**What is the aim of the *Phonics for ESOL* pack?**

The materials are designed to increase ESOL teachers’ knowledge and awareness of phonics, enabling them to integrate phonic approaches into teaching ESOL learners who are just starting to learn to read and write in English. Please note that the Phonics pack does not form a comprehensive guide or course on teaching phonics.

**Key terminology and recommended reading**

A glossary of key terms can be found in the ETF[**Post-16 Phonics Approaches: a toolkit**](https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf3030)It is a comprehensive guide to teaching phonics to post-16 learners. Before using the Phonics pack, please read sections KK&S 3 – 8 of the[**NEW TO ESOL GUIDANCE: TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS FOR LEARNERS NEW TO ESOL AND LITERACY**](https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf3083)and ensure you are familiar with the English phonemes (Appendix 2).

For guidance on teaching ‘basic’ literacy, see Spiegel & Sunderland (2006) *Teaching basic literacy to ESOL learners: a teacher’s guide.*

**What is Phonics?**

***Phonics is an approach to help learners recognise (read) and write or spell the words that they say and hear. It is not an approach to teaching pronunciation.[[1]](#footnote-1)***

**Phonics** builds awareness of the links between the ***sounds of the language*** and the way the ***sounds are encoded in writing*** (sound-symbol relationships). Unlike some other languages, the English phonic code is a complex one.

Phonics is a word-level approach which focuses on the different ways that the sounds of English (phonemes) are represented by written symbols (graphemes), which is a type of ‘code’. (A grapheme is one or more letters that represents a single phoneme.) In order to be successful, a learner needs to be able to hear and pronounce all the different sounds of English.

Learners need to understand the relationship between spoken and written English:

* from print to sound for decoding
* from sound to print for spelling

Many studies have shown that the systematic teaching of phonics is beneficial, particularly with young children at the early stages of reading. English orthography is alphabetically based at least 80% of the time and therefore learning the most frequent phoneme-grapheme correspondences can be helpful in developing decoding skills.[[2]](#footnote-2)

However, a ‘whole word approach’ (recognising words visually) also plays a significant part in learning to read, especially as reading speed increases and learners read for meaning. A phonics approach relies on reading aloud, word by word, which is a very limited representation of the skill of reading. To read well, a learner needs to read silently and develop a full range of reading skills including fluency, vocabulary and comprehension strategies.

**Note:** lower case letters are used in teaching phonics and reading; upper case letters are used at the beginning of names or they can be used for saying the alphabet.

**How is the Phonics pack organised?**

The pack consists of five sections, each closely linked to the five topics in the *New to ESOL* teaching materials <https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/learners-new-esol> . Each section is based around a text and focuses on certain aspects of phonics which can help beginner literacy learners to decode simple, familiar words. It is recommended that the suggested procedure and activities should be adapted by teachers to suit their learners and context, including differentiation and further practice activities.

The materials are designed to show teachers how a simple text can be used and exploited to develop learners’ phonic awareness. It is advisable to work through the sections in order as, although they are not graded, Section 5 is more complex.

**Overview**

[**Section 1: Sara lives in London**](https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf3185)

**Phonics focus**

* One sound to one letter, e.g. consonants **/ l / / m / / f / / v / / t /**
* One sound to two letters, e.g. ‘th’ / **θ /** *with*, *three* and ‘ch’ / **tʃ /** in *children*
* Short vowel sound/letter correspondence, e.g. *in, at,* *bed*
* Long vowel sound spelt with two letters ‘oo’ / **uː** / *room*

[**Section 2: My local area**](https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf3186)

**Phonics focus**

* One sound to one letter, e.g. consonants **/ p / / m / / f / / l /**
* One sound to two letters, e.g. ‘ch’ / **tʃ /** in *children* and ‘sh’ **/ ʃ /** *fresh*
* Soft ‘c’ **/ s /** *centre*
* Long vowel sound spelt with two letters, e.g. ‘ar’ **/ ɑː /** *car, park*
* Blending two consonants ‘fr’ *fruit, fresh*
* Segmenting words into syllables, e.g. *li – bra - ry, mar – ket*

[**Section 3: My name is Ali**](https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf3188)

**Phonics focus**

* One sound to one letter, e.g. *cake, drive, can, six*
* Soft ‘c’ **/ s /**, e.g. *nice*
* Long vowel sound spelt with one letter and split digraphs i-e, o-e, a-e, e.g. *b****i****k****e****, h****o****m****e,*** *c****a****k****e***
* Suffix ‘ing’ (no ‘e’), e.g. *driving, making*

[**Section 4: My week**](https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf3187)

**Phonics focus**

* One sound to one or two letters (vowels and consonants) e.g. *on, in, shopping*
* ‘ay’ **/ eɪ /** sound/letter correspondence in *-day*, *play*
* Double consonants, e.g. *swimming, college, hairdresser*
* schwa **/ ə /** sound/grapheme correspondence, e.g. *Sat****ur****day, hairdress****er****, cent****re****, sup****er****market.*
* Segmenting words into syllables, e.g. days of the week, *every, college*

[**Section 5: Habiba**](https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf3189)

**Phonics focus**

* One sound to one or two letters (vowels and consonants), e.g. ***text****,* ***ph****one,* ***ch****at, ever****y,*** *progra****mm****er*
* One grapheme represents different phonemes, e.g. the letter ‘a’ in *f****a****mily,* ***a****bout, s****a****me, C****a****n****a****d****a***; the letter ‘o’ in *br****o****ther, d****o****ctor, h****o****me*
* schwa **/ ə /** phoneme/grapheme correspondence, e.g. *doct****or, a****bout, programm****er***
* Segmenting words into syllables, e.g. *com put er pro gramm er*

The Phonics phoneme chart (Appendix 1) used in phonics teaching gives the most common phoneme-grapheme correspondences. The focus is on spelling patterns rather than pronunciation.

A useful website for sound-spelling patterns (with audio) is <https://www.spellzone.com/word_lists/list-259.htm> Note that it is not advisable to use Appendix 2 - the international phonemic symbols - with basic literacy learners as this could be very confusing. It is designed for teachers’ reference.

**What is the connection between Phonics and Pronunciation?**

**Pronunciation** focuses on the way the ***sounds of speech are produced***, including articulation, stress and intonation. Therefore, the emphasis is on speaking and producing sounds in a way that is acceptable and comprehensible to other speakers of the language.

There are generally considered to be 44 phonemes (distinctive sounds) in the English language - 24 consonant phonemes and 20 vowel phonemes although there are only 26 letters in the alphabet (see Appendix 2). Unlike other languages such as Spanish, Turkish and Arabic, there is no one-to-one relationship between the letters of the alphabet and the sounds of those letters. For example, in English, the grapheme/letter ‘A’ can be pronounced in several different ways, as in *man, father, age*, *again*; the phoneme /iː/ can be spelled *meet, seat, machine.*

There are many **different accents** throughout the UK although most phoneme charts and dictionaries for English language learners are based on the RP (Received Pronunciation) accent, as shown in Appendix 2 IPA Phoneme chart. RP is considered to be the standard accent of English as spoken in the south of England. Clearly, we do not all speak in the same way and we have different accents, but the number of phonemes will be broadly the same. So the recommendation is to teach phoneme/grapheme relationships which best suit the learners in relation to the regional accent, even if a few of the sounds are different to those in the Phoneme chart, e.g. *bath* is pronounced with the long vowel sound /ɑː/ in the south of England,but pronounced with the short /æ /sound in the North.

Listening to and saying the sounds are the key components of a phonics approach which, in order to be successful, relies a) on learners being able to **discriminate between phonemes** – the distinctive sounds of the language, and b) knowing the words which they are saying.

Some ESOL learners, depending on their other language(s), may not be able to ‘hear’ or pronounce specific phonemes, especially if they do not occur in their first/other language. For example, many Arabic and Spanish speakers find it difficult to hear the difference between /b/ and /v/ as they are not two distinct, separate sounds in those languages. Similarly, vowel sounds often present difficulties as most languages do not have as many different vowel sounds as English. ESOL learners who find it difficult to perceive differences between certain sounds will need targeted sound recognition and discrimination practice using a technique such as ‘[minimal pairs](https://englishpost.org/pronunciation-list-minimal-pairs/#Definition)’[[3]](#footnote-3).It is helpful for teachers to have some knowledge of the learner’s first language and the difficulties it may present for *hearing* certain sounds in English. Learners also need to understand the differences between spoken and written English and develop an understanding of syllable and sentence stress and intonation.

**ESOL Learners**

ESOL learners differ greatly so it may be useful to identify three broad categories with regard to literacy approaches:

1. **Learners who are confident in their literacy in another language**

For ESOL learners who are literate in their main/other language and who have transferable literacy skills, a brief overview and clarification of the English spelling system may be beneficial:

 a) written English is mostly based on phoneme-grapheme correspondences

 b) graphemes may be more than one letter, e.g. ‘ch’ ‘mm’ ‘ough’, and

 c) the relationships between phonemes and graphemes are complex – one phoneme can be represented by different graphemes and one grapheme can represent different phonemes.

1. **Learners just starting to learn the English language and new to reading and writing**

Learners who have had no, or very little, formal education before, who are starting to ‘learn how to learn’ as well as develop oral and literacy skills need to focus on developing oral language first.

With regard to literacy, they will need to learn the names of the letters of the alphabet (in order to spell words aloud) and some may be writing for the first time. Handwriting practice is essential and can be linked to phonics, saying letters and numbers, and writing them.

For customised handwriting practice, see <https://www.handwritingworksheets.com/> At this level, reading and writing should be used to support basic functional literacy such as reading signs and writing names, phone numbers and addresses. Use a ‘whole word’ approach first and focus on phonic elements within words the learners know and can say clearly, e.g. names. See guidance on the Language Experience Approach in the *New to ESOL Guidance document*, p.50.

1. **Speakers of other language(s) who may be fluent speakers of English, but who struggle with reading and writing**

ESOL learners who have lived in the UK for some time may have acquired the language informally. They may communicate confidently, particularly in everyday situations, but find reading, writing and spelling challenging if they have not studied English in a more formal way. In this case, a phonics approach can help these learners develop their reading and writing skills, providing that they can pronounce English sounds and know most of the vocabulary in the texts being used. They also need to be aware of the complexities of the English spelling system and how it differs from the writing system in their own language.

**A key principle is to work from learners’ own oral language and use texts which are meaningful and relevant to the learners**.

**Recommended strategies**

* Give each learner a phonics phoneme chart (**Appendix 1**). Ask them to create their own version, choosing their own example word or picture for each sound. Use the names of the letters as well as the sounds. Use **Appendix 4** to check learners’ awareness of letters and sounds.
* Start with meaningful words that are in the learner’s vocabulary and don’t use ‘nonsense’ words. Ask them to identify the individual sounds in the words (in their own accent) and then find the appropriate grapheme (letter or letter combination) to match to those sounds. For example, use the letters in the learner’s name, audio record the words and concentrate at first on words beginning with the same letters as the learner’s name. Then pick out the initial sounds and write them down.
* Focus on the simplest and most common sound-symbol correspondences first such as words where one sound = one letter (consonant/vowel/consonant patterns), e.g. *s – i - t, p – e – n, t – o – p, b – i – n.* Also include known mutli-syllable words that can be sounded out such as *d - e – n – t – i – s - t*, *l – a – p – t – o – p, p – u – b – l – i - c*.
* Then move on to one sound = two letters, e.g. ‘sh’ *shop, wash,* ‘ch’ *chips,* ‘th’ *this*, *with*, ‘wh’ *when*, ‘ck’ *back*, ‘ay’ *day*, ‘oy’ *boy,* and double letters such as ‘ll’ *bill* and ‘ss’ *miss*.
* Include a focus on syllables, endings such as ‘ed’ ‘y ‘le’ ‘er’ and ‘ing’, and contrasting short/long vowels with split digraphs such as *tap – tape*, *mat – mate, plan - plane*
* Note that the idea of one grapheme = more than one sound is potentially very confusing, e.g. the letter ‘o’ in *hot, some, phone.* Therefore, it is advisable to focus on one phoneme = one grapheme initially and introduce alternative words/spellings gradually. Think of how many different ways‘ough’ can be pronounced! (For more information, see the guidance in the *Post-16 Phonics Approaches: a Toolkit, ETF*.)
* **For spelling**, encourage learners to develop a ‘spelling voice’: break words down into syllables and say the words in a way which reflects the spelling pattern. Change the pronunciation so that the word is pronounced differently to the way it would normally be spoken, e.g. *Wed – nes – day, com – fort – able*. This technique may be particularly useful with words where syllables are not fully pronounced and/or which contain a ‘schwa’.
* Raise awareness of the most common vowel sound in the English language - the schwa **/ ə /** - and its possible written forms. This unstressed vowel sound can be spelt with any vowel letter, which can make it difficult for learners to decide which one to use in writing. It is the final sound in words like *driver* and *doctor* and appears in multi-syllable words like *separate, possible, written*, *solicitor*. For information about the schwa, see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/features/schwa/>
* Encourage learners to look for patterns and use context to check for meaning.
* Many high frequency words are difficult to decode using a phonics approach - ‘tricky’ words - and they are best taught using a whole word approach, e.g. *her, the, was, one, into, said, you, could, does, saw, because, any, what.* For a list of these words, see <https://jolly2.s3.amazonaws.com/Resources/Tricky%20Word%20ChecklistNEW.pdf>
* As far as possible, integrate phonic work with whole word recognition and language experience, working from words the learner already knows and can say. There is information about the language experience approach on p.50, *New to ESOL Guidance* document.
* Keep a list of phonic elements that the learners have been taught and remember to revise/revisit them regularly. Repetition and recycling are essential.
* Encourage learners to write their own short texts using some of the words they have learned.

**General activities for practising phonics**

**Activity 1 (see Appendix 3):** create flash cards using alphabet letters - graphemes – words – pictures. Use them for a variety of practice activities, e.g.

* saying the names of the letters of the alphabet and contrasting them with the sounds
* saying the sounds and blending to form words
* matching a sound to the grapheme, word or picture
* creating consonant blends
* grouping graphemes into syllables
* identifying initial sounds
* matching picture and word cards for basic vowel sounds
* games such as Pelmanism

You can create alphabet letter cards using Templates 7 and 8 from the ‘[New to ESOL Time-saving Templates’](https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf3085)

**Activity 2**: cloze activity. Blank out specific graphemes in one or two words, sentences or the whole text for learners to write in, saying the sounds as they do so (or use phonics phoneme cards).

* Differentiation: create cloze activities on a worksheet, cards, computer, or as a whole class activity using an IWB. Note: it is important for learners to say the sounds as they write them (or choose the correct card).

**Activity 3**: word boxes with each grapheme in a separate box. This is a visual way for learners to become aware of sound-letter correspondences, the differences in the way graphemes are pronounced and the fact that some letters are not pronounced at all.

* Differentiation: give learners blank word boxes to fill in with words (dictated or their choice), placing graphemes in the correct box. For example:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| s | ch | oo | l |

**Activity 4:** sorting activities. Once learners are confident with some sound/letter correspondences, create grids based on either the sound or grapheme, with a list of known words to sort into the correct column. For example:

*carrot city can receipt car cinema*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  c - ‘k’ sound |  c - ‘s’ sound |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**APPENDIX 1 Phonics phoneme chart**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| s**s**un | a**a**pple | t**t**in | p**p**an | ib**i**n | n**n**ose |
| c k**c**loc**k** | e**e**gg | h**h**at | r**r**abbit | m**m**an | d**d**og |
| g**g**irl | o**o**range | u**u**mbrella | l**l**ight | f**f**ish | b**b**ag |
| j**j**acket | z**z**ip | w**w**oman | v**v**an | y**y**ellow | x**x**-ray |
| air**ai**n | oac**oa**t | eetr**ee** | ngri**ng** | oob**oo**k | oosp**oo**n |
| ch**ch**air | sh**sh**op | thba**th** | thmo**th**er | qu**qu**ick | oib**oi**l |
| arc**ar** | orf**or**k | urn**ur**se | owbr**ow**n | erteach**er** |  |
| airh**air** | urepict**ure** | ighn**igh**t | ear**ear** |  |  |

**APPENDIX 2 ESOL phoneme chart for pronunciation *(based on the International Phonetic Alphabet)***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|

|  |
| --- |
| **Consonant sounds** |
| **p** | *pen, copy, happen* |
| **b** | *ball, job* |
| **t** | *tea, light, button* |
| **d** | *day, ladder* |
| **k** | *key, coffee, school* |
| **g** | *get, wriggle, ghost* |
| **tʃ** | *chin, match, nature, rich* |
| **dʒ** | *job, judge, manage* |
| **f** | *fat, cough, photo* |
| **v** | *van, heavy* |
| **θ** | *thin, bath, everything* |
| **ð** | *that, mother, weather* |
| **s** | *soon, stop, sister* |
| **z** | *zoo, music, roses, buzz* |
| **ʃ** | *shop, sure, national* |
| **ʒ** | *pleasure, revision* |
| **h** | *hand, whole* |
| **m** | *more, summer, lamb* |
| **n** | *nice, know, funny, run* |
| **ŋ** | *ring, anger, thanks, sang* |
| **l** | *light, feel, caller* |
| **r** | *right, wrong, sorry* |
| **j** | *yes, use, beauty, few* |
| **w** | *won, one, when, queen* |

 |

|  |
| --- |
| **Vowel sounds** |
| **ɪ** | *kid, hymn, women* |
| **e** | *bed, head, any, friend* |
| **æ** | *sat, hand* |
| **ɒ** | *hot, wash, because* |
| **ʌ** | *cut, love, blood, some* |
| **ʊ** | *good, put, book* |
| **iː** | *sleep, eat, machine, field, key, receive* |
| **eɪ** | *rain, day, great, they, eight, ate* |
| **aɪ** | *five, sign, try, light, buy, eye* |
| **ɔɪ** | *toy, boil, choice* |
| **uː** | *two, too, route, food, move, shoe* |
| **əʊ** | *home, coat, show, go, cold* |
| **aʊ** | *house, now, brown* |
| **ɪə** | *clear, near, here, idea, really* |
| **eə** | *chair, there, square, care, pear* |
| **ɑː** | *car, start, father, heart, laugh* |
| **ɔː** | *saw, door, all, thought, warm, court*  |
| **ʊə** | *pure, cure* |
| **ɜː** | *girl, turn, word, nurse, learn, prefer* |
| **ə** | *again, teacher, picture, postman, colour**doctor* |
|  |  |
|  |  |

 |

**APPENDIX 3: Cue cards**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| s | sun | *Insert a picture for each word* |
| a | **apple** |  |
| t | **tin** |  |
| x | **x-ray** |  |
| p | **pen** |  |
| i | **bin** |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| n | nose |  |
| c  | **cat** |  |
| e | **egg** |  |
| h | **hat** |  |
| r | **rabbit** |  |
| m | **man** |  |
| d | dog |  |
| g | **girl** |  |
| o | **orange** |  |
| u | **umbrella** |  |
| l | **light** |  |
| f | **fish** |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| b | bag |  |
| j | **jacket** |  |
| z | **zip** |  |
| w | **watch** |  |
| v | **van** |  |
| y | **yellow** |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ear | ear |  |
| ai | **rain** |  |
| oa | **coat** |  |
| ee | **tree** |  |
| ng | **ring** |  |
| oo | **book** |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| oo | spoon |  |
| ch | **chair** |  |
| sh | **shop** |  |
| th | **bath** |  |
| th | **mother** |  |
| qu | **quick** |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| k | key |  |
| ar | **car** |  |
| or | **fork** |  |
| ow | **brown** |  |
| ur | **nurse** |  |
| er | **teacher** |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| air | hair |  |
| oi | **boil** |  |
| ure | **picture** |  |
| igh | **night** |  |

**APPENDIX 4: Alphabet and Sounds checklist**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Letter** | **Name** | **Sound** | **Example word or picture** |
| **a A** | *‘ay’* | *‘a’* | *apple*[This Photo](http://pngimg.com/download/12405) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/) |
| **b B** |  |  |  |
| **c C** |  |  |  |
| **d D** |  |  |  |
| **e E** |  |  |  |
| **f F** |  |  |  |
| **g G** |  |  |  |
| **h H** |  |  |  |
| **i I** |  |  |  |
| **j J** |  |  |  |
| **k K** |  |  |  |
| **l L** |  |  |  |
| **m M** |  |  |  |
| **Letter** | **Name** | **Sound** | **Example word** |
| **n N** |  |  |  |
| **o O** |  |  |  |
| **p P** |  |  |  |
| **q Q** |  |  |  |
| **r R** |  |  |  |
| **s S** |  |  |  |
| **t T** |  |  |  |
| **u U** |  |  |  |
| **v V** |  |  |  |
| **w W** |  |  |  |
| **x X** |  |  |  |
| **y Y** |  |  |  |
| **z Z** |  |  |  |

For further alphabet, numbers and phonics practice worksheets, see the Scottish ESOL Literacies resources at [ESOL Literacies National 2 Alphabet Numbers Phonics](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/ESOLLiteraciesNational2AlphabetNumbersPhonics.pdf) and [ESOL Literacies National 2 Alphabet Numbers Phonics](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/ESOLLiteraciesNational2AlphabetNumbersPhonics.doc) (authorable).

1. p.112, Post-16 Phonics Approaches: a Toolkit, ETF [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/phonics/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/unit2/wordrepeat1.shtml> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)