

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](#)

[NSW Government Department of Education guidance on spelling](#)

[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, teem/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/ or /or/ sound after w.	Understanding that vowels can represent many phonemes	/o/: swan, want, wash, was /or/: walk, water, wall

Spelling pattern	Generalisations for use	Student background knowledge and skills required	Example words
Champ the Christmas chef ch	ch makes three sounds: <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/	Two alternate common sounds of s : <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	ough has multiple sounds but not all are common <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • /aw/ as in bought • long o as in dough • short u + /f/ as in tough • /ow/ as in plough • short o + /f/ as in cough • /oo/ as in through 	Ability to isolate individual phonemes in words Knowledge of vowel teams making multiple sounds	/aw/: bought, fought, nought, ought Long o: dough, though, doughnut, although Short u + /f/: tough, rough, enough /ow/: plough, bough, drought Short o + /f/: cough, trough /oo/: through

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 v/cv 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



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