

Reading and spelling are among the most important things your child will learn at school. The processes for learning to read and spell are complex, so knowing how to support your child at home can be tricky. To help with this, we've compiled answers to some frequently asked questions.

How many sounds are in Australian English?

There are 43 sounds in Australian English. These speech sounds are also known as *phonemes*. Every word in Australian English is produced using these 43 sounds. Children need to be able to count the sounds in words before they can read and spell. You can practise orally segmenting words into sounds with your child. For example:

- 'How many sounds are in the word *cat*? *Cat* has three sounds: /c/, /a/, /t!.'
- 'How many sounds are in the word *nest*? *Nest* has four sounds: /n/, /e/, /s/, /t!.'
- 'How many sounds are in the word *beach*? *Beach* has three sounds: /b/, /ea/, /ch!.'

Each sound has an accompanying 'Chant and Action', which you can watch with your child on the Sound Waves Online student site.

What is a grapheme?

A grapheme is a letter or a combination of letters that represents a sound. A grapheme can be a single letter (e.g. the **c** in **cat**), two letters (e.g. the **sh** in **ship**), three letters (e.g. the **eer** in **deer**) or four letters (e.g. the **eigh** in **eight**). Children first learn single-letter graphemes in the Foundation year, before learning more complex graphemes.

What is Sound Waves?

Sound Waves is a whole-school program developed by Australian teachers for use in Australian classrooms. Informed by research on the best practices for teaching reading and spelling, the program incorporates four key areas of teaching:

- phonemic awareness (knowledge of sounds)
- synthetic phonics (mapping sounds to letters)
- morphology (knowledge of the meaningful parts of words: prefixes, suffixes, and Greek and Latin roots)
- etymology (understanding of word origins and history).

Do reading and spelling develop naturally?

Reading and spelling require instruction as they don't develop naturally, unlike spoken language. Research from the education, linguistics and psychology fields confirms that teaching children the connection between sounds and letters (phonemes and graphemes) is the most effective way to learn how to read and spell. Using Sound Waves means your child will be taught to connect sounds with letters, learn spelling patterns and have lots of opportunities to apply this knowledge when reading, spelling and writing.

How does reading to my child support reading and spelling?

Reading children's literature to your child helps them learn about books, words and texts before formal instruction. It fosters language development and vocabulary, which contributes to the ease and efficiency of reading and spelling in the future. Additionally, it creates background knowledge, which contributes to reading comprehension. It also transports them to different worlds and places to hear stories from different people. Reading to your child doesn't need to stop once they begin reading, this practice can then turn into shared reading with your child where you each take turns reading.

How does spoken language impact reading and spelling?

To understand language at a text level (from a book), you must first have an understanding of language at an oral level. Spoken language contributes to the ease and efficiency of learning to read and spell. Research has identified that one of the major contributors to future reading success is the amount of time for ‘talk around dinner’.

To help your child build strong oral language skills, talk with them, discuss concepts, answer their questions and respond when they retell stories. Children need to hear a wide range of words and experience them in different contexts; it isn’t just about quantity, but also quality. Other ideas include:

- listening to audiobooks
- singing nursery rhymes
- playing games such as *Simon Says* or *I Spy* (using locations e.g. ‘I spy something on the carpet.’ or using sounds e.g. ‘I spy something beginning with /s/.’)
- engaging in imaginative play
- asking questions during reading (e.g. ‘How do you think the character feels?’).

What are the Sound Waves Decodable Readers?

Sound Waves Decodable Readers are short texts that only contain the phoneme–grapheme relationships children have been explicitly taught. Each book features one or more focus graphemes so children can practise reading words containing the focus phoneme–grapheme relationship/s in context. The Decodable Readers are to be read independently by children after the corresponding Sound Waves lesson covering the focus grapheme/s.

Children should read the Decodable Readers more than once to build fluency. This allows them to consolidate their understanding of previously taught phoneme–grapheme relationships and also practise reading with appropriate pace, tone and expression. The Sound Waves Decodable Readers are different to predictable books and don’t assign children a reading level. They enable children to blend phonemes to read words, rather than just looking at a picture or guessing.

How can I support my child during reading?

Your child’s teacher may send home Sound Waves Decodable Readers. Before listening to your child read, discuss the front cover and read the blurb to them. The Sound Waves Decodable Readers include tips on supporting your child during reading, and Book Chat questions to foster meaning and help build oral language. Talking about the book helps children build background knowledge and understand word meanings, which contribute to reading comprehension.

What is a Special Word?

Special Words are high-frequency words that contain unusual or advanced phoneme–grapheme relationships. For example, the word *said* is a Special Word because it contains **ai** for /e/ as in *egg*. These high-frequency words are taught in Sound Waves lessons and students practise reading them in context in the Sound Waves Decodable Readers.