



Little Hands, Big Writers. A Playful Journey from Sounds to Stories Playful Learning. Powerful Writing. Lifelong Skills.

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Who: Designed for ESL and Primary Educators

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*Certificates provided for in-person attendees

Q: What is Jolly Phonics?

A: Jolly Phonics is a fun and child-centred approach to teaching literacy through synthetic phonics. With actions for each of the 42 letter sounds, the multi-sensory method is very motivating for children. The letter sounds are split into seven groups, as opposed to being taught alphabetically.

Q: What age is Jolly Phonics suitable for?

A: Jolly Phonics is typically introduced to children aged 4-5 years old. However, it can be used with younger children for phonemic awareness and with older children or adults who need support with reading and writing.

Q: What is the difference between Jolly Phonics and Jolly Literacy?

A: Jolly Phonics focuses on teaching children the 42 main letter sounds and blending skills for reading. Jolly Literacy builds on this foundation by teaching spelling rules, parts of speech, and punctuation for children typically aged 6 and above.

Q: Topics to introduce when teaching writing (Daniela Giuran, Tudor Vladimirescu School, Dragasani)

A: A topic that sparks children's imagination, while also being relevant to the world around them and their interests, is more likely to win them over into writing. A few good topics could be to write an invitation to their birthday party, write a thank you note, write about a princess/ pirate and, more advanced, write about a place that feels important to them, a small moment that changed their day, someone they admire (or don't understand), their earliest memory, a rule they would invent for the world, a sound, smell, or object that reminds them of something etc.

I'd also mix in a few playful prompts because students loosen up when the pressure drops, such as to write from the perspective of a sock lost in the laundry, describe a terrible superhero, write about a secret door that appears once a year.

The best topics are usually specific enough to spark memory, but open enough that students can surprise themselves.



Q: How do the Jolly Learning programmes fit in the Romanian curriculum? (Emilia Burcea, Liceul Pedagogic “Anastasia Popescu”, Bucuresti)

A: Jolly Phonics and Jolly Grammar/ Jolly Literacy programmes fit very well alongside the Romanian national curriculum for English, especially in the primary years. The programmes support many of the curriculum’s core aims: developing listening and speaking skills, building vocabulary, improving reading fluency, and introducing accurate spelling and grammar in a structured way.

Jolly Phonics is particularly useful in the early stages because it gives children a clear, multisensory foundation in English sounds and letter patterns. This helps pupils become more confident readers and writers while also improving pronunciation and listening comprehension.

Jolly Grammar then builds naturally on that foundation by introducing grammar concepts step by step through active practice, reading and writing activities. The progression works well with the communicative approach encouraged in the Romanian curriculum, since children are not only learning rules but using language meaningfully.

Many teachers use the programmes as a complementary resource rather than a replacement for the national syllabus. The content can easily be adapted to curriculum themes, textbook units and expected competencies at each level.

Q: I would like to learn how to combine creativity, phonics and handwriting/ fine motor skills in early writing instruction. (Camelia Dan, EFE Center, Brad; Maria Supeala, Colegiul Tehnic Dinicu Golescu, Bucuresti)

A: One of the strengths of Jolly Phonics is that it naturally combines creativity, phonics, and fine motor development in a very child-friendly way. The multisensory approach allows children to hear the sound, say it, move with it, see it and then write it, which makes early writing much more engaging and memorable.

A simple way to combine these areas is to introduce each sound through action, story, music, or art before moving into handwriting practice. For example, children can trace letters in sand, paint them with brushes, build them with clay, or form them in the air with large arm movements before writing them on paper. These activities strengthen fine motor control while keeping the learning playful.

You can also encourage creativity through short drawing-and-writing tasks linked to the target sounds. After learning a sound, children might draw an object beginning with that sound and attempt to label it using their phonics knowledge. Even very early mark-making helps children connect sounds, symbols and meaning.



Jolly Phonics actions, songs and stories are especially effective because they support memory and reduce the pressure often associated with early writing. Children develop confidence gradually while building both the physical skills needed for handwriting and the phonics skills needed for independent writing.

Q: How can we motivate children to become real independent, autonomous writers? (Magdalena Tolea, Ienachita Vacarescu National College, Targoviste)

A: Jolly Phonics helps children become independent writers because it gives them the tools to “have a go” on their own from the very beginning. Once children understand that they can hear sounds, segment words and represent those sounds with letters, they no longer need to wait for the teacher to spell every word for them. That sense of independence is highly motivating.

A key part of the process is creating a classroom culture where approximation is encouraged. Children should feel confident attempting unfamiliar words using their phonics knowledge, even if the spelling is not yet perfect. Praising effort, risk-taking and communication helps children see themselves as real writers rather than children waiting for correction.

Motivation also grows when writing has a meaningful purpose. Short messages, labels, mini-books, captions, role-play writing, class stories and personal journals all give children authentic reasons to write. Jolly Phonics supports this naturally because children can quickly apply newly learned sounds to real communication.

Choice is important too. Allowing children to choose topics, characters or formats increases ownership and creativity. Even reluctant writers often engage more when they can write about something personal, funny, imaginative or connected to their interests.

Most importantly, independence develops gradually through consistent encouragement. The multisensory structure of Jolly Phonics builds confidence step by step, helping children move from guided practice to increasingly autonomous reading and writing.

Q: Scaffolding examples (Maria Sandu, Scoala Gimnaziala Nr 1, Iaslovat; Laura Stancu, GDS Learning Center, Ilfov)

A: Scaffolding in Jolly Phonics works best when support is gradually reduced as children gain confidence and independence. The idea is to give children just enough help to succeed while still allowing them to think, attempt and apply their own phonics knowledge.

Some simple examples include:

- Oral rehearsal before writing: children say the sentence aloud, clap the words, and identify key sounds before attempting to write.

- Shared writing: the teacher models segmenting and writing words while thinking aloud:
“I can hear /c/ /a/ /t/ – cat.”
- Guided writing frames: children complete partially structured sentences such as:
“I can see a ____.”
“The dog is ____.”
- Picture prompts: children draw first, then label or write simple captions using known sounds.
- Word banks linked to current sounds: display decodable vocabulary children can successfully use independently.
- Finger spelling and sound buttons (pop-it): children segment words physically before writing them
- Partner talk: children discuss ideas with a classmate before writing to reduce cognitive overload.
- Gradual release:
“I do” (teacher model)
“We do” (shared practice)
“You do together” (pair work)
“You do alone” (independent writing)

As children progress, the scaffolds can slowly be removed so that they rely more on their own segmenting, blending and spelling strategies. The goal is always confident, independent communication rather than perfect writing from the start.

Q: How to implement early writing in my lessons with non-native young learners? (Andreea Manea, Freelancer, Bucuresti)

A: With non-native young learners, early writing works best when it is introduced very gradually and always connected to speaking, listening and phonics. Jolly Phonics supports this naturally because children learn to hear sounds, recognize them and immediately apply them in meaningful communication.

A useful approach is to move from oral language to writing step by step. Children first hear and repeat vocabulary, practice the Jolly actions and songs, identify sounds in words and only then attempt simple writing tasks. This reduces anxiety and helps children understand that writing is a way of recording language they already know.



At the beginning, writing activities can be very small and achievable: tracing letters, matching sounds to pictures, labelling drawings, completing simple captions, building words with magnetic letters, writing CVC words from dictation.

As confidence grows, children can move into short guided sentences linked to familiar classroom themes and vocabulary.

Q: Methods to use with large classes (Roxana Buinceanu, SC. Gim. Elena Cuza Iasi)

A: Jolly Phonics strategies can work very effectively in large classes because the programme is highly structured, multisensory and interactive. The key is to create routines that keep all children actively involved at the same time rather than relying only on individual teacher support.

Whole-class participation is especially important. Actions, songs, chants, air-writing, sound blending and oral segmenting allow every child to practice simultaneously. These routines keep energy high and maximize engagement, even in crowded classrooms.

Visual support also becomes essential in large groups. Wall friezes, flashcards and picture prompts, such as the ones in the Jolly Classroom app help children work more independently without constantly waiting for teacher assistance.

Pair and group work can reduce pressure and increase practice opportunities. Children can blend sounds together, dictate words to a partner, practice segmenting orally, complete collaborative mini-writing tasks.

Mixed-ability grouping is often very effective because stronger pupils naturally model pronunciation, blending and writing strategies for others.

Classroom routines should be short, predictable and repetitive. For example:

1. Review sounds
2. Practice actions and songs
3. Oral blending/segmenting
4. Model writing
5. Guided practice
6. Independent attempt

When children know the routine, transitions become smoother and behaviour management improves.

In large classes, scaffolding is especially important. Sentence starters, word banks, visual cues, and guided writing frames allow children to work independently while the teacher circulates and supports smaller groups when needed.

Most importantly, maintain a positive “have a go” atmosphere. Jolly Phonics works best when children feel confident experimenting with sounds and spelling rather than waiting for perfect

answers. Even in large classes, this approach helps create active, motivated and increasingly independent learners.

Q: How to keep the little ones interested and active?

A: Jolly Phonics keeps young children interested and active because it is built around multisensory learning. Children are not expected to sit still and only listen — they learn through movement, music, stories, games, actions, speaking and hands-on activities.

Each sound is introduced with an action, which immediately makes learning physical and memorable. Children enjoy moving, copying gestures and associating sounds with actions and this active participation helps maintain attention and improve retention.

The songs, chants, and stories also play an important role. Young learners respond naturally to rhythm, repetition and imagination, so phonics becomes something enjoyable rather than mechanical. The programme feels playful while still being highly structured.

Another reason children stay engaged is that they experience success very quickly. After learning only a few sounds, they can already begin blending simple words and writing independently. This sense of achievement is highly motivating and encourages children to keep participating.

Jolly Phonics also includes a variety of short, interactive activities that match young learners' limited attention spans:

- sound hunts
- blending games
- air-writing
- magnetic letters
- drawing and labelling
- partner activities
- mini whiteboard tasks

Because activities change regularly, children remain focused and involved.

Most importantly, the programme encourages active learning rather than passive learning.

Children are constantly hearing, saying, moving, reading, writing and interacting, which keeps energy levels high and supports different learning styles at the same time.

Q: How guided/ free should the writing tasks be? (Elena Preda, Sc. Gim. Nichita Stanescu, Ceptura)

A: With emergent writers, writing tasks should usually be highly guided at first, but with small opportunities for choice and independence built in from the beginning. The goal is to provide enough structure for success while still allowing children to feel like real writers.

Too much freedom too early can overwhelm young learners, especially when they are still developing phonics knowledge, vocabulary, fine motor skills and confidence. At the same time, tasks that are overly controlled can reduce motivation and creativity. The balance is very important.

A useful approach is “guided structure with open possibilities.” For example:

- sentence starters with child-selected endings
- picture prompts with independent labels
- guided captions linked to personal drawings
- structured writing frames with vocabulary choices

For example:

“I can see a ____.”

Children can still choose their own animal, colour or idea.

As children gain confidence, the level of support can gradually decrease:

1. Shared writing
2. Guided sentence completion
3. Independent captions
4. Short independent sentences
5. Simple creative writing

Jolly Phonics supports this progression very well because children learn to segment and spell independently from an early stage. Even when tasks are guided, children are still actively making decisions about sounds and words.

It is also important to scaffold orally before writing. Emergent writers benefit from hearing sentences, rehearsing them aloud, clapping words and segmenting sounds together before attempting to write independently.

Most importantly, early writing should feel achievable. Children become more confident and autonomous when they experience repeated success, even through very small writing tasks. Over time, the teacher gradually removes support as children begin trusting their own phonics knowledge and ideas.

Q: How can I make it fun and relevant, especially for the kids that don’t know how to write. Moreover, I’d like to find interesting ways to make them curious and daring enough to try to write. A lot of my kids stop at “I don’t know how”
(Simona Rata, Genesis College, Bucuresti)

A: One of the most important things with emergent writers is helping children understand that writing is not about already knowing everything — it is about experimenting with sounds and “having a go.” Jolly Phonics is very powerful for this because it gives children practical tools they can immediately use, even before they can write conventionally.

When children say “I don’t know how,” they are often afraid of being wrong. The first step is creating a classroom culture where approximation is celebrated. Instead of focusing on perfect



spelling, praise the process: “You listened for sounds!” “You tried writing the first sound!” “You used your phonics!” Children become more willing to take risks when they realize attempts are valued.

Making writing playful also helps enormously. Many children engage more willingly when writing is connected to imagination, movement or curiosity rather than worksheets alone. For example: secret messages, treasure hunt clues, writing to puppets, monster labels, superhero names, classroom signs, mini-books, speech bubbles. These activities make writing feel meaningful and fun.

With Jolly Phonics, children should also write before they are “perfectly ready.” Even if they only know a few sounds, they can already attempt simple words.

Multisensory strategies are especially helpful for hesitant learners. Before writing, children can:

- say the word slowly
- tap sounds
- use actions
- build words with magnetic letters
- trace letters in the air
- rehearse orally with a partner

This reduces cognitive overload and makes writing feel more manageable.

Most importantly, keep tasks short, achievable and success-oriented. Confidence grows through many small successful experiences. Once children realize, “I can hear sounds and write them down,” they begin seeing themselves as capable writers rather than children waiting for the teacher to tell them what to do.

Q: Phonic-based vs whole-language approach (Marina Ghenu, Sc. Gim. Pro Ingenio, Bragadiru)

A: With emergent writers, phonics-based learning is generally far more supportive of independence than relying mainly on whole-word memorisation. A phonics approach gives children a system they can apply to unfamiliar words, while whole-word learning often depends heavily on memory alone.

In programmes like Jolly Phonics, children learn that words are made of sounds that can be heard, segmented, blended and written. This gives even very young learners the confidence to attempt reading and writing independently: “I may not know this word yet, but I can try.” That mindset is extremely important for emergent writers.

Whole-word learning can sometimes help with very common irregular words (tricky words), but if children rely only on memorizing entire words, they may become hesitant when faced with unfamiliar vocabulary. Many children then develop the habit of waiting for the teacher instead of experimenting independently.

A phonics-based approach encourages active problem-solving:

- listening for sounds
- segmenting words
- blending sounds
- attempting spellings
- noticing patterns in language

This is especially helpful for non-native learners because it reduces the memory load and gives children strategies they can reuse across many words.

That said, the two approaches do not need to be completely separate. In practice, many teachers combine them. Jolly Phonics primarily develops decoding and encoding skills through phonics, while also introducing tricky words that cannot be fully sounded out. Children gradually learn both:

- how English works phonetically
- and which words need special attention

Q: I would like to find out more about how to stimulate my students to read more and make up own stories in a very creative way. (Nicoleta Popescu, Mihai Eminescu National College, Bucuresti)

A: One of the best ways to motivate children to read books is to help them experience success very early. When children realize, "I can actually read this by myself," their confidence and motivation grow quickly. Decodable books are powerful because they allow children to apply the phonics they already know instead of guessing or relying entirely on memory.

To keep interest high, it helps to make reading interactive, playful, and creative rather than treating decodable books only as reading exercises. For example, children can:

- act out stories
- change the ending
- retell stories with puppets
- create sound effects
- draw favourite scenes
- hunt for target sounds or tricky words
- become "story detectives"

You can also encourage repeated reading through games and performance:

- partner reading
- echo reading
- reading to toys or puppets
- reader's theatre
- recording themselves reading
- class storytelling circles

To encourage creative story-making, begin with strong scaffolding. Many children become more confident inventing stories when they are given a simple structure:

- character
- setting
- problem
- funny ending

Picture sequences, story maps, puppets and oral storytelling are excellent supports before writing begins.

Jolly Phonics works especially well here because children can use the sounds they know to attempt independent writing straight away. Even very simple invented spellings allow children to become authors from the beginning.

A very effective strategy is combining reading and writing together. After reading a decodable story, children can:

- invent a new character
- add another page
- rewrite the story in a silly way
- create speech bubbles
- make mini-books
- write captions for illustrations

This helps children see reading and writing as connected creative processes rather than separate school tasks.

Q: Interventions and supporting emergent writers (Monica Nistor, Avenor)

A: Interventions for emergent writers work best when they are early, targeted, multisensory, and confidence-building. Many children who struggle with writing are not lacking ideas — they are often overwhelmed by the number of skills involved at the same time: hearing sounds, remembering letters, forming words, controlling the pencil and generating language.

Jolly Phonics is particularly effective for intervention because it breaks literacy into manageable steps and gives children practical strategies they can apply immediately.

A good starting point is identifying where the difficulty lies:

- phonological awareness
- sound-letter knowledge
- blending or segmenting
- fine motor skills
- oral language
- confidence and risk-taking
- memory and processing

Once the barrier is clearer, support can become much more focused.

Effective interventions are usually short, consistent, and highly interactive rather than long worksheet sessions. Small-group or one-to-one practice can include:

- oral sound games
- blending and segmenting with counters
- magnetic letters
- tracing and air-writing
- dictation of simple CVC words
- repeated reading of decodable texts
- guided sentence building

Children who struggle often need far more repetition and overlearning, but in engaging ways. Scaffolding is also essential. Provide picture cues, sentence starters, oral rehearsal before writing.

The aim is to reduce cognitive overload while still encouraging independence.

Confidence-building should remain central. Many hesitant writers become dependent on adults because they fear mistakes. Praising attempts, phonetic spelling, effort and problem-solving helps children develop resilience: “You listened carefully.” “You heard three sounds!” “You used your phonics independently.”

For some children, oral storytelling can act as a bridge into writing. If a child can tell a story aloud, draw it, act it out and label key parts first, writing often becomes less intimidating. Most importantly, interventions should help children experience success quickly and regularly. Small achievable goals, repeated practice and positive reinforcement gradually help emergent writers see themselves as capable readers and writers rather than struggling learners.

Q: I would like to learn more about how to support children’s early writing skills in kindergarten in a natural and age-appropriate way and how these skills can be gradually developed during their first primary school years. (Cagla Ocak, Spectrum Pallady Bucuresti)

A: Preparing writing skills in kindergarten works best when it is playful, meaningful and developmentally appropriate. At this stage, children are still developing oral language, fine motor control, phonological awareness and confidence, so writing should grow naturally out of talk, play, movement, drawing, and storytelling rather than formal written tasks alone.

In the kindergarten years, the focus should be on building strong foundations:

- listening and speaking skills
- vocabulary development
- sound awareness
- fine motor skills
- enjoyment of books and stories
- confidence in expressing ideas

Children benefit greatly from opportunities to experiment with drawing, labelling and “pretend writing” before conventional writing develops. These early attempts are extremely valuable because they help children understand that marks and symbols carry meaning.

Jolly Phonics supports this process very naturally through multisensory learning. Children hear sounds, use actions, sing songs, move, play games and gradually connect sounds to letters and words. This active approach matches young children’s developmental needs very well.

A gradual progression often works best:

Kindergarten:

- oral storytelling
- rhymes and sound games
- tracing and air-writing
- drawing and labelling
- hearing initial sounds
- experimenting with letters and simple words

Early primary years:

- blending and segmenting words
- writing simple captions
- guided sentence writing
- using sound knowledge independently
- reading decodable books
- creating simple stories

Later primary development:

- longer independent writing
- richer vocabulary
- more accurate spelling
- grammar development
- planning and organizing ideas
- creative and informational writing

The key is gradual release. Children move from shared experiences and heavy scaffolding toward increasing independence over time.

It is also important to remember that early writing development is not linear. Some children may draw before writing, others may rely heavily on phonetic spelling and others may communicate more confidently orally at first. All of these stages are part of normal literacy development.

Most importantly, children should associate writing with communication, creativity and success rather than pressure or correction. When classrooms encourage curiosity, experimentation, storytelling and “having a go,” children are much more likely to develop into confident and motivated writers throughout the primary years.

Q: When and how to teach handwriting versus creative expression (Marcela Jalba, Sc. Gim. Ion Heliade Radulescu, Urziceni)

A: Handwriting and creative expression should develop alongside one another rather than as completely separate stages. Young children need explicit support with letter formation and fine motor skills, but they also need opportunities to communicate ideas, tell stories and see themselves as writers from the very beginning.

In the early stages, handwriting instruction should be short, focused, and multisensory. Children benefit from practicing correct pencil grip, letter formation, posture, movement patterns, fine motor control.

With approaches like Jolly Phonics, handwriting is introduced through actions, air-writing, tracing, songs and tactile activities before moving onto paper. This makes practice more developmentally appropriate and less repetitive.

At the same time, children should not have to wait until handwriting is “perfect” before expressing ideas creatively. Even very young learners can:

- draw and label pictures
- attempt phonetic spellings
- create captions
- make mini-books
- invent characters and stories

Creative expression often motivates children to engage more willingly with handwriting practice because the writing has a real purpose.

A balanced approach usually works best:

- short explicit handwriting sessions
- followed by meaningful opportunities to apply writing in playful or communicative contexts

For example, after practising the letter “s,” children might:

- write simple “s” words
- label a snake drawing
- invent a silly snake character
- create a short caption using their phonics knowledge

This helps children connect handwriting with communication rather than seeing it only as a technical exercise.

As children move through the first primary years, handwriting gradually becomes more automatic. Once letter formation requires less cognitive effort, children can focus more fully on vocabulary, ideas, creativity and composition.

Most importantly, children should never feel that neat handwriting matters more than communication in the early stages. A child who is experimenting with sounds, attempting words, and expressing ideas is already developing as a writer, even if handwriting and spelling are still emerging.