Blending Longer Words: Helping Your Child Read Words Like 'frog', 'stop' and 'must'

Key points

- Once your child can read simple three-sound words like 'cat' or 'dog', the next step is words with four sounds, such as 'frog', 'stop' and 'must'.
- A 'consonant cluster' is two or more consonants next to each other in a word, like the 'fr' at the start of 'frog' or the 'st' at the end of 'must'; each consonant keeps its own sound.
- Clusters can be harder to hear and say because the sounds run together, so it is normal for children to need extra time and practice with them.
- 'Blending' means joining the sounds in a word together, one after another, until the whole word is read; children usually do this slowly first and speed up as it becomes familiar.
- Phonics is the method of learning letters and the sounds they make, and the Phonics Screening Check is a short check taken by Year 1 pupils in England near the end of the school year.
- Different schools use different phonics programmes and approaches, so the exact methods your child uses may vary, and your child's teacher is the best person to ask about what they are working on.

Things to try at home

- Say a word slowly and tap a finger for each sound as you go, for example 'f-r-o-g', so your child can see that the word has four sounds even when it sounds like one.
- Try the 'robot arm' game: move one arm forwards for each sound, then sweep both arms together to say the whole word at normal speed, and let your child lead the robot if they like.
- Spot words on a walk or at the shops, such as 'stop' on a sign or 'frog' in a picture book, and sound them out together with a smile.
- Play a quick 'I spy' using sounds, for example 'I spy something that starts with the sounds f-r', and let your child guess the word.
- Read a favourite story together, and when you come to a longer word, let your child have a go at blending it while you cheer them on, stopping whenever they want a break.

Find out more

- GOV.UK: 'Phonics screening check' guidance, which explains what the check is and how it is run in England (search for this title on gov.uk).
- GOV.UK: 'National curriculum in England: English programmes of study', which sets out what pupils are expected to learn in reading and phonics in Key Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2).
- Your child's class teacher or the school's phonics or reading leader, who can explain which programme the school uses and how your child is getting on.