

Articles – Importance of Phonics Sounds

Knowing the Phonics Sounds is an essential skill for those who want to learn to read English, because our written language is based on our spoken language – the sounds in English.

Students can learn the sounds before they learn the letters, or they can learn a sound and then its relevant letter or letter team. What matters is that the sounds are made the priority, rather than the letters. This is important because everyone finds it easiest to build new knowledge and skills on the foundation of what they already know. Students already know and speak the sounds in English. Most students will, however, have to re-learn the skill they had as babies – the skill of separating the individual sounds in words.

Another factor in whether to learn sounds or letters first, is that we use about 45 sounds in English, but we use about 200 letter/letter team combinations to represent those 45 phonics sounds.

In order to be able to read confidently, an English reader needs to be able to read about 20,000 words.

There are very few ways to teach people to read that number of words:

- Teach the alphabet letters and the sounds they represent, then expect students to guess words, or learn each word by rote as though it was a random collection of letters;
- Teach the alphabet letters and letter teams (e.g. sh) and the sounds they represent, then expect students to guess words, or learn each word by rote; or
- Remind students of the phonics sounds they already know, &
 - teach how to segment spoken words into their individual sounds;
 - teach how to blend individual sounds together to form words;
 - teach the most common way to represent each sound in the Alphabet, in writing (guessing & reading by rote are not permitted. Students learn to understand, instead);
 - teach which sounds require the use of multiple letters (e.g. sh) to represent them (by the time students have completed this level, they can read hundreds of words);
 - teach the old (historical) ways some sounds are written (e.g. dge & kn);
 - teach how to the sounds that are written according to rules are written (e.g. ai & ay) (by the time students have completed this level, they can read thousands of words); &
 - teach how to the sounds in the foreign words that are in English are written (e.g. eau & elle) (by the end of this section, students can read almost everything).

This third method is the one used in The Building Blocks of Reading Course available on this site, and it's used by most of the comprehensive, synthetic courses (those that teach the sounding out and blending of words), phonics-based learn to read courses.

Courses based on the third method require greater initial application from tutors and students than the methods mentioned earlier. But these more challenging courses result in far greater success, a higher level of understanding, and far more rapid progress toward independent reading.

Of course, not everyone wants, or is able, to teach reading. So, if the course offered here doesn't appeal to you, you could follow the instructions below to help you find another way your student can become a successful reader.

To look for a suitable course, type the words below, into your favourite search engine:
comprehensive synthetic phonics-based learn to read courses.

You will find a handful of excellent courses, several of them taught online. One of them will suit your student.