

# Nurturing key literacy skills at home

**M**any parents wonder how they can support their child at home while they are learning to read and write, especially with the recent emphasis on the synthetic phonics method in schools. It is difficult to remember how you learnt to read yourself, let alone whether you learnt the ABC or sounds of letters!

Additionally, as literacy methods are continually changing, it is likely that most parents will not have been taught with synthetic phonics. This poses a problem for parents who want to practice what their child is learning at school.

For example, many parents will not sound out the **letter sounds**, but instead say the **letter names** when reading with their children. This can be incredibly confusing for the child. For example, if 'c-a-t' was spelt by its letter names, it would sound like 'see- ai- tee'. This would be impossible for children to blend together to make 'cat'!

The philosophy of synthetic phonics is simple: **Words are made up from sounds.**

There are forty two to forty four sounds in English and only twenty six letters, which means that some sounds have to be represented by two letters put together (digraphs) e.g. /ee/ as in 'see', 'ng' as in 'ring'. Letter sounds can be practiced by doing 'pairs' games.

The word 'synthetic' refers to the act of synthesizing and blending letter sounds together to work out unknown words. In school, children are taught the letter sounds s, a, t, i, p, n first, and are immediately encouraged to blend words using these sounds, for example s-a-t (sat), p-i-n (pin). At this stage, children should learn each letter by its sound, not its name (the letter 's' should be learnt as 'sss' not 'ess'), and provide practice words including only these sounds.

1. s a t i p n
2. c/k e h r m d
3. g o u l f b
4. ai j oa ie ee or
5. z w ng v oo oo
6. y x ch sh th th
7. qu ou oi ue er ar

Children are also taught how to write each letter correctly, by tracing letters in the air or feeling cut-out letters. There are many ways to familiarize children with letter formation at home, using plasticine, finger-tracing in paint or baking letter-shaped biscuits!

The most important skill for **reading** is how to 'blend' letter sounds together to read a word. Try developing blending skills while looking at pictures in a book. Ask your child if they can see the 'd-o-g', the 'sh-ee-p' and so on (but stick to short, simple words). Hopefully they will say 'dog' and 'sheep'!

The key skill for **writing** is how to listen for sounds in a word to spell it. Practice this by saying a word, then get your child to say or write the **sounds** in the word such as "What are the sounds in 'dog'?" "D-o-g".

Once children are fluent in blending words using letter sounds they have sufficient knowledge to cope with reading books suitable for their age. It is important to choose books carefully for your children to read. Confidence is quickly lost if you ask children to work out words that contain unknown letter sounds. It is better to read

unknown words to them than encourage guessing.

As well as supporting children's reading skills, parents should also read books to their child above the child's reading level, in order to give them access to books they can enjoy but cannot read themselves, and to develop their vocabulary and comprehension skills.

The first time a child reads a book or writes their first story is a very special moment. This is what teaching the skills for reading and writing has been leading up to. Finally they can be an independent learner and author, capable of writing whatever they want to say and reading any book of their choice.

There are forty two to forty four sounds in English and only twenty six letters...

s	a	s	a
t	i	t	i
p	n	p	n

**I wish I had something to help me read and write. Something that is just for me...**





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