

# Free Phonics Essentials

**Terms & Rules**

*to teach*



by **Splendidmoms**

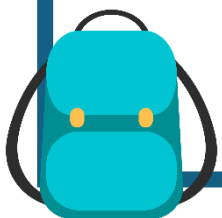
# Phonics Essential Terms & Rules

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# Importance of Phonics

- **Phonics:** It is the system of teaching reading and spelling that emphasizes the relationship between sounds (phonemes) and their written symbols (graphemes).

## *How does phonics work?*

- Children learn to recognize the sounds of individual letters
- They learn to identify the sounds of different combinations of letters, like "sh" or "oo"
- They learn to blend these sounds together to make words
- They use these skills to decode new words they hear or see.

## *Why is phonics important?*

- It helps children learn to read and write
- It helps children hear, identify, and use different sounds that distinguish one word from another
- It helps children decode words as they read
- It helps children become strong, independent readers.

- **Phonemic awareness:** it is the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. It includes skills like isolating the beginning sound of a word, blending sounds to make a word, or substituting sounds to create new words.

- **Phonological awareness:** the ability to recognize and manipulate the spoken parts of words. It involves understanding that words are made up of smaller *units of sound*, such as syllables, onsets, rimes, and phonemes. Includes skills like rhyming word recognition and identifying the number of syllables in a word.

# Phonics - Terms

- **Phoneme:** It is the smallest unit of *sound* that can distinguish words from one another.  
*Example:* The word "ship" is made of these phonemes- /sh/ /i/ /p/. The word ship has four letters, but it has three phonemes. The word king has three phonemes : /k//i//ng/.
- **Grapheme:** One or more letters that represent one sound.  
*Example:* letter **b** is grapheme that represents the sound /b/, like wise **ch, th, oi, oy** are also graphemes.
  - A grapheme can represent more than one phoneme (sound).  
*Example:* the letter **g** has two sounds /j/ and /g/ as in giraffe and goat.
- **Morpheme:** A morpheme is the smallest unit of a word that contains meaning.  
*Example:* The word "incoming" has three morphemes "in-," "come," and "-ing."
- **Blending:** "Blending" means combining individual sounds (phonemes) together to form a word. When you "blend" sounds, you put them together to say a word, like saying "c" "a" "t" to make "cat". It helps in reading.
- **Segmenting:** "Segmenting" means breaking a word down into its individual sounds. When you "segment" a word, you separate it into its individual sounds, like saying "cat" as "c" "a" "t". It helps in writing.
- **Long Vowel Sound representation:** Long vowels can be represented by a horizontal line above the vowel: ā, ē, ī, ō, ū.
- **Short Vowel Sound representation:** The short vowels can be represented by a curved symbol above the vowel: ă, ě, ĭ, ǒ, ŭ.

- **Vowels:** Vowels are speech sounds that are produced without any significant constriction or blockage of airflow in the vocal tract. In the English language, the vowels are the letters **A, E, I, O, U** (and sometimes Y, when it functions as a vowel).
  - Short vowels : short vowel is pronounced quickly  
( ĭ as in sit, ɔ̃ as in hot, ŭ as in cup)
  - Long vowels: Long sound of a vowel is vowel name itself. . (ē as in *me* , *team*, ī as in *kite*, ō as in *home*, *coat* and ū as in *cube*)
  
- **Consonant:** They are the letters of the alphabet that are not vowels.
  
- **CVC word:** CVC words are simple, three-letter words that follow the pattern C=Consonant, V= Vowel, C= Consonant.  
*Example:* cat, bed, sit, dog, cup.
  
- **CVCe word:** Words that contain a consonant, vowel, consonant, and a silent e at the end.  
*Example:* cake, the final "e" plays a crucial role in making the vowel sound long.
  
- **Consonant clusters:** It is a group of two or more consonants that appear together in a word, without any vowels in between them.  
*Example:* **br** in "bricks" and **mp** in "lamp" and **str** in "string".
  
- **Beginning blend:** It refers to consonant cluster that appear at the beginning of a word.  
*Example:* **bl** in "blue" **fr** in "friend", **cr** in "croak", **spl** in "splash".
  
- **Ending blend:** It refers to consonant cluster that appear at the end of a word.  
*Example:* **nd** in "sand" , **sk** in "task", **st** in "fast", **nt** in "went".

- **Digraph:** A digraph is a combination of two letters that together represent a single sound.
- **Consonant digraph:** It is a combination of two consonant letters that together represent a single sound (phoneme) in a word.  
*Example: ph* as in “phone” (represents the /f/ sound), *sh* as in “ship”.
- **Vowel digraph/vowel team:** It is a combination of two vowel letters that together represent a single sound (phoneme).  
*Example: ea* as in “team” (represents the **long/e/** sound), *oa* as in “boat” (represents the **long /o/** sound).
- **Split vowel digraph:** A split digraph occurs when the two vowels that make up the digraph are separated by one or more consonants. Generally, the consonant splits the vowel a,e,i,o or u and the final e (there are only five: **a\_e, e\_e, i\_e, o\_e, u\_e**)
  - *Example: a\_e* in cake, *e\_e* in complete, *o\_e* in drove, *i\_e* in invite.
- **Trigraph:** A trigraph is a combination of three letters that together made one single sound (as in ‘ire’, ‘igh’, ‘ear’).
  - *Example: hear, height.*
- **R Controlled vowels:** The vowel sounds that are influenced or controlled by the letter **r** that follows them.(also known as “bossy r”).  
*Example : ar* in “star”, *ir* in “bird”.
- **Diphthong:** It is a complex vowel sound that begins with one vowel sound and glides into another within the same syllable.  
*Example: ou* as in “out” (starts with /a/ and glides to /u/).
- **Syllable:** It is a unit of sound in a word that typically consists of a vowel sound and any consonants that may come before or after it.  
*Example: cat* has one syllable- **cat**.  
*banana* has three syllables- **ba-na-na**.  
*happy* has two syllables- **hap-py**.



- **Onset:** It refers to the initial consonant or consonant cluster which occurs before the vowel sound in the word or syllable.  
*Example:* in the word cat, the onset is the consonant "c". In the word jump, the onset is "j".
- **Rime:** A rime refers the vowel and any consonants that follow it after the onset within the word or syllable.  
*Example:* In the word cat , the rime is "at", in the word jump, the rime is "ump".
- **Affixes:** Affixes are groups of letters added to a word to change its meaning or grammatical function. They can be added to the beginning, middle, or end of a word.
- **Prefix:** An affix added to the beginning of a word to alter its meaning.  
*Example:* "un-" in "undo" (reverses the action).
- **Suffix:** An affix added to the end of a word to change its meaning or part of speech.  
*Example:* "-ness" in "happiness" (turns an adjective into a noun).

# Phonics - Rules

- **Double final consonant:** If a word has one syllable with one short vowel and ends in letters **f, l, s or z** the final consonant will be doubled.  
*Example :* pass, fill, staff, buzz.  
(Exception : bus)
- **Hard c & g:** The hard sound of c is **/k/** and g is **/g/**. When letter c and g are followed by vowel **a, o or u** the sound is hard.  
*Example:* cat, goat.
- **Soft c & g:** The soft sound of c is **/s/** and g is **/j/**. When letter c and g are followed by **e, i or y** the sound is soft.  
*Example :* cent, gym.
- **Vowel e after I, U and V:** English words never end with **i, u or v** so add a **silent e** to the words ending with **i, u or v**.  
*Example:* tie, due, have.
- **Kite and Cat Rule(c & k):** Letter c and k are often used to represent similar sound **/k/**. To know which letter to use for **/k/** sound look at the sound next to the **/k/** sound.
  - If the letter next to **/k/** sound is **"a", "o", or "u"**, use letter c.  
Example : cat, cot, cut
  - If the letter next to **/k/** sound is **"e", "i", or "y"**, use letter k .  
Example: Kettle, kite
  - If the letter next to **/k/** sound is a **consonant**, then use letter c.  
Example: crop, clap

- **Final /k/:** At the end of the spelling
  - If the /k/ sound comes right after a vowel team or a consonant then use, **-k**.  
*Example:* week, bank.
  - If the /k/ sound comes right after one short vowel use, **-ck**.  
*Example:* back.
  - If the /k/ sound comes right after long vowel sound use **-ke**.  
*Example:* joke.
  
- **Pitch Rule(ch & tch):**
  - Use "tch" when the /ch/ sound is at the end of a syllable and is preceded by a short vowel.  
*Example:* "match", "pitch".
  - Use "ch" when the /ch/ sound is preceded by a long vowel, vowel team, diphthong or consonant.  
*Example:* "search", "church".
  
- **Bridge Rule(ge & dge):**
  - If the /j/ sound comes right after a short vowel use **dge**  
*Example:* bridge.
  - If the /j/ sound comes long vowel, vowel team, diphthong or consonant use **ge**  
*Example:* huge, large.
  
- **Plurals s & es:**
  - To make a noun plural add **-s** to the end  
*Example:* roofs, things.
  - If a word ends in **s, x, z, ch** or **sh** use **-es** to the end.  
*Example:* bushes, buses.
  
- **"S" pronounced /z/:** When the "s" comes between two vowels, read s with /z/ sound.  
*Example:* rose, use.

**Adding Suffixes:** When adding suffixes to words, there are few rules to follow to ensure the proper spelling and pronunciation.

▪ **Consonant Doubling:**

- If one-syllable word ends in a single consonant and is preceded by a single vowel, you double the consonant before adding a vowel suffix.

*Example:* big-bigger, jump-jumped.

- Do not double the consonant when adding a consonant suffix.

*Example:* mad-madly.

▪ **Dropping silent e:**

- If a word ends in an **e**, drop the **e** before adding vowel suffixes.

*Example:* make-making.

- Do not drop e for consonant suffix.

*Example:* cute – cutely.

▪ **Changing y to i:**

- If a word ends in **-y** and is preceded by a consonant, change the **y** to **i** before adding most suffixes (except when the suffix starts with an **i**).

*Example:* study – studied  
play – playing.

▪ **Vowel Team:**

**ai/ay:** is long vowel a sound

- the vowel team “ai” is usually found in the beginning or middle of a word.

*Example:* aid, rain, mail.

- The vowel team “ay” is found at the end of the words.

*Example:* day, way.

**ee/ey** : is long vowel e sound

- The vowel team “ee” is usually found in the middle of the word.  
*Example:* think green, teen, sneeze (Exception bee, tree)
- The vowel team “ey” is usually found at the end of the word.  
*Example:* key, monkey, trolley, kidney.

**ei/ie** : is long e sound

- Use vowel team "ie" in most cases.  
*Example:* chief, believe.
- Use vowel team "ei" when the combination follows the letter "c".  
*Example:* ceiling, receive.

**oa/ow/oe**: is long vowel o sound

- the vowel team “oa” is found in the beginning or middle of words.  
*Example:* boat, road.
- The vowel team “ow” is found at the end of the word  
*Example:* : snow, grow.
- The vowel team “oe” is also found at the end of the words but is least common.  
*Example:* toe, foe.

[Note: There are other vowel teams like ea, ie, oo, ow, and ou, ew, ue, ei, ey, and ui. which do not follow any rule. Also, these vowel teams has more than one sound like ea- has three sounds /ē/ (as in "eat"), /ě/ (as in "bread"), and /ā/ (as in "break"). There is no rule that dictates which may be used. The best practice is to make a list of words based on vowel team that have same sounds for reading. Engage students in blending, reading, writing, sorting, word search to reinforce the sound and spelling pattern ].

▪ **Diphthongs:**

**oi/oy:**

- “oi” is usually found in the beginning or middle of words.  
*Example: coin, oil.*
- “oy” is found at the end of the words.  
*Example: boy, toy.*

**ou/ow:**

- “ou” is found in the beginning or middle of the word  
*Example: out, loud.*
- “ow” is found at the end of the word  
*Example: snow, grow.*
- “ow” comes in the middle of the word if followed by ‘l’ or ‘n’.  
*Example: brown, growl, owl, town.*

# Breaking the Rules: When Phonics Doesn't Play Fair

Phonics is a fantastic tool for learning to read, but let's be honest—English loves to break its own rules! While most words follow predictable phonics patterns, there are always exceptions that can leave learners scratching their heads. Here's a look at some of the trickiest rule-breakers in the English language.

## Common Exceptions to Phonics Rules

◆ **Irregular Vowel Sounds** – Some words just refuse to play by the rules! Take *said* and *does*, for example. These words contain vowel teams that don't follow the usual pronunciation patterns.

◆ **Silent Letters** – Ever wonder why we write *knife*, *honor*, or *gnat* with extra letters we don't pronounce? Silent letters like *k*, *h*, and *g* are just another quirk of English that make reading a bit more challenging.

◆ **Multiple Pronunciations** – Depending on where you live or the context of a sentence, some words can sound completely different. For example, is it *root* or *rout*? *Aunt* or *ant*? The answer? It depends!

## Tips for Teaching Phonics Without the Confusion

Teaching phonics doesn't have to be frustrating! Here are some fun and effective ways to help learners navigate these tricky exceptions:

✓ **Make it fun with games and interactive activities** – Learning through play helps reinforce phonics rules (and their exceptions) in an engaging way.

✓ **Use phonics worksheets** – Structured practice can help solidify patterns, even when exceptions come into play.

✓ **Integrate phonics into daily life** – Reading signs, menus, or even grocery lists can be great real-world practice.

✓ **Encourage positive reinforcement** – Celebrate progress, even with tricky words! A little praise goes a long way.

✓ **Find helpful resources** – There are plenty of books, apps, and online tools to support phonics learning. Keep exploring new ways to make it fun!

While phonics is a great foundation for reading, understanding the exceptions makes learning even stronger. The key is to embrace the quirks of English and turn them into learning opportunities!