ue/ ew (new) Long o/ oe (toe)

a-e (make) e-e (these) i-e (like) o-e (home) u-e (rule) **Split digraphs**

*(NB different programmes teach these in slightly different orders)*

Teach these as you taught the first sets of graphemes. Continue to practice the graphemes already learned as you go along.

### ***Advice on teaching split digraphs***

The split digraphs are, strictly speaking, simply alternative graphemes for a particular phoneme e.g the sound 'ai' can be written 'a- e' (cake). Teachers are now advised *not* to teach this by calling it 'silent e' or 'magic e', in which the 'e' changes the sound of the vowel to its 'long' sound (they are also often told not to use the term 'silent letters' in teaching the graphemes kn, gn, and so on). However, many programmes *do* teach 'magic e', including

Jolly Grammar which shows 'magic stars' jumping over from the 'e' to the vowel and changing the vowel's sound. This may not be correct linguistically speaking but it seems to make sense to children. It also has the advantage of helping later when it comes to spelling words such as 'hopping': we can say that the double letter 'blocks the magic' so we don't write 'hoping'. Again, not linguistically correct but it helps children to visualise and remember spelling rules.

If you want to teach it this way, make a set of cards with the first part of the word, e.g. *rak* for rake and with the 'e's on separate cards. Make some 'magic' (e.g. a shooting star from yellow card) to bridge the 'e' and the vowel it is changing. The child simply adds an 'e' to the base word and then adds the magic linking the 'e' and the vowel: he says the new sound of the vowel and reads the word. It's quite a good way to make it visual and fix it in your child's mind and really can seem like magic to your child if you approach it the right way. For an easier option, simply make some flash cards: on one side write a 'magic e' word, on the other have the matching picture.

Here are some ['magic 'e' flashcards](#) and a [list of 'magic 'e' words](#) if you want to teach it this way.

#### **4. New pronunciations for known graphemes**

i (find)    o (cold)    c (cent)    g (giant)    ow (blow)    ie (field)    ea  
(bread)    er (farmer)    a ( what)    y (by, very)    ch (school, chef)    ou  
(shoulder, could, you)    s (rose)

*(NB different programmes teach these in slightly different orders)*

Here you are introducing the idea that graphemes can represent other sounds than the ones already learned. It is highly possible that your child will already be reading before he has completed these graphemes; if he *is* already reading, studying these letter combinations may suddenly appear very boring. Reflecting this, in school, the focus often shifts towards spelling (See Teaching Spelling).

#### **Advice on teaching alternative sounds for 'y', 'c' 's' and 'g'**

Single letters which are used to represent more than one sound can confuse children. Obviously they will encounter this with vowels, but there are also four consonants to which this applies (y,c,s,g). The letter x also represents two sounds (x as in fox and z as in xylophone) but this is very rare and easily dealt with. As with 'magic 'e', strictly speaking

these letters should be taught as alternative graphemes for the various phonemes they represent: *ee*, *short i* and *long i* can all be expressed a 'y' (jelly, pyramid, cycle) , 's' can be written 'c' (pencil) 'z' can be written 's' (rose) and 'j' can be written 'g'. However, it can help to reverse things here and teach the different sounds of these letters explicitly so your child can be on the lookout for them. It is helpful for your child to know, for example, that

- the letter c will say 's' whenever it is followed by an e, i or y (city, centre, cycle)
- The letter g may (but *will not always*) be read 'j' when it is followed by e, i or y (gem, giant, gym but gift)
- y can represent three vowel sounds. The 'e' sound at the end of a word (e.g. happy) is the one your child will most likely meet first.

It can help to pencil these alternative sounds in small letters on your alphabet chart/book/cards, and reinforce them when they crop up in your child's reading.

Flashcards for [alternatives sounds of c, g and s](#)

Flashcards for the [alternative sounds for 'y'](#)

[c, g and s alternatives word list](#)

[alternative 'y' word list](#)

[Extra phrases 2](#) ('magic e' and alternatives for y, c, s, and g)

## 5. Teaching capital letters and letter names (alphabetical order)

### Capital letters

Capital letters will inevitably crop up early in your child's reading, not necessarily in the phonics exercises you prepare for him, but in real books and around him in the print environment (cereal boxes, billboards, toys, shops). He is likely to pick them up, but it is a good idea to check his knowledge at some point. You can do this by means of a simple card matching game (here are cards you can print out for [upper case](#) and [lower case](#)).

### Letter names

When your child is very confident with identifying grapheme-phoneme- correspondences, teach him the the names of the letters. For this you just need to teach him an alphabet song whilst looking at the letters. By this point he won't confuse the names and the sounds but it's good for him to know both. The names are not actually very important in terms of reading – they are simply easier for us to say (c-a-t is easier than 'cu – ah- tuh'); and of course knowing alphabetical order is crucial once your child starts using a dictionary of thesaurus.

Below are some suggestions for books and websites which can be used to help teach reading using phonics.

## Phonics programmes

### Websites

[Letters and Sounds](#), (published by the Department for Education and Skills in 2007) is a popular, free programme which teaches 42 sounds and their most common graphemes, along with just over 40 high frequency non-decodable words, in six distinct phases. On this site you will find printable flashcards for all the graphemes and spelling words taught in the programme. There is a very long, very thorough teaching booklet accompanying the Letters and Sounds site which is available [here](#) if you'd like more extra explanations and ideas (starting page numbers for each phase are given below).

[Phase 1](#) focuses on listening skills and does not teach graphemes. (booklet page 2)

[Phase 2](#) introduces the first and simplest common graphemes (page 52)

[Phase 3](#) introduces the remaining common graphemes (page 78) By this point your child knows one way of expressing each sound.

[Phase 4](#) consolidates this learning before teaching alternative graphemes. (page 111)

[Phase 5](#) introduce new graphemes/ new sounds for known graphemes (page 135, with stories)

[Phase 6](#) consolidates learning and introduces more challenging spellings. (page 172, focus on spelling)

Throughout these phases, about 40 tricky (i.e. non-decodable but very common) words are also taught. The Jolly Phonics Tricky words list has more tricky words if you would like them: they can be found [here](#)

[Phonics4free](#) Not a very glossy website but here Mona McNee, author of 'Step by Step Reading' (see below), has made all her resources available for free.

[Jolly Phonics](#) is one of the most popular and well established programmes. Their website offers plenty of free resources but also a whole series of books for both teacher and child (as well as new [phonics apps](#))

[Oxford Owl](#) offers lots of advice to parents (aimed at parents supporting schooled children)

The [phonics4](#) company offers weekly postal courses in which all the materials come ready prepared. There are comprehensive instructions and a helpline available for parents to ask questions about the courses. There are 5 courses ranging in price from £78 to £156.

## **Online resources**

Two popular online programmes are [Teach Your Monster to Read](#) (free, also has an app) and [Reading Eggs](#) (free trial, then c£40 per year subscription). I haven't used these so can't rate them.

## **Books**

[Letterland ABC](#) is an old favourite for teaching the sounds of the letters in a memorable way

[Jolly phonics](#) offers a whole range of books, including a reading scheme (see below); it can be quite expensive to build up the whole set and isn't really necessary.

[Step by Step Reading](#) by Mona McNee is a short, simple no-nonsense text which practices reading and letter formation together. This is the book of the website [Phonics4free](#)

[Teach your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons](#) is very popular amongst homeschoolers as it is aimed at parents and gives very thorough instructions. It is American and uses a very different approach from most English books so you would probably want to stick with this or a UK scheme rather than mix and match.

## **Reading schemes**

In schools, reading is usually reinforced through reading schemes with controlled vocabulary (i.e. the books use only words which your child can 'decode' at his or her level plus some 'tricky/irregular' words). To buy a whole scheme can be very expensive and should not be necessary; with help, your child should be able to read simple easy read books which are not strictly decodable once he or she has covered all the basic steps in learning reading (again, look in the easy reader section of the library). Don't forget to check your local library! You can even make simple coded books of your own - just note down which graphemes and tricky words your child knows and try to use largely only the listed words.

If you do want to invest in a full scheme, or part of a scheme, here are some suggestions:

[Oxford Reading Tree](#) very popular in schools

[Sounds write](#) Also available as an e-book (Kindle format) from Amazon

[Phonics bug](#) 134 decodable books from Pearsons

[Piper books](#) aimed at parents teaching at home so more affordable than the popular school scheme. Very straightforward