

# Phonics Primer

## *A free resource to teach reading*

You can use this Phonics Primer to teach a child or adult to read today. This primer lists the 44 sounds in the English language and 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 (that is, text that can be sounded out using the sounds and spellings already taught).

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## The 44 sounds in the English language

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

## 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	<p>Either recommended program for home use is reusable, effective, and affordable (less than \$30.).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Phonics Pathways</a> by Dolores Hiskes (non-scripted lessons).</li> <li>• <a href="#">The Ordinary Parent's Guide to Teaching Reading</a> by Jessie Wise and Sara Buffington (scripted lessons).</li> </ul>
phonics flashcards with the letter or letter combination (such as <i>ou</i> ) on front and clue word (such as <i>out</i> ) on back	<p>Make your own phonics flashcards using index cards based on the lessons in your phonics program or buy a set of cards. Consider #3 <i>Phonogram Cards – Individual Set of 87</i> (item #PC2, \$15) from Spalding Education International, available at <a href="https://spaldingeducationstore.org">https://spaldingeducationstore.org</a>.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> It's important to use phonics flashcards that give the proper sound or sounds for each spelling—many widely available flashcards are incorrect or incomplete. For example, the common sound of <b>x</b> is <b>/ks/</b> as in <b>fox</b>, not <b>/z/</b> as in <b>xylophone</b> or <b>/eks/</b> as in <b>x-ray</b>. Also, the short-vowel sound of <b>i</b> is <b>/i/</b> as in <b>igloo</b>, not <b>/ī/</b> as in <b>ice cream</b>.</p>
decodable stories (preferably 100% decodable)	<p>Although these little booklets are not 100% decodable, the <a href="#">Bob Books</a> box sets by Bobby Lynn Maslen are fun with simple words. Start with <a href="#">Set 1: Beginning Readers</a>, and <a href="#">Set 2: Advancing Beginners</a>, \$14.99 each. Skip the earlier books, which are a waste of money.</p>
writing supplies: index cards, index card file, black wide-tip permanent marker, beginner's wide-ruled writing tablet, 2 pencils with erasers	<p>Purchase supplies at any store that carries school supplies.</p>

## Step 2. Teach the 5 short-vowel sounds and consonant sounds.

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. Drill until memorized.

**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 <b>a</b> pple
short /ĕ/ in <b>e</b> lephant
short /ĭ/ in <b>i</b> gloo
short /ŏ/ in <b>o</b> ctopus
short /ŭ/ in <b>u</b> mbrella

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

### Step 3. Practice two-letter blends.

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**. Drill until blending is automatic.

Two-letter blends		
<b>b + a = ba</b>	<b>s + a = sa</b>	<b>j + a = ja</b>
<b>b + e = be</b>	<b>s + e = se</b>	<b>j + e = je</b>
<b>b + i = bi</b>	<b>s + i = si</b>	<b>j + i = ji</b>
<b>b + o = bo</b>	<b>s + o = so</b>	<b>j + o = jo</b>
<b>b + u = bu</b>	<b>s + u = su</b>	<b>j + u = ju</b>

### Step 4. Practice three-letter blends.

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. Drill until blending is automatic.

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

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

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

## 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
<b>chin, such, patch</b> (silent t)	<b>scruff</b>
<b>ship, wish</b>	<b>split</b>
<b>thin, with</b> (unvoiced /th/)	<b>strap</b>
<b>this</b> (voiced /th/)	<b>thrill</b>
<b>whip</b>	
<b>sang, sing, song, sung</b>	
<b>sank, sink, honk, sunk</b>	

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

### Step 8. Teach the long-vowel sounds and their spellings.

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
<b>/ā/</b> called long a	<b>cake, rain, pay, eight,</b> <b>baby</b>	<b>steak, they, vein</b>
<b>/ē/</b> called long e	<b>Pete, me, feet, sea,</b> <b>bunny</b>	<b>key, field, cookie,</b> <b>receive, pizza</b>
<b>/ī/</b> called long i	<b>bike, hi, fly, pie, night</b>	<b>rye, type</b>
<b>/ō/</b> called long o	<b>hope, go, boat, toe,</b> <b>snow</b>	<b>soul, though</b>
<b>/ū/ &amp; /ōō/</b> called long u	<b>mule, blue, boot, tuna,</b> <b>flew</b>	<b>fruit, soup, through,</b> <b>feud</b>

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

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

### Step 10. Teach the diphthongs /oi/ and /ow/ and various other sounds.

A diphthong consists of two vowels that form a new sound when combined.

Sound	Common spellings
<b>/oi/</b>	<b>oil, boy</b>
<b>/ow/</b>	<b>owl, ouch</b>
<b>short /ö/</b>	<b>cook, pull</b>
<b>/sh/</b>	<b>vacation, session, facial</b>
<b>/zh/</b>	<b>vision</b>
<b>/aw/</b>	<b>jaw, haul, wash, squash</b>
<b>/awl/</b>	<b>bald, wall</b>
<b>/awk/</b>	<b>talk, chalk, walk</b>

### Step 11. Teach these sounds and spelling patterns.

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

**Note:** This *Phonics Primer* does not contain all English spelling patterns. Consult a good phonics program for additional spelling patterns and rules. See suggestions in [Step 1](#).

### **Step 12. After 3 months of daily phonics instruction, introduce decodable stories.**

**Important:** All sounds and spellings in **Steps 2 - 11** should be introduced within the first 3 *months* of phonics instruction. Do not delay or the student will not have enough knowledge to sound out words.

After 3 months of reading lists of words and sentences, your student should be ready to read decodable stories. The [Bob Books](#) box sets by Bobby Lynn Maslen are very popular. The student should read all stories aloud, carefully and accurately. Help him sound out difficult words and **don't let him guess**. 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.)

Your student can practice spelling and have fun by writing short stories too.

### **Step 13. Introduce “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; The Cat in the Hat*, and so on).
- **P. D. Eastman** (*Are You My Mother?; Go Dog, Go!; A Fish Out of Water*).
- **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 14. Dictate phonetically based spelling lists.

Even after your student has finished the phonics program, make sure to reinforce his phonics knowledge by dictating phonetically based spelling lists at least through third grade. Make sure to dictate groups of words that are spelled using the same pattern.

For example, spelling lists for **long /ā/** should introduce one new spelling pattern per lesson, while reviewing patterns introduced earlier, as shown below:

Lesson 1: /ā/ spelled <b>a-e</b>	Lesson 2: /ā/ spelled <b>ai</b>	Lesson 3: /ā/ spelled <b>ay</b>
<b>bake, brake, cake, fake, lake, make, rake, sake, take, wake</b>	<b>brain, drain, gain, rain, main, train, Spain, stain</b> Review words: <b>bake, cake, fake, wake</b>	<b>day, hay, lay, may, pay, ray, way, play, stay</b> Review words: <b>make, rake, rain, stain</b>

While a student won't always choose the correct spelling for a sound he hears, you should be able to read his phonetic spellings. In other words, every attempt at spelling should contain accurate consonant sounds and at least one accurate vowel sound.

For example, if a child spells **rain** as **rane** or **rayn** the first time, this demonstrates that he hears the **long /ā/** vowel sound and has chosen one of the common spellings for **/ā/**. Just gently correct the spelling and explain that **ai** is used in the middle of a word, while **ay** is used at the end of a word.

However, if he leaves out the vowel sound and writes **rn** for **rain**, explain that the vowel sound is missing. Say the word again aloud, stretching out the **long /ā/** sound until he hears and writes the vowel sound.