



## Helping Your Child with Phonic Awareness

### 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 made up of sounds called 'phonemes' and how the letters in words match those phonemes. The process of reading involves decoding or 'breaking' words into separate sounds (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 phonic knowledge 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 easier, just like 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. These first sounds should all be stretched slightly. Try to avoid saying uh after each one: e.g. mm, not muh, ss, not suh. Other languages are more regular having fewer letters and fewer sounds which makes them easier to learn to read.

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

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. However, 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 letters come together to make a phoneme. /oa/ makes the sound in boat.

**What is a trigraph?**

This is when three letters come together to make a phoneme. /igh/ makes the sound in llight.

**What is a grapheme?**

This is the written form of a phoneme.

**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.

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