

UNIT: Beyond First Words

Learning Long Vowels and Other Patterns

KAYLA WAS A THRIVING FIRST GRADER SOARING INTO THE end of the year and zipping through every book she was given. Her teacher had done a masterful job. When Kayla entered second grade after a long summer, she struggled a bit. Dale, her second grade teacher explained, “Kayla loved to read and she could get through most books, but she stumbled a lot. She could sound out simple words and she used context, but when words got a little more complicated and the pictures weren’t there, she didn’t have a lot in her arsenal.” After looking at Kayla’s writing and giving a decoding test, Dale started to understand.

“Kayla would write every word with a long vowel using a silent *e*,” Dale explained. “So *boat* was *bote* and *beat* was *bete*. It was like she knew that you couldn’t just put a vowel by itself, but she didn’t know exactly what to put. When she was reading, words like *harm*, *noise*, *shook*, or *sight* were difficult. I knew that she needed some type of focused instruction on vowels.” When Kayla struggled with the word *meat*, Dale placed a sticky note on this page and used it as an example to begin a lesson on long *e* featuring *ea*.

Chart: *The meat was tasty.*
met meat

Dale: Remember when we were reading this sentence, in this book? [Shows book.] This word [points to *meat*] was confusing. You thought it said *met*. You made a sound for each letter, like /me/ /at/.

The word *met* is *m-e-t*, and it looks like this [points to the word *met* on chart].

But this word [points to word *meat* on chart] has two vowels together, an *e* and an *a*, *m-e-a-t*. This word is *meat*. In this word you put the *e* and *a* together to make one sound, /ē/. We are going to start working on learning these words.

Long vowels are tricky. But after a month of focused, sequenced instruction, Dale noticed that Kayla had gained more confidence. Dale observed, “I think that I just helped organize the information.” Most readers will need some organized instruction about how to tackle vowels in English, especially those beyond simple short vowels. The Beyond First Words unit helps teachers approach this complex content in a pragmatic and logical way.

Why Learning Vowel Digraphs Is Challenging

Children typically learn to read and spell words with vowel pairs (those spelled with two or more letters) after they have learned short vowels, blends, and consonant digraphs (Ehri 2005; Henderson and Beers 1980; Treiman 1993; Treiman, Stothard, and Snowling 2013). (Note: The terms *vowel digraph* and *vowel team* are used synonymously to name vowels with two or more letters that represent a sound other than the short sound.) For beginning readers, words with more than one vowel are difficult for four reasons:

1. *Groups of letters are more complex than a single letter.* One-to-one relationships are easier to understand than two-to-one relationships. So words like *got*, in which each visual symbol represents a sound, are more intuitive than words like *seat*, in which some visual symbols combine to represent a sound.
2. *There is more to learn.* In comparison to short vowels, there are more sounds. As described in Chapter 1, English has over twenty vowel sounds and only five are short sounds, most of which are pretty consistent in single-syllable words. That leaves over fifteen additional vowel sounds in English (e.g., /oo/, /oi/, /ā/, /ar/) that must be learned.
3. *There are different ways to spell the same sounds.* Many of the long and other vowel sounds have more than one spelling, and the only way to know which words take which patterns is to practice building the words.

Long o sound: oa o_e ow oe
 boat hope bow toe

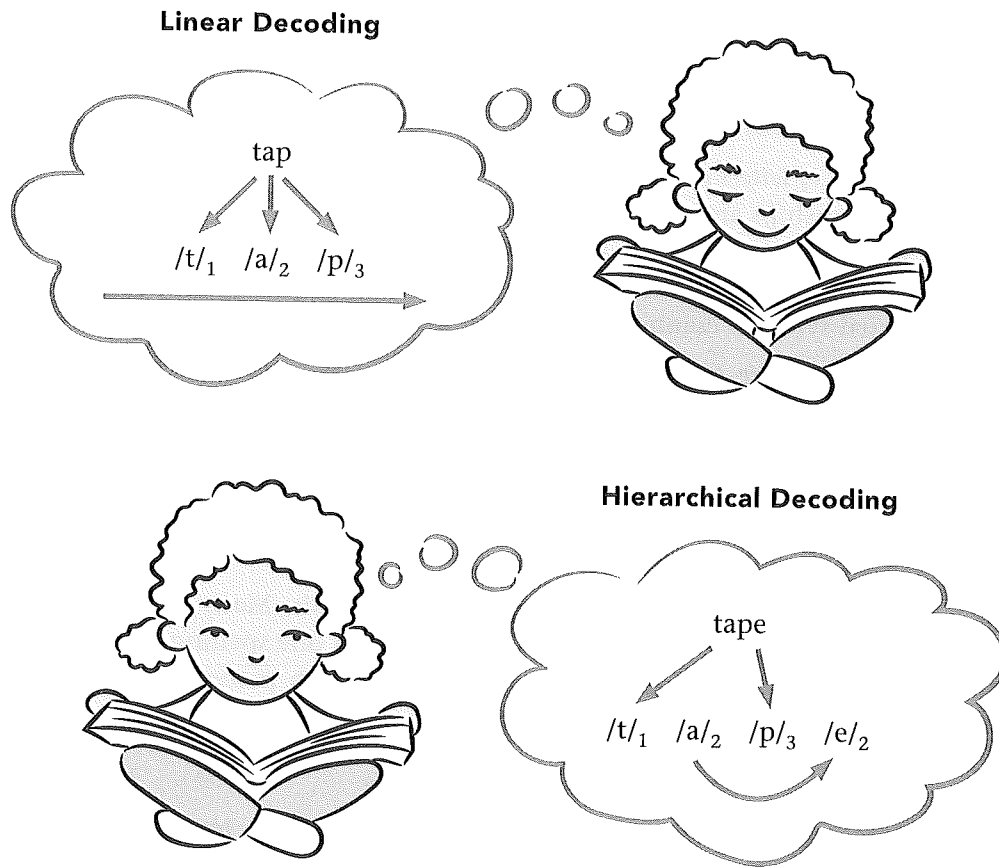
4. *There are different sounds for the same spellings.* In some situations, the same pattern will represent two or more different sounds (e.g., *book, tool, now, tow*).

oo book tool
 ow now tow
 ea head meat

How Should I Teach Vowel Digraphs?

Children must use a sophisticated approach to decode sounds represented by vowel teams (Ehri 2005; Ehri and McCormick 1998; Juel 1983). In earlier stages, they simply decode letter-by-letter from left to right, in linear fashion. See Figure 6.1. Unfortunately, this does not work with vowel digraphs. You must focus on the entire pattern. Your eyes must skip ahead a bit to do some analysis. People have called this the “consolidated” phase of word recognition because children group or consolidate letters. They use a hierarchical approach to decoding in which they recognize grapheme units composed of multiple letters to represent a sound. This usually occurs in mid-first grade after students have become fluent with simpler patterns (Bowey and Hansen 1994; Ehri 1991; Juel 1983, 1991). Figure 6.1 shows the difference between linear and hierarchical decoding.

FIGURE 6.1 Linear Decoding Versus Hierarchical Decoding



Principles for Teaching Vowel Teams

As a teacher, you have to teach vowel teams differently. Following are some basic principles to guide you.

- **Recognize that long vowels take a long time.** As Thelma, a first-grade teacher, said to a student teacher with a very ambitious plan, “Yep. The long part of long vowels is that they take a long time! You’re not just going to pull that off in a few weeks.” Children do not learn to decode long vowel patterns in the same amount of time that they acquire consonants, short vowels, and digraphs and blends. Within the Common Core Reading: Foundational Skills standards, for example, these vowel spellings are introduced over the course of first and second grade (NGA and CCSSO 2012).
- **Target groups of letters.** Vowel patterns in this phase are based on *two* vowels together, so instruction will almost always talk about how vowels work together. Usually two letters are adjacent. For example, usually when you see a vowel + *r*, you will have an *r*-controlled sound. In some cases, the vowel sound pronounced is the long sound of the first vowel (e.g., *ay*, *ee*, *ea* as in *beat*, *ai*) or even a short sound (e.g., *ea* as in *head*). Many people grew up hearing the controversial mnemonic “When two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking.” Figure 6.2 addresses this.

FIGURE 6.2

What really happens when two vowels go walking?

The rule “When two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking” doesn’t always work. The idea is to remember that in digraphs like *ea* the long sound of the *e* is heard. However, Clymer (1963) claimed that the rule only worked 45 percent of the time. The real problem with this rule is that it is not well stated (Johnston 2001). In many situations where two vowels go walking, the sound created is *pretty consistent*, but *neither* letter does the “talking” (e.g., *toil*, *paw*, *bow*, *boot*, *hook*, *shout*). Other times, a consonant influences the sound (e.g., *toy*, *claw*, *bear*, *torn*, *fir*). Teach the vowel pairs with an eye for predictability (see the table following). For example, *oi*, *oy*, and *aw* are very predictable. Pairs like *-ay*, *-oa*, *-ee*, *-ai*, *-au*, and *-ey* are more predictable than they are not. Other vowel pairs, like *ea*, can make up to three sounds, but even so, often have one dominant sound (e.g., *seat* (49.6%), *head* (16.7%), *fear* (14.3%), or *toes* (44.4%), *shoes* (33.3%), *does* (22.2%). Still others might seem like “exceptions,” but if you consider patterns, you will find collections that can be grouped together (e.g., *bread*, *head*, *read*, *dread*, *tread*).

continues

Vowel Teams That Are More Consistent			
Makes One Sound Nearly 100% of Time	Makes One Sound 95%–75% of Time	Makes One of Two Alternative Sounds	
-aw: law, raw	-ay: play, day ^(96.4%)	-ow: bow, tow ^(68%)	-ow: how, now ^(31.9%)
-oi: foil, toil	-oa: coat, boat ^(95%) Exception: roar	-oo: boot, hoot ^(50%)	-oo: book, took ^(40.4%)
-oy: toy, boy	-ee: feet, see ^(95.5%) Exception: deer	-ew: blew ^(88%)	-ew: view ^(11%)
	-ai: wait, paint ^(75%) Exceptions: hair, said		
	-au: cause ^(78.9%) Exception: laugh		
	-ey: key ^(77%) Exception: prey		

Source: Johnston 2001

Note: Pattern words and exception words are examples *only*. Lists are not exhaustive.

- **Remember that distributed practice and repetition are key.** Because vowel patterns cannot be differentiated by sound, it is important to explicitly describe each pattern and then provide lots of opportunities for children to read and spell words. Distributed practice across weeks is crucial. Think about it. The word *date* is spelled with *a_e*, but there is no hint in the pronunciation of *date* to indicate that you would use *a_e* and not *ai*. The only way to learn that it's *date* and not *dait* is to see it read and to *spell* it over and over. When students can spell words themselves, we know that they really “own” the patterns. This is why so many of the activities in this stage are games or word-building activities, in which students just practice spelling.
- **Organize “outsiders,” “exception” words, or “rule breakers” into groups.** As described in Chapter 1, English is not as consistent as other languages, but this does not mean

that it is *not consistent*. This is particularly true with words that seem like exceptions. When grouped together, these words often create a category that suggests that they do not operate in complete isolation. For example, with the *o_e* pattern there are some words that do not have a long *o* sound (e.g., *some, come, dove, love, above, done, one, none, gone*). If you look carefully at these, you will see that they actually form a group, with all but *gone* having the /*ū*/ sound. Teaching these together as a group helps students organize the information cognitively.

Beyond First Words: Scope and Sequence

The scope and sequence for Beyond First Words covers the basic vowel sounds learned after short vowel sounds. See Figure 6.3. The whole unit takes about twenty-three weeks and is divided into four subunits: (1) Sneaky Silent *e*, (2) Teamwork (vowel teams), (3) *R* the Robber (*r*-controlled vowels); and (4) Diphthongs. This list is *not* comprehensive. It is a first pass for students who are just starting to learn vowel patterns. There are several patterns that are not covered (e.g., *-old, -eigh, -ey, -al, -ie*). The exclusion of these does not indicate that they should not be taught; it just indicates that there are others that are more useful.

When are readers ready to learn all these vowel patterns? Students who are ready for learning vowel digraphs are readers. They have a solid collection of about 500 words that they can decode or read by sight automatically. They can read single-syllable short vowel words with blends and digraphs. Generally, teaching long vowel patterns will not start until first grade for most students. The Common Core places the easier patterns (e.g., silent *e*, very common vowel digraphs) in first grade and those that are more complicated (e.g., *r*-controlled vowels) in second grade.

FIGURE 6.3

Week	Letter–Sound Pattern	Example Words
1. Sneaky Silent e		
1	a_e (77.7%) ¹	a e -ake* bake, rake, take, cake, shake, brake, lake, make, stake, wake, fake -ale* male, pale, sale, kale, stale, tale -ame* blame, came, dame, fame, name, game, came, shame -ate* plate, gate, state, Nate, rate, date, late, ate, grate
2	i_e (74.2%)	i_e fine, dine, lime, pine, time, nine, bike, like, hike, hive, mile, time, wife, line -ide* ride, hide, side, bride, slide, tide, pride, glide
3	u_e (76%)	u_e cute, mute, cube, rude, tube, use (Note: As described in Chapter 1, some of these have the /yoo/ sound.)
4	o_e (58%)	o_e hope, cope, rope, slope, mope, note, vote, tone, hole, role -oke* joke, poke, stoke, broke, stroke, woke
5	Sneaky e exceptions	o_e some, come, one, done, none, once, love, glove, shove, above, dove a_e have, dance (Note: Words with <i>-ore</i> are taught below with <i>r</i> -controlled vowels.)
2. Teamwork (Vowel Teams)		
6–7	Long a (ai & ay)	ai (75%) -ain* rain, plain, chain, gain, plain, stain, train, grain, drain, brain -ail trail, sail, hail, fail, jail, mail, nail, rail, bail exceptions: said, again -ay* (96%) hay, may, ray, tray, say, lay, day, gray, play, pay, clay, stay, slay

1. These percentages reflect *estimates* of the percentage of time the target pattern represents the sound in K–3 reading materials. They are based on Johnston (2001) and Gates and Yale (2011). Patterns without percentages did not have information.

Week	Letter-Sound Pattern	Example Words
8	Long e (ee & ea)	ee ^(95%) deep, sleep, sheep, keep, see, bee, tree, weed, seed, sheet, meet ea ^(50%) meal, speak, leap, heal, team, east, feast, peach -eat* heat, meat, beat, neat, seat, wheat, feat, cheat, treat
9	ea exceptions	ea = /ĕ/ dead, head, ahead, instead, dread, tread, bread (The word <i>read</i> can be pronounced with either a long <i>e</i> or a short <i>e</i> .) ea = /ā/ steak, great, break (Note: There are very few instances of <i>ea</i> = long <i>a</i> .) (Contrast short <i>e</i> words [e.g., <i>dead</i>] with long <i>e</i> words [e.g., <i>treat</i> , <i>heat</i>].)
10	Long o (oa & ow)	oa ^(95%) boat, goat, moat, soap, oak, coat, roam, foam ow = /ō/ ^(68%) bow, tow, row, stow, know, low, mow, show, grow, slow (<i>Ow</i> as in <i>how</i> is found in diphthongs.)
11	Long u (ue & ew)	-ue blue, glue, true, clue, due -ew ^(88%) dew, crew, few, grew, chew, mew, new, stew, blew, threw
12	Long and short oo	oo as in <i>boot</i> ^(50%) boot, hoot, root, hoop, food, too, zoo, roof, pool, tool, cool, fool oo as in <i>book</i> ^(40%) took, book, hook, look, brook, shook, good, cook, wood
13	Long i (-y & igh)	-y by, cry, try, dry, shy, sly, my, why, fly, sky -ight* sight, bright, fight, light, might, night, right, flight -igh sigh, high (Note: The letter <i>y</i> also represents the long <i>e</i> sound in multisyllabic words [e.g., <i>pretty</i> , <i>happy</i> , <i>naughty</i> , <i>many</i>]. But the focus in this chapter is single-syllable words.)

3. R the Robber (R-Controlled Vowels)

14	ar	ar bar, car, far, jar, cart, harm, part, dark, bark, chart, smart, sharp, yarn, shark
15	or	or born, fort, corn, form, fork, horn, north, port, for, pork, torn

continues

Week	Letter-Sound Pattern	Example Words
3. R the Robber (R-Controlled Vowels) continues		
16	or sound (continued) ore our	ore* bore, more, sore, wore, shore, chore, tore, snore, store, score, before our your, tour, pour, court, course, fourth
17-18 (2 weeks)	er sound ir er ur ear	ir firm, girl, bird, dirt, squirt, first, chirp, firm, stir, twirl, third, birth er fern, germ, term, herd, perm, verb, serve, nerd, jerk, her, verse, herd ur turn, hurt, curl, curb, surf, nurse, purse, curse, urge, burst, burn, blur ear pearl, earn, heard, learn, search, earth, learn
(R-Controlled + Vowel Digraph)		
19	air sound are air ear	are care, bare, hare, dare, rare, pare, stare, scare, share, square, fare air hair, fair, pair, chair ear tear, bear, wear, pear
20	ear sound ear eer	ear ear, hear, rear, fear, dear, gear, near, year, beard eer deer, steer, jeer, peer, sneer, cheer
4. Diphthongs		
21	oi & oy	oi coin, boil, soil, foil, point, choice, voice, noise oy boy, toy, soy, joy, cowboy, annoy
22	aw & au	aw* paw, claw, yawn, hawk, saw, draw, straw, raw, thaw, awe, crawl, straw au sauce, launch, pause, caught, haunt, fault
23	ou & ow	ou out, shout, proud, loud, found, ouch, cloud, couch, pouch, doubt, about ow how, now, wow, cow, town, crowd, down, brown, frown, growl, owl

Notes: Example words have been specifically chosen as optimal “teaching words.” Use these words during the Decode-It and Spell-It parts of the lessons.

Rimes / word parts marked by the * are in the 37 most frequently used rimes (Wylie and Durrell 1970). These will generate many words and are essential to teach; 12 are taught in Beyond First Words.

Beyond First Words Lesson Template

The lesson template in Figure 6.4 can be used to plan lessons for all the subunits in Beyond First Words.

FIGURE 6.4

Beyond First Words Weekly Lesson Template

Subunit: _____ Lesson #: _____ Letter/Sound Focus: _____

	Decode-It (Analyze) 5-7 min.	Spell-It (Synthesize) 5 min.	Read-It (Apply) 5-7 min.
Monday	Activity: ¹	Activity: ²	Title: ³
	Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Decodable Words:
			Content Words:
Tuesday	Activity:	Activity:	Title:
	Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Decodable Words:
			Content Words:
Wednesday	Activity:	Activity:	Title:
	Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Decodable Words:
			Content Words:

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	Decode-It (Analyze) 5-7 min.	Spell-It (Synthesize) 5 min.	Read-It (Apply) 5-7 min.
Thursday	Activity:	Activity:	Title:
	Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Decodable Words:
			Content Words:
Friday	Activity:	Activity:	Title:
	Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Decodable Words:
			Content Words:

¹ Decode-It Activities: Word Equations, Word Sort Fill-In, Word Sort, Word Changer (Silent e), Vowel Fixing, Highlighting Vowels, Unifix Cubes, Side-by-Side, Word Wheels, Charting Words Found in Literature

² Spell-It Activities: Dictation, Word Building, This or That? Making Words, Dictation with Dry-Erase Boards

³ Read-It Step: Bookwalk, First Read, Second Read, Praise and Practice, Reread

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Subunit 1: Sneaky Silent *e*

The first subunit introduces the silent *e* pattern in a five-week period. Silent *e* is the vowel marker found at the end of a word that usually signals the long vowel sound in the middle. The silent *e* pattern is one of the more reliable patterns in English; as discussed in Chapter 1, it is not foolproof, but it is fairly consistent. As analyzed by Johnston (2001), the long vowel sound, as marked by the silent *e*, is very consistent with *a*, *u*, and *i*. It is used with *e_e* but there are very few words. With *o_e* there are exceptions. Teaching exception words together is useful because it shows that there are actually groups of words that follow the same pattern and that “break” the silent *e* pattern. The silent *e* pattern is a good place to start because children usually pick up on this pattern quickly.

Subunit 2: Team (Vowel Teams)

The next subunit, called Teamwork, dedicates eight weeks to learning the most common vowel digraphs or teams. Each week provides one to three different spellings for the same long vowel sound. The patterns in these subunits were chosen because they appear frequently in English and because several of them have rimes or word families that are found in the 37 most frequently occurring rimes (Wylie and Durrell 1970). These are marked by the * in the scope and sequence (see Figure 6.3).

Because there are a number of *ay* and *ai* patterns, an additional week is suggested at this point. There are also a number of *ea* words, and additional time could be dedicated to those as well. The scope also addresses an *ea* exception group (e.g., *great*, *dead*). In addition, it addresses two sounds for *oo*, the sound in *book* and the sound in *hoot*.

Subunit 3: *R* the Robber (*R*-Controlled Vowels)

The *r*-controlled vowels are some of the most complex graphemes in English. This is why they are taught near the end of the unit. There are multiple ways to spell each sound (e.g., /er/: *ir*, *ur*, *er*), and in some cases the same grapheme will represent two different phonemes (e.g., *ear* as in *hear*, *tear*, and *earth*). (See the box “Vowel Flexing in Single Syllable Words,” p. 187.) Thus, the *r*-controlled vowels take a while to teach and a while to learn. The *r*-controlled subunit takes seven weeks and has two sections. The first section introduces three basic *r*-controlled sounds: /ar/, /or/, and /er/. The *ar* sound, when there is no *e* at the end of the word, is pretty consistent (e.g., *car*). The *or* sound can be represented with just *or* as in *corn* but also can be represented by *ore* and *our* (e.g., *bore*, *chore*, *your*, *pour*). The straight *or* is taught in one week, and then the two additional spellings, *ore* and *our*, are addressed in the following week. The last two weeks of the first section address the multiple ways to spell the *er* sound (e.g., *firm*, *herd*, *hurt*).

“Watch out for the letter *r*! It will steal that vowel sound.” So goes the clever mnemonic. For the vowel pairs listed below when the letter *r* appears, the sound is usually changed from a typical long sound to an *r*-controlled or *r*-influenced sound. Reminding readers to be on the lookout for *r* gives them a handy generalization to use to pronounce a word.

Vowel Flexing in Single-Syllable Words

When a student sees a single vowel in a single-syllable word, the sound will usually be short (e.g., *tack*, *tip*), and if it is not, it will usually be long (e.g., *cold*, *go*). But vowel teams can be tricky. The sound is sometimes long, sometimes short, and sometimes something different. Vowel flexing, also called vowel alert or TOTO (try one, try the other), is a strategy to help students approach the pronunciation of vowels (not short vowels) with flexibility (Lovett, Lacerenza, and Borden 2000; Meese 2016; Steacy et al. 2017). This is important because in one study as many as 50 percent of words read contained a variant vowel (Steacy et al. 2017). Teachers and researchers approach vowel flexing with different steps. The following three-step process is a compilation of the general principles. My approach is to guide students to stop and think about different sounds in words with vowel patterns.

Step 1: STOP

When students see two vowels in a word, the first step is to STOP. This helps them be aware. They know they should proceed with caution.

Step 2: TRY ONE SOUND

In this second step, students try one sound that could possibly fit in the word. This is the one sound they know or the one that is most common. Then they try that one pronunciation and test it against the meaning in the sentence. If the word does not make sense, they go to Step 3: TRY ANOTHER SOUND.

Step 3: TRY ANOTHER SOUND

In the third step, they try another sound that could work. This could be the short sound of the first letter, the long sound of the first letter, or some other sound they know. Then they try that one pronunciation and test it against the meaning in the sentence.

Two Examples for Vowel Flexing

Example 1: *dread*

STOP

TRY ONE SOUND.

The student sees *ea* and attempts the first sound that he knows that goes with *ea*: long *e*. *Dreed*?

The student evaluates the word in the sentence: "He saw the car and was filled with *dreed*." No.

continues

TRY ANOTHER SOUND.

The student tries the short sound of the first letter, /e/. *Dread?*

The student evaluates the word in the sentence: "He saw the car and was filled with dread." Yes. That's it!

Example 2: vow**STOP****TRY ONE SOUND.**

The student sees *ow* and attempts the first sound that she knows: long *o*, as in *know*. *Voe?*

The student evaluates the word in the sentence: "The knight knelt, ready to take a *voe*." No.

TRY ANOTHER SOUND.

The student tries the *ow* sound as in *how*. *Vow?*

The student evaluates the word in the sentence: "The knight knelt, ready to take a *vow*." Yes. That's it!

Note: This is only one strategy to support students in decoding vowel patterns. It is not foolproof. Sometimes a student might not know the two different sounds for a pattern. Sometimes the long vowel and short vowel attempts don't work (e.g., *head* works for the long/short vowel in Example 1, but *row* does not work in Example 2, nor does *tear/earth* in Example 1). The goal of this strategy is to get students to stop and think when they encounter a vowel pattern.

In the second section of the *r*-controlled subunit are vowel pairs + *r*. See Figure 6.5. These are organized by sound. The first is *air* (e.g., *bare, hair, tear*) and the second is the sound *ear* (e.g., *fear, deer*). As with the other *r*-controlled vowels, there are multiple ways to spell each of those sounds. Several *r*-controlled representations are not directly taught in this unit because they are not as common (e.g., *oar, ure, ire*).

FIGURE 6.5

R the Robber	
How the Letter R Influences Vowel Pairs	
Vowel Pair	+ r
ee	-eer deer, steer, cheer
ai	-air pair, stair, hair
ea	-ear rear, hear, fear tear, wear, bear

Subunit 4: Diphthongs

The last three-week subunit is Diphthongs. Although linguists use a different definition for diphthongs, in this unit the term refers to the three sounds typically represented by the following letter pairs: (1) *oi/oy*, (2) *aw/au*, and (3) *ou/ow*. In these situations, the vowel combinations do not take the long or short sound of either of the letters in the team. Rather, they make a glided sound. Both *oy* and *oi* were nearly 100 percent consistent in a sample of words found in elementary grades (Johnston 2001). However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, these sounds can be tricky for kids due to the change that the mouth makes as that sound is made. The *aw* sound, which is also very consistent, is taught next (e.g., *claw*, *caught*). The last sound in the unit is *ou* (e.g., *shout*, *how*). Note that *ow* also represents the long *o* sound, as in *now*. There are almost equal numbers of words that have *ow* as in *how* and words that have *ow* as in *glow*.

Lesson Framework and Activities

Lessons for Beyond First Words are shorter than those in the previous subunits and typically take place about three times per week. They all use the same lesson framework with three parts: (1) Decode-It, (2) Spell-It, and (3) Read-It. There is no phonemic awareness (Hear-It) or Review-It section. The lessons can be fifteen to twenty minutes and might be included at the beginning or end of small-group reading instruction or in a separate phonics small group. Decodables can be used at this stage, although students at this stage are more fluent and will be reading a range of other materials during their language arts block. During the days that students are not meeting with the teacher for instruction, they practice patterns independently. See Figure 6.6.

The lesson has three goals:

- **Decode words with vowel patterns automatically (Decode-It).** Readers build their abilities to pay attention to multi-letter units and decode hierarchically. They look for units that represent sounds that are not the short sounds.
- **Spell words with the target patterns (Spell-It).** The ultimate gauge of students' understanding of the patterns that are being taught is their ability to spell those patterns. This task requires synthesis. When students can spell the various patterns, they are able to match each pattern with the proper word even when the sounds are similar (e.g., *ate* vs. *ait*).
- **Read words in books (Read-It).** Several times a week, during their small-group phonics work, students can read texts that possess some of the vowel patterns that they are learning. At this point in development, these words can be read in texts with some level of decodability, poems, and even children's literature. (See Figure 6.10 for popular titles and the words in them that contain vowel patterns.)

FIGURE 6.6

	Time	Lesson Part	Content	Sample Language	Activity Choices
1	5–7 minutes	Decode-It (Analyze)	Decode words with vowel teams.	<p>Teacher: Let's use the cubes to make the word <i>teen</i>. That word has the /ee/ sound. To make that sound which letters do I need?</p> <p>Student: <i>ea</i>?</p> <p>Teacher: Yes, that makes the long sound but it doesn't go in this word. Is there another set of letters? Think about the word <i>see</i>.</p> <p>Student: <i>ee</i></p>	Unifix cubes Word Equations Word Sort Fill-in Word Wheels or Flip Books This or That? Side-by-Side Word Finds in Literature Vowel Flexing Word Sorts
2	5 minutes	Spell-It (Synthesize)	Spell words letter-by-letter.	<p>Teacher: We are going to do a Word Building starting with the word <i>bat</i>. We are going to review patterns that we learned a while ago and also use the ones we know.</p> <p><i>bat</i></p> <p><i>boot</i></p> <p><i>boat</i></p> <p><i>coat</i></p>	Dictation Dry Erase Boards Making Words Word Building
3	5–7 minutes	Read-It (Apply)	Read connected texts and poems with vowel teams.	<p>Teacher: We are going to read this book, <i>A Store for Norm</i> but first let's do a Book Walk. We are looking for words that have the /or/ sound like Norm. Look at the first page. Do you see an <i>or</i> word?</p> <p>Student: <i>For</i>.</p>	Read-it routine with decodables or poems Word Finds in Literature

Decode-It (Analyze)

During Decode-It, the activities provide opportunities to remember different patterns for the same sounds or compare words. See Figure 6.7. Earlier in the week, when the patterns are newer, use word wheels, word changers, or word sorts. Toward the end of the week, as students gain more practice, use Word Sort Fill-In, where students must supply the correct vowel pair for each word. Word Changer is a great activity for the Sneaky Silent *e* because students must pronounce a word *with* a silent *e* and a word *without* a silent *e*. Sometimes students use highlighters to identify the patterns or Unifix cubes with preprinted patterns to read or build words. During this part of the lesson, students could also be taught vowel flexing. (See the box “Vowel Flexing in Single-Syllable Words.”) Word finds in literature are also useful. There is a list of children’s literature in Figure 6.10 with specific words that follow the many different vowel patterns taught in the unit. These are all delightful, entertaining stories that children can and should read first for their own pleasure.


FIGURE 6.7

Activities for Decode-It: Reading words with multiletter vowel teams

Unifix Cubes with Letter Units

Use unifix cubes to build words with vowel teams.

WATCH



VIDEO 6.1
Unifix Cubes

For an example of a lesson using letter cubes to teach vowel patterns, watch this video.

Word Equations

Call out a word and ask the students to use a dry erase board or word cards to create word equations with the different parts of the word.

goat = g + oa + t
 hope = h + ope
 snow = s + n + ow

continues

Word Sort Fill-In

In a Word-Sort Fill-In, students are given word cards with the vowel team omitted and then must sort words and fill in the correct vowel pattern.

ea meat	ee feet
n_ _t	tr_ _

This activity gets students to think about the pattern that appears in the word instead of simply visually sorting.

Caveat: This activity works best toward the end of the unit, when students have had some practice trying to remember the patterns. If you choose to do it at the beginning, give students access to a set of word cards with the correct spellings to help them.

Word Wheels

As described in Chapter 4, word wheels are a useful way to draw attention to a particular part of a word. In a word wheel, for example, a Sneaky Silent *e* might change the pronunciation of a base word.

Word Changer with Sticky Notes

This is essentially like a word wheel, but instead of using a wheel, students use a stack of sticky notes to change letters.

cak	e
-----	---

This or That?

Present two words with vowel patterns, one that is correct and one that is incorrect. The students have to decide if the proper way to spell the word is "this" or "that."

This?	That?
sope	soap
hirt	hurt
burp	berp
hed	head

Extensions: Students can make up their own This or That? and bring it to group meeting. Check each This or That? before it is shared.

Caveat: Play this game when students know a lot of patterns and have a repertoire from which to pull. If played too early, it falls flat.

Charting Words Found During Word Finds with Literature

After reading children's literature, have students find words with the target pattern. They can keep their own lists in a notebook.

Example: *Where Is the Green Sheep?* by Mem Fox

ee	ear	ai	a_e
sheep	near	train	brave
green	hear	rain	wave
peep			page
asleep			take

See Figure 6.10 for a list of children's books with target patterns.

Spell-It (Synthesize)

For vowel digraphs, the Spell-It section of the lesson is particularly important because spelling the words letter-by-letter helps students remember which patterns go with which words. Simple dictation is a great way to practice. Make sure to take away word cards or other cues so that the students really have to think about how to spell. At this stage, Word Building is optimal because students usually have a larger repertoire of letter-sounds. It is easier to plan Word Building or Making Words when you can include short vowel words, words with digraphs, words with blends, and words with target vowel digraphs. The activities listed below are the same ones that are in Chapter 5.

FIGURE 6.8

Activities for Spell-It: Spelling words	
Dictation	Identify two to three words from the lesson to dictate. Children should correctly spell each word.

continues

Making Words and Word Building

Making Words and Word Building are two activities for spelling. (See p. 171 for more information.) In a Making Words lesson, children use five to seven magnetic letters or letter cards to spell words.

Word Building with vowel teams will have letters that change at the beginning, middle, and ending of words.

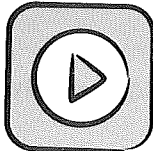
t	a	l	e
b	a	l	e
r	a	i	l

Don't wing it. Plan the words that your students will spell. (See "Making Words or Word Building Lesson" on p. 171.)

Read-It (Apply)

During Read-It in *Beyond First Words*, students practice reading vowel patterns in text. Certainly, texts with some level of decodability are useful at this point, but students can read poems with vowel patterns and may even find vowel patterns literature like *Sheep in a Jeep* by Nancy Shaw. In *Beyond First Words*, students can read more words, so texts with less control that still have target vowel patterns can be read. Figure 6.9 shows the "Read-It Routine" with procedures for reading a decodable text at this stage. It is very similar to the procedure shown in Chapter 5, but there are some differences. In addition, during Read-it, children can read poems or stories and find words with vowel teams.

WATCH



VIDEO 6.2

Finding Words in a Poem

Children finding ee words in the poem "The Sweet Jeep" (and then creating a tune for the poem!), see this video.

FIGURE 6.9

Read-It Routine	
Before the Lesson: Preview the Book	
<p><i>Never</i> use a book in a lesson without first previewing it.</p> <p>Before using a book or poem in <i>Beyond First Words</i>, preview it and check to see that <i>there are a number of words</i> that contain taught vowel patterns. Students at this stage are more advanced. Typically they can read about 500 different words, including 100–200 high-frequency words and about 300 additional words with short vowels (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998). For this reason, the very close match between text words and taught patterns is easier to establish—students know more. However, in order to practice reading words with vowel teams in connected text, ask yourself, “Does the book have words with vowel teams? Will it provide opportunities to practice patterns?”</p>	
Step 1: Book Walk	
<p>The purpose of the book walk is to quickly review decodable words with taught vowel team patterns or complex content words <i>before</i> reading. (Note: At this stage, it is usually not necessary to review high-frequency words during the Book Walk.) The book walk usually takes about three minutes. During the book walk, call students’ attention to words with target patterns: “Oh look, here’s a word that has <i>-ee</i>. What is that? Let’s practice reading that word. Here’s another one on the next page.”</p> <p>Define decodable words with unknown meanings. For example, “Look at this word [point to <i>greed</i>]. How would we read that? <i>Greed</i>? Do you know what that means? It’s when people want everything for themselves.”</p> <p>Note: A book walk is not a picture walk. Don’t feel the need to go through every page and every picture in a book, especially if it’s a long book.</p>	
Step 2: First Reading	
<p>By <i>Beyond First Words</i>, students can usually read the book the first time on their own, especially if some type of book walk has been conducted. If the book is particularly hard, a choral read with the teacher filling in at tough parts could help.</p> <p>Choral read: Read and point the book all together. The teacher’s voice stays in the mix and scaffolds through harder words but then “backs off” if students are more secure.</p> <p>Independent read: This method is for books with words that students can decode very easily. The students read on their own without the teacher’s voice.</p>	

continues

Step 3: Second Reading

Each child reads independently.

Decoding words is the idea in these decodables, so make sure it happens.

The child reads and decodes the story alone. Watch and listen for accurate decoding and help when a student is struggling to decode.

Use vowel flexing with single-syllable words, as described in the box on p. 187.

Remember, don't turn the reading into a phonics lesson. If the child cannot decode the word fairly quickly, provide three quick prompts and move on. (See "Word Prompting: What to Say When They Struggle with a Word" on p. 64.) The first prompt is to pause; the second prompt is to say, "Something tricked you"; the third prompt is based on the child's letter-sound knowledge. If these prompts do not work, model the word.

Step 4: Praise and Practice

At the end of the book, praise something the students have done well.

"When you came to the word *beam*, you stopped and were not sure. Then you said the /bea/ and then put that word together. Good job! What is that word [*beam*, point to word]?"

Then practice something that was difficult.

"When you came to *hat*, you said '*ham*.' Then you stopped and you reread the sentence and you said '____' [let the child fill in the correct word]. You used your letter-sounds to read that word."

Step 5: Reread

After the children have read the book once by themselves, have them reread it to other teachers, cafeteria staff, counselors, family members, and friends. I like to say, "If you read it once, you should read it again!"

Independent Work

At the end of the lessons, the teacher can ask students to do independent work that's to be completed before the next lesson. One great activity for students is to make their own version of This or That? The practice of developing the wrong answers for This or That? and identifying the right answers can be very powerful. Another good independent activity is to have students word find, or identify words with target patterns in the books they are reading. It sometimes helps to have a specific book selected that students can use, so that you know they will find words. A list of children's literature with long vowel words appears in Figure 6.10. I suggest you read these aloud for enjoyment during small-group time and then let students reread a copy on their own and find words. Another approach might be to make several of these titles available to students and allow them to choose a book that interests them and read it. The word

find activity usually works better if you ask students to find *single-syllable words*. Some activities, although very popular for homework, are not particularly useful. These are discussed in the box below.

Homework and Practice: What to Avoid

Rainbow Writing Words

It is very common for students to be asked to “rainbow write” words with each letter in a different color or to cut out letters from magazines to spell words. The supposed purpose of these activities may be to cement the word in memory. However, rainbow writing is time-consuming and the time costs do not match the benefit. Sometimes students do this activity without really thinking about the words. For example, I’ve seen a child write the first letter for a word five times and then write the second letter for the word five times and so on.

Search and Find Puzzles

Search and find puzzles require students to identify target words “hidden” within a sea of letters. Although the student does have to pay attention to the sequence of letters within the words, the main focus is sorting out the word among the letter “noise” in the puzzle. The main skills used are different from those used in spelling words. In addition, we don’t write English words backwards, vertically, or diagonally, the way that they may be found in a word search.

Writing Sentences for Each Word

There is probably no one in the United States over the age of twenty who has not had to write sentences for each spelling word. This laborious activity has produced some of the dreariest and flattest sentences known to man. The main issues are that children do not need to write an entire sentence to practice the words and that this is not really an expressive or authentic application of writing.

Giving Everyone the Same List of Words

Another homework practice to avoid is giving everyone the same list of words to practice. Because students differ in their knowledge of words, they are usually working on different patterns. Thus, sending home one list of words for students to memorize and regurgitate on a weekly spelling test is pointless. In fact, the authors of *No More Phonics and Spelling Worksheets* remind us that children often will not know the words they memorize for a spelling test weeks later (Palmer and Invernizzi 2015).

FIGURE 6.10 Books to Use for Word Finding: Children's Literature with Target Long Vowels

Title, Author	Long A	Long E	Long I	Long O	Long U	Exceptions
<i>Sheep in a Jeep</i> , Nancy Shaw	a_e: sale	ee: beep sheep jeep steep deep weep sweep ea: leap heap cheap	i_e: driver	uh-oh go don't goes		shove comes
<i>Should I Share My Ice Cream?</i> , Mo Willems	ai: wait ea: great ay: maybe day	ea: cream please eat easy ee: sweet ea: easy	i_e: ice like y: my	ow: know o: no oh	ew: blew	love some give have
<i>Kate and Nate Are Running Late!</i> , Kate Egan	a_e: shakes wake takes make makes late Nate Kate hate plate date ace: races ai: straight wait ea: great ay: day okay today Saturday	ee: creeps asleep coffee feeds teeth seems feeling streets need speedy speed see ea: leap please eats squeal e: he she be	i_e: time ice slices ie: tries igh: sigh eyes	oa: toasts ow: flow	u_e: use ui: juice ue: clue	have some been one

Title, Author	Long A	Long E	Long I	Long O	Long U	Exceptions
<i>Rain,</i> Manya Stojic	ai: rain plain a_e: taste shade	ee: see deep feel tree trees green ea: leaves eat e_e: these	i_e: time like y: dry	o_e: hole shone ow: know	ew: grew	have
<i>Where Is the Green Sheep?,</i> Mem Fox	ai: rain train a_e: wave brave page take	ee: sheep green peep asleep	i_e: wide slide		ue: blue	
<i>Ten Sleepy Sheep,</i> Phyllis Root	a_e: race gate ay: gray	ee: sleep sheep knee- deep green bees tree three asleep ea: leap bleats	i_e: time vine nine beehive hive five igh: sighs ie: cries fireflies tried	o_e: rose close doze lope oa: roam	ue: blue	
<i>The Rain Came Down,</i> David Shannon	ai: rain paint rainbow a_e: came made plane baker cakes snake make shave gave ay: day air: hair	y: baby e: me ea: cream stream each ee: see three need sweet ere: here	i_e: wife driver ice inside time nice y: cry ie: dries	o_e: woke poked nose whole drove home cones ow: owner oa: boat		have done

continues

Title, Author	Long A	Long E	Long I	Long O	Long U	Exceptions
<i>Rainy Day!</i> , Patricia Lakin	ai: rainy paint rain hail ay: day play way a_e: make bake came whale face place	ea: each	i_e: outside line sliding ight: right sight	o: go no oa: road soaking ow: know o_e: home		
<i>Mice on Ice</i> , Rebecca Emberley and Ed Emberley	a_e: skate skates skating ai: waiting		i_e: mice ice nice	ow: snow		
<i>Green Eggs and Ham</i> , Dr. Seuss	ai: train rain ay: say may	ee: green see tree ea: eat e: be	i: I i_e: like y: try	oa: goat boat		
<i>Which Witch Is Which?</i> , Judi Barrett	ay: playing saying	ea: lean mean clean reading sneaky eating ee: green feeling	y: trying lying tying i: wild i_e: riding	o: holding	oo: broom balloon moon u_e: prune	

Title, Author	Long A	Long E	Long I	Long O	Long U	Exceptions
<i>Fun Dog, Sun Dog,</i> Deborah Heilingman	ay: stay away sprayed way a_e: take	ee: sweet greet need ea: treat beach reach teach	i_e: ride slide side igh: right y: by my	o_e: home		
<i>Snow Dog, Go Dog,</i> Deborah Heilingman	ay: play yay day stray away a_e: chase race place	ee: feeling sweet greet ea: treat	i_e: hiding ride slide	ow: snow o: go fro o_e: home		loves have

Note: Some very common multisyllabic words are included here.

Closing

“I wasn’t really completing the job with phonics,” explained Darla, a first-grade teacher in New Jersey. “I kind of got the kids to a place where they could blend short vowel words and then just taught other vowels as they came up. Mostly, I just didn’t know how to approach anything beyond short vowels. With all these exceptions and rule breakers, it didn’t feel like it made sense. Since it didn’t make sense to me, I couldn’t really teach it in a way that made sense to kids. I was not organized. It was like these long vowels were a tangled ball of yarn and I would go to the ball of yarn when I needed a piece of string and just grab a piece from anywhere and cut it off. It had all these loose, cut-off pieces in it. I never really knew where the ball of yarn started. Now, I have this nicely wound ball of yarn and I know where the yarn starts. I can unravel the content for the kids in a way that helps them.”

Darla’s experience is very common. So many very strong readers and teachers don’t really have an organized plan for teaching the vowel sounds outside of the short vowels. What this unit does is organize the content and present it in a more logical way. The vowel digraph patterns are not easy and they will take a longer time to learn and more practice, but with an organized approach readers will understand how these patterns work and will move forward empowered with their knowledge.

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