

Appendix: Phonics Instruction Tips and Strategies

Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondence for word decoding and encoding

Through systematic approaches learners can understand the complex alphabetic code.
Use a pattern-based approach that is: diagnostic, systematic, direct, explicit and structured.

Scope and Sequence

We use an alphabet with 26 different letters to represent the 44 sounds of English. This is one reason why there is not a simple correspondence with letters and sounds in English. There are different ways to spell many of the sounds. We need to combine letters to spell those sounds. A scope and sequence reflects a systematic order in which to introduce letters and sounds. The scope is everything that is taught over time. The sequence is the order of teaching. It reflects the knowledge that a learner has at a given time, so that those precise skills can be supported and mastered.

- ✓ Letters and sounds cannot all be taught at once. Do not introduce the learner to the whole alphabet in one go.
- ✓ A good sequence teaches the most common spellings first.
- ✓ All letters and sounds should be revised systematically.
- ✓ All letters and will be built into controlled and achievable reading (decoding) and spelling (encoding) tasks.

Vowels

Learners may need to focus on **vowel sounds**. These are the hardest sounds for learners to distinguish. This is because they are similar in sound and in how our mouth is positioned. They are also usually in the middle of words, making them harder to perceive. There are 19 vowels sounds in English. 10 of these are often grouped as being "long" or "short".

- ✓ Ensure the learner has a clear understanding of which vowels are **long** (e.g. /ā/ in gate), and which are **short** (e.g. /ă/ in hat). This will help them learn which spelling choices to use.
- ✓ Practise identifying long and short vowel sounds in isolation so this skill can be used easily when letters and choices are present.
- ✓ Decodable texts that focus on one vowel at a time may be helpful if vowels are challenging.

Consonants: Note of caution

Be careful not to add an 'uh' vowel sound to consonants when you are teaching or using them. This changes the phoneme from a single sound to a consonant-vowel syllable. If children learn to sound out letters like this, they will often make sounding errors. It is harder for them to read words because they must delete all of the 'uh' sounds when they are decoding the word: "kuh a tuh" → "kuhatuh" → "cat". This requires strong language skills, so can add layers of difficulty to the task.

- Be careful not to say: "puh" (for /p/), "tuh" (for /t/), "kuh" (for /k/), "fuh" (for /f/), "wuh" (for /w/).
- The consonants /p, t, k/ should be short and quiet (not voiced).

Key Words

Make sure there are '**key words**' linked to each sound and spelling for example "<f> for fish", or "<ea> as in *eat"*, vs"<ee> as in *feet".* These key words act as a memory 'hook' to help with retrieval and spelling choices.

- Ensure home and school use the same prompts.
- Visuals can be added to sound cards to support the learner to learn these key words. Remove them as soon as you can, to avoid over-reliance.

Letter Formation

'Grapheme' means the symbol(s) to represent a sound, e.g. <a> or <igh>

We use < > to show that it is a grapheme

Use daily writing practice: ask the learner to **say** the letter sound aloud as they write the spelling on a whiteboard 5-10 times in a row. The '**multi-sensory**' element needed in phonics means linking the sound, the symbol (letter, or grapheme), and the meaning. Always encourage the learner to say the sound as the letter is used.

- Using the whole arm and large letters can provide greater sensory feedback.
- Learners may find it helpful to write letters their eyes closed once they have developed some reliable accuracy. This can add in fun and playfulness, and allows you to check their level of mastery. Avoid using this strategy when the learner is likely to still be making mistakes.
- Focus on one letter shape/ spelling of difficulty at a time.

Letter Reversals

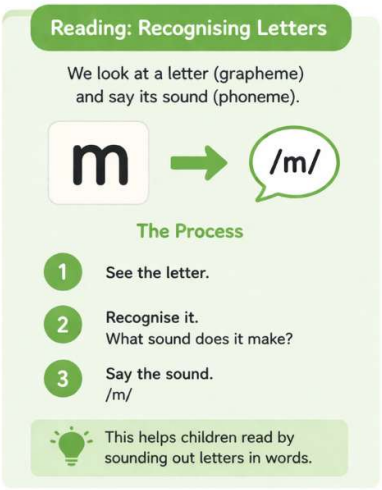
Our brains are wired to recognise the same shape from any angle, so the letters <b,p,d,q> are commonly reversed while learning. It is necessary to provide a high enough dosage of the right motor movements, and explicit strategies, to our struggling learners.

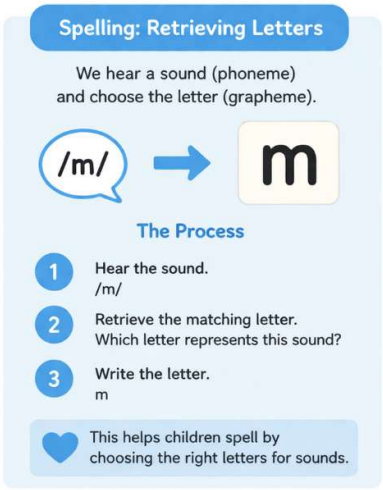
- Tip: Our lips are open (in a circle) when we say /d/, so we draw the circle of the <d> first. Our lips are closed when we say /b/ (making a straight line) so we draw the line of the <b> first.
- Ensure a high enough dosage using the multi-sensory techniques described above.
- For some learners a verbal prompt they can use themselves can be helpful, such as "the bat and then the ball", "the doorknob and then the door"
- It can be helpful to draw attention to the left to right movement for each of these 4 letter shapes.

Repeated Trials

The use of repeated trials cards for letters and sounds is very effective to support learning and transfer to the long-term memory. This allows structured repetition and high dosage in a very efficient way. It allows gradual shifts from repetition of a single grapheme to random exposure to many graphemes that all require revision.

- Write the target grapheme on a minimum of 6 cards, and show these in turn asking the learner to say the sound. Once these are fast and fluent, add another grapheme.
- Once these are fast and fluent, mix the two graphemes together: this random shifting from one to the other will challenge the cognitive load, and strengthen learning.
- Repeat the process, adding in new graphemes as they are taught, written and practiced and systematically randomising and reviewing the full pack.





Remember: Work on both **recognising** and **retrieving** letters. This is the key difference between **reading** and **spelling**.

Evidence based digital practise:

- Oz Phonics
- Reading Doctor: Letter Sounds
- Teach Your Monster to Read

(03) 6234 5717 (phone)
(03) 6234 5447 (fax)
110 Elizabeth St
Hobart TAS 7000
reception@spt.com.au
programs@spt.com.au
spt.com.au
figureofspeechresources.com.au