

Features of the Synthetic Phonics Teaching Principles

Teach the **alphabetic code knowledge** (the relationship between speech sounds and letters or letter groups) by systematically and comprehensively introducing the **letter/s-sound correspondences** of the English alphabetic code. If possible, introduce between two and four correspondences per week at first, including vowel letters and sounds and consonant letters and sounds. Start with mainly one spelling alternative for each of the 44+ **phonemes** (the smallest identifiable sounds in English speech) before broadening out to focus on further spelling and pronunciation variations.

Model how to put the letter/s-sound correspondences introduced (the **alphabetic code knowledge**) to immediate use with real words teaching the **three core skills** of:

1. **Decoding** (reading) – **Synthesise** (sound out and blend) all through the **printed** word to ‘hear’, or ‘discern’, the target word. Modify the pronunciation of the word to sound like the ‘real’ word where necessary.
2. **Encoding** (spelling) – **Orally segment** (split up) the **spoken** word from beginning to end to identify the **phonemes** (sounds) and know which **graphemes** (letters and letter groups) **are code for** the identified sounds.
3. **Handwriting** – Learn to write the 26 **lower case** letter shapes, then the 26 **upper case** (capital) letter shapes, of **the alphabet** correctly. Hold the writing implement with the tripod grip.

Provide regular dictation exercises from letter level, to letter groups, to words, to sentences (as appropriate).

Provide **cumulative, decodable** words, sentences, plain texts and reading books which **match the level** of alphabetic code knowledge and blending/segmenting skills taught to date, when asking the learner to read or write independently.

Emphasise letter **sounds** at first and **not** letter names. Learn *letter names* and *alphabetical order* by chanting the alphabet or singing an alphabet song. Avoid spelling with letter names when learners are in the earliest stages of learning. Teach that conveying a spelling from one person to another by letter names is a *convention* and that the *skill* for spelling is *oral segmenting* and knowing which spelling alternatives to select for each sound. Eventually learn *spelling word banks*.

Do not teach an ‘initial sight vocabulary’ where learners are expected to memorise many words as whole shapes (for example, through whole words on flash cards).

Do not teach or encourage guessing or predicting words from their shape, or from picture cues, context cues or initial letter cues (sometimes known as ‘multi-cueing strategies’ or a ‘range of reading strategies’).

Introduce useful, common ‘**tricky words**’ slowly and systematically emphasising the blending skill once the tricky letter, or letters, have been pointed out. For example, when teaching the word ‘**you**’, say, “In this word (*pointing at the printed word ‘you’*), note that these letters (*pointing at ‘ou’*), **are code for /oo/**.” (‘Tricky words’ are a small number of words, in which there are rare/unusual graphemes, or, common useful words in which not all the graphemes have yet been formally taught, which tend to be used in early reading books.)

Teach **systematically** according to a planned and structured phonics progression – but also teach phonics **incidentally** as the need arises.

Note: This phonics teaching approach is set within a literacy-rich environment and requires a full range of further age-appropriate communication, language and literacy activities and creative opportunities.

Synthetic phonics is generally taught at the level of the ‘phoneme’ (single sound) and not onset and rime (e.g. tr-ick, fl-ap); and not consonant clusters (e.g. bl, sp, scr, -nd, -mp, -st) and not word families (e.g. cake, make, take, flake).

The three complexities of the English Alphabetic Code:

1. One, two, three or four letters can be code for one phoneme (sound):
e.g. /s/ **s** as in ‘sat’, /f/ **ph** as in ‘graph’, /igh/ **igh** as in ‘night’, /ai/ **eigh** as in ‘eight’
2. Most phonemes (sounds) can be represented by different graphemes (letters and letter groups):
e.g. the /oa/ sound can be represented by: **o, oa, ow, oe, o-e, eau, ough**.
3. Some graphemes can be code for more than one phoneme:
e.g. ‘**ough**’ can be code for: /oa/ in **though**, /u/ in **borough**, /ou/ in **plough**, /or/ in **thought**, long /oo/ in **through**

One example of an English Alphabetic Code Chart:

units of sound	example words with spelling alternatives (graphemes)	units of sound	example words with spelling alternatives (graphemes)
/s/	snake glass palace house scissors cents city cycle castle pseudonym	/oa/	oak bow yo-yo oboe rope dough plateau
/a/	apple	/igh/	night tie behind fly bike eider eye
/t/	teddy letter skipped debt pterodactyl	/ee/	eel eat emu concrete key chief sardines /i-ee/ sunny monkey movie
/i/	insect cymbals	/or/	fork oars door snore four dawn sauce chalk wardrobe water caught thought
/p/	pan puppet	/z/	zebra jazz fries cheese breeze
/n/	net bonnet knot gnome engine	/ng/	gong jungle /ngk/ ink uncle
/k/	kit cat duck chameleon bouquet plaque	/v/	violin dove
/e/	egg head said	short /oo/	book should cushion
/h/	hat who	long /oo/	moon blue flute crew fruit soup move through
/r/	rat arrow write rhinoceros	/ks/	fox books ducks cakes
/m/	map hammer thumb welcome column	/gz/	pegs eggs exam
/d/	dig puddle rained	/ch/	chairs patch /chu/ picture
/g/	girl juggle guitar ghost catalogue	/sh/	sheep chef station magician admission
/o/	orange watch qualify salt	unvoiced /th/	thistle
/u/	umbrella son touch thoroughfare	voiced /th/	there
/l/	ladder shell	/kw/	queen
/ul/	kettle pencil hospital camel	/ou/	ouch owl plough
/f/	feathers cliff photograph laugh	/oi/	ointment toy
/b/	bat rabbit building	/yoo/	unicorn statue tube new pneumatic
/j/	jug cabbage gerbil giraffe fridge	/er/	mermaid birthday nurse earth world schwa /er/ or /u/ mixer humour theatre
/y/	yawn	/ar/	artist father palm half calves
/ai/	aid tray table sundae cake prey break eight straight	/air/	hair hare bear where
/w/	web wheel penguin	/eer/	deer ears adhere cashier
		/zh/	television treasure azure courgette collage

Sounds are shown within slash marks like this /s/. Consonant sounds are in blue and vowel sounds are in red.

This chart is not definitive and regional accents may require a chart such as this to be modified. Additional code (further letter/s-sound correspondences) can be added as required within word examples.

For more information about Alphabetic Code Charts including selecting your preferred FREE charts and hearing the sounds of English whilst seeing the spelling alternatives via video clips, go to www.phonicsinternational.com.