

EYFS · PRE-K / RECEPTION / K

Pre-Phonics

30 activities to build foundations

Why pre-phonics matters

Many children arrive in Reception not yet ready for formal phonics — not because of any deficit, but because they haven't yet developed phonological awareness (hearing rhythm, rhyme, syllables, sounds). Trying to teach letter-sound mapping to a child who can't yet hear the sounds is like teaching reading to a child who can't yet see. These activities build the prerequisite skills. Most of them take 5 minutes. Most are oral. None require children to know letters yet.

Listening (5 activities)

#	Activity
1	Sound walks — outside, eyes closed, 'what can you hear?'
2	Mystery sounds — recording everyday sounds, children guess
3	Sound stories — adult tells story, children make sound effects
4	Listening lotto — match heard sound to picture
5	Quiet game — who can be the quietest? Builds attention

Rhythm and beat (5 activities)

#	Activity
6	Clapping names — Sof-i-a (3 claps), Sam (1 clap)



#	Activity
7	Body percussion — copy patterns (clap, stomp, click)
8	Drumming on knees to a known song
9	March-and-stop games — keep moving to the beat, freeze when it stops
10	Loud-and-quiet — same beat, different volumes

Rhyme (5 activities)

#	Activity
11	Rhyming pairs — bear / chair, hat / cat. Picture cards.
12	Rhyming odd-one-out — three pictures, two rhyme, which doesn't?
13	Nursery rhymes daily — repeated, sung, finger-played
14	'I'm thinking of a word that rhymes with...'
15	Rhyme stories — Julia Donaldson books are perfect

Alliteration (5 activities)

#	Activity
16	Same first sound — 'sun, sock, snake' — what's the same?
17	Treasure bag — collect objects starting with the same sound
18	Tongue twisters — Sammy snake's silly socks
19	First-sound match — picture cards in pairs
20	Names and first sounds — 'Sofia starts with sssss'

Oral blending and segmenting (5 activities)



#	Activity
21	Adult sounds out CVC word slowly, children guess: c-a-t → cat
22	Robot talk — 'Robot Mr Smith says: pick up your c-o-a-t'
23	Sound talk in tidy-up time — 'put away the b-l-o-cks'
24	Sound bag — adult sounds out object name, child finds it
25	Toy says 'I want a t-r-e-e' — children find / draw it

Voice play (5 activities)

#	Activity
26	Animal sounds — match to pictures, exaggerate them
27	High and low voices — 'now in a giant voice... now in a mouse voice'
28	Lip and tongue twisters — 'bbbbbb', 'pppppp'
29	Vehicle sounds — vrooom, beeeep, choo-choo
30	Voice stories — children take turns adding to a sound story

How to integrate

Don't make these activities into a separate 'lesson.' Sprinkle them throughout the day: • **MORNINGS** — sound walks, rhyming time on the carpet • **TRANSITIONS** — clapping names, voice play • **OUTDOOR** — listening, big body movements with rhythm • **END OF DAY** — story time, nursery rhyme • **1:1** — when you have a moment with a child, oral blending in passing 5-10 minutes of pre-phonics work per day, every day, builds the muscle. By the time formal phonics starts, children are ready.

When to move into Phase 2 phonics

A child is ready for letter-sound work (Phase 2) when they can: • Hear the rhythm in words (clap names confidently) • Hear rhymes (and produce a few) • Identify same first sounds in words ('what sound do sock and sun start with?') • Orally blend simple CVC words ('c-a-t' → cat) •



Orally segment simple CVC words ('what sounds are in dog?' → 'd-o-g') Most children are ready by mid-Reception. Some take longer. That's not a problem unless other indicators are also delayed. Trust the readiness, don't force it.

