

# **Phonics Check for teachers**

## **Administration guide**

# Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Participating students	4
3	Preparing for the Phonics Check	4
3.1	Receiving your materials	4
3.2	Adapting Phonics Check materials	5
3.3	Teachers' responsibilities	5
3.4	Students with special needs	5
3.5	Time for the Phonics Check	6
4	Administering the Phonics Check	6
4.1	Process	6
4.2	Completing the answer sheet using the paper-based version of the Phonics Check	7
4.3	Scoring the Phonics Check	7
5	Results and reporting	8
6	Sample script	9
7	Annotating student errors: Example	10

# 1 | Introduction

This guide contains information for teachers and school leaders about the Year 1 Phonics Check.

The Phonics Check will confirm if students are developing the phonics knowledge they need to be successful in their reading, spelling and writing programs. As a first step, teachers can respond to students' performance in the Phonics Check by reviewing the existing phonics program. Then design appropriate differentiated learning and intervention processes for reading, spelling and writing.

An understanding of phonics is foundational to the development of writing, spelling and reading skills and is one component of *The 'Big 6' components of reading*<sup>1</sup>. In the Australian Curriculum English language strand, alphabet and phonics knowledge begins in Foundation (Reception) and continues until the end of Year 6, with ongoing application in years 7 to 10. From Year 3 onwards, knowledge about phonological and phonemic awareness will continue to be applied in written words as students develop their spelling knowledge. The *National Literacy Learning Progression*<sup>2</sup> maps the development of these skills. Phonics is an integral part of writing, spelling and reading.

<sup>1</sup><http://tiny.cc/BestAdviceLit>

<sup>2</sup><http://tiny.cc/AClitProgression>

## 2 | Participating students

- The Phonics Check is administered to Year 1 students by the classroom teacher.
- Any Year 1 student can be included in the Phonics Check unless they have no understanding of grapheme–phoneme correspondences (eg a student who has recently arrived in Australia from a non-English speaking background; or a student who has a language or developmental delay).

Students who do not formally participate in the Phonics Check could be provided with a similar experience (eg modify the ‘practice sheet’ to include single letters or simple two-letter blends so that students can demonstrate their skills).

## 3 | Preparing for the Phonics Check

### 3.1 | Accessing the Phonics Check materials (online and offline)

Familiarise yourself with the Phonics Check materials before you are ready to administer the Phonics Check. These include:

- the Phonics Check student materials
- multiple copies (one per student) of the Phonics Check answer sheet
- the Phonics Check practice sheet
- one copy of the Phonics Check scoring guidance.

## 3.2 | Adapting Phonics Check materials

We expect most students will use standard versions of the Phonics Check, but you may adapt Phonics Check materials to meet students' specific needs. Examples of modifications may include:

- changing the font
- changing the font size
- having fewer words per page
- removing the imaginary creatures for any students who might find them distracting
- using a coloured overlay if this is normal classroom practice.

See the PDF versions of student materials (with colour pictures, black-and-white pictures, and no pictures). These are available to download and amend as necessary.

## 3.3 | The teacher's role

- Administer the Phonics Check to Year 1 students on a one-to-one basis.
- Being familiar with the Phonics Check materials will help make the process smooth.
- Set up your room so that there is a quiet, comfortable and well-lit space.
- Feel confident about:
  - administering the Phonics Check
  - amending the Phonics Check for students with special needs (eg by amending font size or background colour)
  - dealing with administration issues (such as rest breaks) during the Phonics Check
  - scoring the Phonics Check.
- Plan differentiated learning for your students.

## 3.4 | Students with special needs

- For students with special needs, make adjustments based on normal classroom practice.
- Changes should not unfairly benefit individual students.
- It may be helpful to use the practice sheet with students before administering the Phonics Check as this may indicate if modifications need to be made (eg including fewer words per page, changing font or font size or allowing for a rest break).
- The sample script can be modified if required but teachers must not refer to words in the actual Phonics Check.

### 3.5 | Time allocation for the Phonics Check

- There is **no time limit** for completing the Phonics Check.
- Most students take 5 to 7 minutes to complete the Phonics Check.
- Give students enough time to respond to each word (10 seconds is usually enough).
- If needed, give individual students short rest breaks but **finish the Phonics Check on the same day**.

## 4 | Administering the Phonics Check

### 4.1 | Process

- Introduce the Phonics Check to each student as consistently as possible, providing enough information to those students who do not initially understand the task. For an example of how to introduce the Phonics Check, see *Section 6: Sample script*.
- You can use the printed double-sided 'practice sheet' to familiarise students with the task. It has four pseudo words and four real words on each side.
- Provide guidance about using the practice sheet, if needed, to ensure students understand the task. Remind students that the sounds must be blended together to say the whole word. Demonstrate what you mean using one of the practice words. (However, this instruction must not be given during the actual Phonics Check.)
- It is important to tell students if there are real words or made up words that match pictures of funny creatures on each page.
- You may prompt the student to move to the next word but be careful not to do so while they are in the process of decoding the word.
- You can indicate which word comes next but be careful not to provide decoding clues (eg pointing left to right).
- Offer encouragement and support during the Phonics Check but do not indicate whether the student has decoded the word correctly or not.
- You know your students best and you will recognise when it is appropriate to take a rest break or when it is appropriate to completely cease the Phonics Check.

## 4.2 | Completing the answer sheet using the paper-based version of the Phonics Check

- If you are using a paper version of the Phonics Check, use the answer sheets to record each student's responses.
- If you are using the online Phonics Check, follow the prompts to record each student's responses
- Add your own comments to help you plan future phonics teaching (eg *the student found blending difficult, and did not know a grapheme*). It is important to record both the errors and the nature of the errors.

## 4.3 | Scoring the Phonics Check

- Refer to the PDF *Scoring guidance sheet* for acceptable pronunciations of the Phonics Check's pseudo words (eg *blan* uses the 'bl' from 'black' and rhymes with 'pan').
- You can record whether the student said the word correctly or not by using the PDF *Answer sheet*. Students score one point for the correct decoding of each word, for a total score out of 40.
- Take into consideration the following points when scoring the student's response:

Score as 'Got it'	Score as 'Not yet'
Sounds out the phonemes, or names the letters, and then says the word	Sounds out the phonemes but does not blend the word (no prompting allowed)
Elongates the phonemes but then blends them to form the word	Elongates the phonemes but leaves gaps and doesn't blend them
Uses alternative pronunciations of graphemes in pseudo words	Inappropriate pronunciations of real words (eg reading 'blow' to rhyme with 'cow')
Corrects initial attempts and finishes with the correct pronunciation	Correctly attempts a word but then re-corrects and finishes with an incorrect pronunciation
Pronunciation difficulties (eg student usually says 'fw' for 'th')	
Words pronounced with the student's accent	

## 5 | Results and reporting

The most valuable use of the Phonics Check results will be at the classroom level. You can find useful information to help you analyse the data you collect from each student's results in the PDF *Analysing and responding to results*.

The expected achievement level of 28 out of 40 items provides teachers with a sense of what is reasonable to expect for Year 1 students, given the requirements of the Australian Curriculum. **Please note that this is not a pass/fail mark.** Rather, it is an indication of the score a student might achieve if their phonics learning is progressing as expected.

After recording the results:

- Did your students do as well as you expected?
- Were there any surprises? (Which students performed better/worse than expected? Is it clear why?)
- How close to mastery of the grapheme–phoneme correspondences are your students? What do they need to learn next?



## 6 | Sample script

### **Introducing the Phonics Check: Example**

In this activity, I am going to ask you to read some words aloud.

You may have seen some of the words before and others will be new to you.

You should try to read each word but don't worry if you can't. If it helps you, you may sound out the letters before trying to say the word.

This 'practice sheet' shows you what the words will look like.

Have a go at reading out loud these four words which you may have come across before [at, in, beg and sum].

The words on this side [turn over 'practice sheet'] are not real words. They are made up words for each of the imaginary creatures. You can see a picture of the creature next to each word.

Can you read out the words on this page for me [ot, vap, osk and ect]?

Okay, now we are going to start reading out some words and I'm going to write down what you say.

I will tell you at the start whether they are real words that you may have seen before or made up names for imaginary creatures.

The first words are names for imaginary creatures and you can see their pictures.

Can you start reading the words to me?

## 7 | Annotating student errors: Example

Recording incorrect responses in a meaningful way will give teachers a clearer means of analysing the data collected from the Phonics Check. Below is a sample of *one* way you could record student errors when decoding a word.

Student response	Notation	Example annotation	
		Got it	Not yet
Correctly sounded	Mark each correctly sounded letter with a tick	✓✓✓ l i g	
Omission of sound	Strike through the omitted letter sound		floost
Substitution	Write the substituted letter above the letter in the word		g c r i f f
Insertion – with sounding out	Add the sound and place a caret where the sound was added		shup ^ m
Insertion – without sounding out	Some students will just say the word with the additional sound included – so just record the insertion		shup ^ m
Self-corrected	Write SC above the corrected letter or after the corrected word (eg student says 'brast' then 'barst' SC)	SC d barst	
Repeated sound	Write R above the repeated sound or after the repeated word	R stribestribe R	
Incorrectly blended	Write the incorrect word in the incorrect column of the answer sheet		woats wats
Letter name said instead of sound	Mark the letter as a capital		M mep
Digraph read as two separate sounds	Write the sounds with a '\ ' between them		oi\i doil
Reversal of adjacent letters sounds	Make a curved arrow between reversed letter sounds		tram ↻

Notes

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