

LEARNING TO READ WITH PHONICS

Teaching children to read shouldn't drive parents up the wall once you find the right method and approach.

The importance of learning to read and cultivating a love for reading cannot be overemphasised. The earlier your child starts reading, the better it is for their learning journey as they discover the world through reading a wide range of books. Academically, reading is not only an essential skill for language subjects, but also subjects like Maths and Science. One proven strategy for teaching reading is phonics.

What exactly is phonics?

In simple terms, phonics is a method of learning the relationship between letter symbols and the sounds they represent. For example, the letter 'B' corresponds to a /b/ sound, as in **ball**. It's like solving one of those "crack-the-code secret message" puzzles – once the link is established, the reader can decode the printed symbols into spoken words.

Although there are some words that cannot be decoded by phonics and have to be learnt by recognition, many English words can be sounded out phonetically. Learning phonics would therefore help develop literacy skills such as reading, spelling, and vocabulary. Being able to sound out unfamiliar words while reading also improves reading fluency – a crucial skill for developing comprehension.

Does it work?

After all, many who went through preschool and primary school before the 1990s didn't learn reading through phonics. Today, however, numerous enrichment programmes that teach preschoolers reading use phonics. Also, Primary 1 pupils who do not meet their reading age requirement are encouraged to go through the school's Learning Support Programme, which uses phonics to close the gap. Once equipped with the rules of phonics, pupils are able to go forth as confident and independent readers.

When and how to teach phonics at home?

Research suggests that you can start as soon as your child is able to identify the letters of the alphabet. Introduce each letter with the

sound it represents. For example, 'T' represents /t/.

Keep it simple and make it fun! Songs and rhymes are great for introducing word families and letter sounds. Yet, it isn't as straightforward as learning your ABCs as some letters can represent more sounds than one, and different combinations of letters also produce different sounds.

Resources designed to impart phonics skills systematically and progressively, such as the *My Phonics Book* series by Educational Publishing House, can help support this process. The series contains engaging, bite-size activities designed to guide your preschooler through the process of learning accurate letter sounds, consonants and blending skills, to being able to read independently before they enter primary school.



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