

The Alphabet Code & How It Works

Adapted from Brunner, Spalding, & and Others

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A. The Alphabet is composed of vowel letters and consonant letters. The vowels are a, e, i, o, and u, and sometimes y. (The letters r, l, and w frequently affect how vowels are sounded: The a is sounded differently in car, call, or caw as compared with cat.) The consonants are easier; let's deal with them first. s is a letter; /s/ is a sound.

<u>b</u> : <u>bat</u>	<u>j</u> : <u>jet</u>	<u>s</u> : <u>sat</u> (s = /s/)
<u>c</u> : <u>cat</u> (c = /k/)	<u>k</u> : <u>kit</u>	<u>t</u> : <u>tag</u>
<u>c</u> ent (before e, i, or y, <u>c</u> = /s/)	<u>l</u> : <u>log</u>	<u>v</u> : <u>vat</u>
<u>d</u> : <u>dog</u>	<u>m</u> : <u>mat</u>	<u>w</u> : <u>win</u>
<u>f</u> : <u>fat</u>	<u>n</u> : <u>nap</u>	<u>x</u> : <u>box</u> (x = /ks/)
<u>g</u> : <u>gun</u> (g = /g/)	<u>p</u> : <u>pan</u>	<u>xylophone</u> (x = /z/)
<u>g</u> em (before e, i, or y, <u>g</u> - /j/)	<u>q(u)</u> : <u>quit</u> (qu = /kw/)	<u>y</u> : <u>yes</u>
	<u>qu</u> ist (qu = /kw/)	
	<u>mystique</u> (qu = /k/)	
	<u>r</u> : <u>run</u>	<u>z</u> : <u>zebra</u>

B. A Vowel letter can represent more than one speech sound, depending on the presence of other letters:

<u>Vowel</u>	("Short") <u>First</u>	("Long") <u>Second</u>	<u>Third</u>	Note: For vowel combinations refer to the Hanna List.
<u>a</u>	<u>am</u>	<u>ate</u>	<u>all</u>	
<u>e</u>	<u>egg</u>	<u>eve</u>		
<u>i</u>	<u>in</u>	<u>ice</u>		
<u>o</u>	<u>on</u>	<u>open</u>		
<u>u</u>	<u>up</u>	<u>use</u>	<u>put</u>	

I will use the terms, "short," "long," and "third" sounds. "Vowel" means a vowel letter, as a. A vowel sound is denoted /a/. Note that in its "long" sound, a vowel "says its own name."

C. Definitions:

Digraph: Two letters together representing one sound:

Consonants: ch (chin/ache/chivalry), sh (ship), th (they/thin), ck (sack), kn (know), gh (ghost), ph (phone), pn (pneumonia), ps (psychic), rh (rhinoceros), sc (science), gn (gnat/sign), wr (write), ng (sing), wh = /hw/ (!) (whale). Note: The /k/ sound is spelled ck after short vowels versus k after a long vowel, example: tack versus take."

Vowels: ea (meat/bread/great) (See Hanna list for more complete listings.)

Mixed: ci (facial), si (session), ti (nation), ce (ocean); These make the /sh/ sound in syllables after the first. (See Rule 9.) qu = /k/ in mystique and technique.

Diphthongs: Two letters (usually vowels) run together uniquely. oi (coin), oy (boy).

Blends: Consonant clusters where each letter is distinctly sounded by connectedly, such as bl and nd in the word "blend;" scr in "scratch."

- ** Rule 1. If a word or syllable ends in a consonant, and has only one vowel, the vowel sound is usually “short.” (Called a “closed” syllable)
Example: at, hat, met, tidbit, hot, hut, suffix.
- (The above Consonant-Vowel-Consonant “CVC” pattern is the most frequent and stable kind of syllable in English, and calls for the short vowel sound.)
- ** Rule 2: Where a word or final syllable ends in a “VCV” pattern, the last vowel is a “silent e,” the preceding vowel usually represents its long sound.
Example: ate, mate, complete, invite, vote, mute.
- ** Rule 3: If a syllable or word has one vowel and it is at the end, the vowel is usually long (Called an “open” syllable. Example: me, go. Note that English words do not end in i. When the long final /i/ sound is needed, the i is changed to a y. Example: my, try; “deny,” but “denies;” “try” but “tries.”
- ** Rule 4: The vowels i and o followed by two consonants may represent their long sounds.
Example: find, cold, most, child, pint.
- ** Rule 5: Third sounds:
The vowel a frequently says its third sound after w (want) or qu (quantity), or before l, ll, (tall), or lt (salt).
- ** Rule 6: Silent e rules:
The silent final e may call for the preceding vowel to represent its long sound.
Example: time, paste
- The silent e may call for the preceding c or g to represent its “soft” sound.
Example: chance (c = /s/), large (g = /j/). (See Rules 7 & 8.)
- English words do not end in u or v. Example: have, argue
- Words ending in /s/ preceded by a mixed or vowel digraph must end in e.
Example: house, sense.
In some cases, the e indicates that the s is not a suffix. Example: lapse.
- Every syllable must have a vowel: litte, bottle.
- Some final e’s have no function. Example: are, were.
- ** Rule 7. When c is followed by e, i, or y, it usually says its second (soft, like /s/) sound: cent, city, cyberspace; Exception: soccer.
- ** Rule 8. When g is followed by e, i, or y, it usually says its soft (/j/) sound. Example: gem, ginger, gymnasium; Exceptions: get, give, giddy, begin, girl, gynecologist.
- ** Rule 9a ed added to a word ending in d or t forms an added syllable, as in “mended” and “acted.”
- ** Rule 9b ed added to verbs ending in the voiced sounds of b, g, l, m, r, s (like /z/), v, or z, will sound only like /d/. Example: sobbed, sagged, filled, slammed, slurred, praised, saved, razed.
- ** Rule 9c ed added to verbs ending in the unvoiced sounds of f, k, p, /s/, or x (= /ks/) will sound like /t/. Example: gaffed, picked, stopped, passed, boxed.

D. “R”- Controlled Vowels

- ** Rule 10a R after a vowel changes the vowel sound. For e, i, and u, a key sentence to remember is: “Her first, nurse, works, early.” Notice that the vowel + r sound is the same in all five words, and they are given in order of frequency of English usage in spelling the /er/ sound. For other vowel + r combinations, note the change of vowel sound between at and are, and between on and or. Exceptions: sword, sworn.
- ** Rule 10b ear says /er/ when followed by another consonant (earn, early); Exceptions: “beard,” “heart,” and “hearth.”

E. Other Mixed Digraphs

ai as in “aid,” but at the ends of words it becomes ay as in “say.”
(English words do not end in i or u; Exception: “you”)

oi as in “oil,” at ends of words becomes oy as in “boy.”

au as in “audio,” at ends of words becomes aw as in “paw.”

ei as in “receive,” “their,” or “foreign.”

ey as in “key,” “they,” or “valley.”

eu as in “rheumatism” or “Europe”.

ew as in “few” or “flew.”

oa as in “oat;” oe as in “toe”.

ow a as in “cow” or “low.” *snow plow* or *slow cow*

ou as in “ouch,” “pour,” or “you.”

ue as in “blue,” “rue,” “value.”

F. Three-letter Phonograms

igh as in “light,” etc., is best taught as “three-letter long i.”

- ** Rule 11 The /ch/ sound is spelled tch after short vowels in one-syllable words, as in “catch,” “fetch,” “itch,” “botch,” and “hutch.” Exceptions: much, rich, such, which, attach, detach, bachelor, duchess, lecherous.
- ** Rule 12 The soft g /j/ sound is spelled dge after short vowel sounds, as in “badge,” “edge,” “ridge,” “dodge,” and “fudge.” (Need to isolate final e from previous vowel.) Exception: College

H. Four-Letter and Uncommon Phonograms

aigh as in “straight;” ough as in “daughter”
or “laugh;” eight as in “eight” and “inveigh;”

Then ough, (the “wild card!”) as in though = /oe/; through = /oo/; thought = /ö/; cough = /off/; rough = /üff/. Fortunately, there are only 37 of such words in the English language!

I. Syllabication The main concern is to try for preservation of pronounceability, thinking of open and closed syllables as in Rules 3 and 1.

** Rule 13 Divide words with long syllables after the vowel, creating “open” syllables: vi-tal, ma-ple, pre-vail. Usually there will be a single consonant between the two vowels.
A prefix, e.g., pre is a syllable.

** Rule 14 Divide words with short vowel syllables after a consonant, creating “closed” syllables: hap-py, riv-er, tap-ping, sel-ling. Usually there are two consonants together such that the word may be divided between them.

** Rule 14a Do not split consonant digraphs: fat-head, but fath-er.

J. Sample Hierarchal Sequence for Teaching: Start with the simple and frequent, and work toward the complex and less frequent (See Hazel Loring’s *Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for 1st Grade*).

** 1. Three-letter, CVC, short vowel sounds: bat, big, hot, hut, bet; Loring Units 1-5

** 2. Four-letter, CVCC, final consonant blends: band, tint, pond, fund, mend; Loring Unit 6.

** 3. Sh & th digraphs: fish, ship, this, thin; Loring Units 7, 8.

** 4. Ch, tch digraphs: chin, catch; Loring Unit 9.

** 5. Wh digraph: when, which; Loring Unit 10.

** 6. Digraphs ng and nk: rang, rank; Loring Units 11, 12.

** 7. Initial Consonant Blends: black, spin, scan, etc; Loring Unit 13, 14

** 8. Short Vowel Compound Words; Loring Unit 15

** 9. Silent final e (VCe): cane, pine, hope, cute, Pete; Loring 16.

** 10. Long vowels per Rules 3 & 4: me, go, cold, wild; Loring 17, 18.
Hanna Vowel Sound Chart, short & long vowel sections.

** 11. “-r controlled” vowels a and o: bar, for; Loring Units 19, 20.

** 12. “-r” controlled vowels e, i, u, etc: Key sentence: “Her first nurse works early!” gives /er/ sounds in order of frequency. Loring 21.

** 13. Vowel digraphs; Loring Units 22 – 25, *Hanna Vowel Sound Chart*, entire.

** 14. Final y: Short as in candy; long as in my, sky; Loring Unit 26.

** 15. Vowel digraphs and diphthongs; Loring Units 26 – 32. *Hanna Vowel Sound Chart*, entire.

** 16. Vowel digraphs aw, au and third sound of a: all, salt; Rule 5 & Loring 33, 34.

** 17 Vowel digraphs ew, ue; Loring 35.

** 18 Unaccented a at the beginning of a word and when not used for emphasis; Loring 36.

** 19. Third sound of u: pull; Rule 5 & Loring Unit 37.

** 20. Soft sound of c & g, followed by e, i, or y; cent, chinch, cycle, gem, gin, gym; Rules 7, 8, & Loring 38, 39.

** 21. Various silent letters k, w, t, and l. Variations se = z, ph = f, le, tion, sion; Loring Units 40 - 44.

** 22. Three sounds of suffix ed: added, aimed, baked; Rule 9 & Loring Unit 45

** 23. Long vowels in open syllables: fa-vor, di-al, po-em, fu-el; Loring 46

** 24. Semiregular high-frequency words: 37 Dolch Words and Words with /zh/ as in treasure; Loring 47

	A	E	I	O	U
SHORT VOWELS	a__ (apple) (4656)	e__ (Eddie) (4403) ea__ (bread) (156)	i__ (Italy) (6J68)	o__ (operate) (hot dog) (3241) wa__ (want) (92) -a (244) (fa la la)	u__ (uppercut) (1545) o__ (month) (136)
LONG VOWELS	a_e (make) (1023) -ay (play) (143) ai__ (rain) (308) -ey (they) (19) ei__ (their) (51) -ea_ (great) -eigh- (eight) -a- (vacation)	c__c (here) (92) -e (he) (7) ee (see) (307) ea (eat) (325) ie__ (piece) (77) i before a vowel (radio) (1719) -y (happy) (1628) -ie (movie) (18) -ey (money) (43)	i__c (like) (878) y__e (type) (23) -y (my) (128) -ie (pie) (11) -igh (night) (88) -ind (kind) -ild (child) } (51) -ign (sign)	o__e (hope) (424) -o (go) (148) -oe (toe) (15) -ow (slow) (130) oa__ (boat) (132)	u__e (cute) (338) -ew (new) (66) -ue (true) (43) ui__ (fruit) (16) eu__ (neutral) (39)
VOWELS CHANGED BY R OR L	-ar (car) (cart) (606) -all (ball) } (96) -alt (salt) -alk (walk)	-er (her) (2066) (jerk) ear__ (heard) (32)	-ir (sir) (girl) (114)	-or (for) (718) (fork) -oll } (84) (roll) -old (cold) war (warm) (79)	-ur (fur) (247) (turn) wor__ (word) (51) our__ (journey) (49) pour out your soup!
OTHER VOWEL SOUNDS	-aw (jaw) (77) au__ (August) (169)	long oo (too) (shoot) (187)	short oo (book) (116) u__ (put) (150)	-ow (cow) (122) Snow plow, Slow cow ou__ (out) (279)	-oy (boy) (53) oi__ (noise) (109)

ough is wild (though, through, thought, enough) (37)

Her first nurse works early!

The Hanna Vowel Sound Chart, though not 100% perfect in settling all arguments, is thoughtfully organized and the most comprehensive guide in compact form. It focuses on vowel sounds, for example, in the second part of the first column in the group with the "long a" sounds, you will find -ey as in "they" and ei- as in "their." The ai- and ei- frequently write the a sound within a word; the -ay and -ey write long a sound at the end of a word. Similarly, in the last box, bottom right, "oy" and "oi" are used to write the same sound blend, but -oy is used at the end of a word, -oi- is used within a word.

The "igh" as in light, night, etc., is best taught as "3-letter long i." The numbers in parentheses are the numbers of English words in which each vowel pattern appeared at the time the list was created. Note that the "ough" which anti-phonics people complain about is involved in only 37 words, a mere "drop in the bucket" which should not be used as an excuse for failing to teach the useful patterns of the alphabetic system in general.

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The address for Mr. Richardson's organization was The Literacy Council, 1 Jefferson Ferry Dr, Ste. 5152, South Setauket, NY 11720-4724. The Literacy Council was closed when Mr. Richardson passed away in April 2008. I appreciated Mr. Richardson for allowing me to publish this educational material on my www.donpotter.net site. *The Alphabetic Code & How It Works* and the *Hanna Vowel Sound Chart* are very useful informational tools that can be used with any good synthetic phonics program.

My teaching experience: I was a certified elementary bilingual teacher, Instructional Resource Teacher, dyslexia teacher, and Junior High Spanish teacher for the Ector County ISD, Odessa, Texas for 21 years. Upon retiring from public education in 2006, I began teaching at the Odessa Christian School in Odessa, Texas where I taught the following subjects: a regular 4th grade class, elementary and middle school Spanish, remedial reading, cursive handwriting for all grades, middle school Texas and American History, 3rd grade American history, award winning cursive, and computers.

I retired from the Christian School on May 31, 2019 in order to dedicate more of my time to my private tutoring, book publishing, and educational consulting.

I published Hazel Loring's *Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for First Grade* in 2003 as a free pdf document on my website, but did not use it in my private tutoring until the summer of 2007. The results fully justify its consideration for use in every first-grade classroom in America.

I began publishing material related to *Blend Phonics* in 2007 on my www.blendphonics.org website.

Blend Phonics Materials Available on Amazon

***Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics* (Includes Teacher's Directions, Word Lists, and Reading Drills)

<https://amzn.to/2Xr6Kgk>

***Blend Phonics Timed Fluency Drills* (words arranged in columns for timing)

<https://amzn.to/2Ri5Dda>

***Blend Phonics Lessons and Stories* (lessons, decodable stories, comprehension questions spelling words)

<https://amzn.to/2IkP4KJ>