

Spelling generalisations, syllable division and morphology for Literacy Hub phonics progression

This document is designed to be used alongside the [Literacy Hub phonics progression](#). It gives detailed explanations of spelling generalisations, syllable division rules and morphology that support phonics instruction. These generalisations have been grouped together as they all help to explain how the alphabetic code can be applied to words.

Teachers can use this document to support their own understanding of the content they are about to teach and to plan for explicit introduction and explanation of concepts for students. When you introduce a new letter-sound correspondence, look at the generalisation relating to that correspondence to clarify your own understanding, then incorporate the generalisation in your instruction. In this way, you enable students to understand how the alphabetic code works in application.

For example:

- When teaching the consonant digraph ck, introduce the spelling generalisation that ck usually makes a /k/ sound at the end of a one-syllable word when it follows a short vowel sound. Example words can then be used for teacher demonstration and guided practice.
- When teaching vowels as either long or short sounds, introduce syllable division rules to demonstrate open and closed syllables, for example, the e in me is long (open syllable) while the e in met is short (closed syllable).
- When teaching the suffix -ed as past tense, use morphology instruction to explain that although the sound of -ed might change (as in rested, fished, timed) the spelling remains constant, as -ed added to a base verb always signifies past tense.

Related links and further reading

[Five from Five spelling rules](#)

[Literacy Hub phonics progression](#)

[Literacy Hub professional learning: Morphology instruction and SSP](#)

[Literacy Hub professional learning: Spelling generalisations and SSP](#)

[Reading Rockets spelling in practice](#)

Spelling generalisations

| Spelling pattern | Generalisations for use | Student background knowledge and skills required | Example words |
|--|---|--|--|
| c or k for /k/ at the beginning of a word | <p>c is used when followed by a, o, u or a consonant.</p> <p>k is used when followed by e, i or y.</p> | <p>Consonants and vowel discrimination</p> <p>Short and long vowel sound discrimination</p> <p>Syllable counting</p> | <p>cat, cot, cub, clip</p> <p>kit, kept, key, kite, Kyle</p> |
| ck or k for /k/ at the end of a word | <p>ck occurs at the end of a one-syllable word, when following a short vowel.</p> <p>k occurs at the end of a one-syllable word when not following a short vowel.</p> | <p>Consonants and vowel discrimination</p> <p>Short and long vowel sound discrimination</p> <p>Syllable counting</p> | <p>deck, lick, back, lock, duck</p> <p>milk, peek, link, soak, fork</p> |
| Floss rule ff, ll, ss, zz | When a one-syllable word ends in f, l, s or z, after a short vowel, the final consonant is doubled. | <p>Syllable counting</p> <p>Short vowel sound identification</p> | fluff, doll, boss, jazz |
| Consonant digraphs sh, *th, ch, wh | <p>Two consonants make one sound.</p> <p>*th has two sounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> voiced /th/ as in this, there, those unvoiced /th/ as in think, throb, thread | Ability to segment words with more than three sounds | <p>sh: ship, wish, shut</p> <p>th: thin, then, this</p> <p>ch: chop, lunch, champ</p> <p>wh: when, why, what</p> |
| Split digraph (silent e) a-e, e-e, i-e, o-e, u-e | <p>A vowel digraph is split by a consonant to form a split digraph.</p> <p>The final e can jump over one consonant only to help the first vowel say its long sound. The final e remains silent.</p> | Discriminate between long and short vowels | <p>a-e: make, lane</p> <p>e-e: eve, theme</p> <p>i-e: hive, mine</p> <p>o-e: rode, bone</p> <p>u-e: cute, rule</p> |
| Sail away ai, ay | <p>ai is used to make the long a sound in the middle and sometimes at the beginning of a word.</p> <p>ay is used to make the long a sound at the end of a word.</p> | Ability to isolate phonemes and choose correct letter pattern to make the sound based on the spelling generalisation | <p>ai: rain, hail, grain, train, paid</p> <p>ay: play, stay, say, pay, day, tray</p> |

| Spelling pattern | Generalisations for use | Student background knowledge and skills required | Example words |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Buzzing bee ee | ee is one of the most common ways of making the long e sound. It often occurs in the middle or at the end of a word. | Ability to isolate individual phonemes in words | free, tree, peel, feel, keep |
| Boat is slow oa, ow | oa is used to make the long o sound in the middle and sometimes at the beginning of a word. ow is used to make the long o sound at the end of a word. | Ability to isolate phonemes and choose correct letter pattern to make the sound based on the spelling generalisation | oa: oats, coat, throat, roast ow: blow, mow, throw, show |
| Bright night igh | igh is used to make the long i sound, often followed by a t. | Ability to isolate individual phonemes in words | high, might, thigh, sight, flight, delight |
| Final y y = long i y = long e | y is used to make a long i sound at the end of a one-syllable word (with 2 or 3 letters). y is used to make a long e sound at the end of a word with two or more syllables (and usually more than three letters). | Syllable counting | Long i: by, my, try, shy, why, cry, spy Long e: lady, teddy, pony, tiny, bumpy, family (include all vowels) |
| Eat bread ea | Two sounds of ea : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> most common: long e as in meat less common: short e as in head ea can also make the long a sound in a few words such as great and break. | Ability to discriminate two different vowel sounds | Long e: meat, eat, dream, seal, mean Short e: head, thread, meant, bread |
| Homophones ee/ea | The two common letter patterns ee and ea for long e sound are often used in homophones (words with the same sound but different meanings). | Knowledge of spelling patterns ee and ea | meet/meat, week/weak, seem/seam, reel/real, feet/feat, team/team |
| A few grew ew | ew can make the long u sound or the oo sound. | Ability to isolate individual phonemes in words | Long u: few, new, dew /oo/: blew, drew, crew |
| The statue is blue ue | ue can make the long u sound or the oo sound. | Ability to isolate individual phonemes in words | Long u: due, argue, value /oo/: true, blue, sue |

| Spelling pattern | Generalisations for use | Student background knowledge and skills required | Example words |
|---|--|--|---|
| Food is good oo, oo | Two sounds of oo : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most common: oo as in mood • less common: oo as in book | Ability to discriminate between two different vowel sounds | Most common: mood, spoon, soon, moon Less common: book, look, hook, hood |
| Boil the toy oi, oy | oi is used in the middle and sometimes at the beginning of a word. oy is used at the end of a word. | Ability to isolate phonemes and choose correct letter pattern to make the sound based on the spelling generalisation | oi: boil, toil, soil, coin, point oy: toy, boy, ploy, coy, enjoy |
| Loud cow ou, ow | ou is used in the middle and sometimes at the beginning of a word. ow is used at the end of a word or in words where the /ou/ sound is followed by l, n, or d. | Ability to isolate phonemes and choose correct letter pattern to make the sound based on the spelling generalisation | ou: out, spout, sound, loud ow: cow, now, gown, crowd, crown |
| Corn in the barn or, ar | r-controlled vowels: when a vowel is followed by the letter r, the r changes the sound the vowel makes. | Ability to isolate individual phonemes in words | or: thorn, horn, lord, fork ar: car, star, cart, bark, park |
| Her bird is hurt er, ir, ur | r-controlled vowels: when a vowel is followed by the letter r, the r changes the sound the vowel makes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most common: er as in her • less common: ir as in stir • least common: ur as in fur | Ability to isolate individual phonemes in words Knowledge of r-controlled vowels | er: term, stern, fern ir: bird, dirt, shirt ur: hurt, burst, burn |
| Gentle Cindy soft g /j/ and soft c /s/ sound | g and c usually make a soft sound (/j/ and /s/) when followed by e, i or y, as in the first e of gentle and the i in Cindy . | Knowledge of regular sounds for g and c Ability to identify vowel sounds | Soft g: gem, giant, gym Soft c: cent, city, cycle |
| dge | dge , the longer spelling of /j/ sound, is used at the end of a one-syllable word, when following a short vowel. | Syllable counting | badge, ledge, ridge, dodge smudge |
| tch | tch , the longer spelling of /ch/ sound, is used at the end of a one-syllable word, when following a short vowel. | Syllable counting | catch, fetch, stitch, hutch |

| Spelling pattern | Generalisations for use | Student background knowledge and skills required | Example words |
|--|--|--|---|
| Consonant digraph ph | Two consonants make one sound: ph makes the /f/ sound. | Ability to segment words with more than three sounds | photo, graph, elephant |
| Pie pieces ie | Two sounds of ie : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> most common sound: long i less common sound: long e | Ability to identify long vowel sounds | Long i: lie, pie, tie, tries Long e: field, piece, chief, niece |
| Grey monkey ey | ey can make two sounds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> long a as in grey long e as in monkey | Ability to identify long vowel sounds | Long a: they, hey, prey Long e: key, honey, donkey |
| Sauce on a prawn au, aw | au is used in the middle and sometimes at the beginning of a word. aw is used at the end of a word, or in words where the /or/ sound is followed by l, n or k. | Ability to isolate phonemes and choose correct letter pattern to make the sound based on the spelling generalisation | au: faun, daunt, laundry, launch aw: yawn, hawk, paw, straw |
| Consonant -le | Two-syllable words with -le making /l/ sound at the end: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> vowel sound is short when two consonants follow the first vowel in the word vowel sound is long when one consonant follows the first vowel in the word | Ability to syllabify words Knowledge of short and long vowel sounds | Short vowel: little, sample, mumble, dimple Long vowel: title, fable, table, bridle |
| Hear the early bear ear | ear makes three sounds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> most common: as in hear less common: as in early least common: as in bear | Ability to isolate individual phonemes in words Knowledge of r-controlled vowels | Most common: dear, near, fear, rear Less common: earth, learn, heard Least common: tear, wear, pear |
| The swan wants water a for /o/ and /or/ sound | a usually makes /o/ sound after w. a can make /or/ sound after w, usually when the a is followed by l or r. | Understanding that vowels can represent many phonemes | /o/: swan, want, wash, was /or/: walk, warm, wall |

| Spelling pattern | Generalisations for use | Student background knowledge and skills required | Example words |
|---|---|--|--|
| Champ the Christmas chef ch | <p>ch makes three sounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Germanic origin: /ch/ as in chimp • Greek origin: /k/ as in Christmas • French origin: /sh/ as in chef | Ability to isolate individual phonemes in words Knowledge of digraphs making multiple sounds | Germanic: chip, chomp, pouch, lunch Greek: anchor, ache, architect, chemist French: chic, quiche, parachute, brochure |
| His bags of treasure s for /z/ or /zh/ | <p>Two alternate common sounds of s:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • s usually makes /z/ when it follows a voiced sound as in dogs • s usually makes /zh/ sound when preceded by a vowel and followed by certain suffixes such as -ure (as in measure) and -ion (as in division) | Understanding that one letter may represent multiple sounds | /z/: gives, peas, sheds, clothes /zh/: explosion, closure, television |
| I bought the tough dough ough | <p>ough has multiple sounds but not all are common</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • long o as in dough • /aw/ as in bought • /ow/ as in drought • /oo/ as in through • short u + /f/ as in tough • short o + /f/ as in cough • /u/ as in thorough | Ability to isolate individual phonemes in words Knowledge of vowel teams making multiple sounds | Long o: dough, though, doughnut, although /aw/: bought, fought, nought, ough /ow/: drought, plough, bough, /oo/: through Short u + /f/: tough, rough, enough Short o + /f/: cough, trough /u/: thorough, borough |

Syllable division

In the following table, 'v' represents 'vowel' and 'c' consonant. So, v/cv represents words with the format vowel/consonant-vowel.

| Syllable type | Generalisations for use | Student background knowledge and skills required | Example words |
|--|---|---|--|
| Open and closed syllables (one-syllable words) | In an open syllable, the vowel is not followed by a consonant, so it makes its long sound. In a closed syllable, the vowel is followed by one or more consonants, so it makes its short sound. | Knowledge of consonants and vowels Knowledge of short and long vowel sounds | me, he, we, she no, go, so hi wet, got, sob, him, mess, hen |
| Wombat words | Two closed syllables in a two-syllable word with a vc/cv pattern. | Knowledge of closed syllables Ability to split words into syllables according to vowel consonant pattern | wombat, rabbit, happen |
| Emu words | First syllable is open in a two-syllable word with a v/cv pattern. | Knowledge of open syllables Ability to split words into syllables according to vowel consonant pattern | taken, even, spider, open, tuba |
| Galah words | First syllable is closed in a two-syllable word with a vc/v pattern. | Knowledge of closed syllables Ability to split words into syllables according to vowel consonant pattern | comet, lemon, melon, cabin |
| Reptile words | Two-syllable words containing a split digraph (silent e syllable). | Knowledge of split digraphs | pancake, athlete, sunshine, remote, costume |
| Sealion words | Two-syllable words containing a vowel team syllable. | Knowledge of vowel teams | peacock, midnight, complain, treetop |
| Lizard words | Two-syllable words containing an r-controlled vowel syllable. | Knowledge of r-controlled vowels | target, person, birthday, forget, surgeon |
| Turtle words | Two-syllable words containing a consonant -le syllable. | Knowledge of consonant -le | sample, kettle, little, noble, puzzle |

Morphology

| Affix | Meaning | Example words |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Suffix -s (noun) | Plural; meaning 'more than one'. | dogs, cats, logs, bins |
| Suffix -es (noun) | Plural; meaning 'more than one' for words ending in sh, ch, ss, zz, x, tch. | passes, wishes, boxes, lunches, quizzes, matches |
| Suffix -s/-es (verb) | Present simple tense; meaning 'something that can be done'. | stays, jumps, skips, draws catches, fixes, finishes, buzzes |
| Prefix un- | Meaning 'not'. | unhappy, unwell, unhurt, unmade |
| Suffix -ed | Past tense; meaning 'already happened'. -ed can have three different sounds: 'ed', /d/ or /t/: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if the verb ends in the letters t or d, the -ed sounds like 'ed' and creates a new syllable • if the verb ends in a vowel sound or a voiced consonant (l, n, r, b, g, m, z, s, v) then the -ed ending sounds like /d/ and does not create a new syllable • if the verb ends in an unvoiced consonant (p, k, f, gh, sh, ch, ss, c, x) then the -ed ending sounds like a /t/ and does not create a new syllable | rested, sailed, fished |
| Suffix -ing | Present tense; meaning 'happening now'. | jumping, trusting, walking |
| Prefix re- | Meaning 'back' or 'again'. | retry, remake, redo, return |
| Suffix -er | A person who (or thing that) does something. er makes the schwa sound /ə/ (the 'uh' sound a vowel makes in an unaccented syllable) | baker, teacher, ruler, rubber |
| Prefix pre- | Meaning 'before'. | preview, preheat, predinner |
| Prefix mis- | Meaning 'wrong' or 'bad'. | mislead, mishear, mismatch |
| Prefix in- | Meaning 'in', 'into' or 'not'. | inside, invisible, inactive |

| Affix | Meaning | Example words |
|---|---|---|
| Suffix -ed/-ing (added to a word with a silent e/split digraph) | Take away the silent e before adding -ed or -ing suffix. | traded, smiled, shining, timing |
| Suffix -ed/-ing (double final consonant) | Double the final consonant after a short vowel. This general suffix rule applies to words with a single final consonant after a short vowel when any suffix beginning with a vowel is added. | tapped, skipping, running, grabbed |
| Irregular past tense | Adding -ed to show past tense doesn't work with some verbs. (Irregular past tense words need to be specifically taught.) | run-ran, write-wrote, swim-swam, think-thought |
| Suffix -er | Comparative; compared to something else. | bigger, smaller, safer, older |
| Suffix -est | Superlative; the most or the least of a group. | biggest, smallest, longest, shortest |
| Suffix -ful | Meaning 'full of'. | beautiful, hopeful, colourful, restful |
| Suffix -ly | Adverb; meaning 'like'. May answer the question 'how?' e.g. 'How did I run?' | quickly, slowly, badly, expertly |
| Suffix -ment | Meaning 'result of an action'. | shipment, excitement, disappointment, payment |
| Suffix -able | Meaning 'able to'. | teachable, reliable, adorable, lovable |
| Suffix -es (change y to i) | Change y to i (when final y follows a consonant) then add -es suffix to show plural or present simple tense. | fly-flies, family-families, body-bodies, puppy-puppies |
| General suffix rule for silent e/split digraph words | Take away the e if the suffix begins with a vowel; keep the e if the suffix begins with a consonant. | Take away e: lovable, hoped Keep e: spiteful, likely |



Visit the **Literacy Hub website** at www.literacyhub.edu.au to access more free, evidence-based literacy resources for teachers.

