



A Guide to Phonics Terminology

Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) is a structured and cumulative method of teaching pupils to read and spell. The 'synthetic' in SSP comes from the synthesising or 'blending' of sounds to make a word. The 'systematic' represents a bottom-up approach, in that lessons begin not with whole words but with sounds first. Throughout Phonics lessons children are introduced to new terminology and methods that you may be unfamiliar with. This is a guide to some of the key aspects you will need to help your children with their phonics learning at home.

Phonemes

Phonemes are the smallest unit of sound that are found within a word. These can be:

- Single sounds such as s, m, o.
- Digraphs (this means two letters that make one sound) such as sh, ai, and oo.
- Trigraphs (this means three letters that make one sound) such as igh, ear and air.
- Split digraphs - these are made up of two letters that are "split" by having another letter in the middle of them. For example, a_e in "game" or i_e in "tide"

The English language has 44 phonemes. Over the course of Reception and Year 1, children are taught to read and write each phoneme, forming them accurately. A list of all the phonemes and how to say them is available in our 'Phoneme Pronunciation Guide'

Graphemes

A grapheme is a way of writing down a phoneme. Graphemes can be made up from 1 letter e.g. p, 2 letters e.g. sh, 3 letters e.g. igh or 4 letters e.g. ough. There are often multiple ways to write each phoneme (multiple graphemes for each phoneme), for example the phoneme 'ay' as in 'play' can be written as 'ai', 'a', 'a-e', 'ei' and 'ey', depending on the word you are writing. These different ways to write each sound will be explored in more detail as your child nears the end of the Reception and throughout their time in Year 1.

Segmenting & Blending

Once children have started learning some phonemes, they will quickly begin segmenting and blending them to read and write words.

Blending is when children use their knowledge of phonemes to read words, saying the sounds in quick succession to hear the word. For example

s - a - t

ch - i - p

l - ight - t

Segmenting is when we break down a word in order to write it, according to the sounds we hear in that word. Children will use segmenting skills, as well as their knowledge of phonemes to spell out and help them to write words.

Common Exception, High Frequency & Tricky Words

Due to the complexity of the English language not every word can be decoded into phonemes or follows traditional spelling rules. This includes common exception, tricky and high frequency words.

These are words which may be exceptions to spelling rules or words which use a particular combination of letters to represent sound patterns in a rare or unique way. If you try to decode words like “was” and “said”, for example, they would sound very different to how we usually say them. Words like this are often referred to as “common exception words” or “tricky words”- they are exceptions to the rule, or tricky to read using current phonic knowledge alone. For this reason, we have to teach children to read these words by sight.

“High frequency words” are usually decodable, especially as your child becomes more familiar with the different phonemes. This term refers to words that we come across in our reading and writing most frequently, therefore it is beneficial for children if they learn to sight read them, and later spell them correctly.

Tricky Words

Phase 2a	Phase 2b	Phase 3d	Phase 4a	Phase 5a
I	he	said	Mr	oh
no	she	have	Mrs	Phase 5b
the	we	so	once	people
Phase 2b	me	do	love	their
go	be	like	one	Phase 5c
to	my	little	Phase 4b	called
	by	some	who	looked
	was	come	what	asked
	they	were	where	could
	all	there	when	would
	her	out	why	should
	are			
	you			

High Frequency Words

Phase 2a	Phase 2b	Phase 3a	Phase 3c	Phase 4a
a	can	pull	see	eyes
as	had	full	with	it's
is	mum	will	then	I'm
it	dad		too	ask
and	get	Phase 3b	them	Phase 4b
	got	that	your	from
Phase 2b	put	this	Phase 3d	just
at	but	push	down	went
on	his		for	help
up	him		now	find
am	big		today	
of	back		day	
if	off			

Other Important Terminology

Clusters: (AKA Adjacent Consonants) Two sounds blended together.

GPC: This is short for Grapheme Phoneme Correspondence. Knowing a GPC means being able to match a phoneme to a grapheme and vice versa.

Vowels: The letters a, e, i, o and u

Consonant: The letters of the alphabet that are not vowels

Consonant digraph - A digraph that is made up of two consonants (sh in shop).

CVC words: This is an abbreviation used for consonant-vowel-consonant words. It describes the order of sounds. Some examples of CVC words are: cat, pen, top, chat

Other similar abbreviations include:

VC (Vowel Consonant) words e.g. on, is, it.

CCVC (Consonant, Consonant, Vowel, Consonant) words e.g. trap and black.

CVCC (Consonant, Vowel, Consonant, Consonant) words e.g. milk and fast.

Letter Names: The name of the letter, not the sound (This is regardless of case).