

Word Study

**A Parent's Guide
From A to Z**

Name _____



A Parent's Guide to Word Study

“Word Study” is understanding letters and sounds, the way letters are connected to make words, and the rules that are used in spelling. Spelling is when we tear down those sounds into each letter-or groups of letters. Reading is the opposite – we build or blend the sounds together to make words.

One important thing to remember is that our English Language words come from so many other languages. This means that the rules are not going to apply **ALL** of the time – but will apply ***most*** of the time. There will always be exceptions to the rules; but most of the time the phonetic rules will help us to read and spell.

This is a short guide to help with some of the more basic word rules and vocabulary. When we teach word study at school, we teach the students to code and decode to read words.

Coding means that students learn to recognize certain sounds that are being made in words and they use codes, or special marks, to show what sound will be made in that word. When they get ready to sound out the word, they know what sound to make and blend together with the rest of the letters in the word.

We begin with small words (1 syllable words). Students learn how to break the bigger words down into smaller parts (syllables) so that each part can be decoded. Students can recognize how many syllables are in a word and learn that each syllable has to have a vowel. This helps tremendously with both reading and writing.

I. Alphabet Facts

There are 26 letters in the alphabet

Consonants (C) - 21 letters

b c d f g h j k l m n p q r s t v w x y z

Vowels (V) – 5 letters

a e i o u (y)

Each vowel can make 2 sounds:

Short sound – the vowel says the sound as in:

cap, red, sit, mop, rug

Long sound – the vowel says its name

- Students learn to code words by associating **V** with the vowels and a **C** with all the consonants.
- Labeling consonants and vowels helps in identifying patterns and groups of letters which make certain sounds.
- This also helps in learning the meaning of words, in addition to how to read and write words.

- *Pattern* refers to understanding the major patterns of letters: CVC (*hat*), CVCe (*hate*), CVVC (*road*), and so on.
- *Meaning* refers to different spellings for the different forms of words, for example, *music* and *musical*.
- Children learn about these three layers through decoding (reading), encoding (writing), and teacher modeling.

II. Basic Vowel Rules



• *Short Vowel*

If a consonant comes after a vowel in a syllable, the vowel will make the short sound. This is a closed vowel or **VC pattern**.

When the vowel makes the short sound, we code it at the **top** with a breve.

A vowel followed by a consonant is short, code it with a breve.

ōn nōt hāt tīp

• *Long vowel*

If nothing comes after the vowel in a syllable, the vowel will make the long sound (it will say its name). This is called an open vowel or **V pattern**.

When the vowel makes the long sound, we code it at the **top** with a macron.

An open, accented vowel is long, code it with a macron.

nō mē hē ī

III. Silent e

If there is a *silent e* at the end of the word and the word has a vowel in the middle, then the vowel in the middle says its name. The vowel in the middle makes the long sound and the *silent e* is silent.

We code the middle vowel with a macron because it makes the long sound.

This is a *silent e* pattern or **VCe pattern**.



When reading words with specific long vowel patterns, you may see this:

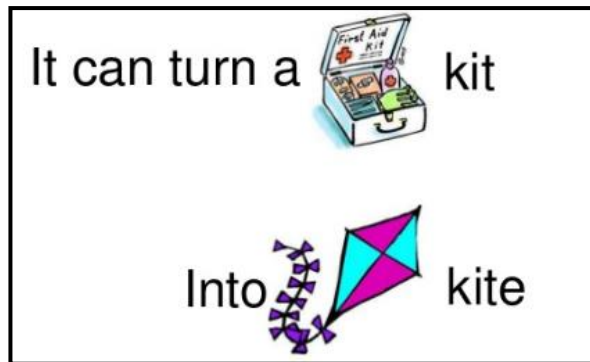
aCe eCe iCe oCe uCe

OR this:

a__e e__e i__e o__e u__e

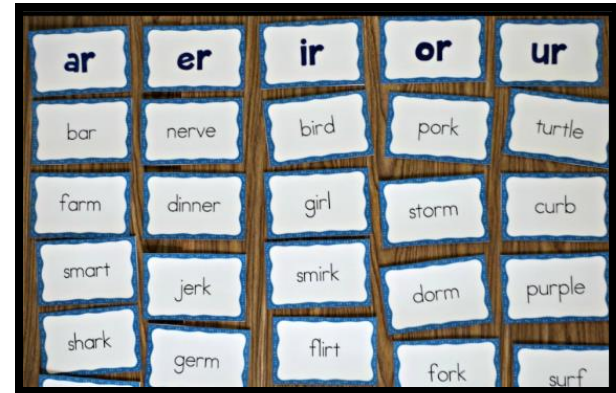
We read these patterns as, “*a consonant e; e consonant e; i consonant e; o consonant e; u consonant e.*”

The vowel is long and the *e* is silent.



IV. r-Controlled Vowels

When the letter *r* comes after a vowel, it controls the vowel sound.



V. Vowel -y

Sometimes the *letter y* functions as a vowel. When it does, it is usually at the end of a word.

***If the word is a one syllable word, the *y* will make the long i sound.

by my cry dry shy why

***If the word is more than one syllable, the *y* will make the long e sound.

many penny holly bumpy

VI. Blends & Digraphs

Blends: Two or more consonants, when combined make a certain sound and two or three sounds are heard.

bl- in blue and black
cl- in clap and close
fl- in fly and flip
gl- in glue and glove
pl- in play and please
br- in brown and break
cr- in cry and crust
dr- in dry and drag
fr- in fry and freeze
gr- in great and grand
pr- in prize and prank
tr- in tree and try
sk- in skate and sky
sl- in slip and slap
sp- in spot and speed
st- in street and stop
sw- in sweet and sweater
spr- in spray and spring
str- in stripe and strap

Digraphs: Two consonants, when combined make a certain sound and one sound is heard.

ch- in chin and ouch
sh- in ship and push
th- in thing
th- in this
wh- in when
ng- in ring
nk- in rink

✓ Vowel Pairs/Vowel Digraphs

Sometimes two vowels will be next to each other in a word. This is called a vowel pair or vowel digraph.

When two vowels are together, usually the first vowel is the sound we hear. And it is usually the long sound of the vowel. The second vowel is silent. Remember, there are exceptions to this rule!

Some of the most common vowel pairs are listed below.

ai ay ee ea ie oa oe ue

Long a Pairs

ai : rain sail main air
(this combination usually happens in the middle of a word)
ay: may day say way
(this combination usually happens at the end of a word)

Long e Pairs

ee: deep feed deer beef
ea: eat bead hear mean
(can have 2 other sounds but this is the most common)
ei : seize receive neither protein

Long i Pairs

ie: die lie pie flies

Long o Pairs

oa: soap float oak road
oe: doe foe hoe toe

Long u Pairs

ue: blue cue due clue

VII. Diphthongs & Combinations –

“Two Letters, One Sound”

A diphthong is when a combination makes two sounds but roll together as if it were one sound.

It is important to learn sounds created by letter combinations. Here are some common combinations.

au: cause haul fault because author

aw: paw jaw crawl draw drawn

eu: neutral deuce

ew: dew few grew chew brew

(sounds like long u, or it can sound like oo)

ey: (long a sound) hey prey whey

ey: (long e sound) monkey money key

ie: (long e sound, silent i) niece piece

ow: (long o sound) low grow mow tow show

ow: cow down wow how now

(makes 2 different sounds)

oo: hood good wood stood book

oo: mood tooth roof food soon

(makes 2 different sounds)

ou: (similar to oo) soup tour cougar

ou: (similar to ow) out

VIII. More Common Combinations

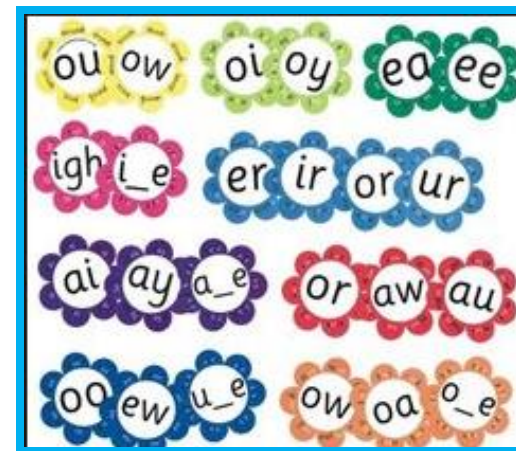
oi: oil boil soil coin voice

This combination usually happens in the middle of a word.

oy: boy toy joy enjoy employ

This combination usually happens at the end of a word.

ou: out our ouch scout loud



IX. Common Sounds

Many more of our more common sounds do NOT follow traditional rules.

Listed below are some of the many different sounds like that.

Schwa

a (sometimes makes a short u /u/ sound): alone above

al (sometimes makes a short o /o/ sound): ball also

C & K

Determining when to use c, k, or ck can be tricky. Keep these rules in mind when writing words that begin with the /k/ sound.

Start with K BEFORE e, i, or y
keep, kick, Kyle

Start with C BEFORE a, o, u,
or consonants
cat, cot, cut, clip

Keep these rules in mind when writing words that end with the /k/ sound.



Use CK After a Short Vowel
back peck thick sock truck

Use K After a Consonant Letter
or Vowel Pair
park bank walk peek book

Soft C and Soft G



- Letter C can sound like /s/ if followed by e, i, y.

Hard and Soft "C"

/k/ → a, o, u consonants	/s/ → e, i, y
 castle cat cup	cop cast cuddle cider city cent  celery circle

- Letter G can sound like /j/ if followed by e, i, y.

Hard and Soft "G"

/g/ → a, o, u consonants	/j/ → e, i, y
 goat gum gas good goose giggle	giraffe gym gem gel giant gist 

X. Basic Syllables

Syllable Division

One of the easy ways to decode or “sound out” words is to divide words into smaller chunks. We call this syllable division or chunking. There are six syllable types.

closed dog lost best camp milk dump desk fast	VC/CV in-tend ton-sil cac-tus nap-kin	VC/CCV lob-ster com-plex tan-trum gum-drop
l-consonant le turtle candle rumble sparkle circle rumble	VCC/CV pump-kin bank-rupt hand-cuff musk-rat	VCe/CV time-line grape-vine fire-side home-made
open open unit silent ruby baby iris even robot	VCC/CCV lamp-shade hand-craft grand-stand milk-shake	
vowel team feet boat leaf loaf teal tree	VC/CV Sep-tem-ber At-lan-tic fan-tas-tic in-ter-fere	V/CV ba-sic o-pen tu-lip si-nus hu-mid ro-bot
e-V-C-e ape Steve bone bike cube flute	VC/V cab-in hab-it rob-in liv-id sev-en trav-el	V/V ne-on diet du-et po-et cre-ate tri-umph
r-control car horn fern church bird		

XI. Final Thoughts on Word Study

A word study program allows teachers to provide differentiated, efficient, effective instruction in phonics, spelling, and vocabulary. Research clearly indicates that memorization of lists of "spelling words" does not promote the development of spelling skills. In the past the traditional approach of "everyone gets the same weekly list," many students who passed the spelling test were not able to transfer the knowledge to their writing! Memorizing a list of words and getting 100% on weekly tests does not necessarily mean your child is a good speller. It may just mean they are good at memorizing words for a test. Word Study takes spelling beyond memorization to mastery.

Word Sorts Build Understanding

- English spelling is based on patterns.
- Gaining word knowledge is based on detecting similarities and differences in words.
- Learning is best achieved when it is interesting and engaging.

Word Study is More Than Spelling

Word Study is much more than spelling, and includes knowledge of:

- Alphabet** – learning the relationship between letters and sounds
- Pattern** – learning specific groupings of letters and their sounds
- Meaning** – learning the meaning of groups of letters such as prefixes, suffixes, and roots. Vocabulary increases at this level.

Word Study Language

Sorting – organizing words into groups based on similarities in their patterns or meaning.

Oddballs – words that cannot be grouped into any of the identified categories of a sort.

Students should be taught that there are always words that “break the rules” and do not follow the general pattern.

Sound marks / / - Sound marks around a letter or pattern tell the student to focus only on the sound rather than the actual letters. (example: the word gem could be grouped into the /j/ category because it sounds like j at the beginning).

Vowel (represented by V) – one of 6 letters causing the mouth to open when vocalized (a, e, i, o, u, and usually y). A single vowel sound is heard in every syllable of a word.

Consonants (represented by C) – all letters other than the vowels.

