

# Phonics Definitions

Page One

## 1. Synthetic phonics

Synthetic phonics teaches children to read by breaking words down into their individual sounds (phonemes) which are then 'synthesised' (blended) to read the word.

## 2. Phonemic awareness

Phonemic awareness is part of phonological awareness, the awareness of the sound structure of words. It is the conscious awareness of phonemes, the smallest units of sound in a spoken word.

## 3. Cognitive load

Cognitive load is the amount of information processing needed to complete a learning task. Cognitive Load Theory was developed by educational psychologist John Sweller and is critical to understand when teaching phonics.

## 4. Phoneme

There are 44 phonemes in the English language. Phonemes are represented by their corresponding grapheme(s) between two forward slashes, e.g. /ar/ as in 'car'.

## 5. Grapheme

A grapheme is a letter, or group of letters, representing a phoneme. Graphemes may consist of up to four letters.

- A **digraph** is two letters which represent one phoneme, for example the 'oa' in 'boat' or the 'ee' in 'tree'.
- A **split digraph** is two letters which represent one phoneme and are split by a consonant. The 'i\_e' in bike is a split digraph.
- A **trigraph** is three letters which represent one phoneme, e.g. the 'igh' in light.

## 6. CVC word

CVC stands for consonant-vowel-consonant. These CVC words are among the first words children begin blending, such as 'sip'.

## 7. Vowel team

A vowel team is two or more letters which represent a single vowel sound, such as 'ow' or 'igh'.



# Phonics Definitions

Page Two

## 8. Schwa

Schwa is the name of the /uh/ sound in English. In some English dialects (and especially the Aussie accent!), the schwa sound replaces r-controlled vowels (like 'er' as in 'winter' or 'ar' as in 'collar').

## 9. Blending

Blending is the process of identifying the phonemes in a word and 'pushing' them together to read the whole word (e.g. reading the isolated phonemes /s/, /u/ and /n/ and pushing them together to form the word 'sun').

## 10. Segmenting

Segmenting is the reverse or inverse of blending. When we segment a word, we are breaking it up into its individual phonemes. We then find the correct grapheme to represent each sound – spelling!

## 11. Decoding/Decodable

Decoding is the process of applying knowledge of letter-sound relationships to correctly pronounce written words. A word which contains only letter-sound correspondences which have been taught is decodable (e.g. if a child has been only taught the phonemes s, m, c, g, t, p, a and o, then the word 'chat' isn't decodable whereas 'cat' is).

## 12. Tricky words

A tricky (or camera) word is an irregular, high-frequency word such as 'the' or 'was' and cannot be completely decoded using phonics. Some tricky words are only temporarily tricky, until a child learns more of the phonics code (e.g. 'l'). Others, such as 'one', are permanently tricky.

## 13. Alternative spellings

Alternative spellings are the various graphemes which may represent one of the 44 phonemes of English, such as 'a', 'ā', 'a\_e' and 'ai' to represent the long /a/ sound.

**Teachers can sign up for a 30-day trial of our Phonics Lessons at**  
**[www.phonicshero.com](http://www.phonicshero.com)**

