

Evidence-Based Strategies for Reading Unknown Words in Text

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Three-Step Strategy for Reading Words



1. Look for parts you know. (single letters; letter combinations; “chunks”)
2. Sound it out.
3. Check it! Make sure the word you read makes sense.

Denton et al., (2010); Solari et al., (2018)

The Three-Step Strategy

1. **Look for parts you know.** For beginning readers, this will likely be a single letter-sound. As students progress, they should look for letter combinations (i.e., th, ch, sh) and endings (ing, ed, s) they have learned. Later, they notice other word parts, such as *ea*, *igh*, and *ar*, prefixes and suffixes.
2. **Sound it out.** Have students sound out the word as smoothly as possible, connecting the sounds that can be connected (mmmaaannn, *not* /m/ /a/ /n/)
3. **Check it.** Students ask themselves whether the word makes sense. If the word is from a text they are reading, they put the word back into the sentence and read the sentence to be sure it makes sense.

Teaching the 3-Step Strategy Before Reading

- Select 1 or 2 tricky words from the text you will read.
- Write one word on a small white board.
- **Model using the strategy** to read the word (Go through each step and demonstrate).
- Write the other word on the white board.
- Have students apply the strategy, step by step, to read the word.

Reading RULES! Strategy



Look for parts you know.



Sound it out.



Check it.

What Students Need To Know About Multisyllabic Words

- Understand the concept of a syllable and that **each syllable has one vowel sound**
- Know that **recognizable word parts** are found in multisyllable words
- Recognize **common prefixes, suffixes, and root words**
- How to **divide the word** into word parts, **read each part**, and **combine the parts** to read the word
- How to be **flexible** when a word has a part or parts that are phonetically irregular

Multisyllable Word Strategy

- We did not teach students complex rules for dividing words into syllables according to the dictionary.
- We taught them to **look for pronounceable word parts** in the words.
- Step one is to **find the vowels and/or vowel teams**. There is one vowel *sound* per syllable, so this helps students find the pronounceable word parts (syllables or “chunks”).
- Then they **look for parts they know in the word**, including letter combinations (e.g., ea, igh, or) and prefixes and suffixes.
- Students then **read each “chunk”**, sounding out only if needed.
- Students **put the chunks together**.
- Students must be flexible with sounds in the word that don’t make sense. They **“make it sound like a real word.”**

Make it Sound Like a Real Word


- Teach students to be flexible if a syllable does not work according to the rules.
- “Play with the word” until it makes sense.
 - Say the vowel another way.
 - Try a schwa sound (“uh” or “i”).
- Check the word to see that it makes sense in the sentence.

pan-da

Used in our
studies in
Grades 1-3



READ **BIG** WORDS

1. Find the vowels.
 2. Look for parts you know.
Remember special endings:
-s -es -ing -er -ed -y
 3. Read the first chunk.
Read the next chunk.
Sound out if needed.
 4. Put the chunks together.
 5. Make it sound like a real word.
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9th Grade Intervention Study

- As part of an intervention that included comprehension strategies, we taught 9th grade students with word reading difficulties to look for syllable patterns and vowel sound-spelling patterns in words.
- We gave them a reference card with these patterns and taught them a version of the Multisyllable Word Reading Strategy.

Our 9th
Grade
Study

Read the **WHOLE** Word!

- Find the vowels and vowel teams.



a....e....i....o...u...ai...or...igh

- Look for parts you know. *Be sure* to check the beginning and end.

reestablishment

- Read the whole word...one “bite” at a time!



ultraconservatism

- Make it sound like a real word.

Reading RULES! Strategy



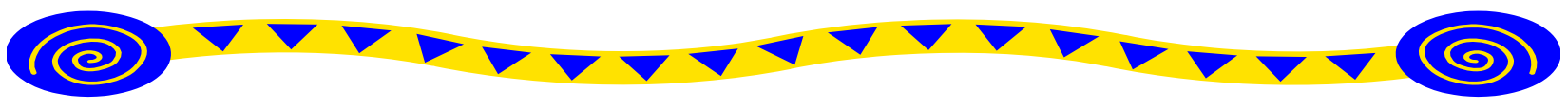
Look for parts you know.



Sound it out.



Check it.



READ **BIG** WORDS

1. Find the vowels.

2. Look for parts you know.

Remember special endings:

-s -es -ing -er -ed -y

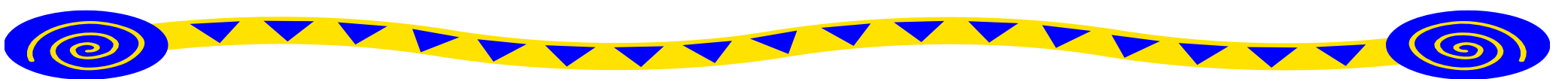
3. Read the first chunk.

Read the next chunk.

Sound out if needed.

4. Put the chunks together.

5. Make it sound like a real word.



SYLLABLE PATTERNS AND VOWEL SOUND-SPELLING PATTERNS

CLOSED SYLLABLES

Short Vowel Sounds:

ă ě ĭ ǒ ŭ

Sound-Spelling Pattern	Key Word
a	ca <u>t</u>
e	le <u>t</u>
i	si <u>t</u>
o	ho <u>t</u>
u	cu <u>p</u>
y	gy <u>m</u>

OPEN SYLLABLES

Long Vowel Sounds:

ā ē ī ō ū

Sound-Spelling Pattern	Key Word
a	pa <u>per</u>
e	me <u> </u>
i	hi <u> </u>
o	go <u> </u>
u	du <u>ty</u>
_y	my <u> </u>
--y	ba <u>by</u> , slow <u>ly</u> , ro <u>cky</u>

SILENT E SYLLABLES:

Long Vowel Sounds

Sound-Spelling Pattern	Key Word
a_e	ca <u>ke</u>
e_e	the <u>se</u>
i_e	li <u>ke</u>
o_e	no <u>te</u>
u_e	cu <u>te</u> , tu <u>be</u>

R-CONTROLLED SYLLABLES

Spelling Pattern	Key Word
ar	ca <u>r</u>
er	he <u>r</u>
ir	bi <u>rd</u>
or	o <u>r</u>
ur	chu <u>rch</u>
Less Common R-Controlled Syllables	
air	ha <u>ir</u>
are	ca <u>re</u>
ear	hea <u>r</u>
eer	che <u>er</u>
oor	do <u>or</u>
ore	mo <u>re</u>
ure	cu <u>re</u>

EXAMPLES OF CONSONANT-LE SYLLABLES

little, able, tackle, riddle, rifle, title, puzzled

VOWEL TEAM SYLLABLES

Sound-Spelling Pattern	Key Word
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Patterns That Spell Long Vowel Sounds

Long A

ai	rain
ay	day
eigh	eight

Long E

ea	eat
ee	see
ey	key
ie	cookie

Long I

igh	night
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Long O

oa	boat
oe	toe
ow	show

Long U

ue	blue
ew	new
oo	moo

Patterns That Spell Other Sounds

al, all	salt, ball
ea	head
oo	look

au	auto
aw	saw

oi	oil
oy	boy

ou	out
ow	cow

EXAMPLES OF WORDS WITH SCHWA

ə = /ǘ/ or /ǚ/

away, taken, pencil, other,
lesson, final, breakable, terrible, panda

ODDBALLS

Sound-Spelling Pattern	Key Word
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(vowel) ng (vowel) nk	sing, sang, song, sung sink, sank, sunk, honk
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old lld lve ed ed sure ture ous	old wild give played slipped measure future joyous
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/sh/spelled *ti*, *si*, or *ci* in the middle of a word

tion sion cious tious cial tial	nation mission delicious nutritious special initial
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