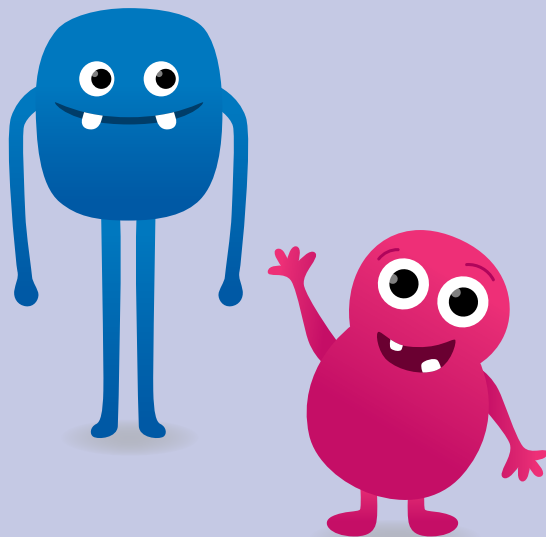# Phonics checks: Phonics continuum

The phonics continuum

The phonics continuum diagram shows the gradual progression of skills that children need to develop so they can read and spell increasingly complex words. By understanding this continuum and using a systematic synthetic phonics approach, teachers can strategically support children to develop strong decoding (reading) and encoding (spelling) skills by teaching at children's point of need.

The phonics continuum refers to the grapheme-phoneme correspondences that children must learn to progress along the continuum. Word complexity increases with the number of letters, phonemes, syllables and morphemes.

Use this continuum and the results of the phonics check to notice, recognise, and respond to children's strengths and needs.

This continuum is based on evidence of how children typically achieved in the phonics check trial in 2024, and reflects a progression of difficulty rather than a prescribed scope and sequence. At a national level, phonics check data will continue to inform the development of phonics-related curriculum resources.

Core skills for decoding and encoding along the continuum

Children's ability to read and spell at word level relies on their code knowledge and their phonemic awareness skills of segmenting and blending. To progress through the phonics continuum and become skilled, automatic readers and spellers, children should be supported with explicit instruction combined with strategic guided practice.

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Te Poutāhū
Curriculum Centre

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Phonics continuum

am	mop	fish	nest	splat	rain	comic	gate	girl	soy	night	reptile	afternoon
VC	**CVC**	**CVC Consonant digraphs**	**CVCC & CCVC**	**CCVCC & CCCVC**	**Vowel digraphs**	**Simple two syllable**	**VCe Split vowel digraph**	**R-controlled vowel**	**Diphthong oi/oy**	**Vowel trigraph**	**Two syllable**	Onwards
One syllable	One syllable	One syllable	One syllable	One syllable	One syllable	Two syllable	One syllable	One syllable	One syllable words with two vowel sounds blending together	One syllable words with three letters representing one sound	Two syllable words with previous vowel patterns	Multi-syllable words: compound words; bases, prefixes & suffixes. (not in Phonics Check)
Vowel, consonant words	Consonant, vowel, consonant words	Three phonemes with two consonants representing one sound	Four phonemes with two adjacent consonants	Five phonemes – two and three adjacent consonants	Two vowels make one vowel sound	Simple two-syllable words with the syllables ending in a consonant	A vowel and an 'e' split by a consonant to make a long vowel sound	A vowel followed by an 'r' to make one sound				