

Which Picture Goes With the Word? Matching Sounds to Objects in Reception Phonics

Key points

- Before children learn to read, they need to hear a sound and know what it means—this is the bridge between saying sounds out loud and reading words on the page.
- In Reception, children learn to listen to the first sound in a word and point to the matching picture or object; this is an important step on the path to phonics.
- Some children find this trickier than blending whole words, and that is perfectly normal—their listening and memory skills are still developing.
- Matching sounds to meaning builds your child's confidence and shows them that the sounds they say connect to real things around them.
- This skill helps when children later learn the letter-sound relationships (grapheme-phoneme correspondence) that they will use to read and write.

Things to try at home

- Sound hunts: walk around the house or garden together, point to objects and say their first sound, then ask 'What does /c/ say?' when you see a cup or cat.
- Picture sorts: gather five or six familiar pictures or real objects (a ball, banana, car, dog, egg) and say a sound, then let your child choose which one matches.
- Sing the same song or nursery rhyme each week and ask your child to clap or jump every time they hear the target sound.
- Play 'I spy' with sounds instead of colours: 'I spy something that starts with /s/' and let your child guess and point.
- Keep it playful and short—two to three minutes is plenty, and stop if your child loses interest.

Find out more

- Your child's school or Reception teacher can explain which sounds are being taught this term and how you can support.
- GOV.UK publishes the National Curriculum for English, which explains what children learn in Reception and Key Stage 1.
- The Department for Education phonics guidance outlines how phonics is taught in England's schools.