PHONICS CONCEPTS

What is a phoneme?

A **phoneme** is the smallest unit of sound in a word. For example: the word "cat" has three phonemes: /k /a/ /t/.

Why do we need phonemes?

Phonemes are essential in learning to read and write because they are the building blocks of words, enabling us to segment and blend sounds to form words. Understanding phonemes helps in the development of literacy skills.
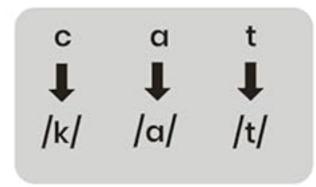
The English Alphabetic Code is based on the 44 phonemes in the English language. The letters of the alphabet represent those sounds with 160+ letter combinations.

When we teach reading, we need to show how the Alphabetic Code works: that the *letters* on the page *spell sounds in words*.
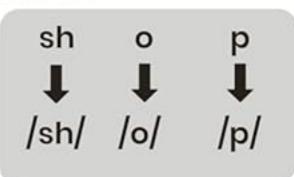
What is a grapheme?

A **grapheme** is a written representation or *spelling* of a sound (phoneme) in a word. A grapheme can be spelled by 1–4 letters.
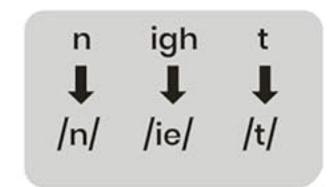
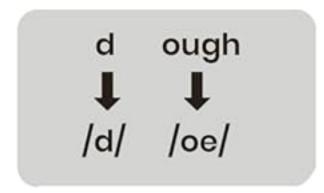In a **1-letter grapheme**, each sound is spelled by one letter:

c → /k/
a → /a/
t → /t/

In a **2-letter grapheme**, a sound is spelled by two letters:

sh → /sh/
o → /o/
p → /p/

In a **3-letter grapheme**, a sound is spelled by three letters:

n → /n/
igh → /ie/
t → /t/

In a **4-letter grapheme**, a sound is spelled by four letters:

d → /d/
ough → /oe/

What is a digraph?

A **digraph** is when two letters represent one sound in a word (phoneme).

di → two (from Greek)
graph → to write letters (from Greek)

Therefore, a digraph means two written letters.

A **consonant digraph** is when two letters represent a consonant sound. For example: the letters 's' and 'h' spell the sound /sh/ in the word "ship".

A **vowel spelling** is when two or more letters represent a vowel sound. For example: the letters 'a' and 'i' spell the sound /ae/ in the word "rain".

What are adjacent consonants?

Adjacent consonants are also called **consonant clusters**. These are two or more adjacent consonants in a word that spell two separate sounds. For example, in the word "stop" the letters 's' and 't' spell the sounds /s/ and /t/.
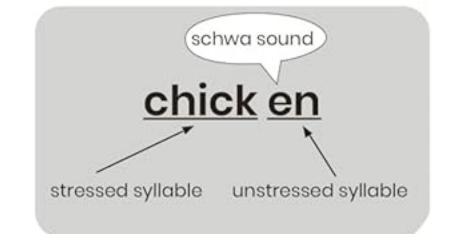
stop

What are split vowel spellings?

A **split vowel spelling** is when the spelling for the vowel sounds /ae/, /ee/, /ie/, /oe/, and /ue/ is split by a consonant:

/ae/	a-e	→	g**a**t**e**
/ee/	e-e	→	**e**v**e**
/ie/	i-e	→	f**i**n**e**
/oe/	o-e	→	h**o**p**e**
/ue/	u-e	→	c**u**t**e**

What is a schwa?

A schwa is a weak vowel sound in an unstressed syllable.

schwa sound

chick en

stressed syllable   unstressed syllable

An example of a schwa is 'e' because it is a weak vowel sound in an unstressed syllable. It gets swallowed up when we pronounce the word "chicken", becoming "chickin" or "chick'n". We need to teach pupils to use their "spelling voice" in order to spell the word correctly and not as they hear it.

LANGUAGE UNITS AND PRINCIPLES

Words to morphemes

There are different ways of looking at a word.

A **word** is a distinct meaningful unit of speech or writing.

Letters are characters used for representing sounds in speech.

Syllables are mouthfuls of words.

Phonemes are speech sounds in words.

Graphemes are spellings of sounds in words.

Morphemes are units of meaning in words.

Distinguishing phonology, phonological awareness and phonics

Phonology is an area of linguistics that deals with speech sound systems and sound patterns of spoken language.

Phonological awareness is the ability to break down words into smaller parts: syllables (mag net), alliteration (Bobby beetle bounced), onset and rime (m at), and phonemic awareness (m a t).

Phonemic awareness is the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds in words (to blend, segment, and manipulate sounds).

Phonics is the teaching of:
- letter/sound correspondences for reading and spelling: c a t = /k/ /a/ /t/
- blending of individual letters/sounds for reading: m a t
- segmenting of individual sounds/letters for spelling: m a t

and spelling of /ch/ and /sh/. A word chain to address this difficulty would look like this:

Letters: m, u, sh, ch, n, b, f, i, p, a, r, c

Word chain: mush—much—munch—bunch—bun—shun—shin—fin—finch—inch—pinch—pin—bin—ban—bash—brash—brush—crush—crash

The two examples above use real words, and this is suitable for young pupils. For older pupils, you can also use nonsense word chains. A typical example would look like this:

Letters: b, l, i, n, a, o, t, u

Word chain: blin—blan—lan—lon—lont—lunt—lut—blut

Here are some guidelines for creating a word chain:

1. Use one syllable words.
2. Use spellings from the simple code. It can get very confusing if vowel spellings are included as many of them can be pronounced in different ways.
3. The word chain can include changing sounds, removing sounds, and adding sounds.
4. Make only one change at a time.

How to teach reading

One of the primary goals in teaching phonics is to equip pupils with the skills necessary to decode and comprehend text effectively. When pupils are reading,

encourage them to sound out each word phonetically and then blend these sounds to form words. This lays the groundwork for developing fluent reading skills, as it enables pupils to approach unfamiliar words with confidence. Slow, laboured reading can interfere with comprehension. When a pupil reads very slowly, reread each sentence after them to maintain comprehension of the text.

Once pupils are comfortable with sounding out and blending words, a next step could be to read a book from a previous lesson for a second time or multiple times to enhance fluency. This repetition helps to consolidate pupils' decoding skills. As pupils revisit the text, they begin to transition from mechanical decoding to reading with greater fluency.

This can be progressed to teaching them to vary their pitch, pace and emphasis according to the words and punctuation in the text. Reading with expression not only makes the reading experience more fun but also aids in comprehension, as it brings the text to life and highlights its meaning.

How to correct reading errors

One of the most important elements of learning is receiving error feedback. With every error feedback, the pupil can adjust their knowledge or skill and can fine-tune them and make their reading increasingly accurate. Making and correcting errors is a great learning opportunity!

Reading with our pupils is a fantastic opportunity for error feedback. But before we can address the error, we need to know what kind of error the reader is making. Here are a few tips:

1. Error feedback should be a positive experience in which the pupil can succeed. So, after the feedback has taken place, the pupil should be able to use the new information and read a word or sentence successfully.

2. It is very helpful to use a pointer or a pencil to show the pupil where the error occurred in the word. The error can even occur between letters on the page, so accurate pointing is essential.

3. When the pupil has read the word correctly, it is helpful to reread the whole sentence so that they can reread the correct word in the context of the text.

What kinds of reading errors do pupils make?

Lack of Alphabetic Code knowledge

Many pupils make reading errors because they have insufficient knowledge of the Alphabetic Code. For example, when a pupil reads the word "goat" as /g/ /o/ /a/ /t/, we can see that they don't know that the grapheme 'oa' spells the sound /oe/.

So, how can feedback be given? Point to both letters and say: "These two letters represent one sound: /oe/. Sound out the word with /oe/ here (pointing to the letters 'oa')." The pupil then blends the sounds together: /g/ /oe/ /t/ → "goat".

Not matching sounds to graphemes (letter/s)

Pupils may add or omit sounds when they read. To develop reading accuracy, they will need to match the graphemes to the sounds in the word. Here are typical examples of reading errors.

Adding sounds: When a pupil reads the word "back" as "black", we can see that they are adding the sound /l/. To give feedback, point to the word and say: "You read "black" but there is no /l/ here (pointing to the place the 'l' would be in the word "black"). Sound out the word." The pupil should then sound the word correctly: /b/ /a/ /k/ → "back".

Omitting sounds: When a pupil reads the word "frog" as "fog", we can see that they are omitting a sound in the word. To give

feedback, point to the letter 'r' and say: "There is a /r/ here. Sound out the word with the /r/ here (pointing to the letter 'r')." The pupil then sounds out the word pointing to the letters /f/ /r/ /o/ /g/ → "frog".

Reversing a word

When a pupil reads "was" for "saw", we can see that they have flipped the word. So, how can feedback be given? Ask the pupil to sound out the word. /s/ /aw/. Remind the pupil that 'aw' spells /aw/. Ask the pupil to blend the sounds into a word: /s/ /aw/ → "saw".

Developing vocabulary

Systematic synthetic phonics focuses on the mechanics of learning to read: developing the skills to sound out, blend to read and segment to spell. It is a structured, progressive programme towards reading fluency. However, alongside that process, it's critical to develop the broader reading skills: prosody, pace, comprehension and vocabulary. Phonics success is based on careful, steady progression, so that pupils are only exposed to words in their books which contain the sounds and high-frequency words they know. Yet, every reading experience is an opportunity to develop a pupil's wider vocabulary, through questioning and discussion. For example: books within the Dandelion World Series include non-fiction Knowledge Builder pages intended for children and adults to read together, which help to reinforce vocabulary and enhance comprehension skills, by encouraging the pupil to think about what they have read.

Talking about the words pupils decode: exploring meaning, looking at patterns, and discussing synonyms and antonyms will not only help secure comprehension and reading for meaning, but will also grow and develop a pupil's more general language knowledge. For example, while reading the word "swift", pupils can explore

Name: **Date:**

1. Single sounds

Unit 1	S m t M i A T a s I
Unit 2	P n O p N o
Unit 3	g B h H c G b C
Unit 4	f V d E v F D e
Unit 5	K r L u k R I U
Unit 6	j Z w J z W
Unit 7	ff y ss ll x zz

Comments:	1. Single sounds	1. Single sounds
	DK:	1st attempt /52
	SC:	2nd attempt /52
	VE:	3rd attempt /52
	UH:	

Name: **Date:**

2. Single words

Unit 1	sat	Sam	sit	mat
Unit 2	not	pat	nip	pot
Unit 3	hob	big	hat	cat
Unit 4	van	fig	man	bed
Unit 5	kid	run	let	bug
Unit 6	win	jug	zap	jet
Unit 7	off	yell	buzz	tax
	lass	mix	yes	will

Comments:	2. Single words		2. Single words
	DK:	OM:	1st attempt /32
	SC:	VE:	2nd attempt /32
	SO:	BL:	3rd attempt /32
	AD:		

Name: **Date:**

1. Single words

chat	mush	this	rock
bang	when	fish	much
quit	moth	ship	king
bunch	then	luck	quick
crash	truck	broth	swing
chimp	shrub	throb	chick

Comments:	1. Single words	1. Single words	
	DK:	1st attempt	/24
	SC:	2nd attempt	/24
	SO:	3rd attempt	/24
	AD:		
	OM:		
	VE:		
	BL:		

Name: **Date:**

High-frequency words:

said   to   is   be   a   the   his   no

(We are not testing high-frequency words. They are here for you to note whether or not they are recognised by the reader.)

2. Text

Jill said to Mick, "Which is the bus?"

"Quick!" said Mick. "That bus! It will not be a long trip to get to the shops!""

Jill and Mick had to rush to get on the bus. Mick flung his bag on the bench next to Jill.

When Mick got his lunch box from his bag, the bus had to stop fast. Mick's lunch box fell off his lap with a thud.

Both Jill and Mick had to pick up the mess and quit the bus with no lunch.

Comments:	2. Text		2. Text	
	DK:	OM:	1st attempt	/88
	SC:	VE:	2nd attempt	/88
	SO:	GU:	3rd attempt	/88
	MW:	BL:		
	AD:			

STEP 2
Application for reading
15 mins

Before reading (3 mins)

- Pre-teach difficult vocabulary in the book (e.g. "shrub"). Clearly say the word: /sh/ /r/ /u/ /b/.
- Then provide a simple definition, e.g. "A shrub is a type of small, woody plant."
- Ask questions such as "Can you name a type of shrub you know?"
- Then write the word on the whiteboard and refer back to it throughout the week for reinforcement.
- You could also draw a picture of a shrub on the whiteboard or show an actual picture.

High-frequency words (2 mins)

- Pre-teach and reiterate these high-frequency words: "I", "a", "was", "you", "be", "my", "to", "no", "yelled" and "said".
- Explain that these are high-frequency words that have tricky spellings the pupils will learn later. Read each high-frequency word aloud. Write the words on the board, showing the separate graphemes in each word.

Application (10 mins)

- The chosen text for this reading activity is Book 12a: Shep and Tosh. Briefly introduce the book, its characters and its context to spark interest and set the stage for engagement.
- Lead pupils through a directed reading of Book 12a: Shep and Tosh. Encourage pupils to sound out each word carefully and then blend the sounds together to form the word.
- Provide support by modelling the blending. This hands-on practice is crucial for reinforcing phonetic skills and building fluency.
- Encourage pupils to sound out each word and then blend to read. This is crucial for reinforcing their learning and for building their confidence.

Extension activities

- Following the initial reading, revisit Book 12a: Shep and Tosh with a focus on fluency.
- Reading the book again allows pupils to practise their newly acquired skills.
- Create an interactive reading environment by inviting pupils to take it in turns reading aloud. Encourage them to point to each word as they read.
- As pupils read more fluently, support them to read with more expression and prosody.

STEP 3
Application for spelling
15 mins

Segmenting and spelling (5 mins)

- Ask pupils to complete the following: **Shep and Tosh game** (Activities, page 43).
- Demonstrate correct pencil grip to the class. The pencil should rest comfortably between the thumb and index finger, supported by the middle finger, with the other two fingers curled inwards. The pupil should have their hands resting on the table and their feet planted squarely on the floor; the paper should be at a slight angle. The pupil should learn to move the pencil forwards using their hand muscles.
- Distribute the activity to each pupil.
- Instruct pupils to look at each picture and use it to determine the missing sound in the corresponding word.
- Encourage the pupils to say the sounds as they write them and then blend the sounds in each word together as they write them.
- After pupils complete the activity, individually model the formation of each letter that was filled in during the activity on the whiteboard. Focus on the starting point, stroke direction, and completion of each letter.
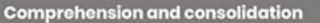
Sentence dictation (10 mins)

- Read out the **Sentence dictation** sentence (Activities, page 47): "Shep was a big dog. Shep had a wish. "
- Encourage the pupils to sound out the words as they spell them.

Extension activities

- Ask pupils to complete the second page of the **Shep and Tosh game** (Activities, page 44).
- Invite pupils to complete the **Free writing** activity for Book 12a: Shep and Tosh (Activities, page 48). The pupils are given picture clues and a bank of high-frequency words to use in their answers.
- For pupils who need additional practice with letter formation, ask them to complete the **Handwriting** activities.
- Additionally, you can create your own sentences using the learned sounds and dictate them for the pupils to spell.

STEP 4
Comprehension and consolidation
15 mins

Book reading (5 mins)

- Reread Book 12a: Shep and Tosh.
- Revisiting the book helps to reinforce familiarity with the text and supports phonetic recognition and comprehension.

Sequencing (5 mins)

- For this activity, the pupils are going to retell the story, using the pictures and words in the **Retell the story** activity (Activities, page 45).
- Divide pupils into small groups.
- Distribute the activity to each group.
- Decide whether to number the cards on the back to make sequencing easier for the pupils.
- Provide each group with a set of cards. Encourage collaboration as they work together to place the picture cards in the correct order of the story.
- Invite each group to retell the story using their arranged cards. Encourage them to use the word cards to narrate the story.
- Alternatively, after sequencing the story, the pupils can use the word cards to reinforce directional vocabulary. Ask pupils to match the word cards to the corresponding picture cards, promoting word recognition and comprehension.

Comprehension (5 mins)

- Check pupils have understood the story by completing the **Comprehension** activity (Activities, page 46).
- The aim of this activity is to reinforce vocabulary and story comprehension through a matching exercise.
- Distribute the activity to each pupil or small group.
- Cut out the words on the page. Then ask pupils to read and match them to the correct pictures.
- After matching, facilitate a discussion where pupils share their matches and explain their reasoning.

Extension activities

- Have pupils find and point to these words in Book 12a: Shep and Tosh: "wish" and "shrub".

STEP 5
Tracking progress

- Complete the **Spelling list** (Activities, page 70) to make a quick, formative assessment of pupils' progress.
- Hide the words and ask pupils to write them out as you read them, encouraging them to segment each sound.
- Depending on your findings, either revisit some of the activities to reinforce any specific skill gaps, or invite pupils to complete an extension activity.

Extension activities

- Play the **Stepping stones game** (Activities, page 69).
- This game is suitable for 1–4 players and requires counters and a die.
- Pupils place their counters at the start of the stepping stones path. They then take it in turns rolling the die. They move their counter according to the number rolled.
- Upon landing on a stepping stone, the pupil reads the word on that stone aloud.
- If a pupil lands on a stone with a directional arrow, they follow the arrow forwards or backwards.
- The first pupil to reach the end of the stepping stones path wins.
- For those needing more support, help them to blend the letter sound or word with assistance.

PARALLEL BOOKS

In addition to Book 12a: Shep and Tosh, the following books also cover the /sh/ sound and can be used for more practice of decoding, for book bags to take home.

Dandelion Launchers
Book 12b: The Shop
Book 12c: Fresh Fish
Book 12d: The Fish Pond

Dandelion Readers
Book 12: "Hush!" (Set 1 Units 11–20)
Book 12: The Cash (Set 2 Units 11–20)

Dandelion World
Book 12a: Trash in the Trench
Book 12b: Sled Dogs Dash