

Tips for Home Reading

What is Phonics?

Schools in the UK, and increasingly around the world, teach children to read using ‘Synthetic Phonics’. This is simply a way in which we break words down into the smallest sounds. So, the sounds in the word ‘cat’ are /c/ /a/ /t/. We are saying words in an unnatural, or synthetic way.

We use the FFT Success for All Phonics programme to teach your children phonics, which has been validated by the Department of Education and meets all their requirements for the teaching of phonics in schools. Every day your child will have about a 25-minute phonics lesson where they will be taught all the skills they need to use phonics to decode words for reading, and to break words down for spelling.

Phonics can be tricky and there are some technical terms that your child will learn and use. These are explained in the ‘Key Phonics Terms’ section, but please don’t worry if you don’t fully understand them. Your child will learn to read and write using phonics because it will be taught systematically. They will learn new skills and then learn to apply them by reading texts before moving on to the next skill.

In many ways, you can be guided by your child. They will understand the process well and may be able to help you through it. If you aren’t confident and need more support, ask a teacher, who will happily help.

Key Phonics Terms

Phonics involves some technical terms which your child will learn and use:

Phoneme	The smallest unit of sound in a word is called a phoneme. If you say the word ‘cat’ slowly you can hear 3 phonemes or sounds: /c/ /a/ /t/.
Grapheme	A phoneme written down is called a grapheme. For example, the letter (grapheme) ‘a’ represents the sound (phoneme) /a/. The word ‘cat’ has three graphemes: the letters ‘c’ ‘a’ ‘t’. A grapheme may have 1, 2 or 3 letters to make one sound, this is explained below. Some graphemes represent more than one phoneme. For example, ‘oo’ has two different phonemes (sounds) as in ‘book’ and ‘zoo’.
Digraph	If a grapheme has 2 letters to make 1 sound, it is called a ‘digraph’. For example: ‘shut’ has 3 phonemes or sounds: /sh/ /u/ /t/. Although there are 4 letters in the word ‘shut’, we say there are 3 graphemes because the letters that make /sh/ go together to make one sound. This is a digraph. The graphemes are ‘sh’ ‘u’ ‘t’. Once your child has learned all the single sounds (the alphabet letters), then they will begin to learn digraphs.
Split Digraph	Split digraphs are digraphs where the grapheme is split up by a consonant. For example: ‘bake’ has 3 phonemes or sounds ‘b’ ‘a_e’ ‘k’. When your child writes the ‘a_e’ digraph, it is split because there is a ‘k’ between the ‘a’ and the ‘e’. Some other split digraphs are: ‘i_e’, ‘o_e’, e-e and ‘u_e’. They make one sound (phoneme) but are split when written.
Trigraph	If a grapheme has 3 letters, it is called a trigraph. For example: ‘light’ has 3 phonemes or sounds /l/ /igh/ /t/. /igh/ is a trigraph.
Grapheme–Phoneme Correspondence (GPC)	The relationship of the phoneme and the grapheme that represents it and vice versa. To see the grapheme ‘sh’ and know the sound that it will make. Or, to hear the sound /sh/ and know how to write the corresponding grapheme.

Why is Phonics not taught in alphabetical order?

It may seem odd that we don't teach phonics in alphabetical order, but there is a good reason for this. We teach phonics in an order that allows us to form words as soon as possible. At the start of Success for All Phonics, we teach s,a,t,p,i,n,m,d, and once children know these first 8 GPCs they can start reading our first Shared Readers. As children learn more GPCs the range of words used in the Shared Readers increases giving children the opportunity to practise reading and writing these words. The teaching sequence is designed to support this process.

How to say Phonemes correctly

Knowing how to say phonemes correctly can be a challenge. It is very important to use what is called a 'pure' sound. An 'impure' sound is where we add an 'uh' sound at the end of a phoneme. So, instead of saying /buh/ we should say /b/ (this usually means we have to use a quiet voice). This is very important because if a child uses impure sounds it is very difficult to blend the sounds to make the word, e.g. /duh/ /ah/ /duh/ doesn't really sound like 'dad' but /d/ /a/ /d/ does.

You can hear all the proper pronunciation of the phonemes taught in SfA Phonics [here](#).

Using the Shared Readers at home

FFT Success for All Phonics has 68 'Shared Readers' that children read to practise their developing phonic skills. The first few texts are very simple, using very few Grapheme Phoneme Correspondences (GPCs), with the first book, 'Tap, Tap, Tap' only using the GPCs s,a,t,p,i,n,m,d. Each week as more GPCs are taught, they are used in the book the children read that week, gradually building up a bigger range of words that can be used and read.

When your child brings home their reading book you will see one or more Grapheme Phoneme Correspondences printed on the front cover at the top right-hand side. These are the new GPCs that have been introduced in that book and your child will have learned these in their phonics lessons. They may still need some practise and help in reading words using recently taught GPCs. Inside the front cover you will find a list of 'Green Words', these are the words in the book that use the new GPCs. Your children practise reading these words in class and reading them together at home will give them even more practise.

The English language is very challenging because there is a wide range of words that cannot be fully decoded using phonics. Technically these are called 'Common Exception Words' but for ease of use we call these 'Red Words'. With Red Words, we encourage children to use their phonics to read the phonetically regular parts of the word and we point out the 'tricky' grapheme, which they need to try to remember. A list of Red Words has also been printed inside the front cover of the Shared Reader so your child can practise reading them with you.

You and your child may want to read our online Shared Readers. Therefore we have provided a complete set of Shared Readers which can be found [here](#) along with recordings of the Readers being read out loud. Your child will enjoy listening to the text being read out loud and it is a good idea for the children to follow the text as this will support their reading fluency!

What sort of questions can I ask my children when we read?

We also want to make sure that children understand what they are reading, so remember to ask some questions as you read with your child. Asking children questions about what they have read is really important because it helps them to understand the text and really get the most from their reading. It can sometimes be tricky to think of questions to ask so some suggestions are provided below.

Questions for storybooks

- What do you think will happen in this book?
- What has happened in the story so far?
- What will happen next?
- What do you think a specific character is thinking?
- How do you think a particular character is feeling? Why do they feel that way?
- Why did a character act the way they did?
- What was the problem in this story?
- How was the problem solved?
- What happened in the end of the story?
- Did you like the story? Why did you like it? Why did you not like it?

Questions for non-fiction books

- What facts did you learn?
- What did you find most interesting?
- Was there anything you didn't understand?
- What would you like to find out more about?

As you ask more questions when you and your child read together, you will find that it becomes a natural part of sharing a book and that you think of excellent questions of your own.

There are also some questions at the back of the Shared Reader and your child should be able to read these, but they might need some help answering the questions. It is important that children always go back to the text to find the answer and don't just guess. This routine will help them as they need to answer more difficult questions.

Developing Fluency

As your child progresses with their reading they should begin to read with fluency. Fluency is where the reader can read each word smoothly and accurately, perhaps even with some expression. At first, your child may need to sound out almost every word. Don't worry, this is normal. As words are read over and over again, they will come to recognise and say them without needing to sound them out. This is the beginning of fluency.

Children sometimes think that we want them to sound out each word because this strategy is modelled for them so often. If they don't recognise a word, then this is the right approach. As they begin to recognise words, they should start to simply say them and they may need you to reassure them that this is what we want. They will get more pleasure from reading when their reading is more fluent as it is easier to understand what they are reading when they do not need to sound out most words.

An excellent way to work on fluency is to choose a page of the Shared Reader and ask your child to read it aloud several times. Each time they read it they will become a little more confident and will read it better. You might choose to ask them to practise reading the same passage on two or three occasions. If you do this each week, your child will gradually start to become more fluent.

You might also like to show your child how you would read a passage, using punctuation to show where to stop and take a breath. Once they can read quite smoothly you could introduce some expression, reading more loudly or softly for example, if that fits the text. You can also use the recordings of all of the readers being read out loud to help develop fluency by letting your child follow the text alongside the recording, you can even pause and practise any sections of the text as required. This is a really useful activity that will help them to improve a wide range of reading skills.

Remember, that your child will continue to need to stop and sound out new words throughout the FFT Success for All Phonics Programme and beyond. This is a life-long strategy we need them to use every time they read an unfamiliar word.

What if my child does not want to read at home?

Children are sometimes not keen to read at home but don't worry because there are some simple ways you can encourage them.

Find the best time of day for you and them. It might be straight after they arrive home from school, after they have eaten, before bed, or even first thing in the morning. It doesn't need to be a serious session, have fun!

Look at the pictures and talk about what has happened in the story. You can even take turns reading words or pages. Try to make it a session that they look forward to and enjoy.

What else can I do to support my child?

Parents often ask what else they can do to help their child to become a good reader. This is an excellent question and because reading and writing involve so many skills, we have a wide range of suggestions.

- Talk to your child about everything they see around them. There is so much to learn and the more they know, the easier it will be for them to understand what they read about in books.
- Taking your child to different places will broaden their experience and their understanding of the world. These experiences will give them background information that will really help them to understand books that relate to these experiences.
- Children sometimes struggle to understand what they are reading simply because they don't understand what some of the words mean. It is easy to assume that children understand words because they can read them, but often they do need to have the meaning explained to them. If you explain the meaning of unfamiliar words they will understand more words when they are reading and use them when they are writing.
- Set aside some time every day when you and your child read together for pleasure. This will teach them so many skills! They will learn how to handle and enjoy books. Developing a love of books will help your child to develop positive attitudes to reading.
- It may seem odd but taking your child to the park and making sure they exercise is very good for their learning. Exercise is good for our brains as well as our bodies and children will also develop strength and coordination. This will help their writing as their arms and hands will be stronger.
- Little hands also need practise to become able to use fine motor skills. As with most skills, practise is what matters, so encourage your children to play with jigsaw puzzles, playdough, threading toys, colouring books or any other activity where they have to use their hands. This will make it so much easier for them to write neatly and well when they are taught at school.