

Foundation for Phonics

26 Letters (minus 3 superfluous letters, *c, q, x*) for 44 Sounds

25 Consonant Sounds

18 Consonant Pairs

<u>Voiced</u>		<u>Unvoiced</u>	
1. /b/	<i>bib</i>	2. /p/	<i>pup</i>
3. /d/	<i>dad</i>	4. /t/	<i>toot</i>
5. /g/	<i>gag</i>	6. /k/	<i>kick</i>
7. /z/	<i>zig-zag</i>	8. /s/	<i>Sis</i>
9. /v/	<i>valve</i>	10. /f/	<i>fluff</i>
11. / th /	<i>then</i>	12. /th/	<i>thistle</i>
13. /w/	<i>wayward</i>	14. /hw/	<i>whistle</i>
15. /j/	<i>jam</i>	16. /ch/	<i>chick</i>
17. /zh/	<i>treasure</i>	18. /sh/	<i>trash</i>

6 Consonants called Semivowels:

- 19. /l/ *lull*
- 20. /m/ *mom*
- 21. /n/ *nun*
- 22. /r/ *run*
- 23. /y/ *yo-yo*
- 24. /ng/ *singing, drink*

1 more consonant:

- 25. /h/ *his*

We have used 19 letters to write 25 consonant sounds: b, d, c, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, y, and z. Two letters are superfluous, q and x. We have used 21 of the 26 letters to write 25 consonant sounds. $26 - 21 = 5$

This leaves us exactly 5 letters – a, e, i, o, u – to deal with 19 vowel sounds.

The 19 Vowel Sounds

5 So-called short vowels:

- 26. /ă/ *bag*
- 27. /ĕ/ *beg*
- 28. /ĭ/ *big*
- 29. /ŏ/ *bog*
- 30. /ŭ/ *bug*

5 So-called long vowels:

- 31. /ā/ *mate* (*ai, ay, eigh, ey*)
- 32. /ē/ *mete* (*ee, ea*)
- 33. /ī/ *mite* (*y, ye, igh*)
- 34. /ō/ *mote* (*oa, oe, ow*)
- 35. /ū/ *mute* (*u_e, ue, ew*)

3 diphthongs:

- 36. /au/ *Paul, crawl*
- 37. /ou/ *spouse, cow*
- 38. /oi/ *noise, boy*

2 sounds for oo, short and long:

- 39. /ō/ *push, whoosh*
- 40. /ō/ *Rube, boob*

1 sound of a in ma:

- 41. /â/ *pa, ma; bar, car*

2 r sounds:

- 42. /air/ *fair, heirs, dare swear*
- 43. /ûr/ *girls, prefer, fur, work, doctor*

All purpose muttering vowel: shewa.

- 44. /ə/ *drama, item, devil, button, circus, about*

25 Consonants + 19 Vowels = 44 Speech Sounds spelled with 26 Letters

This *Foundation for Phonics Chart* was developed by Donald L. Potter from Dr. Rudolf Flesch's discussion, "What is Phonics" in *Why Johnny Can't Read and what you can do about It*. This chart was prepared on 9/22/04 and published on the Internet on 11/3/04. The 72 Exercises Dr. Flesch developed for teaching students to read the 44 speech sounds using the 26 letters of the alphabet can be found in the last half of his book. Other information on phonics reading instruction can be found on the *Education Page* of my web site: www.donpotter.net.

Two Difficulties of Our Alphabet System and Our System of Spelling:

1. We have half as many letters as we have sounds – which means that half the symbols a child has to learn consist not of one letter but two – like *ay*, *ea*, *sh*, *ch*, and so on.
2. Our most important single letters are used to spell two or more entirely different sounds, namely, the five vowels, *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, and the consonants *c* and *g*.

Therefore,

if you want to teach a child to read without utterly confusing him, you have to start with single letters that stand for single sounds, then go on to sounds spelled by two-letter or three-letter combinations, and finally teach him that some letters do not spell one sound but two.

The Catch:

You can't teach a child to read without letting him read words. And every word in English has a vowel. So you *have* to start with teaching the child the letters *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u* in spite of the fact that each of them spells a long *and* a short vowel. The only way to solve this problem is to begin by teaching the child only the five *short* vowels (which are far more common than the long ones) and postpone the long vowels until a much later stage.

The Natural Sequence of *any* phonics method is:

Step One: The five short vowels and all consonant combinations spelled by a single letter.

Step Two: Consonants and consonant combinations spelled with two or three letters.

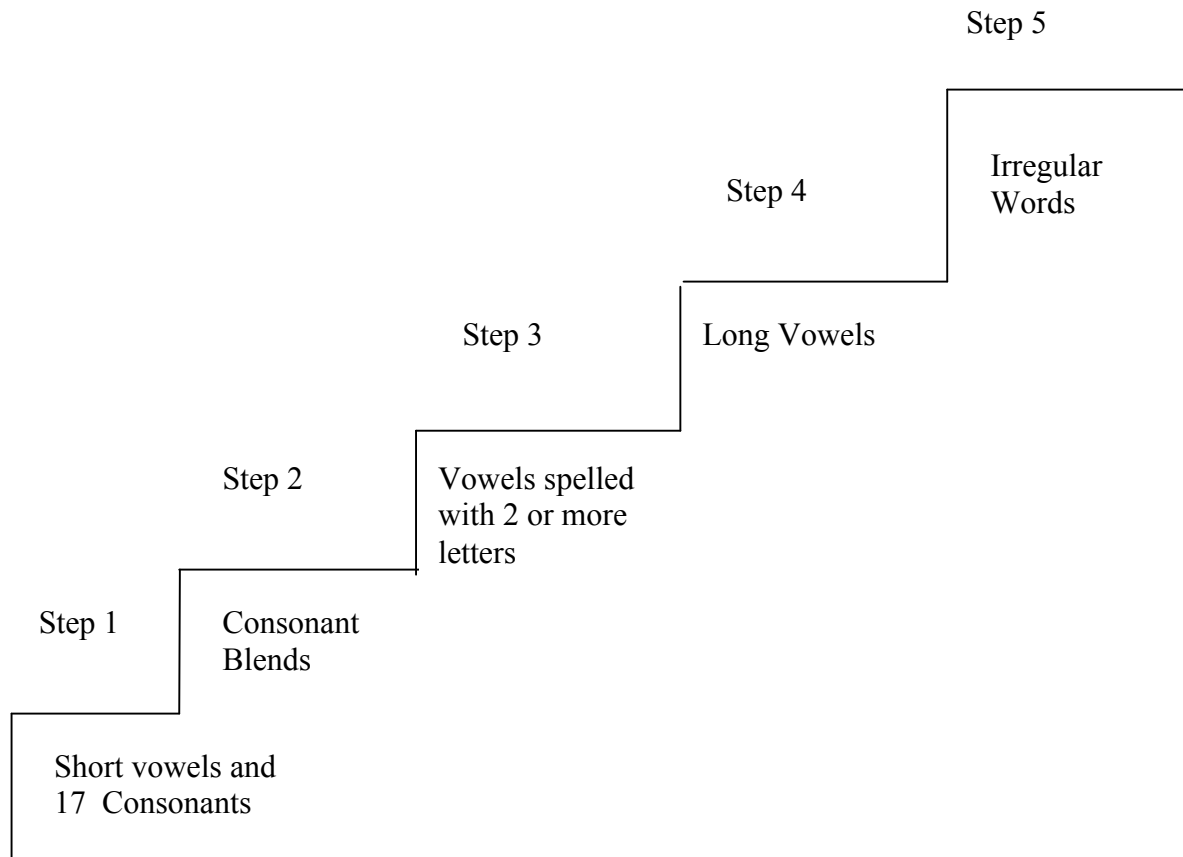
Step Three: Vowels and vowel combinations spelled with two or three letters.

Step Four: The five long vowels: v-c-e (mate, mete, mite, mote, mute)

Step Five: Irregular Spellings.

See pages 27 through 32 of Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read and what you can do about it* for detailed instructions on teaching students to read from the "sounds" using the *Five Steps of the Natural Phonics Primer*. This is the natural sequence based on our imperfect system of spelling. For helpful instruction on how to teach Flesch's method, see my free *Audio Instruction for Teaching Rudolf Flesch's Natural Phonics Primer*[™] on my web site www.donpotter.net.

Five Steps of the *Natural Phonics Primer*TM



“These five steps occur in all phonics systems of teaching a child to read English. There are some so-called phonics readers on the market that do not follow this pattern, but they can hardly be called phonic by any proper definition of the word” (Flesch 27).

Dr. Flesch’s words ring as true today, fifty years after they were written, as they did in 1955. His method is as effective today as it was then. Tens of thousands of children learned to read with his 72 Phonics Exercises, the same is happening today as more and more parents and teachers experience the power of what I like to call, Flesch’s *Natural Phonics Primer*.

My own personal success with Dr. Flesch’s *Five Step Natural Sequence* convinces me that Flesch’s method is highly effective for beginning and remedial reading instruction.

Donald Potter, Odessa, TX – Revised December 17, 2012. Corrected July 24, 2018.