

# An Introduction to Letters and Sounds

## What is the Letters and Sounds Programme?

The Letters and Sounds programme is a system for teaching children to read and develop their speaking and listening skills. It was published by the Department for Education in 2007 with the intention of helping children become fluent readers by the age of 7. The programme is divided into 6 overlapping phases which are taught from the Foundation Stage (birth to 5) to Key Stage one (ages 5-7).

More information about the Letters and Sounds programme can be found on the Department for Education website:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/DFES-00281-2007>

## A guide to Letters and Sounds Terminology

Before we give a brief outline of the different Letters and Sounds Phases we thought we'd put together a few definitions that you may find useful if you're unfamiliar with the Letters and Sounds programme or the practise of teaching phonics.

Term	Definition
<b>Phonics</b>	Refers to a practice of teaching children how to read and write by focusing on the relationship between sounds and the letters (or groups of letters) that they are represented by in the English language.
<b>Phonemes</b>	Phonemes are the smallest unit of sound in a language. They are not segments of words like syllables but rather they are 'speech sounds' that can be combined to form words. There are 26 letters in the English language but there are 44 phonemes.
<b>Graphemes</b>	A grapheme is a letter or a group of letters that spell a sound in a word. In other words a grapheme is a way of writing a phoneme
<b>GPC</b>	GPC stands for Grapheme Phoneme Correspondence and it refers to the ability to match a grapheme to its corresponding phoneme and a phoneme to its corresponding grapheme.
<b>Digraph</b>	A digraph is a grapheme containing 2 letters that makes a single sound
<b>Trigraph</b>	A trigraph is a grapheme containing 3 letters that makes a single sound
<b>Blending</b>	Blending refers to the technique of assembling the individual sounds that comprise a particular word.
<b>Segmenting</b>	Segmenting refers to the ability to divide a word into its various sounds. In particular this involves breaking a word down into the phonemes that make it, deciding which graphemes represent those phonemes and then writing them down in the correct order.
<b>Decode</b>	Decoding involves reading a word by saying and then blending its individual sounds.

<b>Syllables</b>	Syllables are the beats in a particular word when it is spoken. The words syllable consists of three syllables: syl-la-ble
<b>Synthetic Phonics</b>	Synthetic phonics refers to a particular method of teaching phonics where pupils are first taught the letter sounds in isolation before moving on to blending these sounds together to form full words.
<b>CVC</b>	CVC words are words that begin and end with a consonant phoneme and have vowel phoneme in-between.

## An Overview of the Different Letters and Sounds Phases

- Phase 1

Phase one starts in reception class. It is divided in to 7 aspects but in a sense it should be an on-going process. It focuses on the child's ability to listen, make, and talk about sounds. These skills are the cornerstone of the Letters and Sounds programme and should continue to be developed throughout the whole of Key stage 1 and Key stage 2.

- Aspect 1: Environmental sounds
- Aspect 2: Instrumental sounds
- Aspect 3: Body percussion
- Aspect 4: Rhythm and rhyme
- Aspect 5: Alliteration
- Aspect 6: Voice sounds
- Aspect 7: Oral blending and segmenting

- Phase 2

Phase starts to focus on GPC activities to help children start to recognise the link between sounds and written letters. They are taught to read words by constructing them from letters and sounds and blending individual phonemes to make whole words. Spelling is taught by breaking words down in to their individual sounds.

GPC is introduced in a very structured way. Phase 2 concentrates on the following graphemes / phonemes:

Set 1: s, a, t, p

Set 2: l, n, m, d

Set 3: g, o, c, k

Set 4: ck, e, u, r

Set 5: h, b, f, ff, l, ll, s, ss

...as well as the following tricky words: to, the, no, go, I, into.

Children will be expected to take part in several activities for each GPC. These could include matching the graphemes to a picture associated with that sound, matching sounds pronounced by the teacher to graphemes printed on cards or fans, forming letters with a finger in the air, on another child's back, in sand etc.

At this point the emphasis will be on getting the children to say the correct sound when they are shown a letter rather than being able to read whole words.

- Phase 3

Children will continue to practice the GPCs they learnt in phase 2 but they will also be introduced to the following new sets (these include sounds represented by more than one letter):

Set 6: j, v, w, x

Set 7: y, z, zz, qu

They will also be introduced to the following consonant digraphs: ch / sh / th / ng and vowel digraphs / trigraphs: ai, ee, igh, oa, oo, ar, or, ur, ow, oi, ear, air, ure, er.

Focus will also be given to the following tricky words: he, she, we, me, be, was, you, they, all, are, my and her.

Attention will be given to blending skills (for reading) and segmenting skills (for spelling). They will practice reading and writing sentences and captions using capital letters at the start of sentences and full stops at the end.

- Phase 4

Phase 4 does not introduce any new GPCs. Instead it focuses on consolidating and reinforcing the knowledge developed in the previous phases as well as helping children to blend and segment words with adjacent consonants. These are words that begin or end with more than one consonant – CVCC, CCVC, CCVCC, CCCVCC, CCCVC words. Unlike digraphs and trigraphs (where there are two or three letters that make a single sound) adjacent consonant phonemes can both be heard when the word is spoken.

Examples of CVCC words include: lamp, sand, milk, left, vest.

Examples of CCVC words: skin, grin, stop, swim, spot.

Examples of CCVCC words: stamp, drink, print, twist, frost.

Examples of CCCVCC words: scrunch, splint, scratch, strand, stretch.

Examples of CCCVC words: street, string, split, scrap, strap.

Phase 4 also focuses on the following tricky words: said, have, like, so, do, some, come, were, there, little, one, when, out, what. It will last 4 – 6 weeks in and it will involve a lot of practice of blending and segmenting high frequency words as well as reading and writing complete sentences.

- Phase 5

Phase 5 introduces a new set of more complex GPCs. It also focuses on the following tricky words: oh, their, people, Mr, Mrs, looked, called, asked, could.

Children will be made aware that certain phonemes can be represented by more than one grapheme and that certain graphemes can be pronounced in different ways. They will practice blending and segmenting high frequency words and words with more than one syllable as well as practicing reading and writing full sentences.

Phase 5 lasts 30 weeks and is divided in to 3 stages:

- Phase 5a (weeks 1-4)

In the first 4 weeks of phase 5 children will be introduced to a new set of graphemes for reading as well as the phoneme /zh/ (as in treasure).

- Phase 5b (weeks 4-7)

This is where children are introduced to the idea that some graphemes can be pronounced in more than one way. Over the course of phase 5b children will be taught 4 alternative pronunciations of graphemes .

- Phase 5c (weeks 8-30)

The remainder of phase 5 will focus on and teaching children that there is more than one way to spell certain phonemes as well as consolidating the knowledge that they have gained throughout the programme.

- Phase 6

Phase 6 takes place throughout year. It recaps and reinforces much of what was taught in phase 5. By this stage it is hoped that children will know most of the GPCs and their decoding, blending and segmenting skills will have developed significantly to the point where they are able to read a large number of words and spell with a degree of accuracy. They will be encouraged to build their vocabulary and become fluent and confident readers. At this point they will also be introduced to spelling rules and conventions associated with the past tense (for example adding a suffix to a word like 'ed' or 'ing').