The Phonics Check Guidance (Australia)

The Phonics Check is taken towards the end of Term 3 in Year 1. This document explains what students will have covered up to that time, which parts of the code are included in the Phonics Check, and how to adapt teaching in Year 1 to ensure coverage of all parts of the code included in the Phonics Check.

Sounds-Write in Foundation and Year 1

By the end of term 2 of Foundation, if teachers are following our guidance – which means giving daily practice for half an hour using a mix of lessons –, students will have covered the following sound/spelling correspondences in this 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 students will have been taught how to segment, blend and sound swap in real words with a CVC structure. They will also have been taught the concept that letters are symbols that represent sounds and that sometimes we spell a sound with two letters, such as in 'huff', 'fill', 'mess', and 'buzz'.

During the next phase, Units 8, 9 and 10, Sounds-Write focuses on dramatically improving students' skills of segmenting, blending and phoneme manipulation. Students 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 / CCCVC / CCCVCCC words. In addition to this, by the time students have reached Unit 8 of the Initial Code, they will also be practising sound swap with pseudo (nonsense) words. Following this trajectory, at around the end of term 3, students should be reading and spelling words like 'lift' (CVCC), 'frog' (CCVC), 'swift' (CCVCC) and 'scrap' (CCCVC), until their skills are perfect or near perfect. It should be noted that for a small number of children, the work of segmenting and blending three adjacent consonants will need to continue into Year 1 before they reach mastery level.

By the end of the Initial Code (Unit 11), students will also have been taught to segment, blend and manipulate sounds in words containing the following sound-spelling correspondences: < sh > for /sh/, and < ch > for /ch/, < th > for /th/ voiced and unvoiced, < ck > for /k/, < ng > and < wh > for /w/. The spellings < q > and < u >, representing the two separate sounds /k/ and /w/, will also have been taught in Unit 11. This will further enhance their understanding that sounds can be spelt with two letters. At this point, students are properly prepared to take on and work successfully with more complex ideas, as well as learn the code knowledge (the way we spell the rest of the sounds in English) necessary to make them proficient readers and spellers. Specifically, students will now be taught formally[1] that sounds can be spelt in more than one way and 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 gaining. Moreover, the idea that we can spell sounds with more than one letter should not be neglected and students will need to be constantly reminded and the concept deepened as they progress into Year 1.

What is in the Phonics Check?

Section 1 of the Phonics Check will include the sound-spelling correspondences taught in the Initial Code as well as what is described in the Phonics Check guidance as 'consistent vowel digraphs' (for example, < ar >, < ee >, < oi >, < oo > and < or >). These are taught in the Sounds-

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[1] We refer to students being taught formally when the teacher teaches skills, concepts and factual knowledge formally in a lesson. That is not to say that many students don't learn new things when they are reading and writing in everyday classroom activities. For example, when they come across a sound-spelling correspondence they have not yet been taught formally, the teacher may point to the spelling and tell the student what it is. Some students 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.

Write programme through the Extended Code in Year 1.

Section 2 of the Phonics Check may include the spelling < wh >, as taught in the Initial Code, as well as some of the consonant and vowel spellings taught in the Extended Code.

The Phonics Check will contain some polysyllabic words, and these should present no difficulty as the teaching of polysyllabic words is introduced at, or around, the second week of Unit 4 /oe/ of the Extended Code in Year 1.

Words (real and nonsense) in the Phonics Check may contain the following sound-spelling correspondences. Note that spellings shown in orange may occur in Section 1 and/or 2 of the Phonics Check, whilst spellings shown in blue may occur in Section 2 of the Phonics Check.

Sound(s)	Spelling(s) within example word(s)	Sounds-Write Unit(s)
/a/	cat	IC 1
/i/	hit	IC 1
/m/	man	IC 1
/t/	tea	IC 1
/n/	man	IC 2
/o/	hot	IC 2
/p/	pet	IC 2
/b/	bad	IC 3
/g/	gum	IC 3
/h/	how	IC 3
/d/	dog	IC 4
/v/	vet	IC 4
/r/	red	IC 5
/u/	cup	IC 5
/l/	leg, hill	IC 5, IC 7
/k/ /s/	mix	IC 7
/y/	yes	IC 7

/ch/	check	IC 11
/k/ /w/	quit	IC 11
/ng/	sing	IC 11
/th/ (voiced & unvoiced)	this & both	IC 11
/w/	wet, when	IC 6, IC 11
/j/	jug, gem	IC 6, EC 37
/z/	zip, buzz, hens	IC 6, IC 7, EC 48 < s >
/sh/	she, chef	IC 11, Lesson 10 for < ch >
/k/	cat, key, check, school	IC 3, IC 5, IC 11, EC 45 < ch >
/ae/	came, bait, say	EC 1
/ee/	see, she, bead, scheme, chief	EC 2 (plus e_e), EC 29 < ie >
/oe/	cold, boat, cone, blow, *mould	EC 4, *EC 32 < ou >
/f/	if, puff, photo	IC 4, IC 7, EC 40
/er/	fern, girl, turn	EC 6
/e/	hen, head*	IC 4, EC 7
/ow/	out, cow	EC 8
/oy/	coin, boy	EC 23
/oo/ as in 'moon'	room, blue, brute, you	EC 10, EC 36 < ou >
/ie/	mind, fine, pie, high	EC 11
/oo/ as in 'book'	book**	EC 12
/s/**	sit, miss, cell	IC 1, IC 7, EC 16 < c >
/or/	born, launch, raw	EC 19
/air/	air	EC 20
/ue/	stew, unit, cue, huge	EC 21
/ar/	arm, father	EC 24
/schwa/	farmer	EC 50

* You will likely need to say words with <ou> spelling the sound /oe/ in your precise 'spelling voice'. In many Australian English accents, the vowel sound is influenced by the following /l/, and it becomes somewhat 'distorted'. It is no longer a precise /oe/ sound.

** Please refer to the next section for suggested adjustments.

As the structure of words will vary from CVC to CCCVC, adjacent consonant combinations will feature in the Phonics Check. Combinations of two adjacent consonants that occur in English with medium or high frequency will be used. Only four possible combinations of three adjacent consonants can appear in the Phonics Check: 'scr', 'spl', 'spr', 'str'. Note also that the two adjacent consonant *sounds* written with three letters - 'shr' /sh/ /r/ and 'thr' /th/ /r/ - can also appear. These are all introduced in the Initial Code and should continue to be practised in Year 1.

Adjusting the teaching of the Extended Code with the Phonics Check in mind

This is guidance on how Year 1 teachers may want to adapt their teaching sequence to ensure coverage with the Phonics Check in mind. However, schools are very much expected and encouraged to make decisions based on the needs of their cohorts and to maximise the children's long-term progress.

It is suggested that Year 1 teachers adjust the sequence of the teaching to take the Phonics Check into account:

- When teaching Unit 2 /ee/, include the less common < ie > spelling as in 'chief'

- When teaching Unit 4 /oe/, include the less common < ou > spelling as in 'mould'.

- Teach < ph > for /f/ as in 'phone' and 'photo' within Unit 4 /oe/. Include words with < ph > in reading and writing in connected text. Later, teach 'photograph' using the polysyllabic lessons.

- When teaching Unit 10 /oo/, include the < ou > spelling as in 'you'.

- Tangentially (i.e. alongside and in addition to the planned Sounds-Write units) teach < ch > as a spelling of /sh/ through words such as 'chef', 'chute', 'chiffon', 'chalet', 'Charlotte', 'Chicago'. Use Lesson 10 to teach the spelling < ch > representing /ch/, /sh/ and /k/ as in 'lunch', 'chef' and 'school'. Include words with < ch > in reading and writing in connected text.

- Tangentially teach < g > for /j/ as in 'gem'. Include words with < g > for /j/ in reading and writing in connected text.

- Tangentially teach < s > for /z/ as in 'hens'. Include words with < s > for /z/ in reading and writing in connected text.

- Tangentially teach < c > for /s/ as in 'cell'. Include words with < c > for /s/ in reading and writing in connected text.

- Consider moving Unit 20 /air/ and Unit 24 /ar/ earlier in the year with these sound-spelling correspondences also taught incidentally (i.e., as these SSCs arise through reading and writing across the curriculum) through the year.

- Consider moving Unit 23 /oy/ to be covered along with Unit 8 /ow/ - one week could be allocated to each unit at that point in the year.

- Consider moving Units 16, 17 and 18 to your Term 4 sequence. However, ensure that < c > for /s/ is taught tangentially within your reading and writing in connected texts prior to the Phonics Check.

- Units 19 and 20: Sounds-Write teaches many more spellings that are required for the Phonics Check. For each of these units, consider teaching all of the spellings using

- Lesson 6 but then focus the teaching and practice of the spellings included in the Phonics Check using Lessons 7, 8 and 9. Then return to these units after the Phonics Check for more practice with all of the spellings.

- Teach the spelling < er > for the schwa sound 'uh' in polysyllabic lessons (e.g., in words such as 'farmer', 'baker', 'faster' and 'after').

Many spellings can represent more than one sound

The scoring guidance for the Phonics Check explains where alternative pronunciations of some spellings will be acceptable.[2]

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[2] 'Some of the graphemes used in the check represent a number of different phonemes. When decoding a real word in the check, the student 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. (…) Some of the pseudo-words in the Phonics Check contain vowel digraphs that end with 'r', such as 'ur'. In a small number of regional dialects, the 'r' in words with these vowel digraphs is voiced and students who speak with these dialects will be known to their teachers. For these students, pseudo-words with a vowel digraph ending in 'r', such as 'murbs' may be pronounced as /mɜːrbs/ instead of /mɜːbs/. These pronunciations are acceptable alternatives in the relevant pseudo-words.' – Phonics Check Scoring Guidance.