

Terminology used in Spelling

The following definitions have been taken from the Primary National Curriculum and may help parents, particularly when supporting their child with their spelling homework. Please come and talk to us if you would like any further clarification about any aspect of spelling homework, including the terminology.

Term	Guidance	Example
antonym	Two words are antonyms if their meanings are opposites.	hot – cold light – dark
consonant	A sound which is produced when the speaker closes off or obstructs the flow of air through the vocal tract, usually using lips, tongue or teeth. Most of the letters of the alphabet represent consonants. Only the letters <i>a, e, i, o, u</i> and <i>y</i> can represent vowel sounds.	/p/ [flow of air stopped by the lips, then released] /t/ [flow of air stopped by the tongue touching the roof of the mouth, then released] /f/ [flow of air obstructed by the bottom lip touching the top teeth] /s/ (flow of air obstructed by the tip of the tongue touching the gum line)
digraph	A type of grapheme where two letters represent one phoneme / sound. Sometimes, these two letters are not next to one another; this is called a split digraph.	The digraph ck in lock makes one phoneme / sound. The digraph ee in sheep makes one long phoneme / sound.
grapheme	A letter, or combination of letters, that corresponds to a single phoneme within a word.	The grapheme t in the words ten, bet and ate corresponds to the phoneme /t/. The grapheme ph in the word dolphin corresponds to the phoneme /f/.
grapheme-phoneme correspondences	The links between letters, or combinations of letters (graphemes) and the speech sounds (phonemes) that they represent. In the English writing system, graphemes may correspond to different phonemes in different words.	The grapheme s corresponds to the phoneme /s/ in the word see, but... ...it corresponds to the phoneme /z/ in the word easy.
homonym	Two different words are homonyms if they both look exactly the same when written, and sound exactly the same when pronounced.	Has he left yet? Yes – he went through the door on the left. The noise a dog makes is called a bark. Trees have bark.

homophone	Two different words are homophones if they sound exactly the same when pronounced.	hear, here some, sum
phoneme	<p>A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound that signals a distinct, contrasting meaning. For example: /l/ contrasts with /k/ to signal the difference between <i>lit</i> and <i>kit</i> /t/ contrasts with /l/ to signal the difference between <i>bought</i> and <i>ball</i>.</p> <p>It is this contrast in meaning that tells us there are two distinct phonemes at work. There are around 44 phonemes in English; the exact number depends on regional accents. A single phoneme may be represented in writing by one, two, three or four letters constituting a single grapheme.</p>	<p>The word cat has three letters and three phonemes: /kæt/ The word catch has five letters and three phonemes: /kætʃ/ The word caught has six letters and three phonemes: /kɔ:t/</p>
prefix	<p>A prefix is added at the beginning of a word in order to turn it into another word. Contrast suffix.</p>	<u>o</u> vertake, <u>dis</u> appear
root word	Morphology breaks words down into root words, which can stand alone, and suffixes or prefixes which can't. For example, <i>help</i> is the root word for other words in its word family such as <i>helpful</i> and <i>helpless</i> , and also for its inflections such as <i>helping</i> . Compound words (e.g. <i>help-desk</i>) contain two or more root words. When looking in a dictionary, we sometimes have to look for the root word (or words) of the word we are interested in.	<p>played [the root word is play] unfair [the root word is fair] football [the root words are foot and ball]</p>
split digraph	See digraph	
suffix	<p>A suffix is an 'ending', used at the end of one word to turn it into another word. Unlike root words, suffixes cannot stand on their own as a complete word. Contrast prefix.</p>	<p>call – called teach – teacher [turns a verb into a noun] terror – terrorise [turns a noun into a verb] green – greenish [leaves word class unchanged]</p>
syllable	A syllable sounds like a beat in a word. Syllables consist of at least one vowel, and possibly one or more consonants.	<p>Cat has one syllable. Fairy has two syllables. Hippopotamus has five syllables.</p>

synonym	Two words are synonyms if they have the same meaning, or similar meanings. Contrast antonym.	talk – speak old – elderly
trigraph	A type of grapheme where three letters represent one phoneme.	High, pure, patch, hedge
vowel	A vowel is a speech sound which is produced without any closure or obstruction of the vocal tract. Vowels can form syllables by themselves, or they may combine with consonants. In the English writing system, the letters <i>a, e, i, o, u</i> and <i>y</i> can represent vowels.	
word family	The words in a word family are normally related to each other by a combination of morphology, grammar and meaning.	teach – teacher extend – extent – extensive grammar – grammatical – grammarian

open hearts open minds open doors