

Debbie Hepplewhite's simple and complex alphabetic codes overview

- Slash marks /ai/ mainly denote *single sound units* (**phonemes**). *Letters and letter combinations* (**graphemes**) appear in single apostrophes 'ay'.
- References to short vowel sounds relate to the sounds as in 'at, enter, in, on, up' denoted as: /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/ and said in a 'staccato' manner - as opposed to references to the long vowel sounds commonly denoted as: /ai/, /ee/, /igh/, /oa/, /ue/ as in 'rain, tree, night, coat, statue'.

light grey	Mainly simple code - teach first
dark grey	Teach soon after simple code

'Simple code' phonemes and key words	'Complex code' graphemes and key words						Teaching points
/s/ sun	ss kiss	se house purse	ce palace ci city cy lacy cycle	c (soft) centre certain circle	sc scent science scythe *(in effect, 's' followed by 'soft c')	ps psychic	<p>Not every grapheme of the English writing system is included in this chart. As experience grows in decoding, vocabulary development and comprehension, readers can usually deal with rare graphemes when encountered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short words with <i>short</i> vowel sounds usually end 'ss'. • Sound out double consonants as one sound only. • Double consonants alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its <i>short</i> sound. • Letters e, i or y alert the reader that the preceding 'c' will represent the /s/ sound. (This is often referred to as 'soft c'.) • Some people refer to 'silent letters'; others prefer to say that 'sc' and 'ps' are digraphs (graphemes) representing the /s/ sound. See *
/a/ ant							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach 'try the <i>short</i> vowel sound /a/ first, if that does not sound right then try the <i>long</i> vowel /ai/ sound'. • Some people pronounce the 'a' in some words as if it were /ar/: e.g. path p-ar-th; grass g-r-ar-s
/t/ tin	tt otter	ed jumped	bt debt	pt receipt			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double consonants alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its <i>short</i> sound. • Graphemes 'bt' and 'pt' are examples of rare digraphs for /t/.

/i/ in ink	y pony cygnet	ie pixie movie				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letters 'i' and 'y' and the sounds they represent have very close links. Here the letter 'y' acts as a vowel-letter and vowel-phoneme (sound).
/p/ pen	pp apple					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Double consonants alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its <i>short</i> sound.
/n/ nut	nn funny	kn knock	gn gnat			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Double consonants alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its <i>short</i> sound. Some people would refer to 'silent k' or 'silent g'; others prefer to say that 'kn' and 'gn' are digraphs (graphemes) representing the /n/ sound.
c cat	/k/ kitten	ck back	ch chemist	qu marquee	que plaque	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter 'c' represents a /k/ sound when preceding the letters 'a', 'o' and 'u'. Short words with <i>short</i> vowels end with 'ck' and this grapheme never begins words.
/e/ egg	ea head					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When reading short unknown words with single 'e', teach 'try the <i>short</i> vowel /e/ sound first, if that does not sound right then try the <i>long</i> vowel /ee/ sound'. When reading unknown words with the grapheme 'ea', teach 'try the <i>long</i> vowel /ee/ sound then try the <i>short</i> vowel /e/ sound.
/h/ hat						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When letter names are taught, point out that the name for /h/ does not start with the /h/ sound but is pronounced 'aitch'.
/r/ rat	rr curry	wr wrist				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some people would refer to 'silent w'; others prefer to say that 'wr' is a digraph (grapheme) representing the /r/ sound.

/m/ map	mm tummy	mb thumb	mn hymn			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double consonants alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its <i>short</i> sound. • Some people would refer to ‘silent b’ or silent ‘n’; others prefer to say that ‘mb’ and ‘mn’ are digraphs (graphemes) representing the /m/ sound.
/d/ dog	dd ladder	ed coloured				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double consonants alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its <i>short</i> sound.
/g/ gate	gg dagger					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double consonants alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its <i>short</i> sound.
/o/ on octopus	(w)a wasp (wh)a what	(qu)a quad squash				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach ‘try the <i>short</i> vowel /o/ sound first, if that does not sound right then try the <i>long</i> vowel /oa/ sound’. • Alert the reader that the graphemes ‘w’ or ‘qu’ preceding a single letter ‘a’ usually indicate that the ‘a’ represents the /o/ sound. • [Note that a preceding letter ‘w’ also affects the pronunciation of the graphemes ‘ar’ and ‘or’: e.g. warm, worm.]
/u/ up umbrella	o love glove	ou famous couple				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When decoding single letter ‘u’, teach ‘try the <i>short</i> vowel /u/ sound first, if that does not sound right then try the <i>long</i> vowel /ue/ (yoo) sound’.
/l/ leg	ll bell					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make the /l/ sound, roll up the tongue and say close to ‘ul’ rather than saying ‘luh’. • Short words with <i>short</i> vowels usually end with ‘ll’. • Double consonants alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its <i>short</i> sound.
(schwa) effect)	le table	il pencil	al animal	el label	ol symbol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach the ‘schwa’ effect involving /l/ through words such as: little, table, pupil, cymbal, label, symbol (all pronounced close to ‘ul’). • Teach that literal sounding out when reading, however, helps with spelling: e.g. h-o-s-p-i-t-<u>a</u>-l.

/f/ fish	ff fluff	ph graph	gh rough				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double consonants alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its <i>short</i> sound. • Short words with <i>short</i> vowel sounds usually end with 'ff'.
/b/ bat	bb rabbit						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double consonants alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its <i>short</i> sound.
/ai/ aim	ay tray	a table	a-e cake	ey grey	eigh eight	ea steak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'a-i' as in 'baking' alerts the reader to pronounce the long /ai/. • Grapheme 'ea' for the /ai/ sound is rare but mention the three common words in which it appears: break, steak, great.
/j/ jug	g (soft) germ giraffe	ge cabbage	dge hedge	gi magic giant	gy gypsy gyrate		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters e, i or y alert the reader that the preceding letter 'g' <i>might</i> represent the /j/ sound. (This is often referred to as 'soft g'.) • Words ending with the /j/ sound are spelt with the graphemes 'ge' (following a <i>schwa</i> or <i>long</i> vowel sound) or 'dge' (following a <i>short</i> vowel sound) - not the letter 'j'.
/oa/ oak	o no gold	ow snow grow	oe toes	o-e rope	ough dough though although		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'o-i' as in 'poking' alerts the reader to pronounce the long /oa/. • Some people use the 'ough' spelling variation for several sounds as a reason for not teaching phonically as they say that the English writing system is 'not phonetic' enough. This is not the case. Simply <i>explain</i> that 'ough' is a spelling variation for many different sounds and give word lists to illustrate.
ie pie	/igh/ light	y fly	i blind	i-e bike			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'i-i' as in 'liking' alerts the reader to pronounce the long /igh/.
/ee/ bee	ea eat	e me	y rainy	ey key	e-e swede	ie thief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'e-i' as in 'competing' alerts the reader to pronounce the long /ee/.

/or/ fork	aw claw	au sauce	al chalk	oor door	ore snore	our four	(w)ar warm	oar oar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter 'w' preceding grapheme 'ar' alerts the reader to pronounce the 'ar' as /or/.
/z/ zoo	zz buzz								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Double consonants alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its <i>short</i> sound. Short words with <i>short</i> vowel sounds usually end with 'zz'
/w/ wing	wh wheel								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter 'w' preceding vowel graphemes should alert the reader to different possible pronunciations'; (w)a, wasp, wag; (w)ar, warm, wary; (w)or, work. The sound (phoneme) /w/ may also have this effect as in 'qu' words and 'squ' words: e.g. quad, quantity, quarter; squad, squash.
/ng/ ring	nk /ng+/k/ drink								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach 'nk' as if it was one sound unit for reading and spelling purposes even though it is really two; that is: /ng+/k/.
/v/ van	ve dove								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach that words ending with the /v/ sound always end with the grapheme 've'.
/oo/ book	oul should								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach the two sounds represented by the grapheme 'oo' at the same time. Progress (and pay special attention) to linking the /oo/ as in 'moon' with the spelling and pronunciation variations of 'ew', 'ue' and 'u-e' which can represent the /oo/ sound and the /ue/ sound. NB: Grapheme 'ue' is two sounds /y+/oo/ in words like 'statue', but treat as if it is one sound unit /ue/ (yoo).
/oo/ moon	ew brew	ue blue	u-e flute	ui fruit	ou you				
/y/ yellow									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach early on that letter 'y' represents 3 sounds as in 'yes, my mummy' and is often interchangeable with the phonemes /i/ and /igh/ - and grapheme 'i'. In effect, the letter 'y' can act as either a consonant phoneme (as in 'yes') or as a vowel phoneme (as in 'my' and 'mummy').

x /k/+s/ box	/k/+s/ [books, cakes]	/g/+z/ exam exit exist				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach the letter 'x' as if it was one sound unit /ks/ whereas it is really two sounds /k/+s/. Provide word lists of '-x' words, '-ks' words and '-kes' words to compare: e.g. fox, boxes, oxen; looks, books, beaks, likes. It is essential that word lists and experience of reading 'ks' words are provided to help with spelling in particular. Point out that the letter 'x' in words like 'exit' and 'exam' represents the sounds close to /g/+z/.
/ch/ chin	tch patch					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grapheme 'tch' indicates a preceding <i>short</i> vowel sound; e.g. witch, fetch, thatch, notch, hutch, watch. Grapheme 'ch' follows <i>long</i> vowel sounds (bleach, pooch, reaches); but also some common words with <i>short</i> vowels which need to be especially noted: rich, which, such, much. Grapheme 'ch' follows consonants; e.g. mulch, wrench, pinch.
/sh/ shell	ch chef	ti station	ci musician	ssi mission		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw attention to 'ti', 'ci', 'ssi' graphemes in long words. Provide words in groups with the same 'chunk' endings: -tion, -cian, -cial, -ssion, -cious. **Progress to the phoneme /zh/ as in 'television' and 'measure'.
/th/ moth						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach voiced and unvoiced /th/ together. Point out the difference with the sounds /f/ and /v/ and study mouth movements of these sounds carefully.
/th/ this						
qu /k/+w/ queen						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In English the letter 'q' is always followed by the letter 'u' and together they represent two sounds /k/+w/. Treat as one sound unit for both reading and spelling purposes.
/ou/ out	ow owl	ough bough				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The <i>grapheme</i> 'ou' for the sound /ou/ is never at the end of a word. 'ough' is a rare grapheme as an /ou/ sound: bough, plough.

/oi/ oil	oy boy					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The <i>grapheme</i> 'oi' is never at the end of a word except in 'coi carp'.
ue /y/+/oo/ statue	u unicorn	ew news	u-e cube			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Point out that the graphemes 'ue', 'ew' and 'u-e' are also spellings for the /oo/ sound. Treat 'ue' as one sound unit in words like statue and rescue. The 'u-i' as in 'amusing' alerts the reader to pronounce the long /ue/ (yoo).
/er/ herbs	ir girl	ur purse	ear earth	(w)or worm	our armour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter 'w' preceding vowel graphemes alert the reader to different possible pronunciations: work, wok. 'er' and 'our' at the end of words are usually pronounced closer to /u/ (schwa effect): sister, colour.
/ar/ arm	(a) (bath)					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mention early on that some people pronounce some words with the 'a' grapheme as the /ar/ sound rather than the /a/ sound: path p-ar-th, glass g-l-ar-s.
/air/ hair	ear bear	are share	ere there	eir their	heir heirloom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach along with phoneme /eer/ (below) as there are so many similar or identical graphemes representing /air/ and /eer/.
/eer/ beer	ear tears	ere here	ier tier			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See /air/ above.
/zh/ (phoneme only)	si television	z azure	s treasure			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> **Progress to this sound from lessons in the /sh/ sound and its spelling variations - see teaching notes for the /sh/ sound above. /zh/ denotes a phoneme only - there is no grapheme for these letters combined.

The 'red letters' denote letter/s-sound correspondences included on the [STAGE ONE and STAGE TWO CanDoCubes](#). See word lists in STAGE TWO booklet.

This chart addresses the majority of the complex alphabetic code spelling and pronunciation variations of the English writing system. Remember:

- one sound can be represented by one, two or more letters (e.g. z-i-p, sh, ng, igh)
- one sound can be represented by different spellings (e.g. o, oa, ow, oe, o-e, ough)
- one spelling can represent multiple sounds (e.g. ough - though, thought, through, bough)