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## What is Phonics?

[Tutoring for Reading](#) The Kumon Method builds unmatched reading skills and comprehension: [Kumon.com](http://Kumon.com)

[USC TESOL Masters Online](#) Online Masters in TESOL from the University of Southern California [mat.usc.edu/TESOL](http://mat.usc.edu/TESOL)

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Phonics is a word-attack skill in which you "sound-out" difficult words by using the common sounds of letters in the word. It is often the first reading skill taught to people and is considered one of the "basic skills". Knowledge of phonics is most helpful in linking the words one knows through simply hearing them with the actual written word.

### Phonics Rules

The vowels are "a,e,i,o, and u"; also sometimes "y" & "w". This also includes the diphthongs "oi,oy,ou,ow,au,aw, oo" and many others. The consonants are all the other letters which stop or limit the flow of air from the throat in speech. They are:

"b,c,d,f,g,h,j,k,l,m,n,p,q,r,s,t,v,w,x,y,z,ch,sh,th,ph,wh, ng, and gh".

#### 1. Sometimes the rules don't work.

There are many exceptions in English because of the vastness of the language and the many languages from which it has borrowed. The rules do work however, in the majority of the words.

#### 2. Every syllable in every word must have a vowel.

English is a "vocal" language; Every word must have a vowel.

#### 3. "C" followed by "e, i or y" usually has the soft sound of "s".

Examples: "cyst", "central", and "city".

#### 4. "G" followed by "e, i or y" usually has the soft sound of "j".

Example: "gem", "gym", and "gist".

#### 5. When 2 consonants a joined together and form one new sound, they are a consonant digraph. They count as one sound and one letter and are never separated.

Examples: "ch,sh,th,ph and wh".

#### 6. When a syllable ends in a consonant and has only one vowel, that vowel is short.

Examples: "fat, bed, fish, spot, luck".

#### 7. When a syllable ends in a silent "e", the silent "e" is a signal that the vowel in front of it is long.

Examples: "make, fete, kite, rope, and use".

[Teaching Reading](#) Go To Scholastic's Read 180 For A Proven Reading Intervention Program [www.Teacher.Scholastic.com/180](http://www.Teacher.Scholastic.com/180)

[Orton Gillingham Phonics](#) Interactive, Orton-Gillingham multisensory phonics software. [www.jwor.com](http://www.jwor.com)

[Phonics Based Software](#) Teaches 5 Key Reading Skills & Accelerates Class Reading Success [www.LexiaLearning.com](http://www.LexiaLearning.com)

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#### 8. When a syllable has 2 vowels together, the first vowel is usually long and the second is silent.

Examples: "pain, eat, boat, res/cue, say, grow".

NOTE: Diphthongs don't follow this rule; In a diphthong, the vowels blend together to create a single new sound. The diphthongs are: "oi,oy,ou,ow,au,aw, oo" and many others.

#### 9. When a syllable ends in any vowel and is the only vowel, that vowel is usually long.

Examples: "pa/per, me, I, o/open, u/nit, and my".

#### 10. When a vowel is followed by an "r" in the same syllable, that vowel is "r-controlled". It is not long nor short. "R-controlled" er, ir, and ur" often sound the same (like "er").

Examples: "term, sir, fir, fur, far, for, su/gar, or/der".

### Basic Syllable Rules

#### 1. To find the number of syllables:

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—count the vowels in the word,

—**subtract any silent vowels**, (like the silent “e” at the end of a word or the second vowel when two vowels are together in a syllable)

—**subtract one vowel from every diphthong**, (diphthongs only count as one vowel sound.)

—**the number of vowel sounds left is the same as the number of syllables**. The number of syllables that you hear when you pronounce a word is the same as the number of vowel sounds heard. For example:

The word “**came**” has 2 vowels, but the “e” is silent, leaving one vowel sound and **one syllable**.

The word “**outside**” has 4 vowels, but the “e” is silent and the “ou” is a diphthong which counts as only one sound, so this word has only two vowel sounds and therefore, **two syllables**.

**2. Divide between two middle consonants**. Split up words that have two middle consonants. For example: **hap/pen, bas/ket, let/ter, sup/per, din/ner**, and **Den/nis**. The only exceptions are the consonant digraphs. Never split up consonant digraphs as they really represent only one sound. The exceptions are “th”, “sh”, “ph”, “th”, “ch”, and “wh”.

**3. Usually divide before a single middle consonant**.

When there is only one syllable, you usually divide in front of it, as in: “**o/pen**”, “**i/tem**”, “**e/vil**”, and “**re/port**”. The only exceptions are those times when the first syllable has an obvious short sound, as in “**cab/in**”.

**4. Divide before the consonant before an “-le” syllable**.

When you have a word that has the old-style spelling in which the “-le” sounds like “-el”, divide before the consonant before the “-le”. For example: “**a/ble**”, “**fum/ble**”, “**rub/ble**”, “**mum/ble**” and “**thi/stle**”. The only exception to this are “ckle” words like “**tick/le**”.

**5. Divide off any compound words, prefixes, suffixes and roots which have vowel sounds**.

Split off the parts of compound words like “sports/car” and “house/boat”. Divide off prefixes such as “un/happy”, “pre/paid”, or “re/write”. Also divide off suffixes as in the words “farm/er”, “teach/er”, “hope/less” and “care/ful”. In the word “stop/ping”, the suffix is actually “-ping” because this word follows the rule that when you add “-ing” to a word with one syllable, you double the last consonant and add the “-ing”.

#### Accent Rules

When a word has more than one syllable, one of the syllables is always a little louder than the others. The syllable with the louder stress is the accented syllable. It may seem that the placement of accents in words is often random or accidental, but these are some rules that usually work.

1. Accents are often on the first syllable. Examples: ba’/sic, pro’/gram.

2. In words that have suffixes or prefixes, the accent is usually on the main root word.

Examples: box’/es, un’/tie’.

3. If de-, re-, ex-, in-, -po-, pro-, or a- is the first syllable in a word, it is usually

not accented.

Examples: de’/lay’, ex’/plore’.

4. Two vowel letters together in the last syllable of a word often indicates an accented last syllable. Examples: com’/plain’, con’/ceal’.

5. When there are two like consonant letters within a word, the syllable before the double consonants is usually accented. Examples: be’/gin’/ner, let’/ter.

6. The accent is usually on the syllable before the suffixes -ion, ity, -ic, -ical, -ian, -ial, or -ious, and on the second syllable before the suffix -ate. Examples: af’/fec’ta’/tion, dif’/fer/en’/ti/ate.

7. In words of three or more syllables, one of the first two syllables is usually accented. Examples: ac’/ci/dent, de’/ter’/mine.

We’d like to thank [Dennis Doyle](#), Learning Center Director and Reading Specialist & English Lab Coordinator at Glendale Community College, Glendale, CA. Try Dennis Doyle’s [Phonics Quiz](#) to test your knowledge.

#### More on this childhood reading and phonics

[Can An Infant Learn To Read?](#) by Jerrie Hewlett

I’m sure that question elicited an immediate shake of the head. But wait. They actually can. Well, sort of. I will discuss in this article the brain development of an infant. Just what takes place in that tiny little mind? Something amazing!

[Home Environment of Early Readers](#)

Research has shown that there are four aspects to the home environment of nearly every early reader. [Read more.](#)

[Teach A Child To Read Using Children’s Books](#)

Read about this essential book by Mark B. Thogmartin, Ph.D.

[Phonics? Phonemics? Confused?](#)

[Find out](#) what the difference is and how you can use phonemics to give your toddler a headstart on reading.

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