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# Why phonics?

## Teaching methodologies

There are two basic opposing methodologies for the teaching of reading.

The first is the *sight method*. This method comes with different names (such as ‘whole word’ and ‘look say’) and in many guises, but each approaches the task by viewing words as a whole unit, thus treating words as pictures. Students are eventually expected to pick up phonetic cues without prior teaching.

The second method is *phonics*. Although the phonics method acknowledges words as whole units, it uses segmentation of a word into its smaller units (phonograms and syllables) to analyse the sound of the word. Prior teaching of the symbols which represent the sounds of the language (phonograms) is necessary for this.

## Phonics fits the structure of English

Written English is phonetically based—the writing system has been designed using symbols to represent the different sounds which constitute speech.

Phonics advocates believe it naturally follows that a good reader should use these constituent parts to decipher the encoded word, and a good speller should build the word from those same parts.

The National Reading Panel in the USA concluded that an intensive phonics programme which gives attention to 5 prime areas yields superior results:

1. **Phonemic awareness** awareness of sounds in words and the ability to manipulate them
2. **Phonics instruction** learning to use the symbols which represent the sounds (graphemes or phonograms) in the processes of reading and spelling
3. **Fluency instruction** learning to read a text accurately and quickly
4. **Vocabulary instruction** specific word instruction
5. **Text comprehension** understanding text with increasing levels of complexity

The LEM Phonics intensive phonics programme places strong emphasis on all these areas.

## How the human brain perceives language

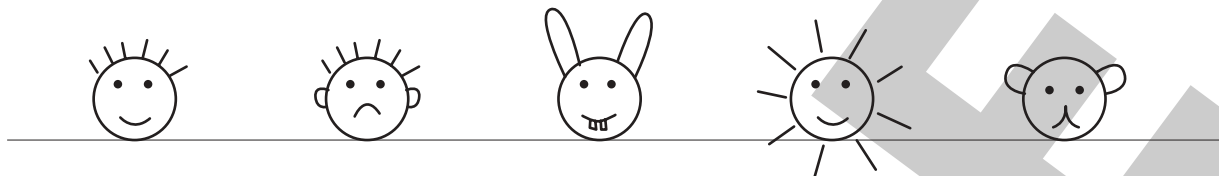
The most foundational mechanism by which humans share information is language. This sharing of language can come in many forms—speaking, reading, listening and writing—and through a variety of traditional and electronic media. Whilst speaking and listening are *natural* activities, reading, spelling and writing are a *learned* set of skills which should be systematically taught.

***The human brain perceives patterns and generates rules about those patterns.***

Therefore in order to achieve competency in reading, writing and spelling, it is essential that students are exposed to and explicitly *taught* the set patterns and rules that govern the language.

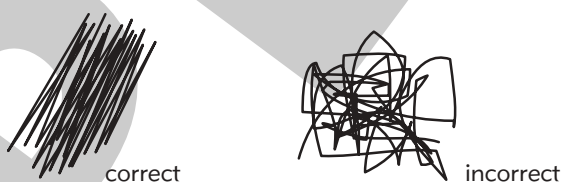
In the English language those patterns and rules are clearly defined. When learned, they allow the new learner to quickly and effectively apply these sound and spelling patterns—not only to the words that are learned, but also (just as importantly) to a range of other sounds and words which use the same patterns.

- Once the students have completed several rows of circles they can decorate them in various ways as suggested below.



- Have the students colour the pictures. Colouring is a good exercise to help young students gain better control of the pencil. Offer them other simple things to colour, encouraging them to use correct colours (e.g. people are not green!) and to keep within the lines.

Show them, too, how to move the pencil in the same direction whilst colouring to achieve a neat appearance:



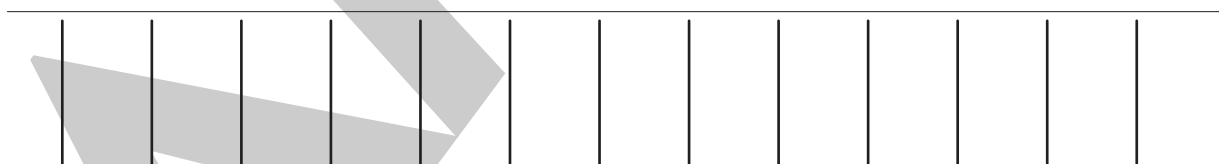
## Teaching tall and short strokes

🕒 WEEK 1 TUESDAY

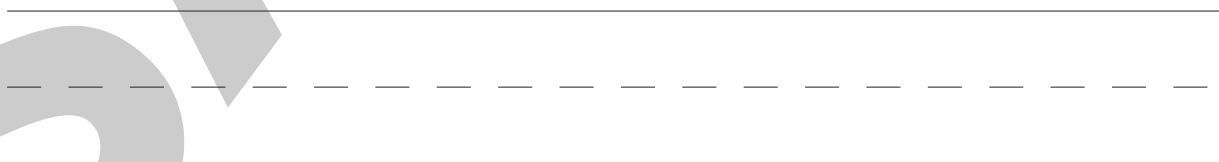
📄 18 MM LINED PAPER WITH DOTTED LINES ADDED

- Repeat the teaching of the circle. Praise students when they form the circle correctly and encourage them to keep trying to improve (they will not be perfect at first).
- Teach the **tall stroke**. Show the students how the tall stroke begins a little below the top line so that letters will not touch the letters sitting on the line above.

Practise a row of tall strokes:



- Teach the **short stroke**, showing the students that it is half the size of a tall stroke. Introduce the term **short letter height** by ruling two lines about 25 cm apart on the board and adding a dotted line halfway between the two lines:



- Let the students try doing short strokes on the board. Provide a sheet of paper with lines 18 mm apart and a dotted line between (a batch could be prepared prior to the lesson). Have students do a row of short strokes:



# Teaching the single phonograms

## Basic steps

- Know thoroughly the sounds and the formation of the phonograms to be taught.
- Have writing grids and lines on the blackboard prepared before the lesson.
- Review a selection of previously learned phonograms.
- Show the new card and pronounce the sounds precisely and clearly, tapping the card from your right to left (left to right for the students) as each sound is said. This gives the correct speed to say the sounds.
- Have the students repeat the sounds several times.
- Demonstrate the written formation on the grid (if applicable) or on the blackboard, and verbalise the formation as the students watch.
- Explain the differences between printed and handwritten form if applicable.
- Identify whether the phonogram is a vowel or consonant.
- Have the students write the phonogram 'in the air' as you mirror image it.
- Demonstrate the size relationship between the lines on the board and spacing principles within a word (i.e. close but not touching) by writing several phonograms along prepared lines.
- Have the students practise several rows in their *Handwriting Practice Book*, chanting the sounds at the same time.
- Have the students complete the relevant workbook pages.
- Erase the phonograms from the board and give a written test of the phonogram with other known ones.

Before commencing with the phonograms it is important to understand the difference between a *phonogram* and a *sound*. Phonograms refer to the way a sound is written, whereas sounds refer to how a sound is spoken or heard. Throughout this book phonograms are shown in **bold** and sounds are shown in quotes. For example, the phonograms in the word **cat** are shown as **c**, **a** and **t**, and the sounds are shown as 'k', 'a', and 't'. Remember we are using sounds, not letter names ('buh', not 'bee').

When teaching the phonograms, we recommend progressing as quickly as the students are able. Too slow a pace may reduce motivation and challenge. But if students are experiencing difficulty with many phonograms, it is important to slow down.

The letters which begin with a circle are taught first, to train students in the habit of beginning circle letters at 1 on the grid.

**a**



WEEK 2 MONDAY



PHONOGRAM CARDS | CIRCLE LETTER GRID | HANDWRITING PRACTICE BOOK  
WORKBOOK 1 PAGES 1-2

1. Hold up the **a** card for the students to see.
2. Say each of the 5 sounds slowly and deliberately, making a short break between each sound.
3. Have the students repeat the sounds several times after you.
4. Explain that **a** is a vowel. All first sounds of vowels are short sounds, and all second sounds of vowels are long sounds. You can use your fingers to show that the first sound is short, the second, third and fourth sounds are long, and the fifth sound is short—just like the fingers on your hand. When showing this

short   long   short



to the students, move from right to left on your fingers so they see it from left to right, reinforcing the direction of writing. Of course, this illustration only works for the phonogram **a**!

5. Show students how to write **a** on the board, telling them that the handwritten letter has a different formation than the typewritten **a** which we see on the card and in most books.

Use the circle letter grid to model the writing of **a**. Begin at 1 on the grid. Draw up and anticlockwise around the circle to 4, then draw straight up past 1 to short letter height and, without lifting the pencil, draw straight down to the baseline.



Model several of these for the students to watch.

6. Have the students follow the formation of a 'in the air', mirroring your hand as you form it backwards for them (practising this in front of a mirror may help you master the technique). Ensure they are holding their pencil correctly even as they are forming a 'in the air'.
7. Issue the students with *Handwriting Practice Books*. Ask them to write a row of the letter **a** on the first grid page, as neatly as they are able. Then repeat on the opposite page without the circle letter grid. It should be your aim to eventually have the students judge the correct sizing of letters without a mid-line. As the students begin to write letters across a line it will be necessary to start teaching correct spacing principles (see page 28).
8. As the students write **a**, have them chant the five sounds to help the memory. Continue this practice with all phonograms.
9. Check the students' pencil grip, sitting position, posture and paper position, correcting where necessary. It is important to establish these good habits early.
10. Erase each letter **a** from the board. Write the date on the first line of an 18 mm lined book—the student's *Test Book*. The book can be cut in half to make it easier for students to handle.

Dictate the phonogram **a**, saying its five sounds clearly. Ensure that the students are listening well. Then have them write the phonogram on the first line of their *Test Book*. When completed have them read the phonogram back to you, saying its five sounds clearly. Correct and help where necessary.

More details about giving phonogram tests are found on page 42.

11. Issue the students with *Single Phonograms* workbooks and have them complete pages 1 and 2. On page 2, they will try to judge short letter height. Help and encourage students in doing this.

Sound the name of any picture on page 1 (e.g. 'k', 'a', 't'), and see if the students can identify it. Train students to hear where the sound 'a' is placed—at the beginning or middle or end of the word. Continue sounding the workbook words for the students up to page 16 (the phonogram **t**), when the students will know enough phonograms to begin sounding the words themselves. Sounding in this manner is a valuable step in developing phonemic awareness (the ability to determine the isolated sounds within words).

**d**



WEEK 2 TUESDAY



PHONOGRAM CARDS | CIRCLE LETTER GRID | HANDWRITING PRACTICE BOOK  
TEST BOOK | WORKBOOK 1 PAGES 3-4



1. Orally review **a** by showing its card and having the students say its sounds. Have them write it on the board and say the sounds.
2. **d** is a circle with a tall stroke. Begin at 1. Draw up and anticlockwise around the circle to 4. Then draw straight up, almost touching the top line and without lifting the pencil, follow the same line down again to the baseline.
3. Hold up the card for the students to see, saying its one sound. Explain that the lips must form a circle to *say d*. Have the students say the sound. Tell them that we also begin to *write d* with a circle. This helps to avoid confusion between **d** and **b**. Have them repeat the sound several times.

# Foundational rules

This list gives the basic rules introduced in *Word List Book K* and *Word List Book 1*.

1. **a**, **e**, **o** and **u** say their second sounds 'ay', 'ee', 'oa' and 'oo' or 'ew' at the end of a syllable:
- |       |    |       |        |        |
|-------|----|-------|--------|--------|
| ba-by | he | o-pen | lu-nar | mu-sic |
|-------|----|-------|--------|--------|

**i** or **y** may say their second sound 'igh' at the end of a syllable, but often they say 'i':

si-lent	fi-nal	gy-rate
an-i-mal	in-di-cate	hap-py

2. **l**, **f**, **s** and **z** are often doubled at the end of a one-syllable word if they follow a single vowel:
- |      |     |       |      |
|------|-----|-------|------|
| fill | off | dress | jazz |
|------|-----|-------|------|

*Exceptions: nil, if, bus, quiz*

Note that **s** never doubles when it says its second sound 'z':

his	was	is	as
-----	-----	----	----

3. **ay**, not **a**, is used to represent the sound 'ay' at the end of a word:

day	de-lay
-----	--------

4. **a**, **e**, **o** and **u** can say their second sounds 'ay', 'ee', 'oa', 'igh' and 'oo' or 'ew' if silent **e** is on the end of the word:

make	late	these	theme	time
file	home	hope	rule	cute

5. **c** always says its second sound 's' if followed by **e**, **i**, or **y**:

cent	circus	cycle
------	--------	-------

6. **g** may say its second sound 'j' if followed by **e**, **i**, or **y**:

gem	gist	gym
-----	------	-----

But it often says its first sound:

girl	angel	anger
------	-------	-------

7. English words may not end with **v** or **u**. Silent **e** ends these words instead:

have	give	blue	true
------	------	------	------

8. Every syllable must have a vowel. Silent **e** will often provide one:

little	centre
--------	--------

9. **a** may say its third sound 'ar' before two consonants:

past	bath	ask	calm
------	------	-----	------

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# Teaching the rules

## *Know the rules*

In order to teach the rules well, it is important to know them well. Whilst it is impossible to pre-empt every question students will ask, being well grounded in the phonograms and their related rules will be beneficial in explaining to students the reasons certain words are spelled or read a certain way. Always answer questions in terms of the students' existing knowledge base, following the philosophical principle of 'building on the known'.

## *Begin with the simplest form of a rule*

In the early stages do not add extra information which students do not need yet. Teach only what is applicable to the word in question, resisting the urge to teach everything about the rule at once. Information overload may confuse the students and make it more difficult for them to retain the basic facets of the rule.

For example, the first word in the word list which ends in the sound 'ay' is **day**. Ask students to sound the word ('d' 'ay') and elicit from them the phonogram which usually says 'ay' at the end of a word ('ay' which we usually use at the end of a word). Applying the identification of the phonogram to the word is enough for the students to digest at this stage. Unless students ask, do not teach other extended rules such as:

- **ey** and **eigh** may also say 'ay' at the end of the word (**they**, **sleigh**)
- **ay** can also say 'ay' at the end of a syllable if a vowel follows (**cray-on**)
- **a** may say 'ay' at the end of a syllable (**la-dy**).

## *Keep answers to student questions simple*

Most rules will be taught following the instructions given in the word list books as words are encountered which use those rules. More advanced concepts will only need to be covered if students ask questions relating to them. An inquisitive student may have many questions—the choice needs to be made whether to explain the advanced rule to that student individually, or to share it with the whole class.

For example, if a student points out that **they** uses the sound 'ay' but doesn't use the phonogram **ay**, explain that other phonograms are sometimes used to represent the sound 'ay' at the end of a word, but not very often. Show the students the few common words which have **ey** on the end (**they**, **obey** and **grey**).

Or a student may come across the word **crayon** and wonder why **ay** is in the middle of a word. This is a good time to tell that student (or the whole class) that the phonogram **ay** may also be used at the end of a syllable *if a vowel follows*. Break the word into syllables on the board (**cray-on**) so students can graphically see how a vowel follows after the syllable break.

If a student encounters proper nouns like **Mrs Taylor** or **Maynard Street** in their general reading and questions the 'ay' sound in these words, teach them that rules which apply in normal words do not always apply to the names of people or places.

Some students will revel in the detail, but as a general rule don't offer too much information unless they ask. Older students in particular will need to move more quickly through the 'rule extensions'. To help a teacher do this, *The Book of Rules* is an excellent resource for looking up the detail of all the rules relating to a certain phonogram or sound, with linked rules and many example words.

Remember to always begin with the simplest aspect of the rule and build the unknown onto the known, step by step.



# Phonemic awareness test—auditory skills

Student name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Age

yrs

mths

Tick or cross the boxes for correct and incorrect responses. Answers are given in [square brackets].

**1. Rhyming** 'Sun' and 'fun' are rhyming words—they are the same at the end. Have the student say other words that rhyme with these words.

sat fat  cot lot  bit kit  hut gut  sack tack

**2. Word awareness** Read these sentences and ask the student to tell how many words they hear.

Please come. [2]  Four boys are here. [4]  The train whistled. [3]  Do you know the answer? [5]

**3. Syllables** Some words can be broken into parts called **syllables** (happy = hap-py). Read these words and ask the student to tell the number of syllables they hear.

today [2]  wonderful [3]  believe [2]  happiness [3]  yes [1]  ponnet [2]

**4. Phonemic isolation** Read these words and ask the student to tell the initial (first), medial (middle) and end sounds for these three-letter words. Ensure the student says sounds and not letter names ('d', not 'dee').

cat ['k' 'a' 't']  dog ['d' 'o' 'g']  sun ['s' 'u' 'n']  vod ['v' 'o' 'd']

**5. Phonemic identity** Say each series of words and ask the student to identify the common sound. The examples include initial, medial and end sounds.

can cat cope kind ['k']  mum make money Michael ['m']  cat plate sit cot ['t']   
cup pop map snip ['p']  cot shop dog doll ['o']  sit rim pin limb ['i']

**6. Phonemic categorisation** Say each series of words and ask the student to identify the word which doesn't belong (because it doesn't share the common sound). The examples include initial, medial and end sounds.

camel cat kitten mule [mule]  rope roof hat roll [hat]  until flip sail hit [sail]   
snake curl pill sill [snake]  nail toes roam mown [nail]  curl sir tale Bert [tale]

**7. Phonemic blending** For the words below, say each sound separately and ask the student to blend the sounds to make a word.

'b' 'i' 'g' [big]  'l' 'i' 'f' 't' [lift]  's' 't' 'o' 'p' [stop]  'b' 'oy' [boy]  'oa' 'v' 'er' [over]  'g' 'l' 'i' 'm' [glim]

**8. Phonemic segmentation** Say each word clearly and ask the student to break the word into its phonemes (sounds) and tell how many there are.

me ['m' 'ee'] [2]  not ['n' 'o' 't'] [3]  girl ['g' 'er' 'l'] [3]  trees ['t' 'r' 'ee' 's'] [4]  chorf ['ch' 'or' 'f'] [3]

**9. Phonemic manipulation** Say these base words and ask the student to add or remove the indicated sound at the beginning, tell the new word, and then add or remove it at the end and tell the new word.

park	add 's' at the start [spark]	add 's' at the end [sparks]	<input type="checkbox"/>
ill	add 'h' at the start [hill]	add 'i' at the end [hilly]	<input type="checkbox"/>
lamp	remove 'l' at the start [amp]	remove 'p' at the end [am]	<input type="checkbox"/>
tins	remove 't' at the start [ins]	remove 's' at the end [in]	<input type="checkbox"/>

**10. Phonemic substitution** Say these base words and ask the student to say the new word when the sound is substituted.

bat remove 't', add 'k' [back]  tap remove 't', add 's' [sap]  dog remove 'o', add 'i' [dig]   
kitten remove 'k', add 'm' [mitten]  set remove 't', add 'p' [sep]

**Summary of skills** Tick the boxes for the student responses above (generally 0–1 correct = poor, 2–3 correct = satisfactory, 4+ correct = good).

<b>1. Rhyming</b>	<b>2. Word awareness</b>	<b>3. Syllables</b>	<b>4. Phonemic isolation</b>	<b>5. Phonemic identity</b>
POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>
SATISFACTORY <input type="checkbox"/>	SATISFACTORY <input type="checkbox"/>	SATISFACTORY <input type="checkbox"/>	SATISFACTORY <input type="checkbox"/>	SATISFACTORY <input type="checkbox"/>
GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6. Phonemic categorisation</b>	<b>7. Phonemic blending</b>	<b>8. Phonemic segmentation</b>	<b>9. Phonemic manipulation</b>	<b>10. Phonemic substitution</b>
POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>	POOR <input type="checkbox"/>
SATISFACTORY <input type="checkbox"/>	SATISFACTORY <input type="checkbox"/>	SATISFACTORY <input type="checkbox"/>	SATISFACTORY <input type="checkbox"/>	SATISFACTORY <input type="checkbox"/>
GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>	GOOD <input type="checkbox"/>