

How to Sound Out Words You Don't Know

KS2 ENGLISH

PHONICS

READING SKILLS

Ages 9-12 ⌚ 3 min read

What Does It Mean to Sound Out a Word?

Sounding out means breaking a word into smaller pieces and saying each sound, then blending them together to hear the whole word. It's one of the most useful tools for reading words you've never seen before.

When you come across an unfamiliar word, your brain doesn't have to give up. Instead, you can use the **letters** and **sounds** you already know to figure it out. This strategy is called **phonics** — using letter sounds to decode words.

Think of it like building a LEGO tower. You don't need to know what the finished tower looks like — you just stack each brick one at a time and see what you create.

How to Sound Out Words Step by Step

Step 1: Look at the word carefully. Notice which **letters** are at the beginning, middle, and end. Pay attention to any letter patterns you recognise, like **ch**, **th**, or **ing**.

Step 2: Break the word into chunks. Don't try to sound out every letter. Instead, group letters that make sounds together. For example, in the word 'butterfly', you might see: **but-ter-fly**.

Step 3: Say each chunk aloud. Don't worry about pronouncing it perfectly the first time. Just say the sounds you see.

Step 4: Blend the sounds together. Push the sounds closer and closer until they merge into one word. Slow down at first, then speed up until it sounds right.

Think of it like following a recipe. You add each ingredient one by one, and then mix them together to create something whole.

Useful Tips for Better Sounding Out

Look for **common patterns** like **silent letters** (k in 'knight', b in 'climb') and **vowel teams** (oa, ea, ai) that make one sound together. If you're stuck, try saying the word

different ways — sometimes the second or third try will sound familiar.

Remember that some words in English are **tricky** and don't follow the normal rules. Words like 'said' and 'two' can't be sounded out perfectly, so it's okay to ask for help or check a dictionary.

Most importantly, sounding out is a **superpower** that gets faster and easier with practice. Every time you successfully decode a new word, your brain remembers it better next time.