

Chapter 6. Sequence, content and lesson ideas for teaching the basic code

Introduction

This chapter sets out Basic Code Plus, a simple-to-complex sequence of phoneme-grapheme correspondences and sample lessons that take into account the mature language experience of post-16 learners. It can be carefully scaffolded for your least confident learners or less structured for those who need to fill in some gaps in their knowledge of how English works as a code.

The sequence in structured and sequential phonics is simply the order in which the phonemes and graphemes are introduced for spelling and reading. In post-16 phonics, the sequence should move quickly from simple to complex, and allow the teaching to move from explicit to incidental as learners internalise the concepts from [Chapter 5](#) and become more confident using them.

Basic Code Plus allows for very rapid progression because most post-16 learners already know the basic code. Basic Code Plus gives them solid ground to stand on whilst learning how to negotiate longer and more complex words.

6.1 What is Basic Code Plus?

Basic Code Plus is the introduction to using the English code for reading and spelling, starting with the simplest and most frequent sound-to-letter correspondences. It gradually adds complexity, including digraphs, and a taste of working with the one-to-many concepts. This is that a single grapheme can represent more than one sound and a single phoneme can be spelt with more than one grapheme. One-to-many is covered in more detail in [Chapter 7](#).

At this level, focus your teaching on learners gaining long word confidence and seeing how reading and spelling are reversible when using the basic code. We approach words as puzzles that can be taken apart, put back together and manipulated to create new words. In each box is an idea for applying this 'words as puzzles' idea.

Your least confident learners will need lots of practice, but your more confident learners will need fresh challenges at this level or to move quickly through it.

Below is an idea of what a simple to complex and explicit to incidental sequence could look like. The order is important at the very beginning because it's carefully scaffolded to build confidence in your least confident learners. As they progress, the need for structure is less.

6.2 The sequence in Basic Code Plus

Box A (below) is the recommended starting place for all learners even if you only work on words with two or more syllables. Boxes B to E contain essential content but can be covered in any order that suits you and your learners. Whatever order you choose, make sure to include content you've worked on previously so learners keep practising whilst moving forward.

In each of the boxes A, B, C, D and E, you can do word, sentence and text level work. Move from spelling with the graphemes visible to word reading, then onto spelling without the graphemes visible. This helps learners discover for themselves how the code works from sound to print and print to sound. In the process they'll learn to read and spell hundreds of words. You can create a variety of support activities for practising at every stage.

The words in each of the boxes below are samples of the type of words learners will be able to spell and read at that level and beyond. If you follow the order laid out below, each lesson or activity will include the concepts and letter/sound correspondences of all the previous ones.

This basic sequence is a natural starting place for Entry Level 1 and assumes learners can speak English fairly fluently and have no or mild learning difficulties. If your learners need more support, that is, they don't know the basic alphabet letters and sounds, or don't yet speak English, you can introduce the phonemes and graphemes from Box A more gradually. However, do challenge learners who can do more to move more quickly. Post-16 phonics helps learners engage latent phonic knowledge enabling them to move quickly through Basic Code Plus.

Box A. One sound to one letter plus <qu> /kw/ and <x> /ks/

Single syllable and multi-syllable words

a e i o u (short vowel sounds only: /æ, e, ɪ, ʊ, ʌ/)

b d c k f g h j l m n ng p q r s t v w x y z

Double consonants (final): ff ll ss zz

Sample words:

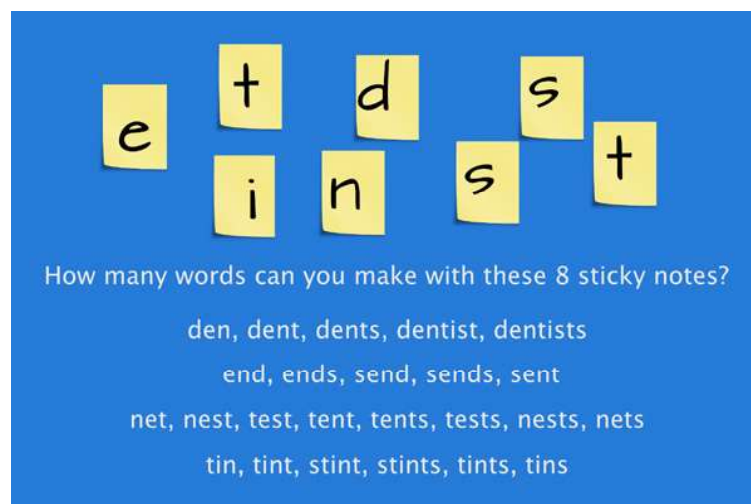
tap, max, quit, mop, dub, yap, mill, tell, buzz, lamp, stand, stamp, cliff, strand, scrimp, rang, fling, strong, upset, laptop, transit, fantastic, profit, inspect, invent, dentist, insect, contest, umbrella (unstressed final syllable)

Activity: Word stretching

Word stretching activity: write each grapheme /d/e/n/t/i/s/t/ on a separate small sticky note. Give a set to each learner or pair of learners. Ask them to build the word 'den'.

Change den to **dent**; change dent to **dents**; change dents to **dentist** – think about the sounds as you're moving the sticky notes around. It works best if learners are saying the sounds as they're working. Have them write each word after they've built it. How would they write '**dentists**'?

You can do this type of activity very early on with emergent readers and writers using graphemes and phonemes to build familiar words.



How many words can you make with these 8 sticky notes?

den, dent, dents, dentist, dentists

end, ends, send, sends, sent

net, nest, test, tent, tents, tests, nests, nets

tin, tint, stint, stints, tints, tins

➤ **Note:** double letters like **zz**, **ll**, and **ss** each go on one sticky note rather than two because they are each a single grapheme.

qu also goes on one sticky note even though it represents two sounds.

Box B. ch sh th (th)

Sample words:

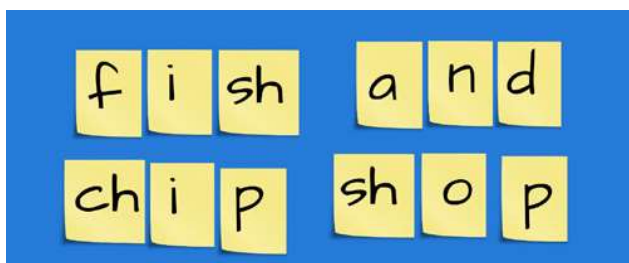
chip, shop, that, this, bath, crunch, lunch, brush, crash, crush, thanks,
lunchbox, astonish (unstressed first syllable), embellish, sandwich, bathtub

Activity: Introducing new graphemes

You can use sticky notes to introduce new graphemes. Ask everyone to say the sounds as they build the words. If they don't say the sounds, it can quickly become a visual spelling activity. Rather, keep the sounds up so it becomes an activity in discovering how English works as a code for spelling.

Make sticky note puzzles with one grapheme on each puzzle; that means sh, ch and th each go on one sticky note. Emergent spellers who think they can't write much can quickly be spelling 'fish and chip shop'.

The puzzle pieces for that are /f/i/sh/a/n/d/ch/i/p/sh/o/p/. You can differentiate by doing one word at a time or by putting all the graphemes on the table and talking through the sounds in each word.



Box C. c. ck ay oy

Sample words:

snack, flack, flick, track, trick, truck, backrest, jacket (unstressed syllable)

tray, stray, spray, payday

joy, soy, toy, enjoy, employ, employment (unstressed final syllable)

Activity: Syllable combining

The sticky note puzzle for employment is /e/m/p/l/oy/m/e/n/t/



You can do this as a syllable combining activity. Have them build **em** then **ploy** then **ment**. Explain that syllables aren't usually the same as words and are often easier to spell.

Now get them to make employ then employment. Have them write it. Ask if anyone would like to try spelling it without the sticky notes in front of them.

Encourage everyone to keep thinking in sounds so they're not just saying letter names.

Box D. Endings -ed -y -le -er -ing plus incidental one-to-many

Sample words:

sprayed, employed, snacked, inspected, snapped, astonishing, twenty, plenty, happy, simmer, hammer, little, trickle

More double consonants (final and medial): bb dd gg mm nn pp rr tt

Incidental one-to-many spelling: Learner is writing a card and asks, "How do you spell the 'er' (/ɜːr/) in Happy Birthday?"

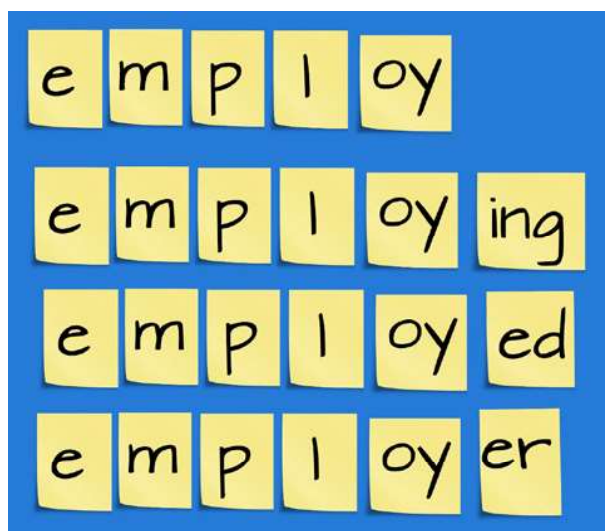
Incidental one-to-many reading: Learners encounter a long vowel spelt with one letter – table, be, wind, so, university – and adjust the sound from short to long to hear words which make sense in the context.

Activity: Endings

Put endings on a single sticky note even if they have more than one sound.

Add sticky notes with /ing/ /er/ /ed/ to the 'employment' puzzle and have learners create new words and write them saying the sounds and endings.

This activity is a multi-sensory and learner-centred way to fulfil the FES Entry Level 1 requirements to read and spell 'common two-syllable words with ay and oy' and '-ed for the past tense when the root word remains unchanged'.



Box E. Split digraphs – tap tape, pet Pete, fin fine, mop mope, cut cute

Sample words:

save, plane, theme, eve, quite, site, crime, robe, slope, drove, tube, cube, mute, pavement, scheme, concrete, dispute, compute

Activity: Split digraphs

When you make a puzzle with a split digraph, the two parts of the digraph are on separate sticky notes and underlined to show they represent one phoneme.

The puzzle pieces for **concrete** are /c/o/n/c/r/e/e/t/

For **pavement** they're /p/a/v/e/m/e/n/t/



6.3 Additional word-level lesson ideas

In Post-16 phonics, word-level work provides the building blocks for sentence level work and text work. Here we set out some ideas for working with words.

Spelling words with the graphemes visible

This is a confidence-building way into spelling. Ask learners to listen for the sounds in a word, identify the correct graphemes for those sounds on a chart, then write them, saying the sounds. Those learners who don't need to look at the graphemes are already spelling, so they can move on. Some will be able to spell at the start, so ask if they'd like the graphemes visible or not.

Single-syllable words

More support: limit the number of visible graphemes to a handful or even only those in the word you're going to spell. If you're not sure, ask your learners if something is too difficult or they need more challenge. Successful post-16 phonics constantly asks learners how they feel about what they're learning, and whether or not the pace is right for them.

Words with two or more syllables

Ask them to say the word in clear syllables. This is descriptive rather than prescriptive, so either rap/id or ra/pid is correct. Likewise, they might say yell/ow or ye/llo w but they won't say yel/low as you might have seen it in a dictionary or split in text. Syllables in post-16 phonics reflect natural speech.

For longer words, limit the graphemes to those required for the word. Make puzzle pieces with one grapheme per piece, on sticky notes or scrap paper, or get everyone to write the correct graphemes, out of order, on a white board. So, the graphemes in 'happy' are h/a/pp/y (four puzzle pieces) and in 'employment' are e/m/p/l/oy/m/e/n/t (nine puzzle pieces). Then they can put them back in the right order as they say each syllable.

Reading words out of context (pure decoding – meaning might need to be supplied by practitioner)

Ask learners to say the sounds in a familiar word one by one and listen out for a word they recognise. This isn't a flashcard exercise for recalling words from memory. Instead, by asking them to say the sounds out loud and then identify the word they hear, learners will see how decoding right through the word leads to meaning. If they don't know that particular word, give them the answer and put it in the context of a phrase for meaning. This is a shame-free exercise and, unless they have serious speech and language difficulties, they will get better at hearing the word they're decoding. Try to pick words your learners will know when they hear them but not necessarily recognise in print.

More support: read the words you spelt in the previous lesson.

Less support: read words learners haven't yet seen but which fit the code knowledge already covered.

Spelling

This is exactly like the first exercise but you're asking learners to recall the correct graphemes without the graphemes visible. You still ask them to say the word, listen for the sounds and attach a letter or letters to each sound. Start with saying syllables for longer words.

6.4 Sentence and text-level lesson ideas

Practise reading the words from the level at which you're working in sentences and text, either created by you or found in a book, article and so on. For writing activities, freely provide all words beyond the current level, but ask them to work through writing words with the code and structure that you've already covered. This will change session by session, as the number of grapheme-phoneme correspondences you've covered increases.

More Support: include mostly words they've already spelt and read out of context.

Less support: include words from the appropriate level but which they haven't yet spelt or read.

By the end of Basic Code Plus, your learners will be able to read and spell hundreds of words and be confident reading and spelling words with one, two or three syllables. They'll be comfortable with writing one and two letter graphemes and decoding words they've never seen before. They'll be able to spell familiar words with simple sound to letter correspondences. They'll have seen that the grapheme <a> can represent the sound in 'cat', 'table' and 'umbrella'.

They'll also have seen that you can spell the long 'ay' (/eɪ/) sound with a single <a> in 'table', a split digraph <a-e> in 'cake', and <ay> in 'payday'. The next step is for them to meet one-to-many concepts in their entirety – that the letter <a> can also represent different sounds in 'father' and 'water'. They'll also meet many more ways to represent the long 'ay' (/eɪ/) sound in 'rain', 'great', 'they', 'eight', 'vein' and 'straight'.

The next chapter is all about the one-to-many concepts.

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A structured approach to phonics exists for the sake of the least confident learners. It mitigates negative past experiences by allowing them to immediately engage in multisyllabic age-appropriate vocabulary. Nothing improves the self-esteem of someone who struggles with literacy like being able to read and spell complex looking words.

Tricia Millar

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Table 3: Basic Code Plus

Basic Code		short vowels only		a bat	e bet	i bit	o bot	u but
b	d	c	k	f/ff fed/off	g	h	j	l/ll lop/fell
m	n	ng	p	qu	r	s/ss sat/boss	t	v
w	x	y	z/zz zap/fuzz					
Plus		long vowels spelt with one letter		a table	e he	i biped	o so	u unit
ck	ay	oy		-le	-y	-er	-ing	-ed
bb	dd	gg	mm	nn	pp	rr	tt	
ch	sh	th		a-e mistake	e-e Pete	i-e bike	o-e alone	u-e mute