



What are phonics?

Phonics-based reading involves learning to recognize the distinct sounds, or phonemes, that go together to make up words. There are just over 40 phonemes in the English language. Some phonemes correspond to a single letter, like the **p-i-g** sounds in the word **pig**, and others to combinations of letters, such as the **sh-ar-k** sounds in the word **shark**.

Synthetic phonics describes the process of reading by *sounding* the individual phonemes in a word, and then synthesizing – running them together – or *blending* to read the whole word. Children who learn to read using synthetic phonics start by learning the individual phonemes, then soon learn to sound and blend in order to read whole words. This gives them the confidence to read unfamiliar words and tackle new texts, an important step towards independent reading.

Words can be divided into two basic groups: regular phonic words, such as “pig”, which can be read by sounding and blending, and words which are wholly or partly irregular. Most words in English are regular, but some very common words, such as **I** and **the**, are irregular and have to be learned. When your child meets an unfamiliar word, encourage him or her to read it regularly; children may recognize the irregularity and correct themselves, or you can guide them if necessary.

When reading with your child, encourage him or her to sound out the words as you go. Soon, most children will start to sound out the words for themselves. This is an excellent way of helping to develop a fundamental reading skill.

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