

Phonics checks scoring guidance: Term 1 2025

Pronunciation of pseudo words

Some of the graphemes used in the check represent a number of different phonemes. When decoding a real word in the check, the child has to select the correct phoneme for the word, for example the 'ow' in 'blow' should not be pronounced as the 'ow' in 'cow'. However, when decoding a pseudo word, all plausible alternative pronunciations are acceptable.

The tables on the next page provide guidance to teachers scoring the check on acceptable pronunciations of the pseudo words in the check.

Variable pronunciations

Children's pronunciation of grapheme-phoneme correspondences may differ based on their speech patterns or accents. For example, a child might produce a soft r sound and provide the answer that sounds like 'wem' for the pseudo word 'rem'. In some accents, certain graphemes may be spoken in a way that sound like different graphemes. For example, in certain accents, the 'p' can be pronounced in a way that resembles the sound of a 'b'. A child speaking with this accent might decode the pseudo word "pon" correctly but pronounce it in a way that sounds more like "bon".

The purpose of the phonics check is to identify the child's phonics decoding ability rather than their speech production accuracy. When marking the check, it is important to consider what is consistent for the child in their regular speech and identify if any incorrect grapheme-phoneme correspondences are due to their speech patterns or due to a decoding error. If unsure, at the end of the phonics check, ask them to repeat other familiar words with the grapheme-phoneme correspondences you are unsure of. If the difference is due to a speech pattern difference, and the child is decoding correctly, mark the word item as correct.

Recording and scoring children's responses

- Teachers should use the Marking sheet to record whether the child said the word correctly or not. One point is awarded for correctly decoding a word, and the total score indicates achievement level. Record children's responses using 'Got it' or 'Not attempted'.
- Teachers should add their own comments to help them plan future phonics learning, for example, "blending was difficult", or "b / d reversal". It is important to record both the errors and the nature of the errors.

Pseudo word	Acceptable pronunciations	Phonemic representation
ag	This item rhymes with bag .	/æ g/
ip	This item rhymes with lip .	/ɪ p/
san	This item uses the 's' in sun and rhymes with ban .	/s æ n/
fof	This item uses the 'f' in fun and rhymes with 'pot'.	/f ɒ t/
tem	This item uses the 't' in 'top' and rhymes with 'hem'.	/t e m/
pon	This item uses the 'p' in 'pat' and rhymes with 'con'.	/pɒn/
rem	This item uses the 'r' in 'run' and rhymes with 'them'.	/r e m/
hux	This item uses the 'h' in 'hat' and rhymes with 'ducks'.	/hʌks /
quop	This item uses the 'qu' in 'quiz' and rhymes with 'stop'.	/kwɒp/
leck	This item uses the 'l' in 'log' and rhymes with 'peck'.	/lek/
jash	This item uses the 'j' in 'just' and rhymes with 'dash'.	/dʒæʃ/
zong	This item uses the 'z' in 'zag' and rhymes with 'song'.	/z ɒ ŋ/
glog	This item uses the 'gl' in 'glue' and rhymes with 'frog'.	/glɒg/
plunt	This item uses the 'pl' in 'plant' and rhymes with 'bunt'.	/plɛnt/
splam	This item uses the 'spl' in 'splash' and rhymes with 'pram'.	/s p l æ m/
braits	This item uses the 'br' in 'brick' and rhymes with 'straits'.	/breits/
keam	This item uses the 'k' in 'kit' and rhymes with 'beam'.	/ki:m/
zale	This item uses the 'z' in 'zag' and rhymes with 'tale'.	/zeil/
splote	This item uses the 'spl' in 'split' and rhymes with 'wrote'.	/splɔʊt/
shird	This item uses the 'sh' in 'shop' and rhymes with 'third'.	/ʃ ɜ: d/
jorb	This item uses the 'j' in 'job' and rhymes with 'absorb'.	/dʒ ɔ: b/