

English-Language Spelling Pattern Generalizations

1. Don't make rules/generalizations the emphasis of phonics instruction.
2. Teach only those rules/generalizations with the most utility.
3. Emphasize applying the rules/generalizations rather than verbalizing them.
4. Teach the rules/generalizations at a point when children can best understand and apply them.
5. Never teach rules as absolutes.

adapted from Wiley Blevins, p. 175

Short vowels

Phoneme	Common Spelling(s)	Frequency of spelling	Placement			Sample words	Generalizations
			B	M	E		
/ă/	a	96%	X	X		add, cat, spasm (want, wasp, wash)	[Short a] When <i>a</i> is preceded by <i>w</i> in a word or syllable, the sound of the vowel may be other than the short or long vowel sound generally associated with that letter. When <i>a</i> is followed by either the sound /l/ or a silent / / in single-syllable words, the <i>a</i> is pronounced /aw/.
/ĕ/	e	91%	X	X		bed, edge, indelible	[Short e]
	ea	4%		X		head, deaf, tear, threat, instead, dreadful	The spelling "ea" can be pronounced three ways. Remember the sentence, "Eat a great breakfast ," to recall the ways it can be pronounced.
/ĭ/	i	66%	X	X		if, big, still, frigid	[Short i] English words do not end in "i"
/ŏ/	o	79%	X	X		odd, fox, toggle (wolf, woman)	[Short o] When <i>o</i> is preceded by <i>w</i> in a word or syllable, the sound of the vowel may be other than the short or long vowel sound generally associated with that letter.
/ŭ/	u	86%	X	X		up, cut, combustion	[Short u]

English-Language Spelling Pattern Generalizations

Consonants							
Phoneme	Common Spelling(s)	Frequency of spelling	Placement			Sample words	Generalizations
			B	M	E		
/b/	b	97%	X		X	bat, bread, jab, carbohydrate	
/k/	c	73%	X			cat, crab, cotton, cut, biscuit	When <i>c</i> comes before <i>a, o, u,</i> or a consonant, it makes the "hard" /k/ sound.
	ck	6%			X	stick, track, locket	Use <i>ck</i> at the end of a word or syllable when there is an accented short vowel spelled with a single letter directly before it. The digraph <i>ck</i> always follows a short vowel sound. When adding endings, the spelling <i>ck</i> is substituted for <i>cc</i> if the following letter is an <i>e, i,</i> or <i>y</i> (<i>picnicking, frolicked</i>).
	k	13%	X		X	ketchup, kill, Kyle, Kyoto, bark, take, sneak	/k/ is spelled <i>k</i> before <i>e, i,</i> or <i>y,</i> or after a consonant, long vowel, or vowel combination. The consonant <i>k</i> is never doubled in English.
	cc				X	raccoon, occupy, hiccups	Sometimes the letter <i>c</i> must be doubled to protect the sound of a short vowel.
	ch	3%	X		X	school, chord, anchor, character, chrome	<i>Ch</i> can stand for the single consonant sound /k/ in words derived from the Greek language. <i>Ch</i> before another consonant is usually pronounced /k/.
	__que				X	unique, oblique	Used in rare cases at the end of words, <i>_que</i> is usually used only in words of French origin. <i>_que</i> must be preceded by another letter in order to make the /k/ sound.
/d/	d	98%	X		X	dog, drip, led, friend, hard	
	__ed				X	roamed, cried; rented, ended	<i>_ed</i> is an inflectional ending indicating past tense. When a base word ends in a voiced sound, the past tense will be voiced /d/. However, when a base word ends in /t/ or /d/, the past tense will be the syllable /ed/.

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Phoneme	Common Spelling(s)	Frequency of spelling	Placement		Sample words	Generalizations	
/f/	f	78%	X		X	food, flat, golf, sniff, defend	The letter <i>f</i> is almost always doubled when it comes at the end of a one-syllable word and is preceded by one short vowel (FLOSS rule).
	ph	12%	X		X	physician, graph	"Ph" is a consonant digraph in which the two letters produce one sound, /f/; it used in words of Greek origin.
	__gh				X	laugh, tough	<i>_gh</i> is used to spell /f/ at the end of a few words. It must be preceded by another letter in order to make the /f/ sound.
	__lf				X	half, calf	This spelling is used in rare cases at the ends of words following /ă/ spelled <i>a</i> .
/g/ (hard g)	g	88%	X		X	game, gone, gulf, get, giddy, tag, tugboat	The spelling <i>g</i> followed by <i>a</i> , <i>o</i> , or <i>u</i> makes the hard /g/ sound. When followed by <i>e</i> or <i>i</i> , it sometimes makes the /g/ sound and sometimes the /j/ sound.
	gh__		X			ghost, ghoul	This spelling is used in rare cases at the beginning of words. It must be followed by another letter in order to make the /g/ sound.
/h/ (aspirated)	h__	98%	X			hound, horseback, dehydrate	<i>h</i> must be followed by another letter, usually a vowel, in order to make the aspirated sound /h/.
/j/	j	22%	X			judge, injury	English words do not end in "j". The letter <i>j</i> is never doubled in English.
	▀dge	5%			X	badge, dodge, ridge	Use <i>-dge</i> to represent /j/ at the ends of words or syllables if there is a single, accented, short vowel directly before it.
	ge	88%	X		X	sponge, cage, village, gent, agent, gem	Use <i>-ge</i> to represent the "soft g" sound /j/ at the ends of words after a consonant; after a long vowel sound; and after an unaccented schwa. <i>The -ge</i> spelling can also come at the beginning of a word or syllable.
	gi__		X			giraffe, giant	The spelling <i>gi_</i> can make the soft g /j/ sound. It must be followed by another letter.
	g(y)		X		X	gym, edgy, spongy	The spelling <i>_gy</i> at the end of a word uses the soft g /j/ sound.
/l/	l	91%	X		X	loop, lion, elephant, dental, pull, will	The letter <i>l</i> is almost always doubled when it comes at the end of a one-syllable word and is preceded by one short vowel (FLOSS rule).
	_le				X	little, handle, able, needle	<i>_le</i> is a final stable syllable. If the vowel sound is short, there must be two consonants between the vowel and the <i>_le</i> . Otherwise, one consonant is enough.
/m/	m	94%	X		X	mad, stream, pump	

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Phoneme	Common Spelling(s)	Frequency of spelling	Placement			Sample words	Generalizations
			B	M	E		
	mb				X	lamb, bomb, crumb	This spelling is used in rare cases at ends of words.
	mn				X	autumn	This spelling is used in rare cases at ends of words.
/n/	n	97%	X		X	no, nest, hinder, pan, craftsman	
	kn__	<1%	X			know, knight	kn__ must be followed by a letter, usually a vowel, and cannot come at the end of a word or syllable.
	gn__		X			gnaw, gnu	This is used in rare cases at beginning of words. It must be followed by another letter, usually a vowel.
/p/	p	96%	X		X	popcorn, flap, stripe	
/kw/	qu__	97%	X			quiet, quick	q is never written without a u following it. The qu_ spelling must be followed by another letter in order to make the /kw/ sound.
/r/	r	97%	X		X	rob, rabbit, car, startle	
	wr__		X			wren, wrestle, wrap	wr__ must be followed by a letter, usually a vowel, and may not come at the end of a word.
/s/	s	73%	X		X	sign, sit, master, loss	The letter s is almost always doubled when it comes at the end of a one-syllable word and is preceded by one short vowel (FLOSS rule).
	ce	17%	X		X	center, bounce	The c in ce makes the soft c /s/ sound.
	ci__		X			city, citrus	The c in ci_ makes the soft c /s/ sound. ci_ must be followed by another letter.
	c(y)		X		X	cyclone, juicy	The c in c(y) makes the soft c /s/ sound.
	sc__		X			scythe, scent	This spelling is used in rare cases at the beginning of words.
	ps__		X			psychology, psycho	This spelling is used in rare cases at the beginning of words, usually words of Greek origin.
/t/	t	97%	X		X	time, statistic, hint	
	__ed				X	barked, hissed	_ed is an inflectional ending indicating past tense. When a base word ends in a voiceless sound, the past tense will be the voiceless /t/.

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Phoneme	Common Spelling(s)	Frequency of spelling	Placement			Sample words	Generalizations
			B	M	E		
/v/	v	99.50%	X		X	vase, have	The consonant v is never doubled in English. A final /v/ is always spelled ve, no matter what the preceding vowel sound may be: hence, <i>have. give. love.</i>
/w/	w__	92%	X			will, want, sideways	w__ must be followed by a letter, usually a vowel, in order to make the /w/ sound. The consonant w is never doubled in English.
/ks/ (also /gz/)	_x	90%			X	box, axe	_x must be preceded by a short vowel sound in order for x to make the /ks/ sound. The consonant x is never doubled in English.
/y/	y__	44%	X			yellow, backyard, yoyo	y must be followed by a letter, usually a vowel, in order to make the /y/ sound.
	i	55%	X			onion, opinion	
/z/	z	23%	X		X	zipper, ozone, buzz, fizz	The spelling z is usually used at the beginning of a word. It is usually doubled (zz) at the end of a word.
	__s	64%			X	as, was, his, glows	
/ā/	a	45%	X	X		alligator, able	[Long a]
	a__e	35%	X	X		grate, snake, ate	The long a sound spelled a_e must be followed by a consonant sound.
	ai__	9%	X	X		ail, bait	The long a sound spelled ai_ must be followed by a consonant sound.
	__ay	6%			X	stay, gray, daybreak	The long a sound spelled _ay must be preceded by a consonant sound. It is the most common spelling for /ā/ at the end of words.
	ea			X		steak, break	The spelling "ea" can be pronounced three ways. Remember the sentence, "Eat a great breakfast," to recall the ways it can be pronounced.
/ē/	e	70%	X		X	even, be, relief	[Long e]
	e__e		X	X		evening, secede, mere	The long e sound spelled e_e must be followed by a consonant sound.
	ee	6%	X	X	X	eel, heel, tee	
	ea	6%	X	X	X	east, wheat, tea	The spelling "ea" can be pronounced three ways. Remember the sentence, "Eat a great breakfast," to recall the ways it can be pronounced.
	__y	41%			X	nearly, heavy	When y follows a consonant at the end of a word with more than one syllable, it stands for /ē/, unless the accent is on the last syllable. When used before another vowel, y says /ē/ (embryo).

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Phoneme	Common Spelling(s)	Frequency of spelling	Placement			Sample words	Generalizations
			B	M	E		
	i			X		abbreviate, obedient, bacterial, unique	The vowel <i>i</i> is pronounced /ē/ when <i>i</i> is followed by a different vowel sound in a suffix. When /ē/ precedes a vowel suffix, it is usually spelled with the letter <i>i</i> . When <i>i</i> is before <i>que</i> or <i>gue</i> , the <i>i</i> is pronounced /ē/, since they are French spellings borrowed by English.
/ī/	i	37%	X			idle, identity, iconic	[Long i]
	i_e	37%	X	X		ice, dime	This spelling must be followed by a consonant sound. It cannot be used at the end of a syllable.
	igh			X	X	slight, sigh	
	_y	14%			X	my, sty, fry, apply	/ī/ is spelled <i>y</i> at the end of one-syllable words. When <i>y</i> comes at the end of a two-syllable word and the accent is on the last syllable, it makes the sound /ī/.
	_ie				X	lie, pie, necktie	The long <i>i</i> sound spelled <i>_ie</i> must be preceded by a consonant.
/ō/	o	73%	X	X	X	open, host, tomato	[Long o]
	o_e	14%	X		X	ode, rope, atone	The long <i>o</i> sound spelled <i>o_e</i> must be followed by a consonant sound.
	_oe				X	doe, floe	The long <i>o</i> sound spelled <i>_oe</i> must be preceded by a consonant.
	_ow	5%		X	X	bowl, crow, stow, flown	<i>_ow</i> is sometimes pronounced /ō/ when followed by <i>l</i> or <i>n</i> .
	oa_	5%	X	X		oat, groan	The long <i>o</i> sound spelled <i>oa_</i> must be followed by a consonant in order to make the /ō/ sound.
/ū/	u	69%	X	X		pupil, student	[Long u] These spellings represent /ū/ pronounced /y/ōō/.
	u_e	21%	X	X		abused, mute	
	_ew	3%		X	X	newt, few	
	_ue				X	due	

English-Language Spelling Pattern Generalizations

Diphthongs and Digraphs							
Phoneme	Common Spelling(s)	Frequency of spelling	Placement			Sample words	Generalizations
			B	M	E		
/ch/	ch	55%	X		X	chip, punch, beach	Use <i>ch</i> at the beginning of a word (<i>chip</i>). Use <i>ch</i> after a consonant (<i>punch</i>). Use <i>ch</i> after a vowel pair (<i>beach</i>).
	t__	31%	X			feature, denture	used in some final stable syllables
	tch	11%			X	stitch, stretch, latch	Use <i>tch</i> at the end of a word or syllable if there is a single short vowel directly before it.
/th/	th	100%	X		X	that, thin, bath, bathe	The spelling <i>th</i> represents two sounds: the <i>voiced th</i> as in <i>this</i> , and the <i>unvoiced th</i> as in <i>thin</i> .
/sh/	ti	53%	X			action, motion	When the letter <i>i</i> follows <i>c</i> , <i>s</i> , <i>ss</i> , <i>sc</i> , or <i>t</i> in the last part of a word, it is usually silent and indicates that these graphemes represent /sh/.
	sh	26%	X		X	ship, dish	
	ch		X			chef, chic, brochure, chandelier	Words influenced by French use the <i>ch</i> spelling for /sh/.
/zh/	su__		X			treasure, leisure	When the letter <i>s</i> is followed by <i>y</i> , <i>i</i> , or <i>u</i> in the middle of a word, it may be pronounced /zh/ or /sh/. Try /zh/ first.
	si__	49%	X			fusion, vision	
/ng/	ng	59%			X	singing, wrong	This spelling always follows a short vowel.
	n	41%		X	X	monkey, junk	
/hw/	wh__	100%	X			where, whiz, whipped	The sound /hw/ spelled <i>wh__</i> has an aspirated <i>h</i> sound at the beginning. When <i>wh__</i> comes before the letter <i>o</i> , only the /h/ is pronounced (as in <i>whole</i>).
/ar/	ar	89%	X	X	X	art, bark, star, tar	When <i>ar</i> follows a <i>w</i> , it makes the sound /or/, as in <i>war</i> , <i>warm</i> , <i>wart</i> .
/er/	er	40%	X	X	X	ergonomically, stern, number	<i>er</i> is the most popular spelling of all the <i>r</i> -controlled vowels.

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Phoneme	Common Spelling(s)	Frequency of spelling	Placement			Sample words	Generalizations
			B	M	E		
	ir		X	X	X	irk, bird, fir	<i>ir</i> can represent /ear/ when another <i>r</i> follows <i>ir</i> , as in <i>irrigate</i> , or when a vowel other than <i>e</i> immediately follows the <i>ir</i> , as in <i>iridescence</i> .
	ur		X	X	X	urgent, gurgle, fur	
/or/	or	97%	X	X	X	organ, fork, lore, for	When <i>or</i> follows <i>w</i> , it makes the sound of <i>er</i> , as in <i>worm</i> , <i>word</i> , <i>work</i> .
/oy/	oi	62%	X	X		oil, devoid	The vowel diphthong /oi/ spelled <i>oi</i> is usually used in the initial and medial positions of words.
	__oy	32%			X	boy, employ	The vowel diphthong /oi/ spelled <i>oy</i> is usually used in the final position of words. The sound /oi/ spelled <i>_oy</i> must be preceded by a consonant.
/ōō/	oo	31%		X		book, foot, wood	Think of the word <i>footstool</i> to remember both sounds for <i>oo</i> .
	u	61%		X		put, bull	
/oo/	oo	38%	X	X	X	oops, spool, drool, cool, boo	Think of the word <i>footstool</i> to remember both sounds for <i>oo</i> .
	u__e	8%		X		flute, dude	These spellings represent /oo/ pronounced /ōō/, not /yoo/. The sound /oo/ spelled <i>u_e</i> must be followed by a consonant. The spellings <i>_ew</i> and <i>_ue</i> must be preceded by consonants in order to make the /oo/ sound.
	u	21%		X	X	truth, flu	
	__ew			X	X	brew, steward	
	__ue				X	glue, undue	
/aw/	aw		X	X	X	saw, guffaw, fawn, crawl	Use <i>aw</i> when you hear /aw/ at the end of a base word. Use <i>aw</i> when you hear /aw/ and it is followed by a final <i>n</i> or <i>l</i> in the base word.
	au__		X	X		augment, audit, fraud	Use <i>au</i> when you hear /aw/ at the beginning or in the middle of a word. Use <i>au</i> when you hear /aw/ and it is followed by an <i>n</i> or <i>l</i> anywhere in the word.
/ou/	ow	29%	X	X	X	owl, crown, bow (of a boat), tower	The vowel diphthong /ow/ spelled <i>ow</i> usually comes in the final position of words, but often followed by <i>l</i> , <i>n</i> , or <i>er</i> .
	ou__	56%	X	X		out, about, ground	The vowel diphthong /ow/ spelled <i>ou_</i> is the most frequent medial spelling for /ou/.

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Resources

Blevins, Wiley. Phonics From A to Z: A Practical Guide. New York: Scholastic Teaching Resources, 2006. Print.

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