

Learning to read with phonics

Learning to read is one of key lifelong skills that children develop. To develop fluency in reading and foster a love of reading, children need to be given the basic building blocks of learning to read to provide a good grounding in the mechanics of reading which can be built upon. These basic building blocks can be taught through systematic synthetic phonics (SSP).

Reading is a code, which requires you to match the smallest units of sound in our speech to written symbols on the page. Understanding that written letters or letter groups on the page represent sounds in spoken words is crucial to word reading. SSP teaches the English alphabetic code and children will apply this knowledge to read, spell and write well.

What is systematic synthetic phonics?

Breaking this name down helps us to understand the meaning of the term:

- Phonics – meaning of or relating to sound, specifically speech sounds.
- Synthetic – from ‘synthesize’ meaning to put together or combine to make a whole
- Systematic – arranged according to an organized system, method or plan

Synthetic phonics is the process of identifying individual units of sound in a word and blending those units of sound together to read a word. For example, to read the word ‘moonlight’ we:

- Identify the letters and letter groups m oo n l igh t
- Translate these to separate sounds /m/ /oo/ /n/ /l/ /igh/ /t/
- Synthesise or blend the sounds together to hear moonlight

If a word we read is also in our oral vocabulary, the decoding process will activate the meaning of the word. The combination of alphabetic code knowledge and the skill of blending supports the comprehension of text.

SSP is systematic in the structure and progression which starts with the ‘simple’ single-letter to single-sound relationships and builds to the many alternative spellings and pronunciations in the complex English alphabetic code. The systematic approach gives structure, consistency and rigour to learning.

The benefits of teaching systematic synthetic phonics

There is a weight of evidence that SSP taught in the first years of education underpins attainment of a good standard of reading. A recent document published by the Department for Education in England stated that ‘the evidence for phonics is indisputable... the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) considers phonics to be one of the most secure and best-evidenced areas of pedagogy and recommends all schools use a systematic approach to teaching it’¹.

In England, SSP is the route to learning to read advocated in the National Curriculum and by Ofsted. Phonics should be emphasised in the early teaching of reading for those beginning to read. The ability to apply phonics knowledge and skills is the key method to decode words. Word reading and comprehension are the two elements that are essential in the National Curriculum for children learning to read and SSP has a pivotal place as part of a rich and varied reading programme. Phonics is also recognised as a key element in supporting children’s spelling and handwriting. The overt teaching of letter/s-sound correspondences and the concept word reading and spelling are reversible supports children’s reading, writing and spelling as their grapheme and phoneme knowledge increases.

In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence states that children should experience a language rich environment which sets high expectations for literacy and language. In the early years there is a focus on the importance of spoken language. The curriculum advocates a mix of appropriate approaches for effective learning and teaching in literacy and states that ‘teachers will balance play-based learning with more systematic development and learning of skills and techniques for reading, including phonics’².

In Wales, the Languages, Literacy and Communication area of learning and experience in the Curriculum for Wales identifies that research recognises phonological and phonemic awareness as important skills in learning to read. Schools should have a clear procedure for the systematic development of phonological and phonemic awareness. Indeed ‘when appropriate for a learner, the teaching of phonics should be systematic and consistent, and take place with other language activities, which promote vocabulary-building and comprehension’³. The guidance emphasises that decoding words alone is not enough, and that comprehension skills are required to enable readers to be able to make sense of what they read.

The benefits of using a systematic synthetic phonics programme

In July 2021 the Department for Education in England published *The reading framework: Teaching the foundations of literacy* which states that ‘the effective teaching of reading ... requires not just a systematic synthetic phonics programme but its consistent implementation in every class’⁴.

Investing in an SSP programme to support the delivery of phonics in the classroom gives you the resources and structure to teach phonics in a high-quality and consistent way across your school.

¹ Department of Education, 2021. *The reading framework: Teaching the foundations of literacy*: 4

² Smarter Scotland: Scottish Government, HMIE, SQA, Learning+Teaching Scotland, 2021. *Curriculum for Excellence: Literacy and English: principles and practice*: 2

³ Llywodraeth Cymru: Welsh Government, Addysg Cymru: Education Wales, 2019/2021. *Curriculum for Wales: Area of learning and Experience: Languages, Literacy and Communication*

⁴ Department of Education 2021: 4

- A systematic approach is essential for teaching phonics – SSP programmes offer you a detailed structure and progression to deliver phonics to your children. They should provide sequences for teaching for both content and delivery – having consistency of routines, teaching sequence, terminology and resources ensures that all children experience the same quality and approach to teaching phonics regardless of which class they are in. Simple, efficient and disciplined routines enable all children to engage with the learning and fidelity to a phonics programme supports children’s progress.
- Resources support organised teaching and ensure that all phonics skills are both taught and practised throughout the programme. Well-organised resources and teaching spaces enable children to focus on what they are learning. Phonics sessions using specific resources should:
 - facilitate children’s active participation in phonics sessions
 - maximise teaching and learning opportunities making the most of the phonics teaching time and using activities that maximise the content that children encounter to both read and spell
 - ensure that children practise the knowledge they have been taught previously in the programme to build fluency and automaticity and freeing up children’s capacity to learn new code
 - teach and practise new knowledge in manageable chunks and support connecting new knowledge with previous learning
 - ensure that children have opportunities to apply what they have learned
- An SSP programme provides full guidance for delivery – support is provided to ensure that all staff delivering phonics are confident and equipped to deliver high-quality phonics lessons.

Floppy’s Phonics teaching programme

SSP is a set of knowledge and skills about the English alphabetic code and how to apply these in both reading and spelling. Floppy’s Phonics teaches the knowledge of the alphabetic code and the phonics skills of decoding and encoding as the first method for reading and spelling. It is a rigorous SSP programme offering comprehensive resources and practical guidance to support teaching and learning.

Floppy’s Phonics has a clear structure and progression which provides daily phonics teaching for Reception and Year 1. The teaching order of the letter/s-sound correspondences in Floppy’s Phonics has been developed by the author of the programme, renowned phonics expert Debbie Hepplewhite MBE, and is informed by her research and experience as a teacher and phonics consultant. Floppy’s Phonics introduces the letter/s-sound correspondences starting in Reception with the simple code of single-letter to single-sound (with the very common alternatives such as **c**, **k** and **ck** as /k/). The progression continues to teach one grapheme for each of the 44 phonemes. It includes a set of ‘stretch’ letter/s-sound correspondences from Level 2 onwards which are common alternative graphemes selected to provide the children with the knowledge and skills to broaden their writing and reading experience and support their progress into the more complex code at the higher levels of the programme. The programme offers a gradual progression into the complex code teaching one common alternative spelling for already learned phonemes as an introduction to the concept that a phoneme can be represented by several graphemes. It progresses to comprehensive coverage of alternative spellings and pronunciations.

This clear and structured progression through the letter/s-sound correspondences is delivered through a robust and consistent teaching and learning sequence which is used throughout the programme to provide structure and consistency to phonics sessions. The teaching and learning sequence consists of the following steps:

- Revisit and Review
- Teach
- Practise
- Apply
- Consolidate
- Read

Floppy's Phonics resources are used to deliver each step.

Alongside this are several routines which underpin Floppy's Phonics and are crucial for effective phonics learning these are: blending, segmenting and handwriting. Routines are essential for phonics teaching and the Floppy's Phonics routines are simple, focused, appropriate and repeated. This enables teachers and learners to focus on new code knowledge within the consistent structure of the programme.

The alphabetic code and the chart that shows it are at the heart of the teaching programme. The chart and all the resources throughout the programme feature a colourful, child-friendly mnemonic system based on key exemplar words and pictures. The consistent use of these across the resources provide prompts for learners at the early stages and a shared language to enable teacher and learner to refer to the spelling alternatives as the programme progresses.

This code is taught in small chunks as shown in the Sounds Books which contain 3-4 letter/s-sound correspondences per book and provide approximately 2 weeks of phonics teaching content.

The teaching and learning sequence and the resources are designed to support children's active participation in their phonics learning. The multi-sensory resources featuring the best-loved characters from the Biff, Chip and Kipper Stories are intended to engage children in the content and provide numerous opportunities for discussions about language featuring the focus sounds and letters.

The programme balances direct teaching sessions with activities using resources designed specifically for children to apply new knowledge and previous learning increasingly independently. The consistent format of the activity sheets allows children to practise and apply what they have been taught to read and write independently.

The programme is content rich and provides many opportunities for children to practise and apply what they have been taught at a word reading level and in cumulative decodable texts. Further activities include dictated sentences, giving children opportunities to practise spelling without requiring them to think about what they want to say, and creative writing to amend or extend existing texts practising their phonics skills and extending their written vocabulary.

Further to the multiple decodable texts, there are decodable readers closely matched to their level of phonic attainment to give further opportunities for children to build fluency and to apply what they have learned.



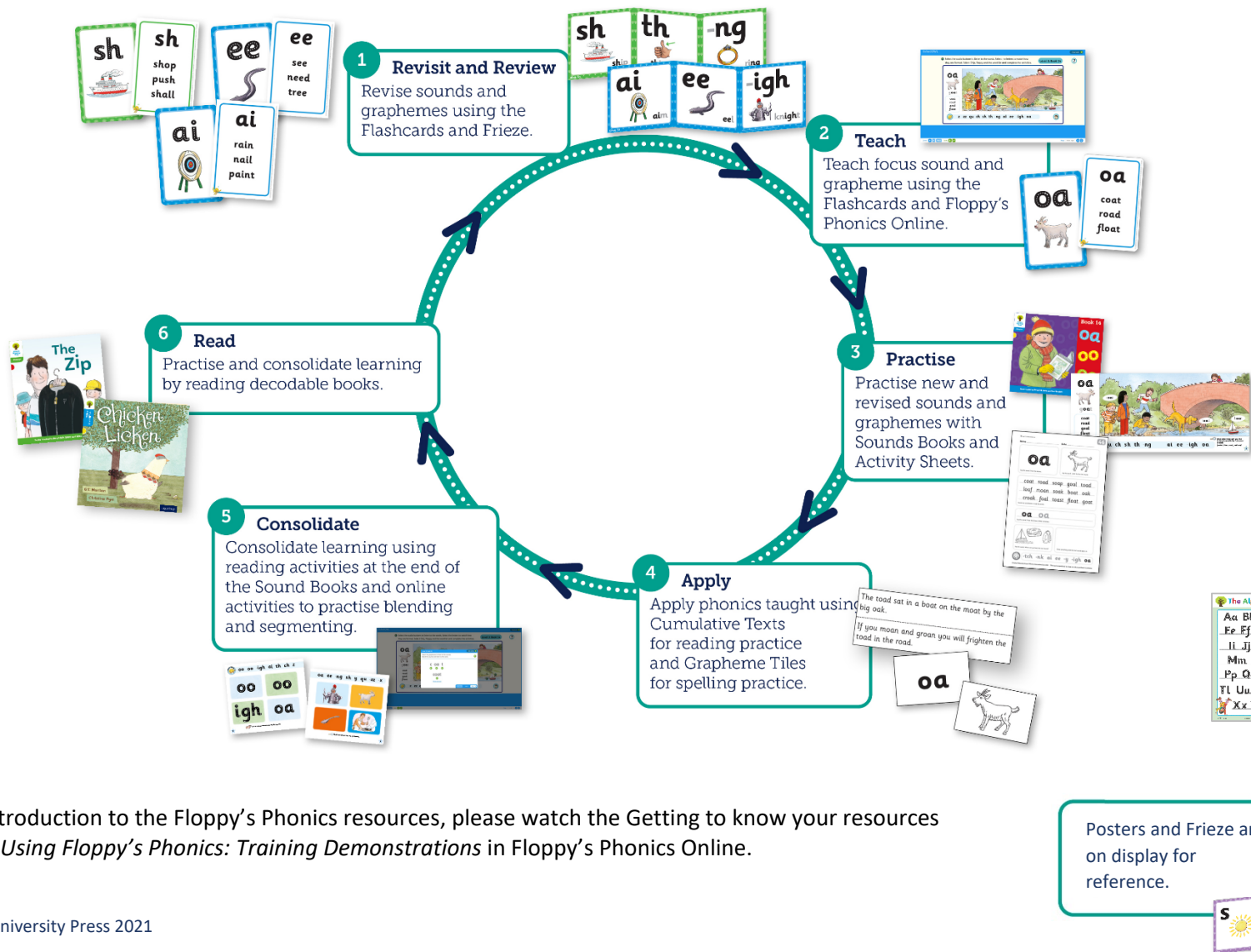
Floppy's Phonics provides rigorous and systemic synthetic phonics teaching delivered through a robust teaching sequence. SSP is 'formal' teaching and learning – yet Floppy's Phonics is also active, multi-sensory and language rich. The simplicity and structure of the programme enable you to deliver systematic teaching of phonics in the classroom. Alongside this, the programme offers practical tips and flexibility for incidental phonics teaching where the opportunity arises for additional teaching of more complex code in a natural manner that fulfils children's inquisitiveness about language and supports the later teaching of the complex alphabetic code.

Floppy's Phonics gives you:

- The structure and resources to deliver effective phonics teaching in the classroom
- Multi-sensory resources to ensure that your children are given opportunities to practise and apply what they have been taught
- Robust routines and a teaching sequence that ensures all letter/s-sound correspondences are taught comprehensively

Using Floppy's Phonics resources

The teaching sequence shows how the resources are used to deliver phonics teaching in the classroom – this will be covered in detail in the training sessions:



For an introduction to the Floppy's Phonics resources, please watch the Getting to know your resources video in *Using Floppy's Phonics: Training Demonstrations* in Floppy's Phonics Online.

Some key phonics terminology

Phoneme

Phonemes are the smallest identifiable sounds of speech. These identifiable units of sound can distinguish one word from another, for example /s/, /p/, /b/ and /k/ in sat, pat, bat and cat.

Grapheme

Graphemes are the written letters or letter groups that are code for the sounds (phonemes).

There are around 44 phonemes in English speech. We have 26 letters in the English alphabet to represent these sounds in writing. As a result, we use both single letters and groups of letters to represent sounds. One sound (phoneme) can be represented by one, two, three or four letters, for example:

/h/ as in **h**-a-t

/sh/ as in **sh**-i-p

/igh/ as in l-**igh**-t

/ai/ as in **ei**g-h-t

A grapheme made up of a combination of two letters is a digraph. A group of three letters representing one sound is a trigraph. A combination of four letters as code for one sound can be called a quadgraph.

Blending/decoding

Blending is the process of identifying the sounds in a printed word, sounding out the graphemes from left to right all the way through the word and then blending them together to hear the whole word. This process goes from print to sound. The blending process is decoding.

Segmenting/encoding

Segmenting is the process of identifying the sounds in a spoken word, saying the word to identify each phoneme in the word and then allocating a grapheme for each identified sound to spell the word. This process goes from sound to print. The segmenting process is encoding.

Helpful Words

These are common words which may include unusual spellings that need special attention. They may contain rare or unusual letter/s-sound correspondences or contain letter/s-sound correspondences that have not been taught yet in the phonics progression. In Floppy's Phonics they are referred to as Helpful Words, in other circumstances you may have heard them referred to as common exception words or tricky words. The Floppy's Phonics Helpful Words list includes the tricky words from Letters and Sounds 2007.

Alternative spellings and pronunciations

The English alphabetic code has many spelling alternatives (graphemes) as code for the sounds and various graphemes have pronunciation alternatives meaning they can be pronounced in more than one way.

One sound (phoneme) can be represented by alternative spellings, for example:

long /oo/

spoon **glue** screw move **soup** through **flute** fruit super

One spelling can be code for alternative sounds, for example:
/ee/ **eat** /e/ **bread** /ai/ **break**

Notation throughout Floppy's Phonics

Throughout the programme we use the following notation methods to indicate whether we are referring to the phoneme or the grapheme:

Letters or letter groups written in slash marks like this /k/ refer to a sound, for example /k/ as in **cat**, **key** and **duck**.

Letters in bold like this **ch** refer to a spelling, for example **ch** as in **chick**, **chef** and **school**.

For some of the letter/s-sound correspondences you will see a grey dash before the grapheme like this - **dge** this indicates that this letter/s-sound correspondence will usually never begin a word.