Phonics screening check

2025 scoring guidance

Pronunciation of real words and pseudo-words

Some of the graphemes used in the check represent a number of different phonemes. When decoding a real word in the check, the child has to select the correct phoneme for the word, for example the 'ow' in 'blow' should not be pronounced as the 'ow' in 'cow'.

The tables on the next page provide guidance on some examples of common pronunciations of the pseudo-words in the check. When decoding a pseudo-word, all plausible alternative and regional pronunciations are acceptable.

Contact details
For more information about the phonics screening check, please contact the national curriculum assessments helpline on 0300 303 3013 or email assessments@education.gov.uk.

Section 1: When decoding a pseudo-word, all plausible alternative and regional pronunciations are acceptable.

Pseudo-word	Acceptable pronunciation	Phonemic representation
dup	This item uses the 'd' from 'dig' and rhymes with 'cup'.	/dʌp/ or /dʊp/
hib	This item uses the 'h' from 'hill' and rhymes with 'bib'.	/hɪb/
gox	This item uses the 'g' from 'gap' and rhymes with 'box'.	/gɒks/
ags	This item uses the 'a' from 'at' and rhymes with 'bags'.	/ægz/ or /ægs/
yech	This item uses the 'ye' from 'yell' with the 'ch' in 'check' or 'school'.	/jɛtʃ/ or /jɛk/
quog	This item uses the 'qu' from 'quiz' and rhymes with 'smog'.	/kwɒg/
loip	This item combines the 'l' from 'leap' with the 'oi' from 'boil' and the 'p' from 'loop'.	/lɔɪp/
chuss	This item uses the 'ch' from 'chick' and rhymes with 'fuss'.	/tʃʌs/ or /tʃʊs/
clen	This item uses the 'cl' from 'clap' and rhymes with 'then'.	/klɛn/
stizz	This item uses the 'st' from 'stick' and rhymes with 'whizz'.	/stɪz/
pult	This item combines the 'p' from 'park' with the 'u' from 'gulp' and the 'lt' from 'melt'.	/pʌlt/ or /pʊlt/
heeft	This item combines the 'h' from 'hair' with the 'ee' from 'keep' and the 'ft' from 'swift'.	/hiːft/

Section 2: When decoding a pseudo-word, all plausible alternative and regional pronunciations are acceptable.

Pseudo-word	Acceptable pronunciation	Phonemic representation
jigh	This item uses the 'j' from 'jump' and rhymes with 'high'.	/dʒaɪ/
saunt	This item uses the 's' from 'seeds' and rhymes with 'taunt'.	/sɔːnt/
virp	This item uses the 'v' from 'void' and rhymes with 'chirp'.	/vɜːp/ or /vɜrp/
phope	This item uses the 'ph' from 'photo' and rhymes with 'scope'.	/fəʊp/
sleft	This item uses the 'sl' from 'slant' and rhymes with 'theft'.	/slɛft/
thresk	This item uses the 'thr' from 'throw' and rhymes with 'desk'.	/θrɛsk/ or /ðrɛsk/
spleg	This item uses the 'spl' from 'split' and rhymes with 'peg'.	/splɛg/
strume	This item uses the 'str' from 'strap' and rhymes with 'plume'.	/struːm/