

Phonics – What, When, Why

What Is Phonics

Phonics is a user-friendly way of learning to read from scratch which teaches children the 43 phonetic sounds in English (25 consonant and 18 vowel sounds). It is an extremely efficient system that is not just about recognizing words on a page, but making them come alive by sounding them out and pronouncing them.

When To Start

The best age for children to learn Phonics is around 4 years old. This is when their attention span lengthens and they become better suited to group learning. You could enroll your kid in a good Phonics programme or maybe teach her yourself. At this age a child's cognitive development is also nicely suited to grasping the concepts of Phonics. Remember, starting to talk and make sounds is part of the brain's natural function; reading is an acquired skill.

Why Is Phonics Necessary

First of all, this is a system that encourages children to read independently as well as comprehend what they read, and Phonics achieves this by teaching them how to decode (read and pronounce) and encode (spell) phonetic sounds. By Primary 1 your child will be well-equipped to handle the curriculum.

Secondly, you will see a vast improvement in your child's spelling, thanks to Phonics' emphasis on the individual "building-blocks" of a word.

A third important reason is that Phonics also teaches correct, more precise pronunciation by focusing on the way letters and letter groups sound. Too often foreigners are unable to understand the way English is spoken by Singaporeans because of shoddy pronunciation. "Six" becomes "sick", "three" turns into "tree", and "film" is either "fillem" or "flim". Phonics achieves an all-round improvement in English fluency.

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Coming next month:

Making Phonics practice at home fun and effective.



Elly Sim is a Child Development Specialist (B.Sc) who was trained and qualified in the US in Child Development and Psychology. She co-founded the school Jan & Elly in 1995 and continues to design and develop its highly-acclaimed English programmes.

Email Elly anything regarding your child's English language challenges to elly@jan-elly.com