

# Phonics for Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Phonics  
for SEN

## Managing High Frequency Words in the early stages of instruction

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# Please read through these instructions carefully

## Rationale

A linguistic view of phonics and written language means that nearly all words can be phonically coded and there are very few *common exception* or *tricky* words.

However, we do need to bear in mind that the very point about these words is that they are high in frequency and so are likely to appear in even simple text and pupils may encounter them when at a very early stage of learning to read and working through a phonics programme. These words are not tricky but are *inconvenient*, for us as teachers and TAs! It is useful for teaching staff to understand these words and how to deal with them but there is no need to refer to this label when working with pupils. To our pupils and words are, well... just words.

So, how do we work on these words?

The Phonics for SEN programme does not explicitly teach the high frequency words as a separate group of words requiring their own focus and lots of teaching materials. The reason for this is that if we explicitly worked on these words, as a group in their own right, we would have to work on a multitude of sounds all at the same time which would be very confusing for the child.

The Phonics for SEN programme also doesn't teach the high frequency words as *sight words* or words that the pupils are expected to remember visually as a *whole words*.

The solution is that the programme takes a gentler approach to these with a long-term view of the situation. The high frequency words are studied intensively when the child works on the appropriate focus sound as they work through the programme, but a *scaffolded approach* is taken to supporting children to read and spell high frequency words when they encounter them in the early stages.

## The Support Strategy

High frequency words are dealt with as they naturally arise in the context of the child's reading or writing. The dynamic blending strategy is used for reading and the sequential segmenting strategy is used for spelling but the teacher or teaching assistant steps in to support the child with just that little bit of knowledge that they lack. This scaffolded approach to reading and spelling supports the child to manage high frequency words early on.

## Reading

For example, a child working at the Set 3 level encounters the word is in a story book. As the teacher or TA, you know that they have worked on the sound /i/ and so you can assume that they know it and can work with it. You also know that the child has learnt that the sound spelling s represents the sound /s/ but have not yet learnt that it can also represent the sound /z/ and it this which will cause them difficulties.

- Encourage the child to start decoding the word and for them to begin by identifying and saying the sound /i/.
- As they move on to the next sound spelling, gently interrupt them and point to the s sound spelling (drawing a ring around or underlining it can help the child to notice the sound spelling).
- Pointing to the s sound spelling say, 'You've learnt that this is a picture of the sound /s/. You haven't done this yet, but you will learn that this can also be a picture of the sound /z/. In this word, this is /z/, say /z/ here.'
- Support the child to start over and dynamically blend the /i/ and /z/ sounds together.
- The child can then dynamically blend to arrive at the word 'is'.

In this way the child has actually decoded 50% of the word, blended 100% of it and concluded what the word is (or 'read' it) themselves. When supporting reading in this way, there is never a need to simply supply a whole word for child.

## Spelling

Here is an example of how to support spelling. A child working at Set 4 level is doing a writing task and wishes to spell the word **said**. As the teacher or TA, you know that they have worked on the sounds /s/ and /d/ and so you can assume that they know them and can work with them. You also know that the child has worked on the sound /e/ being represented by the sound spelling **e** but have not yet worked on the more complex aspects of the /e/ sound. It is the sound spelling **ai** which will cause them difficulties.

- Draw three lines on a whiteboard, one line for each sound in the word.
- Using the sequential segmenting technique encourage the child to identify the first sound they can hear in the word 'said'.
- Invite the child to match (write) the sound spelling for the sound /s/ - s.
- Using the sequential segmenting technique encourage the child to identify the next (middle) sound they can hear in the word 'said' - /e/.
- The child will want to write the sound spelling **e** on the middle line but gently interrupt them and pointing to the matching line on the whiteboard, say, 'Yes, there is an /e/ sound here. You haven't done this yet but there are more ways to write /e/ and this is another one. We will do this later.' Write in the **ai** sound spelling on the line for the child.
- The child can then continue on through the word, identify the /d/ sound, and match a sound spelling to the sound.
- If the child then copies the word from the whiteboard into their book require them to say each sound at the same time as writing the appropriate sound spelling.

This gentle approach to the high frequency words *primes* the child for the time when they can work on them more fully. When encountering these words in the Phonics for SEN decodable books, these words are referred to as 'Prime Words'.

To help you, here is a list of the high frequency words organised by main sound and their appearance in the teaching sequence of the Phonics for SEN programme.

## Word Cards

The cards in this pack primarily help staff to support pupils to read and spell the words as they arise. Staff in schools have varying experiences, knowledge and understanding of phonics and the cards are intended to support them to better understand how the inconvenient words are put together. The cards could be kept on hand and used with pupils to support the strategies above, as needed when reading or writing.

There is information about:



the number of sounds in the word and what they are,



the sound spellings (graphemes) – indicated by a larger gap between them,



why the word is inconvenient – how it fits into phonics progression,



blending - colour coded sound spellings get darker as the pupil blends though the word.

The words selected are taken from the DfE's document, The Framework for Reading – Teaching the foundations of reading July 2021, plus a few additions.

**Please Note that these cards are NOT intended to be used as flashcards or a display that encourages pupils to learn the words visually and remember them as whole words.**

Word Structure	Top 100 High Frequency Words	Top 101-200 High Frequency Words
Set 1 VC CVC	a at sat	
Set 2 VC CVC	in it did	am an dad man
Set 3 VC CVC		on can cat dog got not top
Set 4 VC CVC		up get mum put* ran red run sun
Set 5 VC CVC		if bad bed big but fun had hat him hot let
Set 6 CVC		fox
Set 7 CVC		yes
All Sets VCC	and ask* it's	end
All Sets CVCC	help just went	best fast* last* lost lots must next wind
All Sets CCVC	from	gran stop
All Sets <i>mixed</i> CCVCC+		didn't plant* grandad

\* these words may be explored at different points in the programme depending on variations in regional pronunciation.

Focus Sound	Top 100 High Frequency Words	Top 101-200 High Frequency Words
sh		fish wish
th	that this them then with	bath* path*
ng		king long thing along
ch		much children
k	back	duck
f	off	
l	will	fell still tell
s		miss across
oa	go no so old don't	cold most told going  boat grow snow window
z	as his is	has us clothes
ee	be he me she we see	he's began  been feet green keep need queen sleep tree three each eat sea tea even here these only really
ai	day  came made make they	may play say way away gave take  great again* baby

\* these words may be explored at different points in the programme depending on variations in regional pronunciation.

Focus Sound	Top 100 High Frequency Words	Top 101-200 High Frequency Words
er	her were	after ever never over under every different first girl word work we're
e	said again* head	any many friend
ou		down how now town found our out round shout about
oi		boy
oo	do to into you look* too	today food room took* through
u	put* look* looks* come love some could	book* good took* looking* something would couldn't coming mother other another
ie	by my I'm like time	fly find I'll liked inside night right

Focus Sound	Top 100 High Frequency Words	Top 101-200 High Frequency Words
or	for all call saw your	or morning small  water thought more before door
air	there their	there's  bear
ar	are	can't fast* last* after* father car dark hard park garden
s (adv)		horse house mouse place
l (adv)		animal
b (adv)		rabbit
d (adv)	called looked	cried jumped pulled suddenly
o	was	want wanted gone
i		live lived
ue		use

\* these words may be explored at different points in the programme depending on variations in regional pronunciation.



Focus Sound	Top 100 High Frequency Words	Top 101-200 High Frequency Words
f		laugh
g		eggs ghost
h		who whose
j		giant magic
k		school
m		climb
n		know
p		floppy stopped
r		narrator
t		better little
v		I've
w		what when where which white why
z		please because



Origin: Late Old English þe.  
The word **the** has been used as the definite article since the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Originally the word was pronounced /th/ /ee/, as it still is in some dialects. The /ee/ sound later changed to the schwa sound 'uh' which is written as /ə/. Pupils don't work on the /th/ sound until the beginning of advanced code, the /ee/ sound later in advanced code and the schwa sound /ə/ much later in advanced code when working on multisyllable words.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support for the /th/ and /ə/ sounds.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings **th** and **e**.



# the



2 sounds /th/ /ə/



Sound spellings th e



Origin: Old English wið

The word contains the sound /th/ which pupils don't work on until the beginning of advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support for the /th/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the **th** sound spelling particularly.



# with



3 sounds /w/ /i/ /th/



Sound spellings w i th



Origin: Late Old English n.a.

The word contains the sound /oa/ which pupils don't work on until advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support for the /oa/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the o sound spelling particularly.



no



2 sounds /n/ /oa/



Sound spellings n o



Origin: Old English gan.

The word contains the sound /oa/ which pupils don't work on until advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with the /oa/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the o sound spelling particularly.



go



2 sounds /g/ /oa/



Sound spellings g o



Origin: Old English swa.

The word contains the sound /oa/ which pupils don't work on until advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with the /oa/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the o sound spelling particularly.



so



2 sounds /s/ /oa/



Sound spellings s o



Origin: Old English is. Until the 15<sup>th</sup> century pronounced with a /s/ sound.

The word contains the sound /z/. The /z/ sound is represented by the sound spelling s which pupils don't learn about until early in advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with the /z/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the s sound spelling particularly.



is



2 sounds /i/ /z/



Sound spellings i s



Origin: Old English willian.

The word contains the sound /l/. The /l/ sound is represented by the sound spelling ll which pupils don't learn about until early in advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with the /l/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the ll sound spelling particularly.



w ill



3 sounds /w/ /i/ /l/



Sound spellings w i ll



Origin: Old English me.

The word contains the sound /ee/. The /ee/ sound is represented by the sound spelling e which pupils don't work on until advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with the /ee/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the e sound spelling particularly.



me



2 sounds /m/ /ee/



Sound spellings m e



Origin: Old English he.

The word contains the sound /ee/. The /ee/ sound is represented by the sound spelling e which pupils don't work on until advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support for with /ee/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the e sound spelling particularly.



# he



2 sounds /h/ /ee/



Sound spellings h e



Origin: Old English we.

The word contains the sound /ee/. The /ee/ sound is represented by the sound spelling e which pupils don't work on until advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support for with /ee/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the e sound spelling particularly.



# we



2 sounds /w/ /ee/



Sound spellings w e



Origin: Old English seo.

The word contains the sound /sh/, which pupils don't work on until early in advanced code, and the sound /ee/, which pupils don't work on until advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with both the /sh/ and the /ee/ sound.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with both the **sh** and the **e** sound spelling.



# she



2 sounds /sh/ /ee/



Sound spellings sh e



Origin: Old Norse þeir.

The word contains the sound /th/, which pupils don't work on until early in advanced code, and the sound /ai/ which pupils don't work on until advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with both the /th/ and the /ai/ sound.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with both the **th** and the **ey** sound spelling.



# they



2 sounds /th/ /ai/



Sound spellings th ey



Origin: Old English wæron.

The word contains the sound /er/. The /er/ sound is represented by the rare sound spelling **ere** don't work on until later in advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with the /er/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the **ere** sound spelling particularly.



were



2 sounds /w/ /er/



Sound spellings w ere



Origin: Old English secgan.

The word contains the sound /e/. The /e/ sound is represented by the rare sound spelling **ai** which pupils don't work on until advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with the /e/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the **ai** sound spelling particularly.



said



3 sounds /s/ /e/ /d/



Sound spellings s ai d





Origin: Old English to.

The word contains the sound /oo/. The /oo/ sound is represented by the sound spelling **o** which pupils don't work on until later in advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with the /oo/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the **o** sound spelling particularly.



to



2 sounds /t/ /oo/



Sound spellings t o



Origin: Old English eow.  
Superseded the word thou in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The word contains the sound /oo/. The /oo/ sound is represented by the sound spelling **ou** which don't work on until later in advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with the /oo/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the **ou** sound spelling particularly.



you



2 sounds /y/ /oo/



Sound spellings y ou



Origin: Old English shortened version of ic.

The word is made up of just one sound, /ie/. The /ie/ sound is represented by the sound spelling **i** which pupils don't work on until later in advanced code.

An additional complication for the pupil is that the uppercase letter is used rather than the lowercase with which they are more familiar.



I



1 sound /ie/



Sound spelling **i**



Origin: Old English eall.

The word contains the sound /aw/, which pupils don't work on until later in advanced code, and the sound /l/ which pupils work on early in advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with both the /aw/ and the /l/ sound.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with both the **a** and the **ll** sound spelling.



all



2 sounds /aw/ /l/



Sound spellings **a ll**



Origin: Old English earun

The word is made up of just one sound, /ar/. The /ar/ sound is represented by the rare sound spelling **are** which pupils don't work on until later in advanced code.

For the pupil, this could feel like being asked to memorise a whole word. Stress that the word only has 1 sound and therefore has only 1 sound spelling which is the whole word. It is a rare sound spelling, also occurring in the word 'aren't' to which it is obviously related.



# are



1 sound /ar/



Sound spelling are



Origin: Old English wesæn.

The word contains the sounds /w/ and /z/. The /o/ sound is represented by the sound spelling **a**, which pupils don't work on until later in advanced code, and the /z/ sound is represented by the sound spelling **s** which pupils work on early in advanced code.

For reading: support the pupil to blend the sounds, giving support with the /o/ and /z/ sounds particularly.

For spelling: support the pupil to segment the word and match the sound spellings, giving support with the **a** and **s** sound spellings particularly.



# was



3 sounds /w/ /o/ /z/



Sound spellings w a s



Origin: Old English  
unstressed form of æf.

The word contains the sound  
/v/. The /v/ sound is  
represented by the unique  
sound spelling **f** which pupils  
don't work on until later in  
advanced code.

For reading: support the  
pupil to blend the sounds,  
giving support with the  
/v/ sound particularly.

For spelling: support the  
pupil to segment the word  
and match the sound  
spellings, giving support with  
the **f** sound spelling  
particularly.



o f



2 sounds /o/ /v/



Sound spellings o f

## Further Information about Phonics for SEN

The **Phonics for Pupils with Special Educational Needs Programme** is a systematic synthetic linguistic phonics programme published in a series of seven books by **Routledge in 2018**. For more information about the programme and training, please visit the website:

<https://www.phonicsforpupilswithspecialeducationalneeds.com/>

Seven book programme published 2018 by Speechmark Routledge, available from Routledge, Amazon, Wordery, Blackwells & Waterstones. Books may be purchased singly or as a set.

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