

# Blend Phonics Spelling Rules

By Elizabeth Brown

## Step One: Short Vowels and Consonants

### Units 1 to 5 Spelling Rules

Syllables and words ending in a consonant will have their short sound:

**at in on up, en (as in en-ter); man met lip hop tug**

Short (one-syllable) words ending in a /k/ sound are usually spelled with a ck:

**lack peck sick rock truck**

Short (one-syllable) words ending in a /l/, /f/, or /s/ sound usually have doubled letters:

**fall well mill doll pull; gaff tiff doff muff; mass hiss less toss fuss**

## Step Two: Consonant Blends and Digraphs

### Units 6 to 15 Spelling Rules

The letter groups sh, th, wh, ng, and nk count as one letter for syllable division, and will stay together when dividing words. These are called consonant digraphs.

Words ending in a /ch/ sound are usually spelled –tch:

**watch etch itch much thatch**

Words beginning with wa usually have an /ā/ sound as in *water* instead of the expected short-ă sound:

**want water watch**

Words usually divide between two consonants (ck & doubled letters count as one consonant): (remember the rule that syllables ending in a vowel are long)

**nap-kin rab-bit ad-mit well-ness son-net bob-cat**

Words usually divide between consonant blends:

**hand-craft lip-stick dust-pan**

## Step Three: Long Vowels (VCE)

### Units 16 to 18 Spelling Rules

Words with a vowel followed by a consonant followed by a letter e will have their long sound (silent-e rule.)

**late Pete nine home cube**

Some short words with o and i will have a long sound, they used to have a silent-e at the end of the word. This often happens when these o and i words have the letters l, t, or d in them.

**wild mild child old told bold both post host kind find mind blind roll colt volt**

Words and syllables ending in a vowel will have their long sound:

**be hi go mu my; ma-ker me-ter si-ding mo-tor cu-pid**

(Words ending in an a are exceptions, they will say /ā/, *ma*, *pa*. Syllables ending in a will have their long-ā sound, as in “ma-ker” and “pa-per.”)

Short words with another consonant sound before the /k/ sound will be spelled with a k:

**dark pink perk thank**

After a long vowel the sound /k/ will be spelled with a single k not ck which is used after a short vowel.

**bake make take bike hike coke broke Luke**

## Step Four: R-Controlled Vowels

or will usually say /er/ after a w and at the end of a word, (or normally says /or/ as in **for**):

**word world work; doctor actor janitor**

## Step Five: Vowel Digraphs and Diphthongs

### Units 22 to 27 Spelling Rules

Long ā sound is spelled with an ai within the word and an ay at the end:

**mail, paid; say stay**

Words with ea normally have a long-ē sound (67% of the time.) However, they sometimes (32% of the time) have a short-ĕ sound, and occasionally (1% of the time) will have a long-ā sound.

Long-ē (67%): **seat meal bean seat**

Short-ĕ (32%): **bread breath**

Long-ā (1%) **steak**

Short words with ie have a long-ī sound, longer words with ie have a long-ē sound

Long ī: **pie cried tie dries;**

long ē: **grief field thief yield**

When y is a vowel, it normally has the same sound as i. However, at the end of long words, it is normally a long-ē sound:

Short ī: **gym**

Long-ī: End of a short word: **try my type**

Long ē: End of two or more syllable word: **happy puppy army**

Long-ō is spelled oa within the word and oe at the end: **boat goat loaf; toe Joe**

The sound of /ou/ as in **out** or **how** is spelled with a ou within the word and ow within the word or at the end of the word. It will not be spelled with a ou at the end of a word.

**out south; howl; now plow**

Usually, ou says /ou/ as in **out**, however, it can also have a long-ō sound (11% of the time), a long-ōō sound (8% of the time), or a short-ōō sound (1% of the time, but common words):

/ou/ (81%): **out found**

Long ō (11%): **soul**

Long ōō (8%): **you soup**

Short ōō (1%) **could should would**

The sound of /oi/ is spelled with oi within the word and oy at the end:

**oil, coin; boy, troy**

The sound of /au/ is spelled with au within the word, aw at the end (aw can also be used within the word):

**faun, autumn; lawn, hawk; raw, claw**

## Step Six: Advanced Spelling Patterns

### Unit 36 Spelling Rules

Unaccented syllables are often mashed to the schwa sound of “uh” (shown in the dictionary as /ə/)

### Unit 38 Spelling Rules

The letter c is pronounced as an /s/ before e, i, and y, but with a /k/ sound before all other letters. (Before the vowels a, o, and u and before all consonants.) The letter c is often followed by a silent e whose purpose is to keep the sound of the c “soft,” as its /s/ sound is called. When it is before an e or an i at the end of a word, it will sometimes say /sh/.

c as /s/ before e, i, or y: **cell, city, cyber, ace, dice, mice**

c as /s/ with a silent e to keep the “soft” sound: **prince, fleece**

c as /k/ before a, o, u and all consonants: **cap, cot, cube, club, crash**

c as /sh/ before i or e: **special, ocean**

The c syllables: **ca, ce, ci, co, cu, cy; sca, sce, sci, sco, scu, scy**

(Pronounced kay, see, sigh, koa, cue, sigh; ska, see, sigh, sko, sku, sigh)

### Unit 39 Spelling Rules

The letter g is pronounced as a /j/ before e, i, and y, but with a /g/ sound before all other letters. (Before the vowels a, o, and u and before all consonants.) English words will not end with a j. The letter g is often followed by a silent  $\phi$  whose purpose is to keep the sound of the g “soft,” as its /j/ sound is called. A letter d is added before the ge to keep the vowel short (Two consonants = short vowel: One consonant = long vowel.) A few common words such as **girl** and **get** have a hard /g/ where a soft g /j/ sound would be expected.

g as /j/ before e, i, or y: **gem, ginger, gypsy**

g as /j/ with a silent  $\phi$  to keep the “soft” sound: **age huge**

g as /j/ with a silent  $\phi$  to keep the “soft” sound and a d to keep the vowel short

(Two consonants = short vowel): **badge, ridge, edge, dodge, grudge**

g as /g/ before e, i, or y as an exception – a few common words: **get, girl**

The g syllables: **ga, ge, gi, go, gu, gy** (pronounced /gā/, /gē/, /gī/, /gō/, /gōō/, /gī/)

### Units 40 to 41: Spelling Rules

The letter team igh says long /ī/. The letters gh are not truly silent, it is part of a team of letters making the i long: **high bright**

At the end of words, gh occasionally says /f/: **rough laugh**

The letter team kn is pronounced with the k silent: **knight, knee, knife, know**

The letter team wr is pronounced with the w silent: **write, wrong, wring**

The letter team mb is pronounced with the b silent: **lamb climb comb**

The letters b and t are sometimes silent: **debt, often**

The letter l is not exactly silent, it changes the sound of the vowel: **calf, half**

### Units 42 to 44 Spelling Rules

The letters s and z are consonant pairs. They are pronounced with the mouth in the same position. The letter s often has its /z/ sound, especially at the end of a word: **has, is; nose wise**

Words ending in le divide one letter before le: **ta-ble, ket-tle**. Words ending in el divide directly before el: **lev-el, reb-el**

The letters ed at the end will be pronounced like the name “Ed” after a d or a t: **added acted**

Otherwise, ed will be pronounced /d/ or /t/ with no vowel sound for the e: **saved baked**

(d and t are also consonant pairs)

## Extra Rules

### Extra Rule 1:

Vowel teams that don't make a sound on their own divide between vowels: **ra-di-o, me-ow, cas-u-al** (Exception: some Latin words divide between two vowels that normally make another sound: **di-et, con-gru-ent**)

### Extra Rule 2:

The letters wh normally are a letter team that makes the sound of /w/ (or, in some regions, its unvoiced consonant pair sound of /wh/) However, before o, it often makes the sound of /h/: **when where which; who whose whole**

The letter team gh usually says /g/, and the letter team gn usually says /n/: **ghost, spaghetti; gnat sign**

The letter h is often silent at the beginning of words: **honor, herb**

Longer words ending in a /k/ sound are usually spelled with a single c: **music, celiac, republic**

(Review: short words ending in a /k/ sound are usually spelled with a ck: **duck, pick, lack** and with another consonant sound before the /k/ sound, spelled with a k: **dark, think, perk**)

Divide before prefixes and after suffixes: **pre-fix, be-fore; na-tion, use-ful; pre-ven-tion**

Common prefixes: re- dis- over- un- mis- out- be- co- de- pre- fore- inter- sub- trans-

Common suffixes: -tion -ize -ate -en -ity -er -ness -ism -ment -ant -ship -ive -ful -less

### Extra Rule 3:

The letters ei normally say long-ā as in **rein**. After a c, they say long-ē as in **receipt**. They also sometimes just say long-ē as in **neither**. It sometimes says short-ĭ as in **forfeit** or long-ī as in **feisty**.

Long-ā (66%) **rein**; After c: long-ē **receipt**; long-ē (9%) **neither**; short-ĭ (13%) **forfeit**;  
Long-ī (12%) **feisty**

ear followed by a consonant usually (61% of the time) says /er/ as in **Earl, earth, earn** but sometimes says /ar/ as in **heart, hearth** (39% of the time)

ear at the end of a word or syllable usually says /ēr/ as in **fear, appear** (79% of the time) but sometimes says /ār/ as in **bear, swear** (21% of the time)

ere usually (93% of the time) says /ēr/ as in **here, mere**, but sometimes (7% of the time) says /êr/ as in **there, where**

Words in English will not end in v, so words with ve at the end may be either short or long: **give, live, have** (*Live* can be pronounced either long or short depending on its usage.)

## A Few Important Exceptions

A few words with a u after the s are pronounced with s as /sh/: **sugar, sure**

Words with one vowel mushed to the schwa sound of “uh” /ǘ/ (occurs especially often in words that begin with a or contain the letter o followed by m, n, or v):

**again, about, around, away, what, from, come, some, done, love**

Words with consonant pair substitutions (/z/ sound for /s/, /v/ sound for /f/).

**as, has, is, his, was, use, does, of** (*does* and *was* also have the vowel sound mushed to “uh” /ə/)

These words have one vowel sound off from their expected sound, o as in **mo** instead of long-ō: **to, do, who**. More words vowel one sound off:

**because, been, could, pretty, said, shall, you; never, seven, upon, only**

The or in **wor** is normally pronounced /er/ as in **her**, the a in words starting with **wa** is pronounced “ah” /au/ as in **saw, law**, and the ar spelling in words like **warm** is pronounced like /or/ in **for**.

**word, work, worth; want, wash; warm, ward, war**

### Webster’s Speller Rules

Unaccented syllables are often mushed to the schwa sound of “uh.” This is especially common at the end of words. However, e’s often mush to short-ĭ: **rur-al fill-et** (pronounced /rurul/ and /fillit/) When the last syllable is accented, the sounds will not schwa: **com-pel, la-ment**

(Accented syllables underlined Mr. Potter’s edition of *Webster’s Spelling Book*)

The letter u is already a relaxed sound, so it is already mushed! The letter i usually holds its sound, or at least some of its sound. The letters o and a are most likely to “mush” to a schwa “uh” /ə/ sound. (as noted above, e’s will generally mush to a short ĭ if they schwa, especially at the end)

At the end of a word, the letter y will have its normal long-ī sound when it is accented, but will have a long /ē/ sound in an unaccented syllable (Accented syllables are underlined.):

**de-ny, mis-ap-ply; cru-el-ty**

## Rules Important for ESL Students

### and Students with Speech/Language Difficulties:

u, eu, ue, and ew can be pronounced either /yōō/ or /ōō/ depending on the letter that comes before the vowel. Words that start with a ch, d, j, l, r, or s will say /ōō/, t can say either sound except for a few words which can only be pronounced /ōō/. Words starting with all other letters will say /yōō/

ōō: **due, chew, june, lute, rue, Sue, blue, brew**

yōō: **butane, cube, feud, mew**

Adding ed: Words that end in a d or a t will say “ed:” **ended, added; fasted, listed**

Words ending in a voiced consonant: l, b, g, l, n, m, r, s as a /z/ sound, v or z will end with the sound of /d/:

**mobbed, logged, hauled, claimed, barred, closed, loved**

Words ending in the sounds of /ch/, /sh/, /f/, /k/, /p/, /s/, or /x/ will end with the sound of /t/:

**laughed, kicked, hopped, bossed, boxed**

### Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L Potter

This comprehensive set of Decoding Rules (reading) and Encoding Rules (spelling) were first published by Mrs. Elizabeth Brown in 2012 on her website, [www.40L.org](http://www.40L.org). On January 31, 2017, Mr. Donald L. Potter, a longtime coworker with Mrs. Brown, revised the rules to reflect the changes in the most recent edition of *Blend Phonics*.

You can learn all about *Blend Phonics* on the [www.blendphonics.org](http://www.blendphonics.org) website.