

Dyslexia SA - Fun Phonics Facts

31 Facts a Day for Dyslexia Awareness Month – October 2016

Fun Phonics Fact 1 – Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the sound structure of words (not the letters). It forms the basis of reading and is the best indicator of reading success. A great way to develop a child's phonemic awareness is by sounding out words and getting the child to tell you what the word is. This is a completely auditory process. It's a great thing to do in the car with your child; look at signs, sound out the word and have them tell you what the word is.

Start off with easy consonant/vowel/consonant (CVC) words and blends with a short vowel sound:

c/a/t - d/o/g - d/u/ck -j/u/g -sh/i/p- k/i/ck -s/p/o/t -m/i/n/t

It is also important to use nonsense words so the child is only hearing the sounds and not using their memory of real words:

v/o/s/t - b/a/n/t - ch/i/s/p - b/i/f/t

As adults, we can see the letters in our heads and this can make the sounding out process more difficult. You only want to concentrate on the sound – even if the sound is not corresponding to the letter in which you know the word is spelt. This is especially important with long vowel sounds. Example (using a capital letter for a long vowel sound):

ch/ee/z (cheese) – s/e/n/t (cent) – er/th (earth) – A/t (eight) – r/A/n (rain) -s/n/O (snow) – m/ou/th – b/ir/d – f/or/k – s/p/oo/n – n/l/f (knife) – l/l/t (light) – c/or/t (caught)

Moving on, give your child a word and get them to tell you the sounds, “tell me the sounds in the word pig (p/i/g) or boat (b/O/t)”. You can even use objects or different coloured pieces of paper to represent different sounds. Eg: put a red, blue and green square of paper on the table. Point to each colour and say c/a/t, then get the child to do it. After a few repetitions take the red piece of paper away and replace it with a yellow piece and say, “I've taken the 'c' sound away and I'm putting a 'p' sound there. What does it say now”? As the child gets better with swapping sounds you can do this at the beginning, end and even change the vowel in the word. Remember you are not using any letter representations. Only sounds and objects/colours representing sounds.

Fun Phonics Fact 2 – Phonemes, Graphemes and Letters

Yesterday we talked about phonemic awareness – the sound structure of words. The word phoneme relates to speech sounds and is the sound that a letter or group of letters make.

Every phoneme has a corresponding written grapheme. English is a hard language to learn as it can have multiple graphemes for each phoneme such as 'ir', 'er' and 'ur' and some graphemes represent

more than one phoneme like 'ch' in school compared to 'ch' in chip. Other languages like Italian have only one grapheme for each phoneme (lucky them!). Understanding the relationship between speech sounds (phonemes) and the letters used to represent those sounds (graphemes) is one of the crucial skills involved in reading and decoding words.

A grapheme can represent just one letter sound (such as a consonant) eg: b, c, m, p.

A vowel grapheme can represent the vowels in their long and short form eg: short form – a/pple, e/ddy, i/nsect, o/live, u/pper or long form – A/pe, E/mu, I/ce, O/pen, U/niform.

Graphemes can represent two or three consonants that when put together make one sound (consonant digraph) eg: sh – ch – ck – th – wh - ge (or consonant trigraph) eg: tch, dge.

Graphemes can represent vowel team digraphs eg: ee as in seed – oa as in boat – ea as in sea - ai as in rain.

Graphemes can also represent r controlled vowels (a vowel followed by the letter r which gives the vowel a different sound) eg: er as in her – ir as in bird – ar as in car – ire as in fire.

There are diphthong graphemes (two vowels where a new vowel sound is formed by the combination of both vowel sounds) eg: oi as in boil – ou as in around – oo as in book – oo as in spoon.

In fact graphemes can be any group of letters that represent one sound eg: tion as in nation - sion as in mansion - ive as in give – ture as in creature.

As mentioned, the English language can have many different graphemes for the one phoneme eg: the phoneme 'or' can be represented as - or as in fork – oor as in door – ore as in shore – aw as in paw – au as in caught and ough as in thought. Likewise there is ee as in seed – ea as in sea – ey as in key – ei as in babies, and E as in e/ddy. Crazy huh? No wonder dyslexics find reading hard when they struggle with phonemic awareness and the corresponding written structure of our language is so difficult. This is why phonemes, graphemes and letters must be taught explicitly – there is no room for error, in fact we need to “over teach” them to make them automatic.

Letters are the visual building blocks of written words. When we see the letters of the alphabet we are describing the way a word looks, not the way it sounds. Irregular words or tricky words have unusual relationships between letters and phonemes which make them difficult to decode, read and spell.

So a good way to remember is phonemes can be heard and spoken. Graphemes can be heard, spoken and seen (eg: in a book). Letters can only be seen.

Fun Phonics Fact 3 – Decoding, Phonics and Sight Words

Once children understand the sound structure of words and their written representations they are ready to “crack the code” by linking the letter patterns and speech patterns to decode words. They can do this by blending and segmentation.

Blending is joining individual speech sounds (phonemes) together to make a real word. This is a crucial phonemic awareness skill as being able to mentally join speech sounds together to make real words helps children decode unfamiliar words using letter-sound patterns when reading.

Segmentation is the opposite of blending and is the skill of splitting a word apart. It is crucial for spelling (encoding) since being able to split words up into their separate speech sounds helps to spell unfamiliar words.

Therefore, if children haven’t adequately learnt the first step of reading, phonemic awareness, they will be unable to blend, segment and decode successfully. When they see a word or part of a word it does not register as familiar so it cannot activate its sound. You can see why a phonics check in year 1, an auditory test to check for phonemic awareness, is so important in identifying children who are at risk of a reading difficulty.

Teaching phonics involves explicitly teaching children to understand phoneme/grapheme relationships. The English language is based on the alphabetical principal. About 85% of our words are regular and can be decoded and 15% are irregular and must be learnt by sight. You can see why phonics is so powerful. Phonics leads to the best gains in teaching reading and spelling. Unfortunately, there is only a minority of Australian schools which use a synthetic phonics approach to teaching reading.

Children usually bring home sight words to learn by rote. These are high frequency words in the English language like ‘come’ and ‘the’ and they may have irregular spelling so they are difficult to decode. Learning to instantly recognise highly frequent and irregularly spelled words helps students to develop fluency in reading and prevents students from attempting to decode words that do not contain typical letter-sound patterns. Teaching sight words before children have learnt basic decoding skills is not recommended.

Fun Phonics Fact 4 – Closed, Open and Unit Syllables

Most of us know what a syllable is – the beat in a word. We all remember clapping out syllables at school or putting our hand under our chin to feel our mouth open. A syllable is a segment of a word that contains a vowel – that’s why our mouth opens because saying a vowel sound requires an open mouth movement.

A closed syllable is a vowel that is closed in at the end by a consonant like the one syllable word ‘jug’ or the two syllable word ‘jug/gle’. The ‘g’ is closing the door on the vowel which ensures the vowel

makes its short sound. If a syllable is open it does not have a consonant closing it in so it can make its long vowel sound like the words spl/der or bO/nus.

Have you ever wondered why we double the consonant in some words? This is called the happy rule – we have to double the consonant to keep the vowel in the first syllable short. If we spelt the word as ‘hapy’ then the syllable would divide after the ‘a’ which would make it open and it would give its long A sound – the word would be hA/py not hap/py.

A word with a unit syllable makes an unusual sound – the vowel may not make its short sound even though it is closed in. Unit syllables are always at the end of a word and have three letters. When you are spelling you should NOT break apart a unit into individual sounds.

Units include ‘oll’ as in toll, ‘old’ as in told, ‘ost’ as in most (but not cost, frost or lost), ‘ild’ as in wild, ‘ang’ as in hang, ‘ong’ as in long, ‘olt’ as in bolt, ‘all’ as in tall, ‘ink’ as in think, ‘ing’ as in wing, ‘ank’ as in tank, ‘unk’ as in punk, ‘ung’ as in hung, ‘onk’ as in honk, ‘old’ as in told, ‘ind’ as in blind.

Fun Phonics Fact 5 – The Silent E

In the English language whenever a word ends with an E, the E is silent. This is often referred to as a “Silent E”, “Bossy E” or “Magic E”. Let’s look at the word bOne, lAke and ex/plOde. The E cannot be heard, but its purpose is to keep the vowel in the last syllable long. The E can “jump” over the consonant before it and be “bossy” or “magic” and keep the vowel sound long.

Fun Phonics Fact 6 – The Floss Rule

Whenever a one syllable word with a short vowel sound ends in an F, L, S or Z we double the last letter – the Floss Rule, eg: skill, dress, frizz and cliff. There are some exceptions to the rule, but this is because the words are shortened from longer words such as bus (omnibus), gas (gasoline) and yes (yes-sir-re).

Fun Phonics Fact 7 – Y as a Vowel and Watch out Vowels

The letter Y can be a consonant and a vowel – this is sometimes referred to as “Bossy Y” or “Greedy Y”. In the English language a word cannot end in the letter i (exceptions are the word hi – shortened from hello and ski – which is a Scandinavian word). We have already learnt that a word ending with an E is silent so what do we do if we want to hear an E sound or an I sound at the end of the word? We use a Y as a vowel and a good way to know what sound the Y is representing at the end of the word (E or I) is using the Cry Baby Rule – if a Y is at the end of a one syllable word it makes an I sound, like in ‘cry’. If a Y is at the end of a two syllable word it makes an E sound like in ‘baby’. For a multi-syllable word like justify or custody it can be either E or I so we usually say the word to see what form makes sense.

The vowels E, I and Y are referred to as “Watch out Vowels”. They can change the sound of the consonant that comes before it and also show us what letter to use in certain words.

How do we know when to start a word with the letter C or the letter K? Use the Kiss the Cat Rule – if a word starts with a ‘k’ sound and is followed by a watch out vowel (E, I or Y) use the letter K as in ‘kiss’. For any other vowel or consonant use the letter C as in ‘cat’.

Watch out vowels also help us with reading rules. The letter C makes an ‘s’ sound if it is followed by a watch out vowel, as in ‘city’, ‘cent’ and ‘cycle’. This is why we use the Kiss the Cat Rule, to ensure we achieve the ‘k’ sound and not the ‘s’ sound. The letter G makes a ‘j’ sound if it is followed by a watch out vowel, as in ‘gem’, ‘gym’ and ‘giraffe’.

Fun Phonics Fact 8 – When to use C, K or CK

In the English language we have three letter patterns that make the same sound of ‘k’ – C, K and CK. How do we know when to use each one? We already learnt the Kiss the Cat Rule yesterday for the ‘k’ sound at the start of the word.

At the end of a word:

C is never used at the end of a word with only one vowel.

The only time you use CK is right after a short vowel sound as in ‘truck’. Use K the rest of the time as in ‘milk’ – the Milk Truck Rule!

The only time you don’t use the Milk Truck Rule is if you hear an ‘ic’ sound at the end of a multi-syllable word, like in ‘mu/sic’. Words are only allowed to end in C if they are multi-syllable words. If a word has only one syllable and ends in an ‘ic’ sound use CK, as in ‘trick’ – the Music Trick Rule!

In the middle of a multi-syllable word:

Use a C wherever you can unless it is followed by a watch out vowel (E, I or Y) like in the word ‘picnic’, if this doesn’t work....

use a CK, but only if it is followed by a short vowel sound, like in ‘chicken’.....

if a C or a CK do not work use a K like in ‘basket’ – The Picnic, Chicken Basket Rule!

Note: if a word ends in a ‘kt’ sound like in act, direct or addict you always use the letters CT. This goes back to words with Latin roots and also fits our rules as a K would only be used if a watch out vowel followed it.

Fun Phonics Fact 9 – The Letter Q

The letter Q is best remembered as being the Queen of the alphabet. She is so important that she needs a bodyguard with her everywhere she goes. The letter U is her bodyguard and they go everywhere together. When the U is acting as a bodyguard, it is not a vowel. In the words queen, quilt, quiet etc the U is not recognised as a vowel, only the other vowels are.

Fun Phonics Fact 10 – The ‘ch’ Sound

There are two graphemes that represent the ‘ch’ phoneme – ‘ch’ and ‘tch’. Use the Catch Lunch Rule to remember – the only time you use ‘tch’ is right after a short vowel as in ‘catch’. Use ‘ch’ the rest of the time as in ‘lunch’. There are four exceptions to the rule: such, much, rich and which.

Fun Phonics Fact 11 – The ‘j’ Sound at the End of a Word

English words are not allowed to end in the letter J. There are two graphemes that represent the ‘j’ sound at the end of a word: ‘ge’ as in huge and ‘dge’ as in bridge. Use ‘ge’ if the ‘j’ sound has a long vowel sound before it, as in ‘huge’. Use ‘ge’ if the ‘j’ sound has a consonant before it, as in the word ‘large’. Use ‘dge’ if the ‘j’ sound has a short vowel before it, as in the word bridge – the Huge Large Bridge Rule!

Fun Phonics Fact 12 – Contractions

When we contract a word we change two words into one, such as it is to it’s. Rule: you never change the first word. You take the vowel out of the second word and anything before it and put an apostrophe in its place. If there are two vowels in the second word you only take the first vowel.

is = ‘s

am = ‘m

are = ‘re

have = ‘ve

will = ‘ll

But wait a minute – there are always exceptions!

not = n’t except for the word can’t

would = ‘d

let us = let’s

will not – won’t

Fun Phonics Fact 13 – The Exit Rule

The sound of the letter X is made up of two sounds ‘ks’. When spelling a word with the letter X a letter S never follows – the X itself makes the ‘s’ sound you can hear. Remember the Exit Rule for any words containing an X like exist, expert and extinct.

Fun Phonics Fact 14 – The Aussie Lingo

We have already learnt what unit syllables are – the vowel may not make its short sound even though it is closed in, unit syllables are always at the end of a word and have three letters eg: ung, ild, ang, onk. When you are spelling you should NOT break apart a unit into individual sounds.

Our Australian accent creates some unique sounds when it comes to the letter A. The Americans and English say the short vowel sound of the letter A in closed syllables such as path, staff and task. We tend to say the sound as an ‘ar’ sound. Therefore, to save confusion when a child is trying to sound out words it is easier to learn this sound as part of a unit syllable.

Australian units are: AFT, ASK, ASP, ASS, AST, ATH, AFF. As in words like cast, craft, task, grasp, class, fast, path and staff.

Fun Phonics Fact 15 – Six Syllable Types

We have already learnt that syllables are the beat in a word and a syllable must contain a vowel. There are six syllable types below, some of which have already been mentioned. Tomorrow we will learn how to divide syllables!

Closed Syllable – pattern VC (vowel, consonant), the vowel is closed in and makes its short sound like in cat, dog, chin, bus.

Open Syllable – pattern V (vowel), the vowel is open and makes it long sound like in she, go, my, fly.

Silent e – pattern VCe, the e is silent and it makes the vowel long like in hope, gate, cake and type.

R-Controlled Vowel – pattern Vr, the R controls the sound of the vowel in front of it (it makes it sound a little different) like in car, born, bird, turn.

Consonant le – pattern [Cle, these are at the end of words and the consonant and the letters le must stay together when dividing syllables eg: ta/ble or lit/tle (see if you remember why we double certain letters in multi-syllable words).

Vowel Teams – pattern VV, two vowels together that make one sound, meat, sleep, play, house, book, blow (w is treated as a vowel in the vowel teams ow, ew and aw). Vowel teams cannot be separated. NOTE: DO NOT teach the rule – when two vowels go walking the first one does the talking. This saying only works about 40% of the time and adds confusion.

Fun Phonics Fact 16 – Syllable Division Rules

A syllable must contain a vowel so the student must first locate the vowels in the word, eg: put a line under the vowels then look at the consonants in between the vowels.

Rule 1 – Tiger (VC/V) and Camel words (V/CV)

When there is one consonant between the vowels you always move the consonant to the right which keeps the first syllable open and the last syllable closed. See if it makes a real word as in ti/ger if it doesn't, move the consonant the other way making the first syllable closed as in cam/el.

Rule 2 - Rabbit words (VC/CV) and Rotten Letters

When there are two consonants between two vowels, divide between the consonants eg: rab/bit, mag/net, doc/tor. Think of locating the two vowels and pulling the consonants apart. However, if there is the letter R or L (rotten letters) between the vowels they usually are not split and will both move to one end eg: se/cret, re/gret. You never split a unit syllable as in 'ank" blank/et or a digraph as in 'ck' chick/en as they need to stay together to make their sound.

Rule 3 – Ostrich (VC/CCV) words

When there are three consonants between the vowels you'll do a 1-2 split. This means the first letter goes to the first syllable and the other 2 letters move to the end eg: os/trich, con/flict, sim/ply. Exceptions are – you never split a digraph or a unit and in the case of a compound word (two small words put together to make one long word) you split between the words as in earth/worm, lip/stick. Watch for three letter consonant blends such as 'scr', 'spr', 'str' as these usually stay together eg: con/struct, ab/stract. If the word doesn't make sense after doing a 1-2 split, try splitting the other way 2-1 split.

Rule 4 – Turtle words ([le])

When a word ends with a consonant-le the word is divided before the consonant-le. The consonant-le forms its own syllable eg: tur/tle, ket/tle.

Rule 5 – Lion (V/V) words

When there are two vowels that are not part of a vowel team you divide between the vowels eg: li/on, di/et.

Rule 6 – Multiple syllable words

You already know the rules, you just need to know where to start! Start at the beginning. Find the first two vowels and move them into separate syllables. Count the letters between those two

vowels and divide according to that rule. Then find the second and third vowels, move them into separate syllables, count the letters between and divide according to that rule and so on.

Fun Phonics Fact 17 – Stressed and Unstressed Syllables

Not all syllables are created equal! In words with more than one syllable, one (or more than one) syllable will be stressed (this is sometimes called accented and unaccented). Syllables that are stressed are usually higher in pitch, longer in duration and a little louder – the longer and stronger syllable. Does this matter? Yes, it can affect the pronunciation and meaning of a word. Look at the word ‘present’, it can have two meanings depending on what syllable is stressed – if the last syllable is stressed the word means a gift, if the first syllable is stressed the words means to show something.

A good way to teach syllable stress is to use a rubber band and stretch it out as you say each syllable in the word. The rubber band will stretch more for the longer and stronger sound.

The first syllable in a two syllable word is usually stressed like in cam/pus. However, sometimes the second syllable is stressed, like in con/fess. The FLOSS rule tells us that only one syllable words that end with an S will be doubled. However, there is an exception to this rule if the second syllable in a word is stressed eg: con/fess, dis/cuss, un/less, suc/cess. Remember this as the Campus Confess Rule. – doubling the S makes the second syllable stressed - longer and stronger.

Some longer words can have primary and secondary stress, such as imagination. ‘Ima’ is the primary stress and ‘na’ is the secondary. The first stressed syllable will still be a little longer and stronger than the second.

Fun Phonics Fact 18 – The ‘ALL’ Sound at the Start and Middle of a Word

The FLOSS rule tells us that one syllable words that end with F, L, S or Z will be doubled. ‘All’ is also recognised as a unit syllable at the end of a word as it can make a different sound like in ‘ball’ or ‘fall’.

When we hear the ‘all’ sound at the start or middle of a word we don’t treat it as a unit syllable and the FLOSS rule doesn’t apply so we don’t double the L, like in al/most, sal/ty and bal/tic.

Fun Phonics Fact 19 – The Schwa

I couldn’t avoid the schwa any longer. It’s a doozy to teach kids and most adults don’t know of its existence even though it’s the most common vowel in the English language!

We learnt about syllable stress the other day. In most two syllable words the first syllable is normally stressed and is pronounced clearly and correctly. In order to speak quickly, the vowel in the unstressed syllable (usually the second) is often pronounced as a schwa. So what is a schwa sound? Open your mouth a little, don’t move your tongue or your mouth and just make a sound – it’s a mix of ‘uh’ and ‘er’. Imagine the sound you make if someone pokes you in the ribs and you just let out some air. That’s a schwa – it’s an unstressed vowel. The symbol for a schwa sound in the

dictionary is an upside down lower case e. If you see this symbol ‘ə’ under the word in the dictionary you know that vowel will schwa. The schwa often causes the most problems in spelling as you cannot hear the actual vowel sound to encode the word. This is where dictionaries and spell checkers come in very useful for kids.

Rules for schwa:

1. If the vowel in the second syllable is closed and is an A or and O it will change to a schwa eg: blos/som (the last syllable sounds like “sum” due to schwa), mel/on (sounds like mel/un), pi/lot (sounds like pi/lut), tex/as (sounds like tex/us).
2. If a multi-syllable word ends in any vowel followed by an L it will schwa eg: pen/cil (sounds like pen/sul), e/qual (sounds like e/quul), can/cel (sounds like can/sul).
3. Open A that is not stressed will change to schwa in any syllable eg: plas/ma (sounds like plas/muh), a/dopt (sounds like uh/dopt), a/go (sounds like uh/go) com/ma (sounds like com/muh).
4. Three syllable words with an open I or E in the second syllable will schwa (there is a slight variation here as some suggest that the I or E will say its short vowel sound even though it’s an open syllable, but with the lazy Aussie accent it sounds more like a schwa). Words such as con/fi/dent which, according to syllable division rules, should say their long vowel sound in the open middle syllable, say their short vowel (or a schwa sound) eg: fam/i/ly, hos/pi/tal, an/i/mal, en/e/my, el/e/gant, cin/e/ma.

These rules aren’t finite, but are most common - the schwa can turn up in the oddest of places!

Fun Phonics Fact 20 – Compound Words

An easy one for today after teaching the schwa! A compound word is two smaller words joined together. For syllable division we always split between each word. There are usually 4 consonants between vowels in compound words eg: dish/cloth, grand/child, with/stand, match/box, grand/slam, crank/shaft.

Fun Phonics Fact 21 – The 2 Sounds of Suffix S and the 3 Sounds of Suffix ED

S can either make a ‘s’ or ‘z’ sound. S says ‘z’ when:

- a) S comes between two vowels eg: rise, nose, please.
- b) When S is at the end of a short word eg: as, has, is, his, was.
- c) When a word ends with a voiced sound eg: cars, dogs, rivers.
- d) When a word ends in the suffix ES eg: bushes, catches, foxes.

What is a voiced sound? Some sounds are produced in our throat while others are produced in our mouth or nose. Sounds that are produced in our throat are called voiced sounds as they make our

voice box vibrate. Put your fingers on your throat and say zzzz (you can feel a buzzing sound). Now say ssss (you shouldn't feel any vibration as the sound comes from your mouth). Tip – all vowel sounds vibrate!

Suffix ED can either sound like 'ed', 'd' or 't':

- a) 'ed' is sounded when a baseword ends with a 't' or a 'd' eg: rented, welded.
- b) If the baseword ends in a voiced sound then it will say 'd' eg: hugged, grinned.
- c) If the base word is not voiced then it will say 't' eg: jumped, talked, mixed

Fun Phonics Fact 22 – The 'sh' Sound and the 'tion' and 'sion' Graphemes

Let me tell you about a shifty character, its name is 'sh'. It makes the 'sh' sound at the start and end of words like ship and fish, but it likes to fool us in the middle of words:

'ti' as in nation

'ci' as in vicious and musician

'si' as in mansion

'ssi' as in mission

'ch' as in machine and brochure – also at the start of words such as chef and champagne. Words that use 'ch' as a 'sh' sound are limited as they are derived from the French language.

In order to remember the different 'sh' sounds in the middle of words we make the letters representing the 'sh' sound and the remaining letters in the word into a grapheme (a group of letters that make one sound – except for 'ch' as a 'sh' sound) eg: 'tion' as in nation, 'cious' as in vicious, 'cian' as in musician, 'sion' as in mansion, 'ssion' as in mission. By the way, 'cian' at the end of a word describes an occupation such as musician, politician or physician.

When we use 'tion' and 'sion' graphemes the whole grapheme is referred to as the /shən/ sound (remember the upside down ə is giving the vowel a schwa sound). Reading rules for /shən/ are:

- a) The 'sion' grapheme makes a 'zhun' sound (vibrating throat sound) when it comes after a vowel and 'shun' when it comes after a consonant.
- b) The 'tion' grapheme will only make a 'shun' sound (no vibration).

Spelling rules:

- a) If a consonant is before the /shən/ sound use 'tion' (most of the time) eg: description, production. There are two consonants that don't work. If the /shən/ sound is after an L use 'sion' eg: convulsion, if it is after an N it can either be 'tion' or 'sion' eg: pension, convention – look it up using a spell checker if unsure.
- b) After a long vowel use 'tion' eg: vacation or donation.
- c) After most short vowels, it will be 'tion' as in ambition or nutrition (remember an open I or E in a 3 syllable word will make its short vowel/schwa sound) or else S+sion as in mission or aggression (the s is doubled to keep the vowel short in the syllable before it).

Tip: The /shən/ sound is never a stressed syllable.

Fun Phonics Fact 23 – Plural Suffixes

A plural means “more than one” and we make a word a plural by adding S or ES to a word. The original word is called the baseword. It is important that your child says and spells the baseword first before adding a suffix as suffix S often makes it difficult to hear the last sound in a baseword.

Rules for plurals:

- a) Add S most of the time unless the baseword ends in ‘s’, ‘x’, ‘z’, ‘sh’, ‘ch’ or ‘tch’ then you must add ES. Try saying the word ‘bus’ by adding S and not ES – you can’t tell the difference. Likewise, the word ‘catch’ with just an S instead of an ES makes it hard to distinguish the ‘s’ sound after the ‘tch’ sound.
- b) Add S for words ending with a vowel then an open O eg: radio/radios, shampoo/shampoos, rodeo/rodeos.
- c) Add S for words ending in a vowel then a ‘y’ eg: toy/toys, monkey/monkeys.
- d) Add ES for words ending in a consonant and then an open O eg: potato/potatoes, veto/vetoes. This ensures the O makes its long sound.
- e) If a word ends in a consonant then the letter ‘y’, change the ‘y’ to an ‘i’ and add ES eg: fly/flies, baby/babies.

Fun Phonics Fact 24 – Consonant Suffixes

Suffixes are small words or graphemes that we add to a baseword to make a new word and change the meaning of the word. Remember not to change the baseword when adding a suffix. The suffix creates its own syllable as it contains a vowel. Do not split a consonant suffix. Consonant suffixes include:

ful as in painful (means to be full of something).

less as in childless (without).

ness as in sickness (the quality of something).

ment as in payment (the process of).

ly as in slowly (how).

ship (state or condition of).

Note: suffix ‘ful’ only has one L whereas suffix ‘less’ and ‘ness’ have two SS.

You can also add two suffixes on to the end of a word eg: thankfulness, worthlessness, restfully.

Fun Phonics Fact 25 – Vowel Suffixes and the Doubling Rule

The two most common suffixes are ED and ING. ED means something happened in the past (lifted) and ING means something is happening right now (lifting). Adding these vowel suffixes adds another syllable to the word (as there is a vowel) so syllable division rules apply. We may have to use the doubling rule to ensure the vowel in the baseword is kept short.

Let's look at the word 'bat', when you add a vowel suffix think of the vowel suffix acting like a magnet – it pulls the consonant in the baseword over with it, so 'bat' becomes ba/ted. See the problem? The first syllable is now open and says bA/ted. This is why we need to double the T and make it bat/ted, to keep the vowel short. This applies for a word that ends in a CVC.

For words that end in a VCC we do not have to use the doubling rule eg: 'nest' becomes nes/ting - the magnet pulls the T across to the second syllable but the S is still in the first syllable keeping the vowel short.

For a word that ends in a vowel team like 'snow' the doubling rule does not apply as it is not a consonant (it's a vowel team) eg: 'snow' becomes 'snowing'. Likewise, for a word like 'raid' which has a vowel team, we can just make it 'raided' as the vowel team already makes the long vowel sound.

The doubling rule is mainly used for one syllable basewords. A rule applies for multi-syllable basewords - if the first syllable is stressed then you don't have to use the doubling rule as in 'happen' - hap/pen/ing. If the last syllable is stressed and ends with a CVC then the doubling rule applies as in 'begin' - be/gin/ning and 'regret' - re/gret/ted.

Other vowel suffixes include:

'er' (person who, thing that, compares 2 things – boxer, faster).

'est' (compare 3 or more things, the most - fastest).

'ist' (a person – perfectionist).

'y' (what kind – lucky).

'en' (to make – flatten).

'ish' (behave like – childish).

'ity' (being – humidity).

'able' (able to – refundable).

'ic' (relating to, characterised by, forms an adjective – energetic).

The same doubling rule applies for these vowel suffixes, except 'ity' and 'able'. Did you notice the word 'boxer' does not have a double 'x'? That's because the letter X is never doubled when adding a suffix.

When adding 'ity' or 'able' these suffixes add another two syllables to the word as they contain two vowels. In a four syllable word the syllable that is stressed is usually the third syllable from the end

re/FUN/da/ble, hu/MI/di/ty– notice that the ‘a’ in ‘able’ is also changing to a schwa so ‘able’ sounds like ‘uhble’ (re/fun/duh/ble) and both I’s in humidity are changing to schwa/short vowel sound (hu/mih/dih/ty).

Fun Phonics Fact 26 – Adding Suffixes with the Silent E and Tricky Suffixes

When we add a suffix to a baseword that ends with a silent E we have to first decide if we are adding a consonant or a vowel suffix. When you add a consonant suffix the baseword doesn’t change so the silent E remains. When you add a vowel suffix you drop the silent E. For example:

‘hope’ + less becomes hope/less.

‘note’ + able becomes nO/ta/ble (remember the vowel suffix acts like a magnet and pulls the last consonant in the baseword over to the last syllable. As the syllables now divide differently the first syllable is open so the O makes its long sound and the silent E isn’t needed).

‘state’ + ment becomes state/ment.

‘late’ + est becomes lA/test (we drop the silent E and the E from ‘est’ remains to give its sound).

But wait, there’s always an exception to the rule in English! Some silent E’s that act as watch out vowels (they change the sound of the letter C and G to ‘s’ and ‘j’) need to remain to ensure the word sounds correct. For example:

‘trace’ + ing becomes trA/cing (E, I or Y are watch out vowels and will make the C say its ‘s’ sound so adding ‘ing’ is still ensuring a watch out vowel is after the C).

‘trace’ + able becomes trace/able (A is not a watch out vowel so we need to leave the silent E in place to make the ‘s’ sound).

‘face’ + ing becomes fA/cing (I is a watch out vowel).

‘face’ + less becomes face/less (E stays in place to act as the watch out vowel).

‘manage’ + able becomes manage/able

‘manage’ + ment becomes manage/ment (the E stays in place for both vowel and consonant suffixes to give the G its ‘j’ sound).

Two tricky vowel suffixes that we haven’t mentioned are ‘al’ and ‘ous’.

‘al’ (pertaining to, kind of – bridal)

‘ous’ (possessing, full of – outrageous)

Words ending in AL will usually schwa, but with an ‘al’ suffix it makes its ‘all’ sound. With the suffix ‘ous’ the O is silent and it is pronounced ‘us’. The same rules apply for adding a vowel suffix, for example:

‘bride’ + al becomes bridal (we drop the silent E as the D gets pulled into the second syllable bri/dal which opens up the I so it can still make its long sound and the ‘al’ sound is clearly heard).

'continue' + ous becomes con/tin/u/ous (the baseword ends in a silent E as English words cannot end in a U). Adding 'ous' ensures the word doesn't end in U and it can be dropped without affecting the sound of the word.

'outrage' + ous becomes out/rage/ous (the silent E needs to stay in place to act as a watch out vowel and ensure the G makes it 'j' sound).

You may be thinking – what about basewords that end in 'y' don't they need to change before adding a suffix? Yes they do and we will learn this tomorrow in the Change Rule.

Fun Phonics Fact 27 – The Change Rule

We only ever change the baseword before adding a suffix if a Y is the last letter in the word. The Y must be changed to i before adding any suffix – vowel or consonant suffix. Also to make a plural you must change the Y to an i and add ES. If you just add S you would change the vowel to a short sound eg: 'puppis' instead of 'puppies'.

There are two exceptions to the Change Rule. If the suffix itself starts with an i, you do not need to change the Y because in the English language, words cannot have two i's in a row (cry, cried, crying). Also if the Y is part of a vowel team as in 'ay' you do not change it (play, plays, played, playing).

Examples:

copy – copied, copier, copying.

reply – replied, replies, replying.

plenty – plentiful (why does the 'y' make an 'ee' sound in plenty but a 'i' sound in plentiful?

Remember three syllable words with an open 'i' or 'e' in the second syllable will schwa/make its short vowel sound).

stay – stays, stayed, staying (vowel team).

Fun Phonics Fact 28 – The Many Jobs of the Silent E

We have already learnt that a silent E can make the vowel before it into a long sounding vowel – bossy E, magic E, E makes the vowel say its own name etc. Eg: in the words 'code' and 'wine' the E prevents them from being 'cod' and 'win'.

The silent E can also change the sounds of the consonant before it eg: in the words 'grace' and 'age' we hear "s" and 'j'.

The Silent E also changes the sound of words ending in Se and Ce. Words ending in Se will make the S give a 'z' sound when it follows a long vowel as in wise, chose, phase (vibrating throat sound 'z'). Words ending in Ce will make the C give a 's' sound when it follows a long vowel as in device, twice, brace, face (non-vibrating sound).

Every syllable in a word needs to contain a vowel. Without the silent E words like 'han/dle' and 'tur/tle' would violate a basic rule of English.

The silent E prevents singular words from looking like plural words. Look at the words 'moose' and 'house'. If there were no silent E, you would just have 'moos' and 'hous' and you would be unsure if it is just one or plural.

English words don't end with U or V – the silent E therefore enforces this rule eg: have, cue, blue

Therefore, the silent E is not as pesky as you may think. This letter actually has several rather important functions in the English language.

Fun Phonics Fact 29 – Prefixes

Prefixes are placed at the beginning of words and each prefix has a specific meaning. By combining the prefix's meaning and the baseword meaning, a child can figure out the meaning of the word and expand their vocabulary.

Prefixes and suffixes can make a baseword much longer and some children can panic when they see such a long word. If a child can figure out what the base word is and then the meaning of the prefixes and suffixes, the word isn't so scary after all.

There are four prefixes that mean 'not':

'dis' as in disagree.

'in' as in infrequent.

'non' as in nonfat.

'un' as in unhappy.

These suffixes have a unique meaning:

'mis' means wrong as in misspell.

'sub' means smaller or below as in subway.

're' means again as in refill.

'pre' means before as in prepay.

'inter' means between as in intersection.

'mid' means middle as in midweek.

'over' means too much as in overflow.

'up' means a direction as in uphill or upbringing.

When you add a prefix that ends in a vowel and a baseword starts with a vowel you will end up with two vowels next to each other that are not a vowel team. Sometimes people place a hyphen such as pre-existing or re-admit to make this distinction clear.

Fun Phonics Fact 30 – Greek Words

English is a rich combination of many different languages that have evolved over time. We have elements of Greek, Saxon, Latin, Old-English and French, just to name a few. The roots of our alphabet go back to ancient Greece. The Greek system (750BC) was the first to satisfy all the conditions of a true alphabet – symbols that represent speech sounds. The Greeks refined their alphabet on another ancient system of symbols representing sounds from the Phoenicians (hence the word phonics!). Two well-known graphemes that we still use today from ancient Greece are ‘ph’ and ‘y’. The Greeks used ‘ph’ as the grapheme for the ‘f’ sound and ‘y’ for the ‘i’ sound as their alphabet did not include the letters F and I. Common words we see these ancient graphemes in today include:

dolphin
elephant
graph
phase

python
gym
type

The study of the origin of words is called etymology. It is interesting to learn how our written language evolved (recommended read: Proust and the Squid by Maryanne Wolf).

Fun Phonics Fact 31 – The Bossy W

We will finish up with our Fun Phonics Facts for Dyslexia Awareness Month with the Bossy W. The W can make different sounds in words and can be referred to as a grapheme with the letters following it eg: the ‘wer’ sound as in ‘word’.

Note: different accents will not necessarily fit each example below, especially with the Aussie lingo, but they should fit in one category. Eg: in Australia we tend to schwa the short ‘a’ sound like ‘wuh/ter’ for water and ‘whu/let’ for wallet, whereas the Americans and English dialects keep the ‘a’ with its short sound and it makes a ‘wa’ sound. Remember back to the Aussie Unit Syllables – Fun Phonic Fact 14.

Want, water, wallet, waffle = ‘wa’ sound/or ‘a’ will schwa ‘wuh’.

War, warning, wardrobe, ward, wart = ‘wor’ sound (Americans will say ‘war’).

Word, worms, worth, worst = ‘wer’ sound.

Quantity, squash, qualify = ‘qwa’ sound/or ‘a’ will schwa ‘qwuh’.

Quarry, quarter = ‘qwor’ sound (Americans will say ‘qwar’).

References

The Barton Reading and Spelling System, www.bartonreading.com. This is an excellent explicit and multi-sensory phonics home tutoring system, based on the Orton-Gilligham model.

The Reading Doctor, www.readingdoctor.com.au. Excellent explicit phonics based software/apps to teach your child letter sounds, grapheme sounds, sight words and a word builder app. A full list of the most common graphemes can be found in the app Letter Sounds 2. Creating automaticity for children learning the letter and graphemes sounds is a must for decoding words.

Helpful Hints for Reading, Tutor Eau Claire, www.tutorec.org. A printable manual of phonics rules.

Ultimate Phonics Reading Program, Spencer Phonics, www.spencerlearning.com.

'Proust and the Squid', 2008, Maryanne Wolf.

'Unlocking Literacy', 2010, Marcia K Henry.