

## Phonics Rules for Reading and Spelling

### 1. Vowels in syllables

Every syllable of every word must have at least one vowel sound. A vowel can stand alone in a syllable, as in u•nit and an•i•mal. It can also be surrounded by consonants, as in jet, nap•kin, and fan•tas•tic.

### 2. Short and long vowels

Vowels can make different sounds. The sounds they make depend on where they are in a word. For example, is the vowel followed by a consonant? This helps determine if the vowel makes its short or long sound: go vs. got, she vs. shed, hi vs. him.

When there's only one vowel in a syllable and it is followed by at least one consonant, the vowel usually makes its short sound. Examples include on, itch, mas•cot, and Wis•con•sin. This pattern is called a "closed syllable" because the consonant "closes in" the short vowel sound.

When there is only one vowel and it is at the end of a syllable, the vowel makes its long sound, as in he and ban•jo. This pattern is called an "open syllable."

### 3. Silent e (Magic e)

When e is the last letter in a word, and there's only one other vowel in that syllable, the first vowel in that syllable is usually long and the e is silent, as in sale and in•side. This syllable pattern is called "vowel-consonant-e."

Some teachers call this the "silent e" rule. Some call it the "magic e" rule. The e gives all its power to the other vowel and makes that vowel use its long sound ("say its name").

### 4. Consonant blends and digraphs

Digraph is a fancy word for two letters that represent one sound. In a digraph made of consonants, the two consonants work together to form a new sound. Examples include chap, ship, thin, whiz, and photo. Consonant blends are different. These groups of two or more consonants work together. But unlike digraphs, their individual sounds can still be heard as they're blended together. Examples include clam, grasp, and scrub.

## 5. Vowel digraphs

In a vowel digraph, two vowels are side by side. The first vowel is long and says its name. The second vowel is silent, as in boat, paint, and beach.

Sometimes, two vowels work together to form a new sound. This is called a diphthong. Examples include cloud and boil.

## 6. R-controlled vowels (Bossy r)

When a syllable has a vowel that is followed by r, the vowel is "controlled" by the r and makes a new sound. Examples include car, bird, germ, form, and hurt. This rule is sometimes called "bossy r" because the r "bosses" the vowel to make a new sound.

## 7. The "schwa" sound

Any vowel can make the schwa sound; it sounds like a weak uh or ih. Words like from and final have the schwa sound. Some words have more than one schwa sound, like apartment and banana. It's the most common sound in the English language.

## 8. Soft c and hard c, and soft g and hard g

When the letter c is followed by the vowels e, i, or y, it usually makes its soft sound. Examples of that are cent, circus, and cyclone. With other vowels, the letter c makes a hard sound, as in cat and cot.

Likewise, when the letter g is followed by the vowels e, i, or y, it usually makes its soft sound. Examples of that are gel, giant, and gym. With other vowels, the letter g makes a hard sound, as in gas, gorilla, and yogurt.

## 9. The "fszl" (fizzle) rule

The letters f, s, z, and l are usually doubled at the end of a one-syllable word immediately following a short vowel. Examples include stuff, grass, fuzz, and shell. Exceptions include quiz and bus.

## 10. Ending in k or ck

When a one-syllable word ends with the /k/ sound immediately following a short vowel, it's usually spelled with ck, as in duck and trick. When the /k/ sound follows a consonant, long vowel sound, or diphthong, it's usually spelled with k, as in task, cake, soak, and hawk.

## 11. The /j/ sound and the /ch/ sound

In a one-syllable word, when a /j/ sound immediately follows a short vowel, it's spelled dge as in badge, hedge, bridge, dodge, and smudge. (The d "protects" the vowel from the "magic e" rule.)

In a one-syllable word, when a /ch/ sound immediately follows a short vowel, it's usually spelled tch as in catch, fetch, stitch, blotch, and clutch. The exceptions to this rule are such, much, rich, and which.

## 12. Drop the e with -ing

When words end with a silent e, drop the e before adding -ing. Examples: bike/biking, give/giving, and dodge/dodging. This rule also applies to other suffixes that start with vowels, like -ed, -er, -able, and -ous. Examples: grieve/grievous, excite/excitable, and hope/hoped.

## 13. Doubling

In a one-syllable word like win where one short vowel is followed by one consonant, double the consonant before adding a suffix that starts with a vowel. Examples: winner, winning, winnable.

## 14. Plurals

For most words, add s to make them plural, as in cat/cats. But when a singular word ends with s, sh, ch, x, or z, add es to make it plural, as in classes, brushes, and foxes.

## 15. Y rules

To make plural a word that ends in a vowel immediately followed by y, just add s, as in toy/toys. When y immediately follows a consonant, change the y to i and add es. Examples: family/families, pony/ponies, and treaty/treaties.

Suffixes follow a similar set of y rules. When there's a vowel right before y, keep the y and simply add the suffix. Examples include play/playing and annoy/annoying.

When a word ends with a consonant followed immediately by y, change the y to i before adding suffixes like -ed and -est. Examples include carry/carried and happy/happiest.

But when the suffix begins with i, keep the y and simply add the suffix, as in fly/flying and baby/babyish.

### **Exceptions to the Rules**

Most words in the English language follow phonics rules. But any exceptions to these rules need to be taught and memorized for reading and spelling. These words are often found on lists of sight words/high-frequency words/trick words.