

# Jolly Phonics

*Jolly Phonics* is a thorough foundation for reading and writing. It teaches the letter sounds in an enjoyable, multisensory way, and enables children to use them to read and write words.

This guide provides background advice for parents and teachers. It explains the principles behind *Jolly Phonics* so that your understanding of the teaching, and your ability to help a child, is much greater.

All the material is suitable for use in school and much of it is also well suited to use at home.

*Jolly Phonics* includes learning the irregular or 'tricky words' such as *said*, *was* and *the*. Together with these materials you should also use storybooks.

Parental support is important to all children as they benefit from plenty of praise and encouragement whilst learning. You should be guided by the pace at which your child wants to go. If interest is being lost, leave the teaching for a while rather than using undue pressure. Not all children find it easy to learn and blend sounds. It is important to remember that this is not because they are unintelligent but because they have a poor memory for symbols and words. Extra practice will lead to fluency in reading and help your child manage at school.

The five basic skills for reading and writing are:

1. Learning the letter sounds
2. Learning letter formation
3. Blending
4. Identifying sounds in words
5. Spelling the tricky words



## 1. Learning the Letter Sounds

In *Jolly Phonics* the 42 main sounds of English are taught, not just the alphabet. The sounds are in seven groups. Some sounds are written with two letters, such as *ee* and *or*. These are called digraphs. Note that *oo* and *th* can each make two different sounds, as in *book* and

*moon*, that and *three*. To distinguish between the two sounds, these digraphs are represented in two forms. This is shown below.

1. s, a, t, i, p, n
2. ck, 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

Each sound has an action which helps children remember the letter(s) that represent it. As a child progresses you can point to the letters and see how quickly they can do the action and say the sound. One letter sound can be taught each day. As a child becomes more confident, the actions are no longer necessary.

Children should learn each letter by its sound, not its name. For instance, the letter *a* should be called *a* (as in *ant*) not *ai* (as in *aim*). Similarly, the letter *n* should be *nn* (as in *net*), not *en*. This will help in blending. The names of each letter can follow later.

The letters have not been introduced in alphabetical order. The first group (*s, a, t, i, p, n*) has been chosen because they make more simple three-letter words than any other six letters. The letters *b* and *d* are introduced in different groups to avoid confusion.

Sounds that have more than one way of being written are initially taught in one form only. For example, the sound *ai* (*rain*) is taught first, and then the alternatives *a-e* (*gate*) and *ay* (*day*) follow later.

## 2. Learning Letter Formation

It is very important that a child holds their pencil in the correct way.



The pencil should be held in the 'tripod' grip between the thumb and first two fingers. The grip

is the same for both left and right handed children. If a child's hold starts incorrectly, it is very difficult to correct later on.

A child needs to form each letter the correct way. The letter *c* is introduced in the early stages as this forms the basic shape of some other letters, such as *d*. Particular problems to look for are:

- the *o* (the pencil stroke must be anti-clockwise, not clockwise),
- *d* (the pencil starts in the middle, not the top),
- *m* and *n* (there must be an initial downstroke, or the letter *m* looks like the McDonald's arches).

The *Jolly Phonics Videos* and *Finger Phonics* books show the correct formation of each letter. A good guide is to remember that no letters start on the line.

In time a child will need to learn joined-up (cursive) writing. It helps the fluency of writing and improves spelling. When words are written in one movement it is easier to remember the spelling correctly. *Jolly Phonics* uses the Sassoon Infant typeface which is designed for children learning to read and write. Many of the letters (such as *d* and *n*) have a joining tail at the end (an 'exit' stroke) to make it easier to transfer into joined-up writing. (You should check your school's policy as some schools do not teach joined-up writing to young children.)

### 3. Blending

Blending is the process of saying the individual sounds in a word and then running them together to make the word. For instance sounding out *d-o-g* and making *dog*. It is a technique every child will need to learn, and it improves with practice. To start with you should sound out the word and see if a child can hear it, giving the answer if necessary. Some children take longer than others to hear this. The sounds must be said quickly to hear the word. It is easier if the first sound is said slightly louder. Try little and often with words like *b-u-s*, *t-o-p*, *c-a-t* and *h-e-n*. There are lists of suitable words in *The Phonics Handbook* and the *Jolly Phonics Word Book*.

Remember that some sounds (digraphs) are represented by two letters, such as *sh*. Children should sound out the digraph (*sh*), not the individual letters (*s-h*). With practice they will be able to blend the digraph as one sound in a word. So, a word like *rain* should be sounded out *r-ai-n*, and *feet* as *f-ee-t*. This is difficult to begin with and takes practice. *The Jolly Phonics Regular Word Blending Cards* can be used in class to improve this skill.

You will find it helpful to be able to distinguish between a blend (such as *st*) and a digraph (such as *sh*). In a blend the two sounds, *s* and *t* can each be heard. In a digraph this is not so. Compare *mishap* (where both the *s* and *h* are sounded) and *midship* (which has the quite separate *sh* sound). When sounding out a blend, encourage children to say the two sounds as one unit, so *fl-a-g* not *f-l-a-g*. This will lead to greater fluency when reading.

Some words in English have an irregular spelling and cannot be read by blending, such as *said*, *was* and *one*. Unfortunately, many of these are common words. The irregular parts have to be remembered. These are called the 'tricky words'.

## 4. Identifying Sounds in Words

The easiest way to know how to spell a word is to listen for the sounds in that word. Even with the tricky words an understanding of letter sounds can help.

Start by having your child listen for the first sound in a word. Games like I-Spy are ideal for this. Next try listening for the end sounds, as the middle sound of a word is the hardest to hear.

Begin with simple three letter words such as *cat* or *hot*. A good idea is to say a word and tap out the sounds. Three taps means three sounds. Say each sound as you tap. Take care with digraphs. The word *fish*, for instance, has four letters but only three sounds, *f-i-sh*.

The *Jiglets* help identify the sounds in words. Rhyming games, poems and the *Jolly Jingles* also help tune the ears to the sounds in words. Other games to play are:

- a) Add a sound: what do I get if I add a *p* to the beginning of *ink*? Answer: *pink*. Other examples are *m-ice*, *b-us*, etc.
- b) Take away a sound: what do I get if I take away *p* from *pink*? Answer: *ink*. Other examples as above, and *f-lap*, *s-lip*, *c-rib*, *d-rag*, *p-ant*, *m-end*, *s-top*, *b-end*, *s-t-rip*, etc.

## 5. Spelling the Tricky Words

There are several ways of learning tricky spellings:

- 1) Look, Cover, Write and Check. Look at the word to see which bit is tricky. Ask the child to try writing the word in the air saying the letters. Cover the word over and see if the child can write it correctly. Check to make sure.
- 2) Say it as it sounds. Say the word so each sound is heard. For instance, the word *was* is said as 'wass', to rhyme with *mass*, the word *Monday* is said as 'Mon-day'.
- 3) Mnemonics. The initial letter of each word in a saying gives the correct spelling of a word. For instance, *laugh* - Laugh At Ugly Goat's Hair.
- 4) Using joined-up writing also improves spelling.

## The Actions

- s** Weave hand in an *s* shape, like a snake, and say *sssss*
- a** Wiggle fingers above elbow as if ants crawling on you and say *a, a, a*.
- t** Turn head from side to side as if watching tennis and say *t, t, t*.
- i** Pretend to be a mouse by wriggling fingers at end of nose and squeak *i, i, i*.
- p** Pretend to puff out candles and say *p, p, p*.
- n** Make a noise, as if you are a plane - hold arms out and say *nnnnnn*.

- ck** Raise hands and snap fingers as if playing castanets and say *ck, ck, ck*.
- e** Pretend to tap an egg on the side of a pan and crack it into the pan, saying *eh, eh, eh*.
- h** Hold hand in front of mouth panting as if you are out of breath and say *h, h, h*.
- r** Pretend to be a puppy holding a piece of rag, shaking head from side to side, and say *rrrrrr*.
- m** Rub tummy as if seeing tasty food and say *mmmmmm*.
- d** Beat hands up and down as if playing a drum and say *d, d, d*.
  
- g** Spiral hand down, as if water going down the drain, and say *g, g, g*.
- o** Pretend to turn light switch on and off and say *o, o; o, o*
- u** Pretend to be putting up an umbrella and say *u, u, u*.
- l** Pretend to lick a lollipop and say *llllll*.
- f** Let hands gently come together as if toy fish deflating, and say *ffffff*.
- b** Pretend to hit a ball with a bat and say *b, b, b*.
  
- ai** Cup hand over ear and say *ai, ai, ai*.
- j** Pretend to wobble on a plate and say *j, j, j*.
- oa** Bring hand over mouth as if you have done something wrong and say *oh!*
- ie** Stand to attention and salute, saying *ie ie*.
- ee or** Put hands on head as if ears on a donkey and say *eeyore, eeyore*.
  
- z** Put arms out at sides and pretend to be a bee, saying *zzzzzz*.
- w** Blow on to open hand, as if you are the wind, and say *wh, wh, wh*.
- ng** Imagine you are a weightlifter, and pretend to lift a heavy weight above your head, saying *ng...*
- v** Pretend to be holding the steering wheel of a van and say *vvvvvv*.
- oo oo** Move head back and forth as if it is the cuckoo in a cuckoo clock, saying *u, oo; u, oo*. (Little and long oo.)
  
- y** Pretend to be eating a yogurt and say *y, y, y*.
- x** Pretend to take an x-ray of someone with an x-ray gun and say *ks, ks, ks*.
- ch** Move arms at sides as if you are a train and say *ch, ch, ch*.
- sh** Place index finger over lips and say *shshsh*.
- th th** Pretend to be naughty clowns and stick out tongue a little for the *th*, and further for the **th** sound (*this* and **thumb**).
  
- qu** Make a duck's beak with your hands and say *qu, qu, qu*.
- ou** Pretend your finger is a needle and prick thumb saying *ou, ou, ou*.
- oi** Cup hands around mouth and shout to another boat saying *oi! ship ahoy!*
- ue** Point to people around you and say *you, you, you*.
- er** Roll hands over each other like a mixer and say *ererer*.
- ar** Open mouth wide and say *ah*. (UK English) Flap hands as if a seal, and say *ar, ar, ar*. (US English)