

What are High Frequency Words?

High frequency words are quite simply those words which occur most frequently in written material, for example, "and", "the", "as" and "it". They are often words that have little meaning on their own, but they do contribute a great deal to the meaning of a sentence. Some of the high frequency words can be sounded out using basic phonic rules, e.g. "it" is an easy word to read using phonics. However, many of the high frequency words are not phonically regular and are therefore hard to read in the early stages. These words are sometimes called tricky words, sight words or camera words. In addition to being difficult to sound out, most of the high frequency words have a rather abstract meaning which is hard to explain to a child. It's easy to learn words like "cat" and "house" because they can easily be related to a real object or a picture, but how do you represent the word "the" ?

Why learn the High Frequency Words?

Learning just 13 of the most frequently used words will enable children to read 25% of any text

Ideas for games to play with the flashcards

Print two copies of the words, using two different colours of paper, and cut out the word cards. The first thing you need to do is to limit the number of word cards you use at any one time. For a 4-5 year old, no more than 6 words will avoid overloading them (4 might be even better). Hide the rest away for another day.

Simple matching game

Not so much a game this one, as there is no winner, but many young children seem to enjoy straightforward matching activities without the need for any competitiveness! Spread out six cards of one colour (face up), reading each word out as you put it down. Then give your child the matching cards in the other colour. Read out the first word for them and ask them if they can find the matching word and place their card next to it. It can help to hold the card next to each word in turn to enable easy matching. You can encourage them and emphasise the word, e.g. "This word is 'and' - does that one say 'and'? No, let's try this one. Is it 'and'?" etc.

Pelmanism

Spread out your two sets of matching cards, face down. Take turns to pick up two cards, one of each colour. Read each word as you or your child turns it over. Check whether the words match - if they do, keep them and have another go. If they don't, put them back face down and let the other player have a turn. Soon, your child will begin to read the words without you.

Snap

Shuffle up the cards and share them out. Each player takes turns to turn over their card, put it down and read the word. If it matches the previous card played, the first person to notice shouts 'snap!' and wins the pile. This game is best used to practise words your child knows fairly well, rather than new ones, as it's quite fast-paced.

Once your child knows a word reliably, you can 'retire' it from your current pack of cards and bring in a new word. Every so often, play a game with the 'retired' cards, so that your child doesn't forget them. It's a good idea to try and discard a known word and add a new word every day, once your child is getting the hang of learning new words.