

Glossary of Thomas A' Becket Infant Phonic Terminology

Adjacent consonants

Two or more consonants that come together in a word without any intervening vowel or vowels (for example, 'd-r' in 'drop', 's-t-r' in 'strap'). Adjacent consonants do not constitute a discrete unit of sound and are read by blending the individual consonant phonemes involved.

Alien words

A child-friendly term for 'pseudo-words'.

Alphabetic code

The relationship between the sounds that can be identified in speech (phonemes) and the letters used to represent them in writing (graphemes).

Alternative pronunciation

A different way of pronouncing a grapheme. For example, the letters 'ow' can represent the sounds /ow/ as in 'crown' and /oa/ as in 'snow'.

Alternative spelling

A different way of spelling a phoneme. For example, the sound /w/ can be represented in writing by 'w' as in 'wave' and 'wh' as in 'what'.

Blend

To combine individual phonemes into a whole word, working all the way through from left to right. Once the GPCs involved have been learned, blending is the key process involved in reading words effectively. It is a skill that needs extensive practice. Practice in oral blending is very helpful, both before and during the process of learning to read. It is important to understand that blending sounds into a word is not simply a matter of saying them more quickly, nor of mixing them together like paint. Phonemes need to be joined into one continuous stream of sound to make a spoken word. Extensive practice, following teacher modelling, is the key.

Catchphrase

A type of mnemonic in the form of a memorable (often funny) phrase. Catchphrases are generally used in to help children remember some of the later GPCs learned.

Chunk it up

To break up a longer word and read it one part (chunk) at a time, to avoid being overwhelmed and to ease the process of blending.

Common Exception Words (Year 1 and 2)

Words that break the phonic rules taught at school and often used regularly in texts. Such as, the, as, is.

Compound word

A word made by joining two individual words together, for example, 'houseboat' is 'house' + 'boat'.

CVC Word

A word made up with a consonant followed by a vowel, followed by a consonant (sat, pin) Other combinations such as CCVC (chip) or CVCC (bank).

Decode

The practice of reading – turning graphemes into phonemes.

Encode

The practice of writing – turning phonemes into graphemes.

Digraph

A grapheme using two letters to represent one phoneme. With children, we frequently reinforce it with the mantra 'two letters, one sound'. At the appropriate stage, it is useful for children to learn to use the term and to understand what it means.

Fluency

The ability to read accurately with speed and expression. Fluent readers read words automatically without needing to decode. It is at this point that we see them able to focus on comprehension and make sense of what is being read.

GPC

This stands for grapheme–phoneme correspondence, the sound–letter relationship between each element of the alphabetic code. Written English is quite complex and does not have one-to-one grapheme–phoneme correspondence. The same phoneme can be represented by different graphemes in different words, and the same grapheme can represent different phonemes in different words. To ensure learning is systematic, and to avoid cognitive overload, we teach one fairly common grapheme representation of each phoneme first. Alternative spellings of the same phoneme, and alternative pronunciation of the same grapheme are usually taught later, mostly in Phase 5.

Grapheme

A letter or group of letters used to represent a particular phoneme when writing. With children, we sometimes call this 'a sound written down', although, as with 'phoneme', it is helpful for children to learn to use the correct term from the beginning. The way graphemes are used to represent phonemes in our written language is known as the 'alphabetic code'.

Group reading practice

A group reading session where the children read alongside an adult from books containing known GPCs and tricky words and have the opportunity to apply and practise their knowledge. The children should be able to access these books with 90% accuracy.

Mnemonic

Any simple device used to assist memory. It is a combination of a catchphrase, engaging picture (sung as a song) with a letter and is used as a 'hook' to help children remember a particular GPC when they first learn it.

Multi-syllable word

A word with more than one syllable. Syllables are easy to recognise when words are spoken, but hard to distinguish in printed words until you know how to say them. The best way for children to learn to recognise syllables is to count (or clap) them when reciting known rhymes, songs, and so on.

Oral blending

A technique for the early practice of blending. The teacher articulates each phoneme in a word separately, in order, and children respond by saying the whole word aloud. Alternatively, they can be asked to blend the word silently and show they have done so by responding with some action, for example, touching their head, after the teacher has pronounced the separate phonemes in the word 'head'. Such practice is valuable both before and during the early stages of learning to read. (Also known as 'sound-talk'.)

Oral Segmenting

Hearing a whole word and then splitting it up into the phonemes that make it. Children need to develop this skill before they will be able to segment words to spell them.

Phoneme

The smallest unit of sound that can be identified in words. We sometimes simply call this a 'sound', although it is helpful for children to use the term 'phoneme' from the beginning of our programme. (Note: We do not usually notice discrete sounds in words. We deliberately separate them out so that children can learn how our writing-reading system works. Children are first helped to identify the separate sounds in words through oral blending and segmenting, and this is reinforced as they begin to work through our systematic synthetic phonics programme.)

Phonetically plausible

Comprising grapheme-phoneme correspondences that can be found in English words, even if they are not correct spellings of the (or any) actual word, for example, 'thor' instead of 'thaw'.

Phonics screening check

A statutory national assessment in England, conducted internally by schools towards the end of Year 1. Its sole purpose is to determine whether a child can phonically decode single words to an annually predetermined national standard.

Phonics

The method by which we teach children to read by recognising the connections between the sounds of spoken words (phonemes) and the letters that are used to write them down (graphemes).

Pseudo-words

Simple, phonetically plausible 'words' that don't occur in the English language; used (as in the Phonics screening check) to assess whether a child can correctly read a word they haven't seen before, using phonic decoding; use should be confined to assessment.

Pure Sound/Schwaring

The production of each letter sound clearly and distinctly without adding additional sounds to the end e.g. 'f' and not 'fuh'. A schwa is an unstressed syllable where a vowel does not make its long or short vowel sound. It makes an 'u' sound, such as teacher where we do not stress the er sound. The schwa is also important when teaching children correct pronunciation. For example, when teaching them to say the sound 'g' or 'm' the emphasis is on the sound only, rather than making an 'u' sound after the letter as this can hinder children when learning to blend.

Segment

To identify each of the individual phonemes in a word, working all the way through from left to right. This is an important first stage of writing (spelling) a word but needs to be practised orally first. Counting the phonemes is often helpful in reinforcing this process.

Sound button

A graphic device to help children recognise the separate phonemes in a printed word. Sound buttons can be used as a support in the early stages of learning. For each word, a dot is placed under any single-letter grapheme and a short horizontal line under the group of letters that form a digraph or trigraph.

Split vowel digraph

A digraph representing a vowel sound where its two letters are split by an intervening consonant (for example, 'a_e' in 'take'). Despite having a consonant in between them, the two letters involved (here 'a' and 'e') still count as one digraph, making one sound. The vowel sound is pronounced at the position of the first of the two letters of the digraph (that is, in the middle of 'take'). At early learning stages, a split digraph is often highlighted with a short line joining the two halves of the digraph above the intervening consonant.

Suffix

A recognisable unit of language added to the end of a word to change its form, such as the tense of a verb. For example, 'playing' is 'play' + '-ing', so '-ing' is the suffix. Examples of other common suffixes are '-er', '-ed', '-est'.

Tricky words

High-frequency words that, although decodable in themselves, cannot be decoded by children using the GPCs they have been taught up to that point. Not all high-frequency words are 'tricky words'. Many tricky words cease to be tricky in the later stages of the Phonic Phases, as more GPCs are learned.

Trigraph

A grapheme using three letters to represent one phoneme. With children, we frequently reinforce it with the mantra 'three letters, one sound'. At the appropriate stage, it is useful for children to learn to use the term and to understand what it means.

Vowel sound

Although we have five vowel letters in English, each one can be pronounced in different ways and there are, therefore, far more than five vowel phonemes (vowel sounds). Each one has a short vowel form, with a staccato pronunciation; these are the vowel sounds heard, for example, in 'hat', 'bed', 'big', 'hot' and 'tub'. Each also has a more elongated pronunciation, the long vowel form heard, for example, in 'play', 'seed', 'high', 'blow' and 'tube'. There are, additionally, more complex vowel forms, for example, those heard in 'bear' and 'farm'. Graphemes for short vowel phonemes are the easiest to learn and are taught first. Most GPCs for long vowels involve digraphs or trigraphs and are taught later, generally in Phase 5.