

# A Parent's Guide to Phonics

What exactly is phonics? Many parents hear the term when their child is learning to read, but a lot of them have no clue what teachers are talking about--let alone how they might be able to help.

Plain and simple, phonics is the relationship between letters and sounds in language. Phonic instruction usually starts in kindergarten, with kids learning CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words by the end of the year. Words such as hat, cat, and pot are all CVC words.

But CVC is just the beginning. The bulk of phonics instruction is done in first grade. Students usually learn consonant blends (-gl, -tr -cr), consonant digraphs (-sh, -ch, -qu), short vowels, final e, long vowels, r-controlled vowels, and diphthongs. From second grade on up, phonics continues to build fluency and teach multisyllabic words.

Interest peaked, but don't know where to begin? Here are some basic phonics rules to keep in mind as your child learns to read:

- **Short vowels:** When there is a single vowel in a short word or syllable, the vowel usually makes a short sound. Short vowels usually appear at the beginning of the word or between two consonants. Examples of short vowels are found in the words: cat, pig, bus.
- **Long vowel:** When a short word or syllable ends with a vowel/consonant /e combination, the vowel is usually long and the "e" at the end of the word is silent (this rule doesn't apply in all cases). Examples of vowel/consonant/e combinations are: bake, side, role. Here's another rule with long vowels: when a word or syllable has a single vowel and it appears at the end of the word or syllable, the vowel usually makes the long sound. Examples are: no, she.
- **Consonant blends:** When two or three consonants are blended together, each consonant sound should be heard in the blend. Some examples of consonant blends are: black, grab, stop.
- **Consonant digraphs:** A combination of two consonants sounds that together represent a new sound. Examples of consonant digraphs are: shop, chin, photo.
- **R-controlled vowels:** When a vowel is followed by the letter "r," the vowel does not make the long or short sound but is considered "r-controlled." Examples are: bird, corn, nurse.
- **Vowel diphthongs:** The term "vowel diphthong" refers to the blending of two vowels sounds – both vowel sounds are usually heard and they make a gliding sound. Examples include: moon, saw, mouth.

Phonics are the building blocks to reading. And while they're not always intuitive, once you know the rules, they can help quite a bit. So learn the basics. Not only will you be helping your child, but you'll finally understand what the teacher is talking about!

