

Bug Club Phonics Pronunciation Guide

It's important to pronounce the phonemes clearly because this helps children blend to read.

Making a 'pure' sound

You should avoid adding a schwa sound to the phonemes where possible.

A schwa is like an /uh/ sound. A good way to show the difference between making a pure sound and adding a schwa is to say the /c/ sound as if you have started to say 'cat' but stopped right after 'c'.

You'll hear this is a short, clipped /c/. Now say /c/ but add a schwa – /cuh/. Try sounding and blending 'cat' using both pronunciations. It is much easier to blend and read 'cat' by saying /c/ /a/ /t/ than it is to blend /cuh/ /a/ /tuh/.

However, some sounds cannot be heard clearly in isolation unless a small schwa is added. You will find guidance on these sounds below.

Voiced and unvoiced sounds

Where a sound is marked as 'unvoiced', this means that you don't use your vocal cords to make the sound. A good way to show the difference is by whispering (unvoiced) and speaking (voiced).

Regional pronunciation

Some of these phonemes are sounded differently in different regional pronunciations. BCP provides special notes within daily lesson plans where you may want to adapt according to regional pronunciation.

Phase 2 Phoneme Pronunciation Guidance

Phoneme	Pronunciation guidance	Graphemes
s	Put your teeth together and hiss out (unvoiced) – ssss sun	ss, c(e), c(i), c(y), sc, st(l), se
a	Open your mouth wide and make the /a/ sound at the back of your mouth – a a a apple	
t	Place the tip of your tongue to the roof of your mouth (towards the front) with lips slightly parted and push the air out as you open your mouth (unvoiced) – t t t tap	
p	Press your lips together tight and push the air out as you open your mouth (unvoiced) – p p p pan	

i	Pull your lips into a smile and make a sharp /i/ sound at the back of your mouth – iii insect	
n	Put your tongue to the roof of your mouth (towards the front) with lips parted and make the /n/ sound – nnnnn nest	kn, gn
m	Press your lips together tight and make the /m/ sound – mmmmm mat	mb
d	Place your tongue to the roof of your mouth (towards the front) as you make a quick /d/ sound (small schwa) – d d d dog	
g	Open your mouth slightly and make a soft sound in your throat (small schwa) – g g g goat	
o	Make your mouth into an 'o' shape and make the /o/ sound – o o o octopus	(w)a
c	Smile slightly and move the back of your tongue to the top of your mouth, then push the air out as you release your tongue, making the /c/ sound (unvoiced) – c c c cat	k, ck, ch
e	Open your mouth wide as you smile slightly and make the /e/ sound at the back of your mouth – e e e elephant	ea
u	Open your mouth wide without smiling and make the /u/ sound in the back of your mouth – u u u umbrella	o
r	Keep your teeth close together as you pull your lips back slightly and say the /r/ sound as though you are growling – rrrrr rat	wr
h	Open your mouth and say the /h/ sound as you breathe out sharply (unvoiced) – h h h hat	
b	Press your lips together tight and push them out as you say the /b/ sound (small schwa) – b b b bag	
f	Put your front teeth onto your bottom lip and push the air out (unvoiced) – fffff fan	ff, ph
l	Behind your teeth, point your tongue to the roof of your mouth – lllll leg	ll, le

Phase 3 Phoneme Pronunciation Guidance

Phoneme	Pronunciation guidance	Graphemes
j	Put your teeth together, pucker your lips and touch the tip of your tongue to the top of your mouth (towards the front) as you say the /j/ sound (small schwa) – j j j jam	g(e), g(i), g(y), dge
v	Put your top teeth onto your bottom lip and gently force out air to make a buzzing sound – vvvvv van	
w	Start with your lips in a small ‘o’ shape, then move them slightly further apart as you push air out of your mouth (small schwa) – w w w web	wh
x	Put the /c/ and /s/ sounds together to make /x/ by moving the back of your tongue to the top of your mouth, and push air out as you release your tongue, then put your teeth together as you hiss out (unvoiced) – x x x fox	
y	Raise the middle of your tongue towards the roof of your mouth, then sharply move your tongue downwards and drop your jaw as you make the /y/ sound (small schwa) – y y y yell	
z	Holding your lips slightly parted, put your teeth together and force air between the tongue and the roof of the mouth and out past the teeth – zzzz zip	zz, se
qu	Put the /c/ and /w/ sounds together to make /qu/ by moving the back of your tongue to the top of your mouth, then push out air as you release your tongue. At the same time, round your lips into a circular shape and widen them as you push air out (unvoiced and small schwa) – qu qu qu queen	tch
ch	Put your teeth together, placing your tongue to the roof of your mouth (towards the front) and round your lips slightly as you release your tongue and push out air (unvoiced) – ch ch ch chips	
sh	Push your lips forwards and show your teeth as you push air out, like you’re shushing someone (unvoiced) – shshshsh shell	ch, c(ial), c(ian), t(ion), ss(ion)

th	Put your tongue between your teeth and push air out sharply (unvoiced) – th th th moth	
ng	Open your mouth slightly and lift the back of your tongue to the back of the roof of your mouth as you make the /ng/ sound – ng ng ng king	
ai	Open your mouth to a wide smile (tip of tongue touching the back of your lower teeth) then arch the middle of your tongue towards the roof of your mouth as you move your jaw up – ai ai ai snail	ay, a-e, eigh, ey, ei
ee	Starting with your mouth in a relaxed, open position, the tip of your tongue stays behind your lower teeth as the middle/front part of the tongue arches towards the roof of your mouth and you pull the corners of your lips into a smile – eeee sheep	ea, e-e, ie, y, ey
igh	Open your mouth as wide as possible and relax your lips as you flatten your tongue in your mouth, then arch the middle/front part of your tongue towards the roof of your mouth as you move your jaw up – igh igh igh night	ie, i-e, y, i
oa	Make your mouth into an ‘o’ shape and then pull it into a tighter circle as you make the /oa/ sound – oa oa oa boat	ow, o-e, o, oe
oo (long)	Start with your lips in a relaxed position and move them into a tight circle as you push out the /oo/ sound – oooo spoon	ew, ue, u-e
oo (short)	Purse your lips as you sharply push out the /oo/ sound from the back of your mouth – oo oo oo book	u, oul
ar	Start with your mouth open wide, lips in a relaxed position, then bring your jaw up a little as you curl your top lip slightly to say /ar/ – ar ar ar star	
or	Make a small ‘o’ shape with your mouth, drop your jaw and shift your tongue back in your mouth (so the tip doesn’t touch anything) as you say /or/ – or or or fork	aw, au, al
ur	Start with your mouth slightly open, then raise your top lip as you say /ur/ – ur ur ur surf	er, ir, ear

ow	Start with your mouth wide open with your tongue flat and then move your lips into a pursed position, lifting the back of your tongue upwards – ow ow ow owl	ou
oi	Make a small ‘o’ shape with your mouth, then relax your mouth as the middle of your tongue moves towards the roof of your mouth – oi oi oi coins	oy
ear	Pull your lips into a smile, relax the tongue down as you make the /ear/ sound – ear ear ear ear	ere, eer
air	Open your mouth and push your tongue towards the front slightly as you make the /air/ sound – air air chair	are, ear
ure	Place the tip of your tongue just behind your lower front teeth and raise the middle of your tongue towards the roof of your mouth, then sharply move your tongue downwards and drop your jaw as your top lip curls upwards to make the /ure/ sound – ure ure ure manure	

Phase 5 Phoneme Pronunciation Guidance

Phoneme	Pronunciation guidance	Graphemes
zh	Put your teeth together and push your lips forwards, then move the tip of your tongue towards the roof of your mouth at the front (without touching it) as you make a buzzing sound – zh zh zh	s(ion), s(ual), s(ure)