



## ***Phonic and Spelling Rules***

### Sources:

Ingham, A. (1973). *The Blended Sound-Sight Method of Instruction*,  
Regina, SK  
and others

**SpEd 625 Assessment for Instruction**  
Brownbridge



## Phonic and Spelling Rules

In 1963 Clymer reported on his study of how frequently the application of phonics or spelling rules would result in the true pronunciation of words. As a result of his study, Clymer advised teachers that the application of phonics or spelling rules must not be considered useful unless it results in the accurate pronunciation or spelling of written words 75% of the time.

Clymer, T. (1963). The utility of phonic generalizations in the primary grades. *The Reading Teacher*, 17, 252-258.

Johnston, F.P. (2001). The utility of phonic generalizations: Let's take another look at Clymer's conclusions. *The Reading Teacher*, 55(2), 132-143.

### **Caveat re: the use of Phonic/Spelling Rules:**

1. *Children who struggle in reading also usually struggle to memorize phonic rules and often have difficulty in applying such rules to connected print.* To help remedy this problem, two things must happen:
  - Only the most important phonic rules should be taught in the least complicated manner possible. For example, in teaching vowel sounds, it is distracting to talk about "short versus long" vowels. Instead, a child should be taught the short vowel sounds first. Then when a child encounters a long vowel as in the word **find**, tell him, "That vowel says its own name."
  - Phonics must be taught in a way that allows these children to immediately practice phonic information in real stories. Every time a child is taught new phonic information, he should be given a short reading selection that highlights the phonic rule. Completing a skill sheet is good, but even better is to help the child practice applying the phonic skill to connected print.
2. *Sometimes the rules don't work.*
  - There are many exceptions in English because of the vastness of the language and the many languages from which it has borrowed. The rules do work, however, in the majority of words.

## Vowels and Consonants

The **vowels** are **a, e, i, o, and u** and sometimes **y** and **w**. Vowels also include the diphthongs **oi, oy, ou, ow, au, aw, oo** and many others.

The **consonants** are all the other letters which stop or limit the flow of air from the throat in speech. They are: **b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, qu, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z, ch, sh, th, ph, wh, ng,** and **gh**.

## The Most Common Phonic and Spelling Rules

1. When 2 consonants are joined together and form one new sound, they are called a *consonant digraph*. They count as one sound and one letter and are never separated, e.g., *ch, sh, th, ph* and *wh*.
2. Every syllable in every word *must* have a vowel. English is a "vocal" language; every word must have a vowel.
3. When a syllable ends in a consonant and has only one vowel (*closed syllable*), that vowel is short, e.g., *fat, bed, fish, spot, luck*.
4. The vowels *a, e, i, o, u* at the end of a syllable (*open syllable*) usually say their names – /A/, /E/, /I/, /O/, /U/, e.g., *ba by, he ro, bi cycle, o pen, mu sic*. OR: When a syllable ends in any vowel and is the only vowel, that vowel is usually long, e.g., *pa per, me, l, o pen, u nit,* and *my*.
5. If the vowel in the first syllable is long, the following consonant is not doubled, e.g., *baby, lady, holy, tiny*.
6. When a syllable ends in a *silent e*, the *silent e* is a signal that the vowel in front of it is long, e.g., *make, gene, kite, rope,* and *use*.
7. *When two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking, saying its own name* – when a syllable has 2 vowels together, the first vowel is usually long and the second is silent, e.g., *pain, eat, boat, res cue, say, grow*. NOTE: Diphthongs don't follow this rule – in a diphthong, the vowels blend together to create a single new sound. The diphthongs are: *oi, oy, ou, ow, au, aw, oo* and many others.
8. When a vowel is followed by an "r" in the same syllable, that vowel is *r-controlled* and is neither long nor short. *R-controlled er, ir,* and *ur* often sound the same (like /er/), e.g., *term, sir, fir, fur, far, for, su/gar, or/der*.
9. The *q* never goes alone; it is always followed by *u*, e.g., *queen, quiet, quick*.

10. At the end of a word, the *v* never goes alone. It is always followed by an *e*, e.g., *leave, have*.
11. The *u* never goes alone on the end of words; it is always followed by an *e*, e.g., *blue*.
12. The letter *c* usually says /k/ when it comes at the beginning of words, e.g., *cat, car, cap, color, collar, come, cut, cute*.
13. Often when *c* is followed by an *e, i,* or *y*, it sounds like /s/, but you write *c*, e.g., *face, city,* and *cyclone*.
14. The letter *g* usually says /g/ when it comes at the beginning of words, e.g., *gave, get, give, got, goal, gut*.
15. Often when *g* is followed by an *e, i,* or *y*, it sounds like /j/, but you write *g*, e.g., *cage, ginger, gyrate, gem, gym,* and *gist*.
16. In a two-syllable (beat) word the *y* says /E/ at the end of the word, e.g., *ba by, Sal ly, dad dy*.
17. In a one-syllable (beat) word the *y* says /I/ at the end of the word, e.g., *my, by*.
18. In a two-syllable (beat) word, the *l* is followed by an *e*, e.g., *table, purple*.
19. The *final e* on the following words has no job and thus is referred to as the *lazy e*, e.g., *come, are, house*.
20. When you hear /F/, /L/, /M/, /N/, /S/ in a word, you usually spell the sound as *-ef-* or *-eff-*, *-el-* or *-ell-*, *-em-*, *-en-*, and *-es-* or *-ess-*, e.g., *left, effort, elbow, bell, empty, enter, especially, dress*.
21. When *or* comes after *w*, it usually says /er/, e.g., *work, worry, worm*.
22. The *si* is used to say /sh/ when the syllable before it ends in *s*, e.g., *session, possession*.
23. The *si* can say /zh/ as in *division, erosion, explosion*
24. Words of one-syllable ending in one consonant which have one vowel before the last consonant, always double the last consonant before adding an ending that begins with a vowel. This is called the *one-one-one rule*, e.g., *get – getting, bat – batted, batting*.
25. Where a consonant doubles in a two-beat word, the consonant in the second syllable is the only one that can be heard, e.g., *getting*.
26. Words ending with a *silent e*, drop the e when adding an ending that begins with a vowel, e.g., *hope – hoping, have – having*.
27. Words of 2-syllables where the second syllable has one vowel

followed by one consonant and is accented, always double the last consonant before adding an ending that begins with a vowel, e.g., *begin – beginning*.

28. Words ending in *f, l,* or *s* after one vowel, usually end in *-ff, -ll,* or *-ss,* e.g., *tall, mess, will, off, stuff, fuss.*
29. When the vowels *i* and *o* are followed by two consonants, they usually say their letter names (*/I/* and */O/*), e.g., *mild, mind, find, old, hold, bold.*
30. The suffix *-ful* never has two *l*'s, e.g., *handful, mindful, mouthful.*
31. An *s* never follows *x* primarily because *x* has the sound */ks/*. For the plural of words ending in *x*, use *es*, e.g., *boxes, foxes, tuxes, mixes.*
32. Usually, an *l* in a two-syllable word is not doubled, e.g., *al ways, al so.*
33. */g/* is spelled *-dge* when preceded by the short vowels *-a-, -e-, -i-, -o-* and *-u-*, e.g., *badge, hedge, ledge, bridge, lodge, judge.*
34. */ch/* is spelled *-tch* when preceded by the short vowels *-a-, -e-, -i-,* and *-o-*, e.g., *catch, hatch, fetch, snatch, scotch.*
35. Words ending in *y* after a consonant, change the *y* to *i* before adding the suffix or ending except one beginning with *i*, e.g., *pity – pitied, pitiful,* but *pitying.*
36. Words ending in the sound */k/*, when a consonant comes between a short vowel sound and the */k/*, we use the letter *k*, e.g., *bank, sink, bulk, hunk.*
37. Words ending in the sound */k/* preceded by a short vowel sound, we put *ck* at the end of the word, e.g., *back, neck, tick, sock, luck.*
38. The *i-e / e-i* rule: *i* before *e* (e.g., *thief, chief, piece, sieve, wiener*) except after *c* (*receive, deceive, deceit, receipt*) or when sounded like */A/* as in *neighbor* and *weigh*.
39. Sometimes words have silent letters. These follow patterns that can be memorized. The best way to remember how to spell such words is to say/remember the word the way it should be said/spelled: e.g., **gn, pn, kn = /n/ words:** gnome (think: */gnOm/*), pneumonia (think: */pnUmOnEa/*), knife; **rh, wr = /r/ words:** rhyme, wrestle; **pt, ght = /t/ words:** ptomaine, height; **ps, sc = s words:** psalm, science; **wh = /h/ words:** whole

## Basic Syllable Rules

A **syllable** is a basic unit of written and spoken language. It is a unit consisting of uninterrupted sound that can be used to make up words. For example, the word *hotel* has two syllables: *ho* and *tel*. These will be marked here as in *ho/tel*.

## Counting Syllables

To find the number of syllables in a word, use the following steps:

1. Count the vowels in the word.
2. Subtract any silent vowels (like the silent *e* at the end of a word, or the second vowel when two vowels are together in a syllable)
3. Subtract one vowel from every diphthong (diphthongs only count as one vowel sound.)
4. The number of vowel sounds left is the same as the number of syllables.

The number of syllables that you hear when you pronounce a word is the same as the number of vowel sounds heard. For example:

1. The word *came* has 2 vowels, but the *e* is silent, leaving one vowel sound and one syllable.
2. The word *outside* has 4 vowels, but the *e* is silent and the *ou* is a diphthong which counts as only one sound, so this word has only two vowel sounds and therefore, two syllables.

## Six Kinds of Syllables

There are six different kinds of syllables in English:

1. **Closed Syllables:** A closed syllable has one and only one vowel, and it ends in a consonant. Examples include *in*, *ask*, *truck*, *sock*, *stretch*, *twelfth*, and *on*.
2. **Open Syllables:** An open syllable has one and only one vowel, and that vowel occurs at the end of the syllable. Examples include *no*, *she*, *l*, *a*, and *spry*.
3. **Silent-E Syllables:** A silent-e syllable ends in an *e*, has one and only one consonant before that *e*, and has one and only one vowel before that consonant. Examples include *ate*, *ice*, *tune*, *slope*, *strobe*, and *these*.
4. **Vowel Combination Syllables:** A vowel combination syllable has a cluster of two or three vowels or a vowel-consonant unit with a sound

or sounds particular to that unit. Examples include *rain, day, see, veil, pie, piece, noise, toy, cue, and true.*

5. **Vowel-R Syllables:** A vowel-r syllable is one which includes one and only one vowel followed by an *r*, or one vowel followed by an *r* which is followed by a silent *e*, or a vowel combination followed by an *r*. Examples include *car, or, care, ire, air, and deer.*
6. **Consonant-L-E Syllables:** In these syllables, a consonant is followed by *le*. The vowel sound in these syllables is the schwa sound that occurs before the *l*. Examples include *-ble, -cle, -dle, -fle, and -gle.*

## Dividing Words into Syllables

1. **Divide a word between two middle consonants.**
  - a. Split up words that have two middle consonants, e.g., *hap/pen, bas/ket, let/ter, sup/per, din/ner, and Den/nis.*
  - b. The only exceptions are the consonant digraphs (*th, sh, ph, th, ch, and wh*). Never split up consonant digraphs as they represent only one sound.
2. **Usually divide before a single middle consonant.**
  - a. When there is only one syllable, you usually divide in front of it, as in: *o/pen, i/tem, e/vil, and re/port.* The only exceptions are those times when the first syllable has an obvious short sound, as in *cab/in.*
3. **Divide before the consonant in an "-le" syllable.**
  - a. When you have a word that has the old-style spelling in which the *-le* sounds like *//*, divide before the consonant preceding the *-le*, e.g., *a/ble, fum/ble, rub/ble, mum/ble* and *this/tle.*
  - b. The only exception to this is *-ckle* words like *tick/le.*
4. **Divide the prefix or suffix from the root word that has a vowel sound.**
  - a. Split off the parts of compound words like *sports/car* and *house/boat.*
  - b. Divide off prefixes such as *un/happy, pre/paid, or re/write.*
  - c. Also divide off suffixes as in the words *farm/er, teach/er, hope/less* and *care/ful.*
  - d. In a word like *stop/ping*, the suffix is actually *-ping* because this

word follows the rule that when you add *-ing* to a word with one syllable, you double the last consonant and add the *-ing*.

## Accent Rules

When a word has more than one syllable, one of the syllables is always a little louder than the others. The syllable with the louder stress is the accented syllable. It may seem that the placement of accents in words is often random or accidental, but these are some rules that usually work.

1. Accents are often on the first syllable, e.g., *ba'/sic*, *pro'/gram*.
2. In words that have suffixes or prefixes, the accent is usually on the main root word, e.g., *box'/es*, *un/tie'*.
3. If *de-*, *re-*, *ex-*, *in-*, *po-*, *pro-*, or *a-* is the first syllable in a word, it is usually not accented, e.g., *de/lay'*, *ex/plore'*.
4. Two vowel letters together in the last syllable of a word often indicates an accented last syllable, e.g., *com/plain'*, *con/ceal'*.
5. When there are two like consonant letters within a word, the syllable before the double consonants is usually accented, e.g., *be/gin'/ner*, *let'/ter*.
6. The accent is usually on the syllable before the suffixes *-ion*, *ity*, *-ic*, *-ical*, *-ian*, *-ial*, or *-ious*, and on the second syllable before the suffix *-ate*, e.g., *af/fec/ta'/tion*, *dif/fer/en'/ti/ate*.
7. In words of three or more syllables, one of the first two syllables is usually accented, e.g., *ac'/ci/dent*, *de/ter'/mine*.