

Sounds-Write and the DfE's Year 1 phonics screening check

Now that the Standards and Testing Agency of the DfE has introduced a statutory phonics screening check for all Y1 pupils,* many schools are evaluating how successful their literacy strategy is in preparing pupils for the test.

Sounds-Write teaches everything children need for the test, including:

- ✓ The 40–60 % of 'less common' real words in the test
- ✓ Any of the pseudo words in the test
- ✓ Words with a more simple structure
- ✓ Words with a more complex structure.

If you feel the need to evaluate your current strategy, here are some questions you may want to ask of any phonics scheme you consider:

Does it teach the following spelling/sound correspondences: <a>, , <c>, <d>, <e>, <f>, <g>, <h>, <i>, <j>, <k>, <l>, <m>, <n>, <o>, <p>, <q>(u), <r>, <s>, <t>, <u>, <v>, <w>, <x>, <y>, <z>, plus some consonant two-letters spellings, <ch>, <ck>, <ff>, <ll>, <ng>, <sh>, <ss>, <th> and <zz> in words with the structures CVC, VCC, CVCC, CCVC as outlined in Section 1 of the screening test?

Does it also teach the following vowel digraphs: <ar>, <ee>, <oi>, <oo>, <or> as outlined in Section 1 of the screening test?

Does it teach the following spelling/sound correspondences: <a-e>, <ai>, <ay>, <aw>, <ay>, <ea>, <e-e>, <er>, <ew>, <ie-e>, <ie>, <ir>, <oa>, <o-e>, <ou>, <ow>, <oy>, <ue>, <u-e>, <ur>, <air>, <igh> as outlined in Section 2 of the screening test?

And, does it also teach the consonant digraphs: <wh> and <ph> as outlined in Section 2 of the screening test?

Moreover, does it teach the vital skills of blending, segmenting and phoneme manipulation necessary to enable children to be able to use the code knowledge you have taught to read and spell proficiently?

Finally, does the programme already include the opportunity to practise regularly blending and segmenting pseudo (nonsense) words?

Sounds-Write is a rigorous, quality first phonics programme that teaches all of these elements of skill and code knowledge and more.

For a detailed look at where and when in the Sounds-Write programme all of the above is taught, please read on.

* For details see the DfE website, particularly this page:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/pedagogy/phonics/a00197709/developing-a-new-year-1-phonics-screening-check>

Sounds-Write Covers It All

By Christmas of YR, as long as teachers are following our advice – which means giving daily practice for half an hour using a mix of lessons – the pupils will have covered all of the following sound-spelling correspondences in the following order:

Unit 1: a, i, m, s, t; Unit 2: n, o, p; Unit 3: b, c, g, h; Unit 4: d, f, e, v; Unit 5: k, l, r, u; Unit 6: j, w, z; Unit 7: x, y, ff, ll, ss, zz.

All the above will have been taught in the context of real CVC words and pupils will have been taught how to blend, segment and swap sounds in real words with a CVC structure. They will also have been taught that letters are symbols for sounds and that, sometimes, we spell a sound with two letters, such as the ones in **huff**, **fill**, **mess**, and **buzz**.

During the next phase, Units 8, 9 and 10, Sounds-Write focuses on dramatically improving the pupils' skills of blending, segmenting and phoneme manipulation. They continue working with the code knowledge they have been taught in the first phase (Units 1-7), and the complexity of the structure of the words increases so that they are reading and spelling CVCC, CCVC, and CCVCC/CCVC/CCVCCC words. In addition, by the time the pupils have reached Unit 8 of the Initial Code, they will also be practising sound swap with nonsense (pseudo) words. Thus, following this trajectory, by Easter, pupils should be reading and spelling words like 'lift' (CVCC), 'frog' (CCVC), 'swift' (CCVCC) and 'scrap' (CCVC), until their skills are perfect or near perfect.

At this point, pupils are now properly prepared to take on and work successfully with more complex ideas, as well as learning the necessary code knowledge (the way we spell the rest of the sounds in English) to make them proficient readers and spellers. Specifically, pupils will now be taught formally[†] that sounds can be spelled in more than one way and they will learn that many spellings can represent more than one sound. They will also continue to practise the skills that will enable them to use the knowledge they are learning.

In Section one of the phonics screening check, the structure of the words tested include CVC, VCC, CCVC and CVCC. It comprises the following spellings: <a>, , <c>, <d>, <e>, <f>, <g>, <h>, <i>, <j>, <k>, <l>, <m>, <n>, <o>, <p>, <q>(u), <r>, <s>, <t>, <u>, <v>, <w>, <x>, <y>, <z>, plus some consonant two-letter spellings, <ch>, <ck>, <ff>, <ll>, <ng>, <sh>, <ss>, <th> and <zz>. All of these, as well as <wh>, are taught in the Initial Code.

[†] We refer to pupils being taught formally when the teacher teaches concepts and factual knowledge formally in a lesson. That is NOT to say that many pupils don't learn new things when they are reading and writing in everyday classroom activities. For example, when they come across a sound-spelling correspondent they have not yet been taught formally, the teacher may point to the spelling and tell the pupil what it is. Some children may remember that and apply it whenever they see it. Even if they don't remember it, they may recognise it later when it is taught formally.

In addition, the screening check also covers what it describes as ‘consistent vowel digraphs’ or two-letter spellings, such as for example, <ar>, <ee>, <oi>, <oo> and <or>. However, it is not necessary to teach these independently of the Sounds-Write programme because all of them are taught in the course of the programme, before the end of Y1.

The specific spellings listed in the screening check occur in the following units of the Extended Code of the Sounds-Write programme:

- <ar> is taught in Unit 24
- <ee> is taught in Unit 3
- <oi> is taught in Unit 23
- <oo> for _moo_n and _boo_k are taught in Units 10 and 12, respectively
- <or> is taught in Unit 19 (first spellings).

If these spellings come up in the course of the teaching of the curriculum before they have been taught formally, simply do what we advise elsewhere in the programme: Point to the new spelling and, in the case of <ar> for example, say, “This is ‘ar’. Say ‘ar’ here.” Or, in the case of <ee>, say, “This is ‘ee’. Say ‘ee’ here.”

As you will already have taught words with greater structural complexity, such as CVCC, CCVC and CCVCC/CCVC words in the Initial Code, you will now be going on to teach the Extended Code.

Where do these specific spellings listed in Section 2 of the screening check occur in the Extended Code of the Sounds-Write programme?

<a-e>, <ai> <ay> and <ea> as first spellings of the sound ‘ae’ are all taught in Unit 2
<ee>, <ea> and <e-e> as first spellings of the sound ‘ee’ are all taught in Unit 3
<oa>, <o-e> and <ow> as first spellings of the sound ‘oe’ are all taught in Unit 5
<er>, <ir> and <ur> as first spellings of the sound ‘er’ are all taught in Unit 6
<ow> and <ou> as first spellings of the sound ‘ow’ are all taught in Unit 8
<ew>, <ue> and <u-e> as first spellings of the sound ‘oo’ are all taught in Unit 10
<i-e>, <ie> and <igh> as first spellings of the sound ‘ie’ are all taught in Unit 11
<aw> and <au> as first spellings of the sound ‘or’ are all taught in Unit 19
<air> as a first spelling of ‘air’ is taught in Unit 20.

All of the above leaves only one sound-spelling correspondence in the phonics screening check not yet dealt with - <ph> - and this can be introduced at any time after Unit 11 of the Initial Code has been taught.