



Synthetic Phonics

Synthetic Phonics is a method that teaches children the alphabetic code of English. In the first nine weeks or so, the children are taught the 42/44 letter sounds, how to blend them to read words, and how to cope with the first few irregular keywords. At this point the children can attempt to read books for themselves.

There are four main elements to the teaching:

1. Learning the Letter Sounds

The main 42 sounds of English are taught – one sound every day.

1. s a t i p n
2. c k e h r m d
3. g o u l f b
4. ai j oa ie ee or
5. z w ng v oo oo
6. y x ch sh th th
7. qu ou oi ue er ar

A multisensory method is used to introduce the children to the letter sounds. There is a storyline, action and 'Sound Sheet' for each sound. By doing an action associated with the sound, e.g., rub tummy and say "mmmmm" for the /m/ sound, the children remember it more easily.

Each child has their own 'Sound Book'. Every day the letter sound taught is stuck into the book and taken home. Parents are asked to help their children learn the sounds, either by going through the Sound Book, or by cutting up the letters and playing a game of 'Pairs' with their child.

In order to blend efficiently it is important to know the letter sounds fluently. Every day flash cards of the sounds that have been taught should be held up for the children to call out the sounds as they do the actions.

Some sounds, digraphs, are represented by two letters. The children need to recognize digraphs in words, e.g., the 'ng' in 'strong'. The digraphs 'oo' and 'th' each have two sounds, e.g., 'book' and 'moon', 'thin' and 'that'.



2. Blending

As well as learning the sounds, the children need to be taught how to blend them together to hear a word. This teaching starts on the first day. The aim is to enable the children to hear the word when the teacher says the sounds, e.g., “Listen carefully, what word am I saying ... ‘d-o-g’?” A few children will hear ‘dog’. Try a few more words, e.g., ‘s-u-n’, ‘b-oy’, ‘m-ou-se’.

Once the children can hear the word when an adult says the sounds, they are ready to try and blend words for themselves. Initially, being able to blend letter sounds fluently is the essential skill for reading and should always be the first strategy for working out unknown words. Children must also be able to recognize consonant blends and digraphs in words such as ‘fl-a-g’ and ‘sh-o-p’.

After the letter sounds have been taught and the children can read simple, regular words, they start taking home the ‘Word Boxes’ for extra practice. The Word Boxes start with simple words made from the first group of letter sounds. Invariably, the children who are the fastest at learning to blend sounds become the more fluent readers.

At first, one way of spelling each vowel sound is taught, e.g., ‘ai’ as in ‘rain’. The children should have practice blending these spellings in words before the alternatives are introduced, e.g., ‘ay’ as in ‘play’ and ‘a-e’ as in ‘lane’.

Once the children have worked their way through the Word Boxes, and learned some irregular common keywords, they should be given storybooks to read for themselves. Explain to parents that their child may not bring home a storybook until they have mastered the skill of blending. Parents should then encourage their children to talk about what they have read.

3. Identifying Sounds In Words

It is essential that children can hear the individual sounds in words, especially for writing. Initially, the children are asked to listen carefully and say if they can hear a given sound in words. Start with words that have three sounds in them, for example, “Is there a ‘s’ in ‘sun’ ... ‘mouse’ ... ‘dog’?”; “If there is a ‘s’ where does it come – the beginning, middle or end?”. Then the children are encouraged to say the sounds they hear. Practice by saying a word like ‘hat’. The children should respond by saying ‘h-a-t’. As they say each sound they hold up a finger ... ‘h-a-t’ three fingers, three sounds; ‘sh-i-p’ three fingers, three sounds, etc. Progress to more complicated words such as those with initial and final consonant blends.



The teacher writes the letters on the board as the children say them. Then the children look at the word, say the sounds and blend them to read the word. This gives a good understanding of how reading and writing work. A few examples every day helps to develop this skill.

As soon as the children can hear the sounds in three letter words they can start their dictation homework, material in *The Phonics Handbook*.

Once a child can hear the sounds in words, and knows one way of writing each sound, they can write independently. Initially, the children will not spell accurately but their work can be read, for example, 'I went hors riedin that wos fun'. Most children, by the

end of their first year, should be able to write their own news and simple stories independently. It will be exactly what they want to say as they are not restricted by writing only the words they have learned by heart. Accurate spelling develops gradually from reading books, knowing the alternative vowel sounds and following a spelling scheme.

4. Tricky Words

After their first month at school, when the majority of the children know about 18 letter sounds and have been blending regular words as a group activity, they can begin to learn the tricky words. Tricky words are words that cannot always be worked out by blending. These can be introduced gradually using the *Jolly Phonics Tricky Word Cards*. Look at what is 'tricky' in each word, e.g., 'was' has an /o/ sound in the middle instead of an /a/ sound. Try and teach 2–3 a week, continually revising for reading and spelling.

Three spelling techniques are:

- Look (identify the irregularity and say the letter names), Cover, Write and Check.
- Say It As It Sounds, e.g., pronounce 'mother' with a short /o/ sound so that it rhymes with 'bother'.
- Mnemonics, e.g., '**p**eople **e**at **o**melettes **p**eople **l**ike **e**ggs' to spell the word 'people'.

5. Conclusion: Aims to Achieve in the First Nine Weeks

All the children can:

- read and write the 42/44 letter sounds,
- form the letters correctly, holding their pencil in the tripod grip,
- blend regular words fluently, for example, 'leg', 'flag', 'shoot' and 'bringing', and



- write simple, regular words by listening for the sounds, for example, ‘bed’, ‘flat’, ‘band’, ‘ship’ and ‘spoon’.

6. What Comes After the First 9 Weeks?

Every day a little work on each skill is needed:

1. Frequently work through the flash cards of the letter sounds:
 - including the alternative spellings, e.g., ‘er’, ‘ir’, ‘ur’,
 - practice reading regular words that use the alternative spellings.
2. Develop the ability to write fluently and neatly:
 - correct formation of capital as well as lower-case letters,
 - dictation of words and sentences.
3. Develop reading fluency and comprehension:
 - reading individually to parents or to adults in school,
 - group and silent reading,
 - develop a wider vocabulary and understanding of the meaning of words.
4. Develop writing skills:
 - draw pictures on the board and ask the children to write a sentence about each one,
 - writing news independently,
 - writing simple stories that have been told to them by the teacher,
 - write the first sentence of a story on the board for the children to copy and continue,
 - creating and writing their own simple stories,
 - writing up science and topic work.
5. Continue teaching the tricky words for reading and spelling.

Please contact Coral George, Professional Synthetic Phonics Trainer, if you have any queries or wish to receive further training.

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To purchase “Synthetic Phonics” materials, please contact www.thebookvan.com your local distributor.

Useful Websites

- www.coralgeorge.com
- www.syntheticphonics.com
- www.jollylearning.co.uk
- www.phonicsinternational.com
- www.rtf.org.uk