# The Phonics Screening Check Guidance (England, UK)

The Phonics Screening Check (PSC) is taken towards the end of Year 1 by all children in England. This document explains what students will have covered up to the time when they will take the PSC, which parts of the code are included in the PSC, and how to adapt teaching in Year 1 to ensure coverage of all the parts of the code that will be included in the PSC.

## Sounds-Write in Reception and Year 1

By around the end of the first term of Reception, students will have covered all of the following sound/spelling correspondences in the following order, as long as teachers are following our guidance – which means giving daily practice for half an hour using a mix of lessons:

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. Pupils 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, by the time the pupils 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 Easter break 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 > (as one sound for speakers of some accents) 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

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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.

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 PSC?

Section 1 of the PSC will include the sound-spelling correspondences taught in the Initial Code as well as what the DfE describe as 'consistent vowel digraphs' (for example, < ar >, < ee >, < oi >, < oo > and < or >). These are taught in the course of the Sounds-Write programme through the Extended Code in Year 1.

Section 2 of the PSC 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 PSC 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 PSC may contain the following sound-spelling correspondences. Note that spellings shown in orange may occur in Section 1 and/or 2 of the PSC, whilst spellings shown in blue may occur in Section 2 of the PSC.

| 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 |

*In some regions the < ea > in 'head' represents the same sound as the < ea > in bead: /ee/. All regional pronunciations are acceptable.

** In some regions the < oo > in book represents the same sound as the < oo > in room: /oo/. All regional pronunciations are acceptable.

As the structure of words will vary from CVC to CCCVC, adjacent consonant combinations will feature in the PSC. 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 PSC: '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 PSC in mind

This is guidance on how Year 1 teachers may want to adapt their teaching sequence to ensure coverage with the PSC 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 PSC into account:

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

- 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.

- Units 16, 18, 19, 20: Sounds-Write teaches many more spellings that are required for the PSC. For each of these units, consider teaching all of the spellings using Lesson 6 but then focus the teaching on the spellings included in the PSC using Lessons 7, 8

and 9.  Then return to these units after the PSC for more practice with all of the spellings.

- Leave the teaching of < sc > for /s/ in Unit 16 until after the PSC to avoid confusion, because < s > < c > is a common adjacent consonant combination that could come up in the PSC.

- 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 produced by the DfE gives some alternative pronunciations of some spellings in the nonsense words. Teachers should note that this is not exhaustive[2]. When a spelling can represent more than one sound, teachers should accept the alternatives within **nonsense** words. For example, in 2019 the nonsense word 'meast' was included. It would be acceptable if a child read with < ea > representing the sound /ee/ or the sound /ae/. Similarly, the word 'strow' from 2015 could be read with < ow > representing the sound /ow/ or the sound /oe/.

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[2] "you can allow alternative pronunciations of graphemes in pseudo-words — the scoring guidance gives some alternative pronunciations, but the list of acceptable pronunciations is not exhaustive" - DfE 2023 PSC administration guidance