

An introduction to the Super Minds Phonics Focus sections by Karen Elliott

What is synthetic phonics?

The concept at the heart of synthetic phonics is that each of the 44 phonemes of English can be represented by a letter (e.g. the 'b' phoneme in 'big') or a combination of letters (the 'sh' phoneme in 'fish').

A phoneme is introduced with its corresponding letter or letters. Students are encouraged to blend the sounds to make words from the start of the course. The short vowel sounds 'a', 'e', 'i', 'o' and 'u' are taught early on, so that students are able to read words such as 'bag', 'red', 'fish', 'dog' and 'sun'.

Combinations of vowels are required to read words containing long vowel sounds (e.g. 'brain', 'tree', 'pie', 'boat' and 'too'). Once students have learned one pattern for each of the long vowel sounds, they learn to recognise alternative spellings such as 'day', 'tea', 'fly', 'home' and 'blue'. This also applies to some consonants, for example, the alternative spelling of the 'f' phoneme found in 'elephant'.

The information above is set out in the Alphabetic Code. See the separate Alphabetic Codes document on the Super Minds website for details.

Students also need to be aware of exceptions to English sound-spelling patterns. These exceptions are known as 'special' or 'tricky words'. An example is the long vowel sound found in 'me', 'we' and 'be'. These are often taught by rhyming the exceptions with words that follow the pattern, for example, 'me' rhymes with 'see'.

Why has Super Minds chosen this approach to pronunciation?

Through phonics in Super Minds, students will discover that English is made up of phonemes which are represented by different symbols. They will learn the combinations of phonemes characteristic of the language, which are blended to make words. They will also learn to recognise which phonemes are the same as those in their language and which ones they need to practise to improve their pronunciation.

Since the Alphabetic Code is fundamental to the language, the information students are given will give them the independence to build on this knowledge throughout their language learning.

How is the method integrated with the content of Super Minds?

Each unit has a *Phonics focus* section. The phonemes are presented and practised through an illustrated sound sentence or dialogue which students repeat. Further practice is provided by exercises in the Work Book.

The *Phonics focus* has been chosen to reflect key vocabulary in the unit and progresses to include alternative spellings, contrasting phonemes and strategies for learning and remembering the pronunciation of difficult words. In Levels 5 and 6, a phonics tip gives students extra information about sound-spelling patterns and pronunciation.

The Teacher's Book gives teachers all they need to understand the concepts in each Phonics focus section. Once they are aware of the underlying principles of phonics, they will be able to remind students of previous spelling patterns presented, providing the reinforcement which will help their students to remember and recycle what they have learned.



Mike flies by pies in the sky.

Content of the Phonics focus sections in Super Minds, unit by unit

Grapheme: one letter = one sound Digraph: two letters = one sound

Super Minds 1		
Unit	Phonics Focus	Concept
Welcome	—	
1	a	short vowel sound as in 'b <u>a</u> g'; consonant-verb-consonant (CVC) words
2	e	short vowel sound as in 'r <u>e</u> d' + a / e sounds contrast
3	i	short vowel sound as in 'f <u>i</u> sh' + a / e / i sounds contrast
4	o	short vowel sound as in 'd <u>o</u> g' + a / e / i / o
5	u	short vowel sound as in 's <u>u</u> n' + a / e / i / o / u
6	h	consonant h
7	st, sp, sk	consonant clusters with s
8	g	consonant g
9	ee / ea	long vowel ee and presentation of alternative spelling ea

Super Minds 2		
Unit	Phonics Focus	Concept
Welcome	—	
1	ee / ea	long vowel sound ee and alternative spelling (revision)
2	ie / y / i_e	long vowel sound ie and alternative spellings
3	gr / br / tr	initial consonant blends with r
4	w / wh	consonant w and alternative spelling wh (e.g. 'w <u>i</u> sh' and 'w <u>h</u> ite')
5	oo	long vowel sound oo with two pronunciations (e.g. 'b <u>oo</u> k' and 'p <u>oo</u> l')
6	ai / ay / a_e	long vowel sound ai and alternative spellings, including the split digraph a_e as in 'f <u>a</u> ce'
7	ue / oo	long vowel sound oo, alternative spellings and tricky words (e.g. 'fr <u>ui</u> t')
8	oa / o_e / ow	long vowel sound oa and alternative spellings including the split digraph o_e as in 'h <u>o</u> me'
9	s / z	consonant phonemes s and z with alternative pronunciation (s for z phoneme e.g. 'l <u>e</u> gs')

Super Minds 3

Unit	Phonics Focus	Concept
Welcome	a, e, i, o, u	Revision and contrast of short vowel sounds
1	The letters of the alphabet	Learning how to say the letters of the alphabet for spelling and further spelling patterns work
2	ie, i_e and tricky words	Rhyming tricky words with long vowel sounds (e.g. 'pie', 'I' and 'eye' have the same sound)
3	v / f	Contrasting two phonemes (voiced v and unvoiced f)
4	r / ar	Contrasting the r consonant sound (as in 'rat') with the ar long vowel phoneme (e.g. 'car')
5	s / sh	Contrasting consonant sounds s and sh (both unvoiced) and alternative spellings
6	a_e / e_e / i_e / o_e / u_e	Alternative spellings of long vowel sounds: split digraphs (i.e. final e makes the vowel sound long)
7	-ed endings	An introduction to /t/ and /d/ voiced and unvoiced consonants in regular past tense (e.g. 'loved' but 'hated')
8	y	Two different pronunciations of the letter y (long ee as in 'funny' and i as in 'gym')
9	er / ur / ir	Alternative spellings of the long vowel sound er (as in 'her', 'purple' and 'bird')

Super Minds 4

Unit	Phonics Focus	Concept
Welcome	oi / oy + oo / ue	Contrast two long vowel sounds as in 'boy' and 'blue'
1	ou + oa with ow	Two long vowel sounds + alternative spelling ow ('town' and 'snow')
2	silent letters	'Special' words containing silent letters (e.g. 'listen')
3	ie / igh	Long vowel sound ie + trigraph (three letters = one sound) alternative spelling igh (e.g. 'night')
4	air phoneme	air phoneme + tricky (special) words e.g. 'bear', 'where'
5	ar / or phonemes	Contrast two long vowel sounds ('farm' and 'horn')
6	ea spelling	two phonemes for ea (e.g. 'bread' / 'peas')
7	er / or	Contrast two long vowel sounds and alternative spellings (e.g. 'fern' and 'bird'; 'short' and 'tall')
8	er /ə/	The weak sound in unstressed syllables in words (e.g. 'farmer')
9	er /ə/	The weak sound in unstressed syllables in sentences (e.g. a cup of tea)

Super Minds 5

Unit	Phonics Focus	Concept
Welcome	Rhyming words	Learning alternative spelling patterns and exceptions through rhyming them with decodable words (e.g. 'too', 'you' and 'through')
1	Final e making long vowel sounds	Split digraphs (e.g. 'c <u>a</u> ke', 'th <u>e</u> se', 'b <u>i</u> ke', 'h <u>o</u> me' and 't <u>u</u> be')
2	ch and j	Contrast voiced and unvoiced consonants ('c <u>h</u> eat' and 'j <u>e</u> ep')
3	o and oa	Contrast short o and long oa sounds ('r <u>o</u> ck' and 'r <u>o</u> ll')
4	c and s	When c gives a s sound (e.g. 'c <u>i</u> ty')
5	doubled consonants	Doubled consonants make the vowel sound short (e.g. 's <u>i</u> lly' and 'r <u>u</u> nn <u>n</u> g')
6	sh / ch alternative spellings	Contrast soft sounds in special/tricky words such as 'st <u>a</u> tion' and 's <u>u</u> re' with ch sounds in words such as picture
7	silent e	Where the final e is not pronounced e.g. horse (as opposed to split digraphs where the final e makes the vowel sound long)
8	th	The voiced and unvoiced pronunciations of the digraph th
9	put, foot, should	The short /ʊ/ sound and its spellings

Super Minds 6

Unit	Phonics Focus	Concept
Welcome	Spelling patterns	Looking for alternative spellings of the same phonemes (revision)
1	-ure endings	The schwa at the end of words; the 'zh' sound as in 'treas <u>u</u> re' and ch sound as in 'p <u>i</u> ct <u>u</u> re'
2	-ion endings	The weak endings of the -ion suffix with ch, zh and sh pronunciation of previous consonant ('st <u>a</u> tion', 'revis <u>i</u> on' and 'quest <u>i</u> on')
3	-ed endings	The three possible pronunciations of the regular past tense ('ask <u>e</u> d', 'lov <u>e</u> d' and 'wait <u>e</u> d')
4	y	The four pronunciations of the letter y ('fl <u>y</u> ', 'fun <u>n</u> y', 's <u>y</u> mbol' and 'y <u>e</u> s')
5	s / z / c	Tricky words with the s or z pronunciation
6	words ending in -gh	Rhyming words ending in -gh with other words to remember their pronunciation (e.g. 'laugh-h <u>a</u> lf', 'rou <u>g</u> h-stuff')
7	u and special words	u phoneme in 's <u>u</u> n' but also 'o <u>u</u> e'
8	Word stress	Word stress in two, three and four syllable words (e.g. 'ad <u>v</u> enture')
9	or / aw / al	Alternative spellings for the or phoneme (e.g. 'r <u>o</u> ar', 'c <u>r</u> awl', 'h <u>o</u> rn' and 'dinos <u>a</u> ur').