

Understanding phonics: a guide for parents, carers and families

This guide explains what phonics is, why it is important, and how you can support your child's learning at home.

Reading is a foundational life skill and a source of pleasure and wonder.

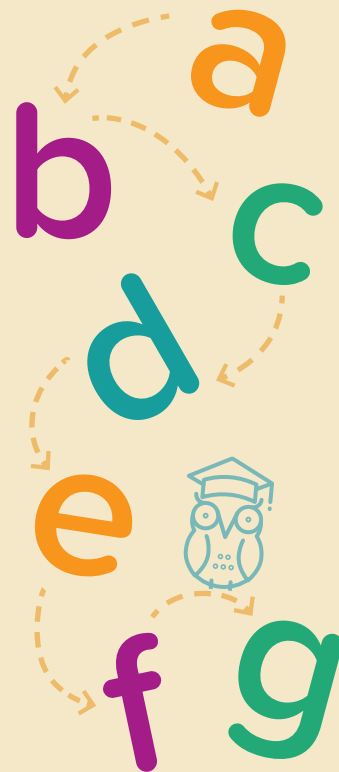
The teaching of **phonics** is a key component in helping children become **confident, fluent readers**.

Phonics links **sounds** to their **letters**.

Students learn to read words by recognising these sound-letter relationships.

Phonics instruction is a highly effective way to teach children to read words accurately.

It builds **decoding skills**—sounding out words—which help students figure out **unfamiliar words**. Phonics gives children the tools to understand **patterns in text**, boosting their **reading fluency and comprehension**.



How can you support phonics learning at home?

Learning to read takes time and **encouragement**, and everyone learns at their own pace.

It's important to **celebrate your child's small wins** and encourage them to **keep trying**, even when it's hard.

When children **enjoy learning**, they stay motivated and build a **strong reading foundation**.

Making **phonics practice fun** is the best way to keep them engaged. Here are some activities you can stick on the fridge and do at home with your child:



Read together

Choose a favourite book and read it together.

Phonics bingo

Create cards with letters/words. Call out a sound and ask your child to find the matching card.

Memory games

Use flashcards with letters and images (like 'Cc' and 'cat') to find matching pairs.

I spy

Play 'I spy,' focusing on the starting sound (e.g., "... begins with /b/").

Sand or salt trays

Trace letters in salt or sand while saying the sound aloud.

Playdough letters

Make letters with playdough, saying the sounds as you make them.

Hopscotch with sounds

Draw a hopscotch grid with letters. Say the sound as you hop on each letter.

Phonics songs

Find fun phonics songs online that use repetition and music to remember the sounds.

Nursery rhymes and poems

Use rhymes to spot sound patterns and shared letters.

Sound hunt

Find objects around the house that start with a specific sound (e.g., /s/).

Word hunt

Hide word cards. Have your child find and read them aloud.

Letter collage

Cut out pictures from magazines that start with a specific sound and make a collage.

Phonics jump

Write letters on the floor. Call out a sound and jump to it.

Sound labels

Label objects (e.g., the door with /d/). Sound it out every time you pass.

Sound of the day/week

Choose one sound (like /a/). Listen for it in conversation, TV, or books.

Make your own

Have fun making up your own activities using sounds and words!

How is phonics taught in schools?

The key elements of phonics are:

- > **Phonemes:** the **smallest sounds** in words (like the /k/ sound in 'cat').
- > **Graphemes:** the **letters** or groups of letters that represent those sounds (like the letter 'c' in 'cat').
- > **Blending:** putting **sounds together** to read a word (e.g., /k/ /a/ /t/ becomes 'cat').
- > **Segmenting:** breaking words down **into sounds** to spell them (e.g., 'chat' becomes /ch/ /a/ /t/).

Phonics is taught in a **step-by-step way**.

Children start with the **simplest sounds** (like /s/, /a/, and /t/) and slowly move to more **complex sound-letter patterns** (like /ee/ as in 'bee' or /oa/ as in 'cloak').

This is called **systematic synthetic phonics**.

Children **learn sounds first**. Then they practise **blending those sounds together** to read whole words.

Teachers have many different ways to make phonics lessons engaging. This might include short, focused lessons which incorporate both reading and writing. They may also play games, like the ones suggested in this guide.

What if my child is struggling with phonics?

If your child is having trouble, talk to their teacher. Some children just need a little extra practice or a personalised teaching approach.

For more information, please see: www.academy.vic.gov.au/resources/understanding-phonics



This guide was produced by the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, in partnership with Parents Victoria.