

## Blending CVC Words: Why 'Sound-Talking' Comes Before Reading Whole Words

A gentle guide to oral blending, the skill of listening to separate sounds and putting them together to hear a whole word, which helps children in Reception start their reading journey.

### What is blending?

Blending is a key part of phonics, which is the method schools use to teach children how to read and write by linking sounds to letters. Specifically, we are looking at CVC words. CVC stands for 'consonant-vowel-consonant'—simple three-letter words like 'cat', 'dog', or 'pin'. Before children read these words on a page, they often practice 'oral blending'. This is simply 'sound-talking', where a child listens to the individual sounds (phonemes) and blends them together in their head to say the word aloud, without needing to see the letters first.

### How it works

When a child blends, they take separate sounds—for example, /c/ /a/ /t/—and push them together to make 'cat'. In the classroom, the teacher might say the sounds slowly, and the child identifies the word. This is a vital bridge to reading. If a child can blend sounds they hear, it becomes much easier for them to blend sounds they see in a book. It prevents the common habit of guessing a word based only on the first letter or a picture, ensuring they are actually decoding the word based on its sounds.

### What this means for your child

Every child learns at their own pace. For some children in Reception (the first year of primary school), blending sounds comes naturally. For others, especially children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) or those learning English as an additional language, it can take a little more time and playful practice. The goal is to build their confidence so that when they encounter a CVC word in a book, they have the mental 'muscle memory' to blend the sounds together smoothly rather than feeling overwhelmed.

### Fun ways to help at home

You don't need any special equipment to help your child. Try playing 'I Spy' with sounds. Instead of saying 'I spy a dog', try 'I spy a /d/ /o/ /g/'. See if they can guess the word! You can start with simple word families, like the 'at' family (cat, mat, sat) or the 'op' family (hop, mop, top). Keep it short and playful—just a few sounds while you are in the car or making dinner. If you are unsure which sounds your child is learning, your child's teacher can tell you which ones to focus on.

### Common questions

Parents often ask why their child can't just read the word immediately. It is because hearing the sounds first builds the foundation for reading. Another common question is whether to use letter names (like 'cee') or sounds (like 'cuh'). In phonics, we use the sounds, as these are what children blend together to make words. If you are worried about your child's progress or if they seem stuck, the best thing to do is have a quick chat with their teacher to see how they can be supported.

## Sources

- Department for Education, 'The reading framework'
- GOV.UK, 'National curriculum in England: early years foundation stage'