

Learn to Read and Spell with Synthetic Phonics



Parents Guide



Get Reading Right™

the tools to read and spell

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.

English is essentially a code that can be encoded (written) and decoded (read). We need to teach children this code with as much emphasis as possible on the rules and regularities of the written language.

In the **Get Reading Right** books we call this process "Making and Breaking". 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 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 word your child should know). Other languages are more regular having fewer letters and fewer sounds which can make it easier to learn to read. The **Get Reading Right** books teach a group 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
- Get Reading Right books help you to teach all of the above.

So what is wrong with the old way?

Across the English speaking world there is recognition that there are far too many children failing to learn to read as well as they should. The costs to the individual as well as to society as a whole are huge. Government reviews in the UK, Australia and the U.S. have all concluded that all children should be taught to read using a systematic, synthetic phonics approach because this approach minimizes failure and maximizes success.

Previous approaches to the teaching of reading often taught children spelling rules that subsequently turn out not to work. It is often a long time into a child's schooling that he/she even starts to decode (sound out) a word or actively use these skills to read words in books. Children who miss some early teaching, have some learning difficulties, or are young for their year group often have trouble acquiring a systematic understanding of the phonemic code. It can be a hit or miss affair especially if the child changes schools or his/her language of instruction.

At a glance:

- The pace of teaching and learning was too slow
- All 44 phonemes were not taught

- Children were not encouraged to use their phonic knowledge to spell new words
- Children were not taught the many ways that each phoneme can be written.

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

Synthetic phonics starts with phonemic awareness and the matching of 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; like in the word /ch/ /o/ /p/. /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/.

This advanced code is taught only after the basic rules are mastered. At first the rules are regular with no exception.

Another big difference you will notice is that the phonemes are taught at a faster, more efficient rate than ever before. No more letter a week. Your child may learn up to 8 phonemes in a week! Sounds like a lot, but they all 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.

At a glance:

- The pace of teaching and learning is faster
- All 44 phonemes are taught in a particular order
- Children are encouraged to use their phonic knowledge to read and spell new words
- Children are taught all the ways that each phoneme can be written
- Children are taught that phonics can be used to read, write and to spell; that the code is reversible.

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.

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.

How do we know teaching synthetic phonics works?

Each of the governments mentioned has conducted systematic reviews of what works and what doesn't in the early teaching of reading. Each review came to similar conclusions and each government made recommendations that every child should be taught to read and spell using a synthetic phonics approach. Other recommendations were that every teacher be trained to teach reading using this method. Another important recommendation was that parents need to be shown how to use a synthetic phonics approach to help their children at home. In the UK every school has been instructed to use this approach from September 2006. One study in Scotland showed that children taught using this approach were still ahead of their peers in reading and spelling some seven years later. In our experience we have had similar situations with whole schools enthusiastically adopting the approach once its effectiveness has been demonstrated.

At a glance: There has been extensive research worldwide. You may like to look at:

- Research conducted by St Andrews University in Scotland
- National Enquiry into the Teaching of Early Reading in Australia
- www.rff.org.uk
- www.childrenofthecode.org

So how do we start to help?

First we will start with the eight sounds represented by the letters: **s m c t g p a o**.

You will be teaching these eight sounds all at once right from the start. It will be a gradual process so do not expect your child to get everything right the first time. 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; each of the books has a table telling you exactly how the sound should be pronounced. 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. If you are still unsure how to pronounce each of the phonemes look for 'pronounce the phonemes under synthetic phonics' on the website.

There are many ways that you can teach these sounds in a fun way. As well as direct instruction there are a number of games and activities which can be used to reinforce what your child has learned. These

games and all the cards you will need to play them can be found on the Get Reading Right website and some of them are mentioned in the appendix at the end of this guide. These games include “sound bingo” and even a version of Twister™, which children love.

If you want more support you may like to use ‘The Synthetic Phonics Toolkit’ which is our teaching programme.

OK Let’s Get Started!

Step 1 – Learning the phonemes

Lay out each of the letters *s m c t g p a o* on a magnetic board or use letter tiles. Demonstrate how to pronounce each phoneme as you push the letter up onto a line.



Then push each phoneme down again asking your child to say the sound as you do this.

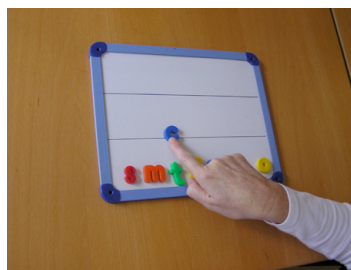
When your child knows how to pronounce each of the phonemes; move on to step 2.

Step 2 – Blending the phonemes to make words

Right from the start we want children to put the sounds together to spell a word. It needs to be a physical as well as a spoken activity. Have your child move the magnetic letters or letter tiles together and make the first words in the books. The code is a reversible one so that spelling progress goes alongside reading progress. Children soon realise that if they can “break it” then they can “make it”. The letter tiles or magnetic letters enable the whole process to be separated from the early struggle to control a pencil and to produce something that is legible. Instructions for this are contained in the directions at the front of each book.

Have a list of consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words ready that you can make from the focus phonemes. (Available at www.getreadingright.com) Ask your child to make each of the words using the magnetic letters. Make sure your child moves each letter up to the line as it is being said aloud.

For example, ask your child to make the word ‘c a t’. Stretch out each of the letters as you say the word.



Demonstrate with a hand movement that reading is a left to right process.

c a t
→



m a p
→



Continue to model the process of pushing the magnetic letters together to make words. Lots of practice, on lots of occasions is the key to this kind of learning. It is helpful to stretch out the word so your voice suggests the blending of the sounds to make the word. Then say the word at normal speed. Once your child has some success pronouncing and writing the first group of sounds, she will be very pleased that she will soon start to read simple whole words.

Step 3 – Manipulating the sounds in words.

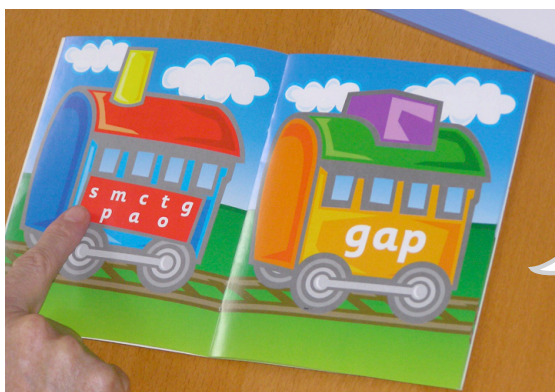
Your child needs to be able to hear these first eight sounds at the beginning; at the end, and in the middle (for the vowels) of the words. Do activities such as “can you make the word ‘c a t’ with your letter tiles?” and “Show me how to make ‘m a t’ with your letter tiles.” Practise with your child identifying the position of each of the phonemes in the word. If your child removes all letters and begins to make the entire word, ask “if I say ‘cat’ and then say ‘mat’ which phoneme changes?”

We call this “segmenting”; the ability to do this is a very high predictor of reading success.

Step 4 - Teaching your child to blend phonemes to read words.

Start with the Train book. Read the instructions on the inside cover.

Find a comfortable, quiet place to read. Open the practice page and check that your child can recognise and pronounce each of the target phonemes.



Point to each separate letter and ask your child something like: “What does your mouth say when you see this?”

When you are confident that your child knows how to pronounce each of the phonemes; move on to blending them together to read the words on pages 3 – 12.

Demonstrate with the word 'gap' on page 3. Point to the letter 'g' and say /g/ then to 'a' and say /a/ and finally to the 'p' and say /p/ then run your finger along the bottom of the word 'gluing' each of the phonemes together saying 'gap'.



Ask your child to do exactly the same process on pages 4 to 12. Encourage your child to blend each of the phonemes and then read the word. If your child gets stuck; a gentle reminder of the phoneme that each letter represents will help. Then run your finger along the word and say it out loud.



What does this word say? Well done. I like the way you sounded each phoneme out and then glued that word.

Once each word has been read, it's time to move on to the "Make it to Break it" page.

Make sure that your child cannot see the list of words on the page. This page is like a mini spelling test. This is an important activity because it teaches children that the phonemic code is a reversible one. In other words, if you can read a word, you can spell it.

Say the word slowly, stretching it out slightly. Ask your child to make the word using magnetic letters or letter tiles.



Can you make the word 'gap'? What does it start with? What else can you hear? What sound can you hear at the end?

Praise Your Child

Your child needs feedback that he is being successful in learning the strategies that will make him an accomplished reader. These are small steps for you and are probably automatic but for a child these steps are huge and represent a real achievement. Once the child has started to understand the process and is putting the words together, there is often a huge sense of accomplishment that acts as its

own reward. Repetition for young children is the key to making progress. For the older child, it is often important to relearn previous ideas about reading that are either wrong or unhelpful. If a child knows a skill on three days consecutively then you can take it that the skill is well learned; so do not make the mistake of trying to go too fast.

In what order do I teach the sounds?

At first the code is the simple or basic one with the child only being presented with consonant-vowel-consonant (c-v-c) words with three phonemes. Once the majority of the twenty six letters have been covered, then we make the smallest next step which is the double letters which do not change the sound e.g. ll ss zz . This introduces the child to the notion that life in reading is not always going to be so straightforward and they will soon be learning more advanced material!

The next group of letters, taught across two levels of the books, introduces a new set of phonemes where a new sound (phoneme) is made from the combination of two letters that they have already been learned e.g. sh ch th Because all the focus has been on the sounds the children soon learn that putting two familiar letter symbols together can produce something entirely new.

The order for the phonemes (note that we did not say letters!) in the books is the same as recommended by the UK government. What is important is that the order chosen has "fidelity" i.e. nothing is missed out and all the code is covered. Follow the order of the books and the structure will be preserved.

At a glance:

Set 1A:

There are four phonic books and one Camera book at each level.

First level *s m c t g p a o*

Second level *r l d b f h i u*

Third level *v w y z j n k e*

Set 1B:

There are four phonic books and one Camera book at each level.

First level *ll ss ff zz*

Second level *sh ch th wh*

Third level *ck ng qu x*

Do not show your child all the books at once. It is best to introduce each book one at a time so that each book will be fresh and novel.

Hey! Not all words can be decoded!

That's right. They can't. But so many can, and at this stage in your child's education, we concentrate on the ones that can. That's not to say that we don't introduce words in the beginning that your child will need to read simple texts and write simple sentences. We try to stick to tricky words that are not easily decodable. We call these tricky words "Camera' words because children must learn them, just like they were taking a photo of them with their 'mind's eye'. They are encouraged to memorise the whole word. It is important to remember that very few words need to be learned by sight.

What are 'Camera' Words?

Camera words are a group of words in the English language that children like to use in their speech and in their writing that cannot be decoded or needs advanced skills to do so. Children want to read and spell these words right at the beginning of their schooling. Knowing a small bank of these tricky

words helps children to begin to read and write sentences that make sense and encourage them to communicate in writing right from the start.

At **Get Reading Right** we recognise that even when we expose children to phonetically regular words and teach the phonemic code rules there are going to be words that are exceptions that are useful to learn. These words are introduced and taught in a fun, lively way in our "Camera books". Camera books look different to the phonic word books. Children soon see and then learn the difference between the two.



It is a good idea to visit these books regularly and to keep the learning fun and exciting. This can be done through playing lots of games. See our website for great game ideas like how to play camera word skittles, bingo, snap and Go-Fish! Each level of the series contains one camera book with six camera words per book. When it comes to spelling, there is no make or break only a spelling test. Do not attempt to teach using any "sound it out" strategy.

We have English as our second language. Can this approach help us?

Yes it most certainly can but some extra issues need to be thought about.

First of all take some guidance on how the sounds should be made. The website does this for you but a native speaker can also help ensure that the parent gets this right before the child is given the material. Correct pronunciation of the phonemes is important. Your child will be taught the correct pronunciation at school.

You may notice that you do not know the meaning of some of the words, even though they are short ones and you have a good level of English. Do not worry about this; it happens because we have chosen as many words as we can that can be made from our list of phonemes and many of these words are not common English words in day to day use There is a picture dictionary on the website that can be printed off which will enable you to be a step ahead of your son or daughter. It will be good for your vocabulary as well as for theirs. Please note that the pictures are meant for you. They are not to be used in the teaching of decoding skills. We want the child to learn to read, not guess from the pictures. This is in line with the advice from the government in the UK.

cap 	cat 	cog 	cop 	cot 
--	--	--	--	--

If your written language is a strongly visual one (idiographic) such as Chinese, then do remember that the child has to decode the words; only the Camera words should be remembered by sight. Children that are over reliant on remembering by sight, soon come to a halt despite early progress.

So, what next?

Series One books introduce the basic code to children and some of the easier aspects of the advanced code. Our Series Two books take children even further into the advanced code. Children begin to read full sentences and are introduced to capital letters, full stops, question and exclamation marks.



Set 2A:

First level – longer words which use the format: CVCC (consonant-vowel-consonant), CCVC and VCC

Second level – ee, ea, y, e, e_e

Third Level - igh, y, ie, i-e, i

Set 2B:

First Level - oa, ow, o, o-e,

Second level - ai, ay, a-e, a

Third level - oo, ew, ue, u-e

Set 3A:

First Level - rr, wr, r

Second Level - oy, oi,

Third Level - ph, f, ff,

Fourth Level - ow, ou,

Fifth level- s, se, soft c, sc,

Six Level - oo, oul, u, o

Seventh Level - ar, a er, au, ear

Set 3B:

First Level - ir, er, ear, ur, or

Second Level - or, au, aw, al, ore

Third Level - air, are, ear, ere

Fourth Level - j, dge, ge, g

Fifth level- ch, tch, tu

Six Level - sh, ci, ti,

Seventh Level - s, si

What is being taught using the **Get Reading Right** books is essentially the technology of reading. We have done everything to make sure that children learn the mechanics of reading well. It is thought that if the demands of decoding are reduced and made easier, then there will be more resources available to start understanding what has been read. There is a whole world of books and literature which the child needs to engage with. We hope that together we are helping to provide the solid foundation for a lifelong love of all that books can bring.