



Phonics Terminology

Term	Meaning	Example
Phoneme	The smallest unit of sound in a word represented by letters of the alphabet.	What you hear - think phone.
Grapheme	A letter or group of letters representing one sound (phoneme).	ck, igh, t, sh Graphics - what you see!
Grapheme - Phoneme Correspondence (GPCs).	The relationship between sounds and the letters that represent those sounds and vice versa.	/ay/ai/a-e/ /ee/ea/e-e/ey/y/
Consonants	The letters of the alphabet (apart from the vowels a, e, i, o and u).	b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y and z.
Vowels	The letters a, e, i, o and u.	a, e, i, o and u
Digraph	A grapheme made up of two letters that makes one sound.	ar/ay/ow/oy/ay etc.
Consonant Digraph	A digraph that is made up of two consonants.	'sh' in fish.
Vowel Digraph	A digraph that is made up of two vowels.	ai/ea/ee/oa etc.
Split Digraph	When a long vowel sound digraph is split by a consonant.	cake/phone/shine/theme
Syllable	The smallest unit of spoken language usually containing a vowel. This is unrelated to the number of phonemes a word contains.	chat - 3 phonemes but just one syllable.
Trigraph	A grapheme made up of three letters that makes one sound.	'igh' in high
Blends	To draw individual sounds together to pronounce a word.	s-n-a-p = snap r-ai-n-b-ow = rainbow
Adjacent consonants (cluster)	Two (or three) letters making two (or three) sounds.	strap straight jump
Segment	To split up a word into its individual phonemes. This supports spelling.	j-a-m ch-a-t
VC	Vowel consonant words	It, in, is at
CVC	Consonant vowel consonant words	cat, peg, pin, hot, nut
CCVC	Consonant consonant vowel consonant words	slam, frog
CVCC	Consonant vowel consonant consonant words	bent, milk
Tricky Words	Words that are commonly used but have complex spelling patterns which make them difficult to read and write.	said, of, was
High-frequency words	Common words that often appear in written texts.	when, how, over, school, thought etc.

Alliteration	Several words that begin with the same letter sound.	Simon s ays s ing Hiltingbury H eroes Flickering f ierce f lames
Compound word	A compound word is two or more words linked together to produce a word with a new meaning.	toothbrush football chalkboard
Onset	Initial phonological unit of any word	/c/ in cat
Rime	The string of letters that follow the onset (usually a vowel and final consonants).	'at' in cat
Prefix	Letters that we add at the beginning of words to make new words with new or different meanings, or definitions.	safe/ un safe happy/ un happy tie/ un tie
Suffix	Letters that go on the end of a word to change its meaning.	fox - foxes beautiful - beautifully slow - slowest fast - faster
Mnemonic	A technique to aid remembering the spellings of tricky words.	because - B ig e lephants c an a lways u nderstand s maller e lephants.
Root word (base word)	A word in its own right that can be changed with a prefix or suffix.	undress - dress - dressed unhappy - happy - happily
Contraction	A shortened form of words that omit letters or sounds (replaced by an apostrophe).	could not - couldn't should not - shouldn't cannot - can't I Will - I'll
Nonsense word (pseudo, alien, made up)	A non-word used to assess phonics understanding.	chom, blurst, geck, thazz, steck, stroft, quemp, toin, bulm, stip etc.
Pure sound	Pronouncing sounds clearly/distinctly without adding additional sounds to the end	