

Teaching Phonics

A Short Guide for Parents



Welcome to your comprehensive guide on teaching phonics to your child! Phonics is a crucial foundation for reading and writing, and with the right approach, you can make learning fun and effective. This guide will provide you with practical strategies, tips, and resources to help your child master phonics. Additionally, we will recommend some excellent phonics cards and storybooks by Julia Donaldson that you can purchase through affiliate links.

Understanding Phonics

Phonics is the method of teaching reading by correlating sounds with letters or groups of letters. It helps children decode words, improving their reading fluency and comprehension. Here are the key components of phonics:

- **Phonemic Awareness:** The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.
- **Phonics Instruction:** Teaching the relationship between phonemes and their corresponding letters.
- **Blending:** Combining individual sounds to form words (reading)
- **Segmenting:** Breaking down words into their individual sounds (spelling & writing)

Here are some key terms to help you understand phonics better:

Phoneme

- A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a word. For example, the word "cat" has three phonemes: /c/ /a/ /t/. There are around 44 phonemes in the English language.

Grapheme

- A grapheme is the letter or group of letters that represent a phoneme in written form. For example, the phoneme /ai/ can be represented by graphemes like "ai" (in rain) or "ay" (in play).

Blending

- This is the process of combining individual phonemes to read a word. For example, blending /c/ /a/ /t/ gives "cat."

Segmenting

- Segmenting is the reverse of blending. It involves breaking a word down into its individual phonemes for spelling. For example, segmenting "dog" would break it into /d/ /o/ /g/.

Digraph

- A digraph is two letters that work together to make one sound (phoneme). Examples include "ch" in chip and "sh" in ship.

Trigraph

- Similar to a digraph, but this involves three letters making one sound. For instance, "igh" in light.

Split Digraph

- Also known as the "magic e," a split digraph involves two letters working together to create a long vowel sound, but they are separated by a consonant. For example, the "a_e" in "cake."

CVC Words

- CVC stands for consonant-vowel-consonant words like "cat" or "dog." These are often the first types of words children learn to read.

Decodable Words

- These are words that can be sounded out (decoded) using phonics rules, such as "ship" or "frog."

Tricky Words (or Common Exception Words)

- These are words that cannot easily be sounded out and must be learned by sight, such as "the," "said," and "because."

Best Practices and Expert Tips for Teaching Phonics



It Starts with You

The way we teach phonics (and as a result, reading and writing) has changed a lot over the last couple of decades, so your own memories of learning ABCs might not match your child's way of learning today.

Correct Pronunciation: It's important to make sure you're pronouncing each sound correctly and avoiding common mistakes. For example, the 'm' sound should be 'mmm', but many adults incorrectly place an 'uh' sound on the end, so it sounds more like 'muh'. The sounds this happens to the most are usually f, l, m, n, r, s, and t. Don't worry if you do this - it's easy to change the habit once you know!

Practice: Spend some time practicing the correct sounds yourself. There are many online resources and videos that can help you with this. Once you feel confident, you can start teaching your child.



Model: Show Your Child How to Do It

Once you feel a bit more confident with phonics, it's helpful to show your child how we say each sound. Let them clearly see your mouth when you speak so they can watch your mouth move differently for each sound or word. Join them in sounding out some words, so they can observe the technique before trying it themselves.

Demonstration: Sit face-to-face with your child and exaggerate the mouth movements for each sound. This visual cue helps them understand how to form the sounds themselves.

Interactive Learning: Use a mirror so your child can see their own mouth movements and compare them to yours. This can be a fun and engaging way to practice.

Mistakes are Okay: Don't panic if you get something wrong - it's always good for children to see that grown-ups make mistakes too. Correct yourself and carry on... unless your child has already corrected you, in which case they're clearly learning something!



Remember: It's Not Just About Letters

When children reach Reception, there is a big emphasis on learning which sounds correspond to which letters. Before this stage though, children have been learning phonics skills since they were born; differentiating between sounds such as their mother's voice and a phone ringing, or trees rustling and birds tweeting.

Sound Differentiation: You can play with sound by using instruments (or simply drumming on anything they can find), listening to stories and joining in with nursery rhymes are all activities that build a good foundation for later letter and sound learning.

Activities: Engage in activities that focus on sound recognition. For example, play games where you identify different sounds around the house or outside. This helps build their auditory discrimination skills.



**TWINKLE
TWINKLE
LITTLE
STAR**

Make Reading Fun!

Reading should be a fun, shared experience. Read together, read to your child, read in a tent, in the garden, upside down... shake things up a bit!

Variety: Even if your child is a confident reader, reading together (and being read to) allows them to share the experience and be exposed to that all-important modelling. Read books that interest your child, even if they can't read all of the words themselves. Read fiction and non-fiction, read street signs, posters and recipes. Find the wider world of words!

Engagement: Create a cosy reading nook or a special reading time each day. Make it a routine that your child looks forward to.

Work at Your Child's Level

If a child is struggling to sound out the word 'cat', there's no point in asking them to read the word 'thought'. Children can become very self-conscious when they feel they aren't 'good' at reading, so although we want to challenge them, we also need to help build their confidence.

Appropriate Challenges: Phonics always requires repetition and sometimes it takes a lot of it, but there are plenty of games and activities you can do to make it more enjoyable. Use phonics cards and storybooks that match their current level of understanding.

Positive Reinforcement: Celebrate small victories and progress. This boosts their confidence and encourages them to keep trying.

Start with Simple Sounds

Begin with simple consonant sounds and short vowels. Use visual aids like phonics cards to help your child associate sounds with letters.

Step-by-Step: Introduce one sound at a time and practice it until your child is comfortable. Gradually add more sounds and blend them to form simple words.

Visual Aids: Phonics cards are a great tool for visual learners. They help children recognize letters and sounds quickly. You can purchase high-quality phonics cards through the affiliate links provided.

Use Multi-Sensory Techniques

Engage your child's senses by incorporating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities. For example, use songs, rhymes, and physical movements to reinforce learning.

Multi-Sensory Learning: Incorporate activities that involve seeing, hearing, and touching. For example, use sand or shaving cream to write letters, sing phonics songs, and clap out syllables.

Interactive Tools: There are many educational apps and games that focus on phonics. These can be a great supplement to traditional teaching methods.

Practice Regularly

Consistency is key. Set aside time each day for phonics practice. Short, frequent sessions are more effective than long, infrequent ones.

Daily Routine: Create a daily phonics practice routine. Keep sessions short and engaging to maintain your child's interest.

Repetition: Regular practice helps reinforce learning. Use a variety of activities to keep things interesting.



Encourage Blending and Segmenting

Teach your child to blend sounds to form words and segment words into individual sounds. This helps with reading and spelling.

Blending: Start with simple words and demonstrate how to blend the sounds together. For example, "c-a-t" becomes "cat".

Segmenting: Practice breaking down words into individual sounds. This helps with spelling and understanding the structure of words.

Conclusion

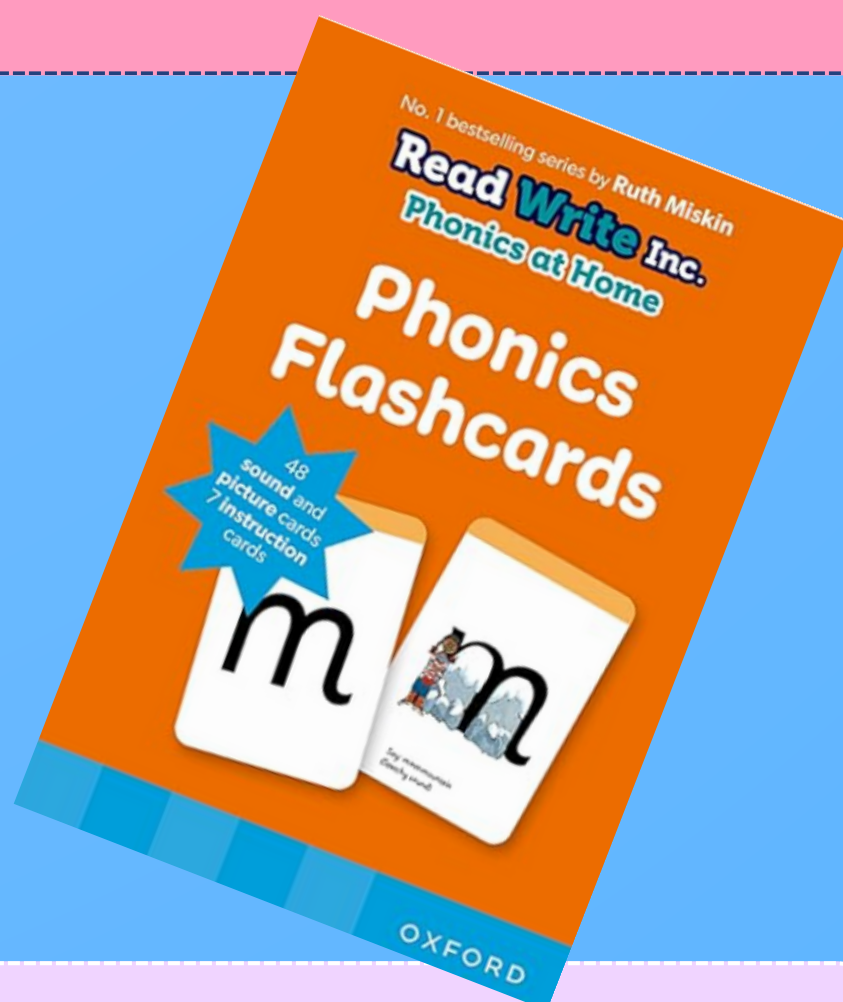
Teaching phonics can be a rewarding experience for both you and your child. By using the strategies and resources outlined in this guide, you can help your child develop strong reading skills that will benefit them throughout their life. Remember to be patient, consistent, and make learning fun!

Happy teaching and thanks for reading,
Kate

Recommended Resources

Phonics Cards- these are from the scheme Read, Write Inc. It's worth checking what scheme your child's school use so you don't confuse them.

- **Affiliate Link 1:** Phonics cards are really helpful and encourage children to say the sound quickly and accurately. These cards are a handy little pack to slip in your bag and can be used in a variety of ways.
- **Affiliate Link 2:** This next set of cards helps your child progress to learning digraphs, trigraphs, and split digraphs.



Affiliate Link 1: The Julia Donaldson Phonics Storybook Collection stands out as the best phonics storybooks because they expertly combine engaging storytelling with effective phonics practice.

