

Articles - Learn to Read all the Sounds

School age is the time most children are ready to learn to read. A few children are ready to learn to read before then; older students, and adults who have passed school age, are not too old to learn to read.

Learning to read should not be a long drawn out process. A little child can learn to read independently within a year, doing 15 minutes of work a day. Older students, such as 15 year olds, can learn to read in less than 6 weeks, if tutored for 1 – 2 hours each day.

Endless rote learning isn't necessary. Lots of reading practice isn't necessary. What's essential is learning the approximately 160 sound/letter combinations that make up almost all our words. Students need to be able to say the relevant sound as soon as the letter or letter team is seen. Students also need to have sufficient practice blending these separate sound/letter combinations into words.

Whether your students are 4 or 64, they have to learn the same body of knowledge, and the same set of skills, in order to become independent readers. Once students have acquired the essential knowledge and skills, they can read almost anything.

Here are the 160 sound/letter combinations students need to learn:

NB: The most common sound/letter combination in each group is first.

Sound	Letter/s	Sound/Letter Combination Name	Other Words
/a/	a	/a/ in apple	at, am
/ae/	a	/ae/ in taken	basin, April
	ae/a e	/ae/ in ice cream sunda e plate	Fae, name
	ai/ay	Old /ae/ in mer maid display	paid, play
	e/ee	Foreign /ae/ in cafe & matinee	eclair, puree
	ea	Old /ae/ in steak	break, great
	ei/ey	Foreign /ae/ in reindeer survey	veil, they
/air/	air	/air/ in airplane	stair, pair
	are/ar	Old /air/ in share & shared	glare, blared
	ear	Foreign /air/ in bears	pear, wear
/ar/	ar	/ar/ in star	far, jar
	a	Foreign /ar/ in Ma & Pa	sultana, banana
	a	/ar/ before two consonants	glass, balm
/b/	b	/b/ in bat & ball	rib, cub

Sound	Letter/s	Sound/Letter Combination Name	Other Words
/k/	c	See /k/	
/d/	d	/d/ in dog	dent, had
	ed	Past tense /ed, d, t/ in dented, pried, & pricked	slimmed, grinned
/e/	e	/e/ in egg	end, egg
	ea	Old /e/ in bread	head, thread
/ed/	ed	Past tense /ed, d, t/ in dented, pried, & pricked	trotted, hunted
/ee/	e	/ee/ in began , at the end of a syllable & /ee/ in be , at the end of a few short words	defrost, defend me, he
	ea	/ee/ in eat	flea, tea
	ee/e e	/ee/ in seeds for Eve	free, Steve
	ei/ey	Foreign /ee/ in seize & honey	protein, key
	i	Foreign /ee/ in ski , at the end of a word, & /ee/ in budgerigar at the end of a syllable	taxi, origami Damian, Gabrielle
	ie/i e	Foreign /ee/ in Marie's magazine	Katie, police
	y	/ee/ in baby at the end of most multi-syllable words	family, puppy
/el/	elle	Foreign /el/ in Gabrielle	Estelle, gazelle
/en/	enne	Foreign /en/ Adrienne	Lucienne, Lilienne
/er/	er	/er/ in letter	her, boxer
	ear	Foreign /er/ in search	learn, earth
	eur	Foreign /er/ in amateur	chauffeur, masseur
	ir	Old /er/ in dirty	first, girl
	or	/er/ in American favor	vapor, harbor
	our	/our/ in British favour	vapour, harbour
	re	Old /er/ in fire	here, hire
	ur	Old /er/ in spur	burp, burn
/et/	ette	Foreign /et/ in brunettes	Antoinette, Evette
/f/	f	/f/ in fly swat	fig, fun
	gh	Foreign /f/ in laugh , in ghosts weigh their weight and laugh	rough, cough
	ph	Foreign /f/ in photo	phone, Joseph

Sound	Letter/s	Sound/Letter Combination Name	Other Words
/gh/	gh	Foreign /g/ in gh osts at the beginning of a syllable, in gh osts weigh their weight and laugh	g hee, Afghan
	gu	Foreign /g/ in g uide before letters e, i or y	g uilt, rogue
/h/	h	/h/ in h ere	h uff, h en
/i/	i	/i/ in i t's i tchy	t in, s it
	y	Foreign /i/ in Dylan	Darryl, syrup
/ie/	i	/ie/ in Ivan at the end of a syllable	quiet, p ilot
		/ie/ in find before two consonants	blind, w ild
	ie/ey	/ie/ in heists & in eye witnesses	feisty , eyeball
	ie/i e	/ie/ in bow ties inside	pie , h ide
	igh	/ie/ in fight	thigh , n ight
	uy	Old /ie/ in guy	buy , guys
	y	Foreign /ie/ in my python at the end of a short word, or at the end of a syllable	by , fry pylon, dynamite
ye/y e	Foreign /ie/ in Goodbye Clydesdale	dye , type	
/j/	g	Letter g may show sound /j/in g ems, before letters e, i, or y	g enius, fragile, g ym
	dge/dg	3 letter /j/ in badg e	f ridge, f idget
	j	/j/ in j ust stop right now	j ust, j ot
/k/	c	/k/ in cl amp	cat , music
	ch	Foreign /k/ in monarch	school , ch emist
	ck	2 letter /k/ in duck	crack , brick
	k	/k/ in keys	milk , desk
	qu	Foreign /k/ in conquer	antique, raquet
/ks/		See /x/	
/kw/		See /qu/	
/l/	l	/l/ in l adder	ill , list
	le	/l/ in wobbl e	nibble , gobble
/m/	m	/m/ in m ountains	am , him
/n/	n	/n/ in neckl ace	in , tin
	gn	/n/ in gn at	sign , design
	kn	Old /n/ in kn aves & kn ights	knot , knit

Sound	Letter/s	Sound/Letter Combination Name	Other Words
/ng/	ng	/ng/ in sing	cling, gang
/ng g/	ng	/ng g/ in fingers	hunger, fungus
/ngk/	nk/nc	/ngk/ in Pink Zinc [®]	drink, franc
/o/	o	/o/ in orange	on, off
	a	Foreign /o/ after a /w/ sound in want	quarrel, swamp
/oe/	o	Letter o may show sound /oe/ at the end of a syllable, & at the end of a word, & before two consonants	robot, open go, video cold, hold
	eau	Foreign /oe/ in plateau	beau, beaus, beaux
	oa	Old /oe/ in moat	cloak, soap
	oe/o e	/oe/ in toe bone	hoe, note
	ow	Old /oe/ in bow & arrow	low, yellow
/oo/	oo	/oo/ in look	hoof, book
	u	Old /oo/ in push	pull, bush
/ooe/	oo	/ooe/ in moon	tattoo, zoo
	ew	Foreign /ooe/ in Andrew	flew, grew
	o	Old /ooe/ in to do	undo, who
	ou	Old /ooe/ in you	youth, group
	u	Foreign /ooe/ in futons at the end of a syllable	fluent, strudel
	ue/u e	Foreign /ooe/ in flue & June	blue, rude
/or/	or	/or/ in ordinary dots	form, corn
	a	/or/ before letter l	ball, hall
	ar	See /war/	
	au/aw	Old /or/ in dinosaur paw	Saul, saw
	oar	Old /or/ in all aboard	hoard, board
	oor	Foreign /or/ in floor	poor, door
	ore	Foreign /or/ in before	more, store
	our	Old /or/ in yours	tourist, downpour
/ow/	ou/ow	/ow/ in Ouch! Ow!	cloud, fowl
/oy/	oi/oy	/oy/ in boil oysters	coin, boy
/p/	p	/p/ in pinch	limp, map

Sound	Letter/s	Sound/Letter Combination Name	Other Words
/qu/	qu	/qu/ (kw) in quarrel	quit, quill
/r/	r	/r/ in roar	run, rug
	rh	Foreign /r/ in rhinoceros	rhubarb, rhea
	wr	Old /r/ in writing	wren, wrist
/s/	s	/s/ in snake	its, ants
	c	/s/ in pencil before letters e, i, or y	cell, pencil, cycle
	sc	Foreign /s/ in science	scissors, muscle
/see/	cei	Foreign /see/ in receive	deceit, ceiling
/sh/	sh	/sh/ in shhh	ash, finish
	ch	Foreign /sh/ in quiche	crochet, chef
	ci	Foreign /sh/ in special	social, facial
	si/ssi	Foreign /sh/ in tension session	expulsion, expression
	ti	Foreign /sh/ in nation	caution, addition
Silent letters	e	Silent e in wobble , so every syllable has a vowel	crumble, humble
		Silent e in impressive , because letter v must not end an English word	active, save
	gh	Foreign silent gh in ghosts weigh their weight and laugh	bough, though thought, might
		There are other silent letters spelt various ways depending on their original language.	
/t/	t	/t/ in touch	it, nit
	ed	Past tense /ed, d, t/ in dented, pried, & pricked	snicked, packed
/th/	th	/th/ in thirsty	teeth, north
/the/	th	/the/ in there	them, smooth
/u/	u	/u/ in up	us, sun
	a	/u/ in away , at the end of a syllable or word	vanilla, gorilla
	o	/u/ in mother , before letters m, n, th, and v	son, brother, glove
	ou	Old /u/ in trouble	touch, young
/ue/	u	/ue/ in humans , at the end of a syllable	tunic, duet
	eu/ew	Foreign /ue/ in European newspaper	feud, few
	ue/u e	/ue/ in rescue & cute	value, mute

Sound	Letter/s	Sound/Letter Combination Name	Other Words
/v/	v	/v/ in valley	vet, vest
	ve	/v/ in impressive , to end words that may not end with letter v	have, save
/w/	w	/w/ in worms wiggle	wet, well
	wh	/w/ in whale	whale, white
/war/	war	Old /wor/ in warm	warn, wardrobe
/wh/	wh	/wh/ in whale (Optional sound /hw/)	whale, white
/x/(ks)	x	/x/ in axe/ax	fix, ox
/y/	y	/y/ in yawn	yes, yap
	i	Foreign /y/ in brilliantly	onion, union
/z/	z	/z/ in zoom	fizz, jazz
	s	/z/ in his	hers, is
	x	Foreign /z/ in xylophone	Xavier, xylem
/zh/	si	Foreign /zh/ in explosions	Asian, vision
		This sound is spelt in various ways, depending on that word's original language.	

To see the list of sound/letter combinations listed according to their letters, click [Articles](#) in the menu, then go to [Sounds – Letter Sounds](#).