



Phonics

Parents' Guide

This guide is to help you understand how we teach phonics at Glade Primary School and the part that you can play in helping your child become a confident and fluent reader.

Our aim is for our children to become independent, life long readers, able to read a wide range of texts for a variety of purposes with understanding and for pleasure.

We welcome and encourage support from home in the teaching of phonics and reading. We hope that the information in this booklet will be of help in this partnership between home and school.

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First of all, what is synthetic phonics?

It is a technical name and nothing to do with being artificial. The synthetic part refers to synthesizing or blending sounds to make a word. Phonics is a method of teaching children how spoken words are composed of sounds called phonemes and how the letters in words correspond to those phonemes. The process of reading involves decoding or 'breaking' words into separate phonemes, so that meaning can be gained. On the other hand, the process of spelling requires the writer to identify all the phonemes in a word and then use their knowledge of the phonemic code to write or 'make' the word.

We can make a word from the sounds and then break it apart again when we want to spell it. You will find that the teaching of spelling goes hand in hand with the teaching of reading; once you know the alphabetic code and how to listen for each phoneme then spelling becomes as easy as reading.

Written English is recognised as being a complex language. We have 26 letters but 44 "speed sounds" (phonemes) in the spoken language. There are a huge number of letter combinations needed to make these 44 phonemes (a phoneme is the technical name for the smallest unit of sound and is a technical word your child should know). Other languages are more regular having fewer letters and fewer sounds which makes them easier to learn to read. The Read Write Inc programme teaches groups of phonemes together and right from the start, your child is making words and decoding simple consonant-vowel-consonant (c-v-c) words such as **c a t** and **d o g**.

It is the speed, the efficiency and the effectiveness that characterises this approach.

At a glance: Synthetic phonics:

- Teaches all 44 phonemes
- Teaches all the ways each phoneme can be written
- Teaches children to blend phonemes in a word to read
- Teaches children to listen for sounds in words to spell
- Teaches children to look for phonemic clues when decoding irregular words

How does Synthetic Phonics differ from the 'old' type of phonics?

Synthetic phonics starts with 'phonemic awareness' which is hearing the different sounds in a word and the matching of these phonemes to single letters. At the same time it shows how these phonemes (sounds) can be 'blended' to produce words and the words can be 'segmented' to write. Your child will learn simple letter to sound correspondence. This is when a phoneme is represented by a single letter as in the word /c/ /a/ /t/.

When that's mastered your child will learn that sometimes one phoneme is represented by two letters (digraph); as in the word /ch/ /o/ /p/ ; where /ch/ is only one phoneme (sound).

Then after that, even though at first it may sound confusing, your child will learn that sometimes a single phoneme can be represented many different ways. Like the sound /ay/ in play. Your child will eventually learn that this phoneme can be written;

/ay/ as in the word play
/a-e/ as in the word spade
/ea/ as in the word break
/ey/ as in the word hey
/eigh/ as in the word eight
/a/ as in the word later
/ei/ as in the word vein

Finally your child will learn that sometimes a single (or more) letter may represent more than one phoneme; for example, the 'o' in /most/ and the 'o' in /hot/ or the 'ow' in /wow/ and the 'ow' in /tow/. We know this can be confusing but with the structure and regularity of synthetic phonics almost all children will pick this up. This advanced code is taught only after the basic rules are mastered. At first the rules are regular, with no exceptions.

Another big difference you will notice is that the phonemes are taught at a faster, more efficient rate than ever before. No more "a letter a week". Your child may learn up to 8 phonemes in a week! Sounds like a lot, but they do cope! Children start to make their own words straight away. There is recognition that although English is complicated, there is a high degree of order to it, and this needs to be taught.

What do all these technical words mean?

What is a phoneme?

It is the smallest unit of sound and a piece of terminology that children like to use and should be taught. At first it will equate with a letter sound but later on will include the digraphs.

What is a digraph?

This is when two or more letters come together to make a phoneme. /oa/ makes the sound in boat.

What is blending?

Blending is the process that is involved in bringing the sounds together to make a word or a syllable and is how /c/ /a/ /t / becomes cat.

What is a consonant blend?

Previously, consonant blends were taught as if there was something special about them. Children were taught that /st/ was one phoneme, when actually it is two, /s/ and /t/. Think about it. Why teach /st/ when children already know /s/ and /t/, it just wastes time and clogs up children's memory. But note that /sh/ is a digraph. It cannot be made by a process of blending the two letter sounds of /s/ and /h/ together. We need to teach the digraphs not the blends.

At a glance:

- It is not important to know all the jargon. It is important to try to use the same words your child is being taught at school.
- It is important to know how to pronounce each of the phonemes correctly
- Remember that teaching the old consonant blends just wastes time and energy with something your child already knows; it can also lead to confusion.

How can I help my child learn to read?

Read as many stories to your child as you can. Talk about the stories. Explain the meaning of new words. Most importantly though, show the fun that can be gained by listening to stories. What you read to your child today, he will be able to read for himself very soon. Do not teach your child to say the letter names. These do not help with reading, despite all the effort put into teaching alphabet songs etc. It is important that the pronunciation of the sounds is taught correctly from the start. For instance, it is necessary to make the sound for m as **mmm** and not as **M** (the letter name) or **muh**. This is important because teaching the wrong pronunciation can lead to problems reading later on.

Step 1: Help your child to learn Speed Sounds Set 1

Before you start to teach your child, practise saying the sounds below. These are the sounds we use to speak in English. We use pure sounds ('m' not 'muh', 's' not 'suh', etc.) so that your child will be able to blend the sounds into words more easily. At school we use a puppet called Fred who can do this beautifully! When we say words in sounds we call it 'Fred Talk', e.g. d-o-g, c-a-t, m-a-n, sh-o-p, c-l-a-p.

These first sounds should all be stretched slightly. Try to avoid saying uh after each one:

e.g. mm, not muh
ss, not suh
ff, not fuh

m	mmmmmmountain (keep lips pressed together hard)
s	sssssnake (keep teeth together and hiss – unvoiced)
n	nnnnnet (keep tongue behind teeth)
f	ffffflower (keep teeth on bottom lip and force air out sharply – unvoiced)
l	llllleg (keep pointed curled tongue behind teeth).
r	rrrrrrobot (say rrr as if you are growling)
v	vvvvvvulture (keep teeth on bottom lip and force air out gently)
z	zzzzzzig zzzzzag (keep teeth together and make a buzzing sound)
th	thhhhank you (stick out tongue and breathe out sharply)
sh	shhhh (make a shhh noise as though you are telling somebody to be quiet!)
ng	thinnnnngg on a strinnnnngg (curl your tongue at the back of your throat)
nk	I think I stink (make a piggy oink noise without the oi! nk nk nk)

These next sounds cannot be stretched. Make the sound as short as possible avoiding uh at the end of the sound:

t	tuck tongue behind the teeth – unvoiced
p	make distinctive p with lips – unvoiced
k	make sharp click at back of throat
c	as above
h	say h as you breathe sharply out – unvoiced
ch	make a short sneezing sound
x	say a sharp c and add s – unvoiced

You will find it harder to avoid saying uh at the end of these sounds.

d	tap tongue behind the teeth
g	make soft sound in throat
b	make a short, strong b with lips
j	push lips forward
y	keep edges of tongue against teeth
w	keep lips tightly pursed
qu	keep lips pursed as you say cw – unvoiced

The short vowels should be kept short and sharp:

a	a-a-a (open mouth wide as if to take a bite of an apple)
e	e-e-e (release mouth slightly from a position)
i	i-i-i (make a sharp sound at the back of the throat – smile)
o	o-o-o (push out lips, make the mouth into o shape)
u	u-u-u (make a sound in the throat)

The long vowel sounds are all stretchy sounds

ay	ay may I play?
ee	ee what do you see?
igh	fly high
ow	blow the snow
oo	poo at the zoo
oo	look at a book
ar	start the car
or	shut the door
air	that's not fair
ir	whirl and twirl
ou	shout it out
oy	toy for a boy

Before children read the Storybooks, they are taught to read Set 1 Speed Sounds.

The children are taught the Set 1 Speed Sound cards in the following order:

m a s d t, i n p g o, c k u b, f e l h sh, r j v y w, th z ch qu x ng nk

Step 2: Help your child learn to read words by sound-blending

Children learn to read words by blending the letter-sounds that are in the Speed Sound pack. Help children to say the pure sounds, as quickly as they can, and then to blend the sounds together to say the whole word. We call this Fred Talk e.g. l-e-g, b-a-ck, h-ea-d, p-e-n, c-u-p, g-r-ee-n

Make sure that children can read the Speed sound cards before you attempt to sound-blend a word. Choose 3 cards from the Speed Sound pack that will make up a 3-sound word. Muddle the cards and point to these sounds in and out of order to check these can be read at speed. Put the cards in order and practise reading the sounds quickly until your child can work out the word.

Step 3: Help your child to read the Ditties

Children use sound-blending (Fred Talk) to read short ditties. They will bring these home. Ask children to read the sounds at the top of the page, the word list and then the short text. If they hesitate ask them to use 'Fred Talk' to read the word.

Step 4: Storybooks

Once children can read the first set of Speed Sounds and can read the Ditties, they will start to bring home the Storybooks. The Storybooks have been written by Gill Munton, a talented and experienced author. When you read Gill's stories, you forget that you are reading a text with a strong phonic structure. The language is natural and fluent and each story has a clear shape. Humour is a strong feature - children want to read the books again and again. The Storybooks will be brought home once children have completed all the work associated with this book.

There are instructions in every book for you to follow. **Always praise your child!**

Speed Sounds Sets 2 and 3: The long vowels

Once children have started to read the green storybooks you may like to teach your child more Speed Sounds. Most vowel sounds have more than one spelling. Teach Set 2 speed sounds thoroughly before starting Set 3.

Example session – Vowel card: ay

Introduce the picture side of the card e.g. may I play?

Say: *'This is a picture of children playing. They are saying ay, may I play?'*

Say the words listed on the back.

Ask your child to repeat the word and say 'ay' after each word.

Show the other side of the card. Say the sound 'ay'.

Keep turning the card over saying 'ay, may I play' on the picture side and 'ay' on the other side. As you teach more sounds, put the sounds you have taught in a Speed Sound pack, along with others from Speed Sounds Set 1.

See how quickly your child can read the cards. Get quicker and quicker.

Long Vowel Sounds

	Set 2 Speed Sounds Teach these first	Set 3 Speed Sounds	
ay	ay: may I play	a-e: make a cake	ai: snail in the rain
ee	ee: what can you see	ea: cup of tea	e: he me we she be
igh	igh: fly high	i-e: nice smile	
ow	ow: blow the snow	o-e: phone home	oa: goat in a boat
oo	oo: poo at the zoo	u-e: huge brute	ew: chew the stew
oo	oo: look at a book		
ar	ar: start the car		
or	or: shut the door	aw: yawn at dawn	
air	air: that's not fair	are: share and care	
ir	ir: whirl and twirl	ur: nurse for a purse	er: a better letter
ou	ou: shout it out	ow: brown cow	
oy	oy: toy for a boy	oi: spoil the boy	
ire		ire: fire fire!	
ear		ear: hear with your ear	
ure		ure: sure it's pure?	