

Phonics Definitions & Glossary

alliteration: Alliteration is the repetition of the first letter sound in a phrase.

alphabet: ordered set of letters of a language – our English language consists of 26 letters A – Z

Analytic phonics: an approach to the teaching of reading in which the phonemes associated with particular graphemes are not pronounced in isolation.

base word: a word to which a prefix or suffix may be added to form a new word (try + ing = trying)

blend: to draw individual sounds together to pronounce a word, e.g. s-n-a-p, blended together, reads snap

breve: mark accompanying a letter and indicating a specific sound value

closed syllable: a syllable that ends in a consonant sound

compound word: phonics definition – a word made by putting two or more words together (seesaw)³

cluster: two (or three) letters making two (or three) sounds, e.g. the first three letters of ‘straight’ are a consonant cluster

consonants: phonemes marked by constriction or closure in the breath channel – letter other than a, e, i, o and u.

consonant blend: a sequence of two or three consonants, each of which is heard with minimal change.

consonant digraph: consists of two consonants that together represent one sound (sh, ch, th, gh) – which is not associated with the constituent letters (ship, chip, phone, laugh). The “kn” in know is not a digraph, for example. ‘Wh’ may or may not be a digraph, depending on how it is spoken (for some speakers, weather and whether have different initial sounds)

contraction: a short way to write two words as one by writing the two words together, leaving out one or more letters and replacing the missing letters by an apostrophe (cannot = can’t)

diacritical mark: mark accompanying a letter and indicating a specific sound value

diphthong: phoneme where the mouth glides from one vowel sound directly into another in the same syllable – both vowels may be heard, but not quite making their usual sounds because of the blending. These include oi, oy, ow, and ou.

final blends: blends of two or three-letter consonants which make only one sound. These include -ng, -nk, -sh, -ch, and -tch.

flashcards: a visual teaching resource

fluency: the ability to read words or larger language units in a limited time interval – freedom from word decoding problems that might hinder comprehension in silent or oral reading

fricatives: phonics definition – consonant sounds that are made by the sound of air friction in the mouth:

grapheme: a letter or a group of letters representing one sound, e.g. sh, ch, igh, ough (as in ‘though’)

homographs: words which are spelled alike but have different sounds and meanings (bow and arrow vs. bow of a ship)

homonyms: words which sound the same but have different spellings and meanings (bear, bare)

initial consonant blends: two or three-letter consonant combinations in which both letters are pronounced.

long vowel sounds: – say the name of the letter – for example the letter “a” would be pronounced as “aiy” as in “hay” or “day”

medial: phonics definition – coming in the middle of a word

mnemonic: a device for memorizing and recalling something, such as a snake shaped like the letter ‘S’

onset: the consonant sounds in a word that came before the first vowel sound in a syllable; Not all words or syllables have onsets (at, oar)

open syllable: phonics definition – a syllable that ends in a vowel sound, typically a long vowel sound (tiger, hotel)

phonemes: basic sound unit of speech

phonemic awareness: the understanding that words are made up of individual sounds (phonemes); this is a sub-category of phonological awareness. It includes the ability to distinguish rhyme, blend sounds, isolate sounds (such as initial & final), segment sounds, and manipulate sounds in words.

phonetics: the study of speech sounds

phonics: the relationships between the sounds of a language and the letters used to represent those sounds – a way of teaching reading and spelling that stresses symbol sound relationships

phonics rules: keys to sounding out new words and application in spelling

phonological awareness: awareness of units of speech, such as words, syllables, and phonemes

phonograms: a letter-sound combination that includes more than one grapheme or phoneme

prefix: phonics definition – a syllable or group of syllables attached to the beginning of a word or root to change its meaning (reprint, unpack, dislike)

r-controlled vowels: An ‘r’ sound following a vowel sound almost always distorts the vowel, making such words harder to spell – cat/car. Common r-controlled vowels are: ar, er, ir, or, ur.

rime: the first vowel sound and any others that follow it in a syllable (cat, treat, chair). Cat, sat and fat rhyme because they share a rime. Each syllable in a word can be analyzed in terms of onset/rime: fantastic, playground, airplane.

root word: a word with no prefix or suffix added; may also be referred to as a base word

schwa: the vowel sound of any unaccented syllable in English

segment: phonics definition – to split up a word into its individual phonemes in order to spell it, e.g. the word ‘cat’ has three phonemes: /c/, /a/, /t/

seriation - understanding the sequence of letters/syllables

short vowel sounds: the short vowel sounds are the first to be introduced, for example the letter “a” with the short vowel sound would sound like “a” as in “cat” or “sat”

soft c and g rule: when c or g is followed by e, i, or y, it is usually soft

sight word: any word recognized by memory only

silent e: an e that makes no sound that is usually found in the final position of an English root word

split digraph: two letters, split, making one sound, e.g. a-e as in make or i-e in site

structural analysis: the process of using knowledge of root words, endings, and affixes to decode words

syllabication: the division of words into syllables

syllable: a minimal unit of sequential speech sounds made up of a vowel sound or a vowel consonant combination and always contains a vowel sound

syllable patterns: phonics definition – English syllables can be grouped into basic patterns according to their use of consonant and vowels sounds: (CVC, CVVC, CVCe, CV, man, mean, mane, me). Keep in mind that a “C,” or consonant in these patterns may be a single consonant, digraph, blend, or cluster. Polysyllabic words can be broken down by syllable patterns (hopping = cvc-cvc, hoping = cv-cvc)

synonyms: words which have the same meaning

synthetic phonics: an approach to the teaching of reading in which phonemes associated with particular graphemes are pronounced in isolation.

suffix: phonics definition – a syllable or group of syllables attached to the end of a word or root to change its meaning (s, ed, ing)

transitional spelling: phonics definition – the result of an attempt to spell a word whose spelling is not already known, based on a writer’s knowledge of the spelling system and how it works

unvoiced consonant: the vocal cords do not vibrate in creating the sound

voiced consonant: the vocal cords vibrate in creating the sound

vowels: phonemes where air flows through the mouth unobstructed (In reading instruction, the letters a, e, i, o, and u are considered vowels, although vowel sounds can be represented by consonants, as in myth or fly, or a combination of consonants and vowels, as in night.

vowel digraph: two vowels together that make one phoneme or sound (bread, need, book, field)

whole language: phonics definition – a method of teaching children to read by emphasizing the use and recognition of sight words

word families: words that share an ending, called a rime (mat, bat, flat, sat, that)

y as a vowel rule: if y is the only vowel sound at the end of a one-syllable word, y has the sound of long i; if y is the only vowel at the end of a word of more than one syllable, y has a sound almost like long e