

Teach the **knowledge** of the alphabetic code (the letter/s-sound correspondences)

and the **three core skills** and their **sub**-skills

Suggestions for good phonics routines and raising awareness of some common misunderstandings - by Debbie Hepplewhite

Skill one: Decoding (reading: blending or synthesising)	Skill two: Encoding (spelling: oral segmenting and selecting graphemes)	Skill three: Handwriting
<p>Sub-skill without print:</p> <p>Adult says the separate sounds “ /d/ /r/ /e/ /s/ ”. Learners ‘discern’ or ‘hear’ the whole word ‘dress’ then say the whole word “dress”.</p> <p>Try not to say the sounds with an added ‘schwa’ or ‘uh’ sound on the end – say the sounds as close as possible to ‘real speech sounds’.</p> <p>If in doubt, to work out how to say the individual sounds, start with a whole spoken word and say it very, very slowly but as close as possible to the natural way of saying the word – and the individual sounds will become distinguishable as real speech sounds.</p> <p>Note that vowel sounds are often low and loud compared to consonant sounds. Avoid <u>monotone</u> ‘robot talk’ as this may result in all the sounds having the same volume and pitch unlike real speech sounds.</p>	<p>Sub-skill without print:</p> <p>Adult says the whole word “duck” <u>very slowly</u> so that the separate sounds start to become evident and then models how to orally segment (split up) the word into its separate sounds “ /d/ /u/ /k/ ”.</p> <p>Learners repeat the whole word “duck” and then repeat the separate sounds “ /d/ /u/ /k/ ”.</p> <p>Eventually the learners can do this independently for any short words building up to longer words. Chunk multi-syllable words into syllables first if necessary.</p> <p>Begin to do the oral segmenting process with left hand, palm facing, to tally the sounds to thumb and fingers. Make sure that learners know which is their left hand and right hand for this process. If everyone faces the same way, this is much easier.</p> <p>Do <u>not</u> repeat the whole word <u>after</u> saying the separate sounds. The last thing learners should say and hear are the separate sounds to support their spelling – <u>not the whole word.</u></p>	<p>Sub-skill:</p> <p>Hold the pencil with the correct tripod grip. To make this child-friendly and fun, say “Froggy legs [thumb and index finger] grip the pencil at the end of the painted part [not on the sloping cone part] with the log under [the middle finger]”.</p> <p>Sit at a correct-height desk with good posture and practise writing or drawing on paper.</p> <p>Use an incentive such as a beanbag frog to place on the table of the learners making a good effort – or use the frog as a reminder.</p> <p>Provide normal thickness pencils as small hands cannot grip fat pencils well enough. This might explain why many young learners hold the pencils on the cone part which then obscures their writing.</p>
<p>Sub-skill with print:</p> <p>Point to pre-printed graphemes that have been taught to date: “See the graphemes (letters or letter groups) and say the sounds.”</p> <p>Make sure that this routine is very frequent using Grapheme Flash Cards, Say the Sounds Posters, Say the Sounds Strips. Place Say the Sounds Posters around the classroom and around the school and build them up in the learners’ personal folders. Avoid loud calling out as this will lead to the ‘schwa’ or ‘uh’ being added. Provide opportunities for slower-to-process or reserved learners to do this in quiet places and small groups or one to one.</p>	<p>Sub-skill with print:</p> <p>Say the separate sounds as close to possible as real speech sounds that have been taught to date: “Hear the sounds, point to the graphemes.” “Hear the sounds, write the graphemes.”</p> <p>Use Grapheme Tiles for learners to select when they cannot write well enough.</p> <p>Learners can air-write the graphemes as they begin to learn letter formation.</p> <p>Introduce ‘quickfire’ activities for learners to write the graphemes on whiteboards or paper once they can handwrite.</p>	<p>Air-writing for directionality of letter shape formation: When modelling air-writing, do not face the learners and air-write in reverse, instead face the same way as the learners and model the air-writing in the correct direction for both you and them.</p> <p>Display an alphabet poster, or alphabet letter shapes, as a visual aid for upper and lower case letter shapes – with writing lines. Provide a small version to take home.</p> <p>Finger-tracing: Use the index finger of the writing hand to trace pre-printed letter shapes.</p> <p>Pencil-tracing: Trace pre-printed grey or dotted letter shapes with a pencil.</p> <p>Copying: Copy letter shapes with finger or pencil.</p>

Core skill for **decoding (blending)**:

1. Glance at (scan) the printed word from left to right to 'recognise' any letter groups.
2. Use the index finger to point directly under each grapheme (letters and letter groups) whilst saying the sounds as close to real speech-sounds as possible from left to right of the printed word.
3. Say the whole word whilst running the index finger left to right beneath the whole printed word.
4. Modify the pronunciation of the blended sounds into the real word's pronunciation if necessary.

If learners cannot 'discern' the word when they have said the sounds, train them to have more attempts automatically – building up the speed and fluency at which they say the sounds.

Then, if necessary, the adult can say the sounds as close as possible to real speech and, sometimes, the learner is then able to discern the word. Tick, or acknowledge, the letter/s-sound correspondences that the learner knew.

Make sure that there are supportive Frieze Posters nearby so that the learners can see the mnemonic prompts to remind them of the sounds.

Avoid doing too much for the learners – this results in '**learned helplessness**'- learners may never get sufficient practice and independence to progress.

Do not restrict slow-to-learn pupils with only words consisting of **three letters and three sounds**. Model longer words, and provide longer words, as part of their daily practice as well as simple words.

Core skill for **encoding (spelling-with-editing)**:

1. Adult stands and faces the same way as the learners, to their 'left', and models how to raise the left hand, palm facing, to tally the separate sounds on to thumb and fingers.
2. Say the focus word slowly and tally each sound identified to thumb and fingers in turn.
3. Then, count how many sounds are identified and write 'sound dashes' top left of board or paper (draw the lines from left to right). The sound dashes are used to account for a grapheme per sound, but also act as **writing lines**.
4. Select Grapheme Tiles, or magnetic letters, or **write the graphemes** whilst saying each separate sound from beginning to end.
5. Finally, sound out and blend all-through-the-word (as if blending it for the first time) to check the spelling. Then 'tick' the spelling.
6. If a sound and grapheme is missing, demonstrate how to use an 'arrow head' in the correct place to add the missing grapheme. Cross off the spare sound dash if it has been replaced with an arrow head pointing to a grapheme. Re-check the spelling by sounding out and blending.

Repeat this routine frequently, and as learners progress, hold back on modelling the tallying and the rest of the routine to allow the learners the chance to do these things independently and show you.

Draw back the adult support over time and in response to the needs of the learners – but remember not to over-model even for the slower-to-learn pupils. Aim for as much **pupil-engagement** as possible.

Core skill for **handwriting**:

1. Correct tripod pencil grip (– **be vigilant!**)
 2. Correct posture sitting at desk
 3. Slightly slanted paper, use free hand to hold paper steady
 4. Write under the letters and words – don't hook hand and wrist around
 5. Say the sounds whilst writing graphemes or words – making links between graphemes and sounds
- Provide plenty of examples of letters, words and sentences on writing lines for learning correct position.
 - Provide writing lines for practising letter formation - mainly paper and pencil exercises.
 - Have very high expectations for pencil hold, letter formation and writing activities.

Mini whiteboards can be fit-for-purpose for 'quick-fire show me' activities but they are **not suitable** for sustained writing beyond graphemes and word level and learning how to hand-write well.

Make a record of how many learners currently throughout the school do not hold their pencils correctly, do not sit with good posture, do not form letter shapes correctly, and tend to hook their wrists round to write their words from the 'top' rather than 'beneath' the words. Aim to improve this record in both the short term and the long term.

For a print style and a fully joined handwriting style with free resources and an efficient method for teaching joined handwriting quickly, see www.debbiehepplewhitehandwriting.com