

Phonics Primer

You can use this Phonics Primer developed by The National Right to Read Foundation to begin teaching a child or adult to read today. This primer lists the [44 sounds in the English language](#) and then gives [steps for teaching](#) those 44 sounds and their most common spelling patterns. In addition to learning sounds and spellings, each day the student must read lists of phonetically related words and spell these words from dictation. Phonics instruction must be reinforced by having the student read decodable text.

The 44 Sounds in the English Language

5 Short-Vowel Sounds	18 Consonant Sounds	7 Digraphs
short /ă/ in a pple short /ĕ/ in e lephant short /ĭ/ in i gloo short /ŏ/ in o ctopus short /ŭ/ in u mbrella	/b/ in b at /k/ in c at and k ite /d/ in d og /f/ in f an /g/ in g oat /h/ in h at /j/ in j am /l/ in l ip /m/ in m ap /n/ in n est /p/ in p ig /r/ in r at /s/ in s un /t/ in t op /v/ in v an /w/ in w ig /y/ in y ell /z/ in z ip	/ch/ in ch in /sh/ in sh ip unvoiced /th/ in th in voiced /th/ in th is /hw/ in wh ip * /ng/ in ng /nk/ in nk * (wh is pronounced /w/ in some areas)
6 Long-Vowel Sounds	3 r-Controlled Vowel Sounds	Diphthongs and Other Special Sounds
long /ā/ in a ke long /ē/ in e et long /ī/ in i e long /ō/ in o at long /ū/ (yoo) in u le long /ōō/ in o ew	/ur/ in u rn, u rd, and u rt /ar/ in a rk /or/ in o rk	/oi/ in oi l and oi y /ow/ in ow l and ow ch short /ōō/ in oo k and oo ll /aw/ in a w and a ul /zh/ in z hion

Steps for Teaching Phonics

Step 1. Gather the materials listed below and store them together in a box.

Materials for Teaching Phonics	
What You Need	Suggestion
systematic phonics program	Consider a program from Phonics Products for Home or Phonics Products for School .
* phonics flashcards with the letter or letter combination (such as ou) on front and clue word (such as out) on back	Consider the <i>Individual Set of 70 Phonogram Cards</i> (item #IPC, \$10) from Spalding Education International, available at www.spalding.org . It's helpful to also purchase the <i>Spalding Phonogram Sounds CD</i> (item #CD, \$5.00) to learn how to pronounce each sound correctly.
decodable stories (preferably 100% decodable)	If your phonics program does not contain 100% decodable stories, consider the 17-book set of readers from the <i>Sing, Spell, Read, & Write</i> program. These books (called <i>2nd Edition 1st Grade Storybooks</i>) can be purchased individually or as part of the Level 1 program by visiting the publisher Pearson Learning at http://www.pearsonlearning.com/singspell/index.cfm .
writing supplies: index cards, index card file, black wide-tip permanent marker, beginner's wide-ruled writing tablet, 2 pencils with erasers	Purchase writing supplies at any office supply store.

*** Note:** Make sure your phonics flashcards give the proper sound or sounds for each letter or letter combination – many widely available flashcards are incorrect or incomplete. For example, the common sound of **x** is /ks/ as in **fox**, not /z/ as in **xylophone** or /eks/ as in **x-ray**. Also, the short-vowel sound of **i** is /ɪ/ as in **igloo**, not /i/ as in **ice cream**.

Step 2. Teach the 5 short-vowel sounds and consonant sounds. Drill until memorized.

During the first week, use the flashcards to drill the short-vowel sounds. Add several consonant sounds each day until you are drilling all short-vowel sounds and consonant sounds with your student daily. Do not rush this step. Keep drilling until all sounds are memorized, which usually takes 2-4 weeks.

Tip: Work on phonics for at least 15 minutes a day, 5 days a week with your student. Frequency and consistency are more important than the length of time spent on each lesson.

Short-Vowel Sounds
short /ă/ in a pple
short /ĕ/ in e lephant
short /ĭ/ in i gloo
short /ŏ/ in o ctopus
short /ŭ/ in u mbrella

Consonant Sounds		
/b/ in b at	/k/ in k ite	/s/ in s un
/k/ in c at	/l/ in l ip	/t/ in t op
/d/ in d og	/m/ in m ap	/v/ in v an
/f/ in f an	/n/ in n est	/w/ in w ig
/g/ in g oat	/p/ in p ig	/ks/ in fo x
/h/ in h at	/kw/ in qu een	/y/ in y ell
/j/ in j am	/r/ in r at	/z/ in z ip

Step 3. Practice two-letter blends. Drill until blending is automatic.

After your student knows the short-vowel sounds and consonant sounds, next teach him how to orally blend two letters (**b-a**, **ba**) and read two-letter blends such as: **ba**, **be**, **bi**, **bo**, **bu**.

Two-Letter Blends		
b + a = ba	s + a = sa	j + a = ja
b + e = be	s + e = se	j + e = je
b + i = bi	s + i = si	j + i = ji
b + o = bo	s + o = so	j + o = jo
b + u = bu	s + u = su	j + u = ju

Step 4. Practice three-letter blends. Drill until blending is automatic.

After your student can read two-letter blends, progress to three-letter blends, that is, *words*. Each day, have your student read a set of short-vowel words, then dictate these same words to him. (Show him how to form each letter and correct him gently, if necessary). This not only helps him remember the phonics lesson just learned, but it greatly improves spelling.

Golden Rule of Phonics: *Never allow your student to skip, guess, or substitute words. Accuracy is more important than speed.*

Three-Letter Blends		
fa + t = fat	ki + t = kit	ro + d = rod
de + n = den	ma + d = mad	se + t = set
bo + x = box	ye + s = yes	tu + g = tug
hi + d = hid	no + t = not	wi + n = win
ju + g = jug	pu + n = pun	la + p = lap

Step 5. Teach the twin-consonant endings, plurals, and two-consonant blends. Drill until blending is automatic.

Twin-Consonant Endings	Two-Consonant Blends	Two-Consonant Blends
puff	blab	stun, fist
sell	brag	swam
kiss	club	trot
fuzz	crop	twin
lock	drag	fact
	fled	raft
Plurals:	frog	bulb
cats (sounds like /s/)	glum	held
beds (sounds like /z/)	grip	elf
	plug	sulk
	prim	film
	scat	help
	skip, mask	silt
	sled	jump
	smug	hand
	snip	mint
	spot, gasp	kept

Step 6. Teach the digraphs (ch, sh, th, wh, ng, nk). A *digraph* consists of two consonants that form a new sound when combined. Also teach three-consonant blends.

Digraphs	Three-Consonant Blends
chin, such, patch (silent t)	scruff
ship, wish	split
thin, with (unvoiced /th/)	strap
this (voiced /th/)	thrill
whip	
sang, sing, song, sung	
sank, sink, honk, sunk	

Step 7. Introduce a few high-frequency words necessary to read most sentences.

After your student can read three-letter and four-letter words easily, it's time to add a few high-frequency words that are necessary to read most sentences. Some high-frequency words are phonetically regular (such as "or"), but are introduced out of sequence because of their importance. Other words are truly irregular, because they contain one or more letters that don't follow the rules of phonics (such as "once" and "who").

The Basic High-Frequency Words table lists the most important words. Write each word on an index card. Introduce three or four new words a week. Drill your student on these words everyday, **encouraging him to sound out as much of the word as possible (usually the vowel sound is the only irregular part)**. As your student masters each word, file the card in the card file under "Words I Know." When your student comes across a new "wacky" word (such as "sugar" in which the "s" is pronounced /sh/), make up a new index card and file it under "Words To Learn."

***Tip:** What distinguishes this high-frequency word list from the typical "sight word" list? Many words in the list below cannot be completely sounded out, either because they contain one or more letters that don't "follow the rules" or the rule is learned later. In contrast, the typical "sight word" list contains mostly phonetically regular words (such as "and" and "when") that the student is forced to memorize simply because he has never been taught to sound them out.*

Basic High-Frequency Words	
Introduce after student can read short-vowel words, /th/, and /sh/	Introduce after student can read long-vowel words
<p><i>A vowel by itself says its name:</i> a, I</p> <p><i>"e" at the end of a short word says its name:</i> be, he, me, we, she, the*</p> <p><i>"o" at the end of these words says its name:</i> no, go, so</p> <p><i>"or" says /or/:</i> or, for</p> <p>do, to, into, of, off, put</p> <p><i>* also pronounced /thŭ/</i></p>	<p>was, were, are doing, does said, says, have, give you, your, yours they, their, there where, what, why, who once, one, come, some done, none two, too</p>

Step 8. Teach the long-vowel sounds and their spellings. Note that there are five common spellings for each long-vowel sound. Also teach the “Silent-e Rule”: When a one-syllable word ends in “e” and has the pattern **vce** (vowel-consonant-e), the first vowel says its name and the “e” is silent.

Long-Vowel Sounds	Common Spellings	Less Common Spellings
long /ā/	cake , rain , pay , eight , baby	steak , they , vein
long /ē/	Pete , me , feet , sea , bunny	key , field , cookie , receive , pizza
long /ī/	bike , hi , fly , pie , night	rye , type
long /ō/	hope , go , boat , toe , snow	soul , though
long /ū/ & /ōō/	mule , blue , boot , tuna , flew	fruit , soup , through , feud

Step 9. Teach the r-controlled vowel sounds and their spellings.

r-Controlled Vowel Sounds	Common Spellings	Less Common Spellings
/ur/	fern , bird , hurt	pure , dollar , worm , earth
/ar/	farm	orange , forest
/or/	fork	door , pour , roar , more , war

Step 10. Teach the diphthongs /oi/ and /ow/ and their spellings. A *diphthong* consists of two vowels that form a new sound when combined. Also teach other special sounds.

Sound	Common Spellings
/oi/	oil, boy
/ow/	owl, ouch
short /ö/	cook, pull
/sh/	vacation, session, facial
/zh/	vision

Step 11. Teach /aw/, /awl/, /awk/ and their spellings.

Sound	Common Spellings
/aw/	jaw, haul, wash, squash
/awl/	bald, wall
/awk/	talk

Step 12. Teach these sounds and spelling patterns.

Sound	Common Spellings
/s/ spelled c <i>Rule: c followed by e, i, or y sounds like /s/.</i>	cent, face, cinder, cycle
/j/ spelled g, ge, dge <i>Rule: g followed by e, i, or y usually sounds like /j/.</i>	frigid, age, fudge, gym
/f/ spelled ph <i>Rule: ph sounds like /f/ in words of Greek origin.</i>	phone, phonics
/k/ spelled ch <i>Rule: ch sounds like /k/ in words of Greek origin.</i>	chorus, Christmas
/sh/ spelled ch <i>Rule: ch sounds like /sh/ in words of French origin.</i>	chef, champagne

Note: This Phonics Primer does not contain all English spelling patterns. Consult a good phonics program such as one from [Phonics Products from Home](#) or [Phonics Products for School](#) for additional spelling patterns and rules. Most products contain detailed instructions and practice reading selections.

Step 13. After 3 to 4 months of daily phonics instruction, begin introducing decodable stories.

Important: All sounds and spellings in Steps 2 - 12 should be introduced within the first 4 months of phonics instruction.

After 3 to 4 months of reading lists of words and sentences, your student should be ready to read decodable stories. The student should read all stories aloud, carefully and accurately. Help him sound out difficult words, as needed. Explain the meaning of all new words. Encourage him to read each story several times to gain fluency, but don't let him memorize the story (reciting a story from memory is not reading). Model fluent reading by reading a sentence aloud with expression, then asking him to repeat what you read with the same tone of voice. Explain and demonstrate the meaning of basic punctuation (*period* = stop, *comma* = pause, *exclamation point* = speak with excitement, *question mark* = raise the pitch of your voice on the last word to ask a question.)

Step 14. Begin introducing “easy-to-read” books.

After the student masters decodable stories, let him move on to easy books such as those by Dr. Seuss (*Hop on Pop; One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish; Ten Apples Up on Top; Green Eggs and Ham*; and so on), P. D. Eastman (*Are You My Mother?; Go Dog, Go!; A Fish Out of Water*), and Cynthia Rylant (*Henry and Mudge* series; *Poppleton* series; *Mr. Putter and Tabby* series). As your student reads each book, add new wacky words to the Words To Learn file and review daily, if necessary.

Continue teaching the lessons in the phonics program – don't stop just because your student can read. Most children need 1 to 2 years of reinforcement before their phonics knowledge becomes permanent.

Step 15. Continue to give phonetically based spelling lists.

Even after your student has finished the phonics program, make sure to reinforce his phonics knowledge by giving phonetically based spelling lists each week at least through third grade.

Revised: 1/07