



• Cracking the Code: Key Terms for Parents

A Parent-Friendly Literacy Glossary

Alphabetic Principle

The understanding that letters and letter patterns represent the sounds in spoken language.

Background Knowledge

What a child already knows about the world. Strong background knowledge helps children understand what they read.

Blending

Putting individual sounds together to read a word.

Example: /m/ /ă/ /t/ → **mat**

Comprehension

Understanding the meaning of what is read. This is the ultimate goal of reading.

Consonant Blend

Two or more consonants that appear together, where each sound can still be heard.

Examples: **bl, st, gr, fl**

Consonant Digraph

Two consonants that work together to make one sound.

Examples: **sh, ch, th, ck, wh**

Decodable Text

Reading material that mainly includes letter-sound patterns a child has already learned.

This helps children practice reading with success.

Decoding

Using knowledge of letters and sounds to read words.

Encoding

Using knowledge of sounds and letters to spell words.

Fluency

Reading with accuracy, appropriate speed, and expression. Fluent reading sounds smooth and helps children focus on meaning.





- **Grapheme**

A letter or group of letters that represents a sound.
Example: The sound /f/ can be written as f, ff, or ph.

High-Frequency Words

Words that appear often in reading and writing. Some are easy to sound out, while others have tricky parts.

Examples: the, said, was, you

Irregular Word

A word that has one or more parts that do not follow the expected spelling pattern. These words still have sounds we can map, but they may have a “tricky part.”

Example: said

Letter-Sound Correspondence

The connection between a letter and the sound it represents.

Example: The letter m represents the sound /m/.

Morphology

The study of meaningful word parts, such as prefixes, suffixes, and base words.

Example: unhelpful = un + help + ful

Multisyllabic Word

A word with more than one syllable.

Examples: sunset, fantastic, remember

Orthographic Mapping

The process the brain uses to store words for quick and automatic reading. Children map sounds to letters so words become familiar over time.

Phoneme

The smallest unit of sound in a word.

Example: ship has three phonemes: /sh/ /ɪ/ /p/

Phonemic Awareness

The ability to hear, identify, and work with individual sounds in spoken words.

Phonics

Instruction that teaches the relationship between sounds and letters.





• **Phonological Awareness**

The ability to hear and work with the sound structure of spoken language. This includes rhyming, syllables, and individual sounds.

Prefix

A word part added to the beginning of a word that changes its meaning.

Examples: un-, re-, pre-

R-Controlled Vowel

A vowel followed by the letter r, which changes the vowel sound.

Examples: ar, er, ir, or, ur

Segmenting

Breaking a word into its individual sounds.

Example: dog → /d/ /ŏ/ /g/

Sight Word

A word a child can recognize automatically. Sight words are not just memorized by shape; they become automatic when the brain maps the sounds to the letters.

Structured Literacy

A clear, systematic, and explicit approach to teaching reading and spelling. It includes phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and morphology.

Suffix

A word part added to the end of a word that changes its meaning or grammatical role.

Examples: -ing, -ed, -ful, -less

Syllable

A word part that has one vowel sound.

Examples: cat has 1 syllable; sunset has 2 syllables.

Vocabulary

The words a child knows and understands. Strong vocabulary supports reading comprehension.

Vowel Digraph

Two vowels that work together to make one sound.

Examples: ea, ai, oa, ee





• **Word Attack Skills**

Strategies children use to read unfamiliar words, such as looking at the sounds, breaking the word into parts, and blending.

Word Recognition

The ability to read words accurately and automatically.

Parent-Friendly Reminder

Reading is not guessing from pictures, memorizing word shapes, or skipping tricky words. Strong readers learn to connect sounds, letters, and meaning so they can read with confidence and understanding.

