

UFLI Phonics Rules



Syllables and Vowels

- **Open syllables** end in a vowel. The vowel says its name (like in "go").
- **Closed syllables** end in one or more consonants. The vowel makes its short sound (like in "cat").
- The letter **y** makes a sound like /y/ when it's at the beginning of a word (like in "yes").

Special Vowel Rules

- When **a** comes before **m** or **n**, it makes a "whiny" sound (like in "am" or "fan").
- When **y** is at the **end of a word**, it can say:
 - **Long i** (like in "cry")
 - **Long e** in **two-syllable words** (like in "funny")
- The vowel pair **ea** usually says **long e** (like "eat"), but sometimes it says **short e** (like "head").
- Sometimes **a** sounds like **short o**, especially after **w** (like in "water" or "swamp").

Doubling and Endings

- After a short vowel, double **f, l, s, or z** (like in "puff," "bell," "miss," "fizz").
- Use **ck** at the end of a word or syllable right after a **short vowel** (like in "duck").
- Use **tch** and **dge** at the end of a word after a **short vowel** (like in "match" and "badge").

Hard and Soft Sounds

- The letters **c** and **g** make soft sounds (/s/ and /j/) when followed by **e, i, or y** (like in "cent" or "giraffe").

R-Controlled Vowels

- These are vowels followed by **r** that change the sound:
 - **ar, er, ir, or, ur**
- When **or** is at the end of a word, it often becomes **ore** (like in "store").
- When a word starts with **w**, "or" may sound like **er** (like in "word").

Vowel Teams

- **ai** = long a, comes at the **beginning or middle** (like "rain")
- **ay** = long a, comes at the **end** (like "play")
- **ee, ea** = long e, can be **beginning, middle, or end**
(like "see," "meat")
- **ey** = long e at the **end of two-syllable words**
(like "monkey")
- **oa** = long o at the **beginning or middle** (like "boat")
- **ow** = long o at the **end** or sometimes middle (like "snow")
- **oe** = long o at the **end** (like "toe")
- **ie** = long i at the **end** (like "pie")
- **igh** = long i in the **middle or end** (like "night")
- **oo** can be long (like "moon") or short (like "book")
- **u** can be long (like "unicorn") or short (like "umbrella")
- **ew** = long u at the **end** (like "few")
- **ui** = long u in the **middle** (like "fruit")
- **ue** = long u at the **end** (like "blue")
- **au, aw, augh** = say "aw" (like in "cause," "saw," "caught")

Diphthongs

(two vowels that make one sound)

- **oi** = at the **beginning or middle** (like "coin")
- **oy** = at the **end** (like "boy")
- **ou, ow** = say "ow" and appear at the **beginning, middle, or end** (like "shout" and "cow")

Silent Letters

- **kn** is silent **k** at the beginning (like "knee")
- **wr** is silent **w** at the beginning (like "write")
- **mb** is silent **b** at the end (like "thumb")

Compound Words

- A **compound word** is two shorter words joined together (like "sunflower").

Affixes

- An **affix** is something added to a word to change its meaning.
- There are two kinds of affixes:
 - **Prefixes** go at the **beginning** of a word.
 - **Suffixes** go at the **end** of a word.
- Prefixes and suffixes are **morphemes**—word parts that carry meaning and help change what a word means.

Suffixes and Verb Endings

- **-s** and **-es** make nouns **plural** (dogs, boxes) and can change verb **tense** (runs, washes).
 - Use **-es** when a word ends in **sh, ch, s, x, or z**.
- **-ed** makes the **past tense** of verbs. It can sound like:
 - **/d/** after a voiced sound (like "played")
 - **/t/** after an unvoiced sound (like "jumped")
 - **/id/** after **t** or **d** (like "landed")
- **-ing** is added to verbs to show ongoing actions (like "running").

Suffixes

- **-er** = means "more" (like "taller")
- **-est** = means "most" (like "fastest")
- **-ly** = means "like" or "how something is done" (like "quickly")
- **-less** = means "without" (like "hopeless")
- **ful** = means "full of" (like "joyful")

Prefixes

- **un-** = means "not" or "opposite of" (like "unhappy")
- **pre-** = means "before" (like "preview")
- **re-** = means "again" (like "redo")
- **dis-** = means "not" or "apart" (like "dislike")

Consonant Doubling Rule

- When adding **-ed**, **-ing**, **-er**, or **-est** to a word with **one short vowel followed by one consonant**, double the final consonant.
 - Example: hop → **hopping**, big → **bigger**
- This happens in **closed syllables** (short vowel followed by a consonant).

Drop the E Rule

- If a word ends with a silent e, drop the e before adding **-ed**, **-ing**, **-er**, or **-est**.
 - Example: bake → baking
- Note: This rule does not apply when adding **-ly**.
 - Example: safe → safely

Y to I Rule

- If a word ends in **y**:
 - And the letter before the y is a **consonant**, change the y to **i** before adding **-er, -est, -ed, -s, or -es**.
 - Example: happy → **happier**, cry → **cries**
 - If the letter before the y is a **vowel**, **do not** change the y.
 - Example: play → **playing**
 - When adding **-ing**, **do not** change y to i.
 - Example: cry → **crying**

Suffixes: What They Mean

- **-er / -or / -ist:**
 - Mean “a person who...” (like **teacher**, **sailor**, **artist**)
 - **-er** can also compare things (like **taller**)
- **-ish:** Means “somewhat” or “like” (like **greenish**)
- **-y:** Turns a noun into a describing word (like **cloud** → **cloudy**)
- **-ly:** Means “in a way” or “how something is done” (like **quick** → **quickly**)
- **-ness:** Turns an adjective into a noun (like **kind** → **kindness**)
 - Follows the **y to i** rule (happy → **happiness**)
- **-ment:** Turns a verb into a noun, means the result or state of something (like **enjoy** → **enjoyment**)
- **-able / -ible:** Means “can be” or “able to” (like **fixable**, **visible**)
 - Drop the silent e before adding **-able** or **-ible**

Prefixes: What They Mean

- **un-** = not or opposite
 - **Example:** unfair, unsafe, undo, unhappy
- **pre-** = before
 - **Example:** preview, preschool, preheat
- **re-** = again or back
 - **Example:** redo, rewrite, replay, return
- **dis-** = not or apart
 - **Example:** dislike, disconnect, dishonest, disagree
- **uni-** = one
 - **Example:** unicycle, uniform, unicorn
- **bi-** = two
 - **Example:** bicycle, bilingual, biweekly
- **tri-** = three
 - **Example:** tricycle, triangle, trilogy

Alternate Spellings for Long Vowels

- **Long A:**

- **ei** (middle) | **Examples:** veil, neighbor, their
- **ey** (end) | **Examples:** they, convey, obey
- **eigh** (middle) | **Examples:** eight, weigh, freight
- **ea** (middle) | **Examples:** great, steak, break

- **Long U:**

- **ew** (end) | **Examples:** nephew, few, chew, threw
- **eu** (beginning) | **Examples:** eucalyptus, Europe
- **ue** (end) | **Examples:** rescue, blue, true, cue

- **Long O:**

- **ough** | **Examples:** though, although, dough
- **aw** | **Examples:** law, draw, claw, straw
- **aught / ought** | **Examples:** brought, fought, taught

Final Stable Syllables

These syllables always stay the same at the **end of a word**.

- **-le**

- This ending follows a consonant and sounds like /əl/.

- **Examples:** apple, puzzle, table, bottle, little

- **-tion**

- Usually sounds like /shun/.

- **Examples:** rotation, vacation, station, action

- **-sion**

- Can sound like /zhun/ or /shun/.

- **Examples:** vision, decision, confusion, mission

- **-ture**

- This ending sounds like "cher" and appears at the end of some nouns.

- **Examples:** picture, nature, creature, structure, feature, adventure

Silent Letters & Oddball Rules

- **gn**

- Silent **g** at the beginning, or just **n** sound at the end.

- **Examples:** gnat, gnome, reign, design, campaign

- **gh**

- Silent in some words, especially before **t** or at the end of words.

- **Examples:** ghost, high, night, thought, sigh, weigh

- **t**

- Sometimes silent in the middle of a word.

- **Examples:** whistle, listen, castle, hustle, often

- **ch**

- Can make different sounds:

- /k/ sound (hard ch)

- **Examples:** chord, chorus, school, chemical, architect

- /sh/ sound (soft ch)

- **Examples:** chute, chef, machine, charade