Glossary of Phonics Terms

Term	Definition	Example
Phoneme	The smallest unit of sound in a spoken word. You cannot see a phoneme; you can only hear it.	The sound /d/ at the beginning of the word 'dog'.
Grapheme	The written representation of a phoneme. A grapheme can comprise either one, two or three (and very occasionally four) letters.	The grapheme 'ck' represents the /k/ sound at the end of the word 'chick'.
Digraph	A digraph is a grapheme that comprises two letters.	The word 'queen' has two digraphs – 'qu' and 'ee'.
Split Digraph	A split digraph is a digraph that is split by a consonant, usually a long vowel sound.	In the word 'some' the sound /u/ is represented by the 'o' **and** the 'e' even though they are separated by the grapheme 'm'. We would refer to this as the split digraph 'o-e'.
Vowel Digraph	A vowel digraph is a grapheme with two letters that represent a vowel sound (either short or long).	The digraph 'ea' represents the /e/ sound in the word 'head'. The digraph 'ue' represents the /oo/ sound in the word 'blue'.
Trigraph	A trigraph is a grapheme that comprises three letters.	The trigraph 'tch' represents the /ch/ sound in the word 'pitch'.
Vowel Trigraph	A vowel trigraph is a grapheme with three letters that represent a vowel sound (either short or long).	The trigraph 'oul' represents the /oo/ sound in the word 'could'.
Grapheme–Phoneme Correspondence (GPC)	The relationship of the phoneme and the grapheme that represents it and vice versa.	To see the grapheme 'sh' and know the sound that it will make. Or, to hear the sound /sh/ and know how to write the grapheme.
Blending	To say the sounds in individual words sufficiently quickly that they synthesise to make a word.	To hear the separate sounds /sh/ … /ee/ … /p/ and to 'glue them together' to say the word 'sheep'.
Segmenting	The opposite skill to blending. It involves being able to break a word into component phonemes.	To hear the word 'fish' and say the phonemes /f/ /i/ /sh/.
Decoding	To look at the individual graphemes that comprise a word, from left to right, and link with the corresponding phonemes.	To see the written word 'dog' and then say the phonemes /d/ /o/ /g/.
Encoding	To represent the phonemes in an individual word with the appropriate graphemes (spelling and writing).	To hear the spoken word 'cat', say /k/ /a/ /t/, and write appropriate graphemes to spell the word.