

Useful spelling rules for teachers of beginning readers and spellers

1. The role of y in words

When you hear a /y/ at the start of a word, spell it with **y**.

When you see a **y** at the end of a word, it won't sound like /y/.

In little words it probably sounds like a long /i/ (cry, sky), and on longer words (with more than one clap or syllable) it probably sounds like a long 'e' (happy, baby).

Sometimes a **y** on the end of a word has a vowel letter before it – **ay, ey, uy, oy** – these patterns have their own vowel sounds – **ay** (long /a/), **ey** (long /e/ or long /a/), **uy** (long /i/), **oy** (/oy/).

2. Spelling the long /e/ on the end of a word

If the word has one clap or syllable, use an **e** pattern (e, ee, ea) – *me, she, see, tea*

If the word has two or more claps or syllables, use a **y** or **ey** pattern – *happy, funny, honey, monkey*

3. Spelling the /j/ sound

If you hear a /j/ at the start of a word it can be written with **j** or **g**

If you hear a /j/ at the end of a word it will be written with a **ge** or a **dge** – never with a **j**

N.B. The letter **g** will only sound like /j/ if it is followed by an **e, i** or **y**. Every word that has a **g** followed by **e** or **i** will not sound like /j/ (get, give, giggle) but in most words where there is a **g** followed by **y**, the **g** will be pronounced 'j' (gypsy, gymnast).

4. Using ck for /k/

The **ck** pattern is used to spell /k/ on the end of lots of words that have only one clap or syllable. It always comes after a short vowel sound.

N.B. If children see it in words like *jacket, package, clicking* etc., cover up the letters or suffix after the **ck** and show them how there is still a whole one-syllable word left over that ends in **ck** (*jack, pack, click*).

5. Spelling the /ng/ sound

Lots of words end with the /ng/ sound after a vowel – **ang, ong, ing, ung** words. It is always written **ng** on the end of a word.

Some words have the /ng/ sound before a /k/ or /g/ – then it is just written with **n** – *think, bank, clunk, single, jungle*

6. /v/ on the end of a word

All words that end in **v** must be followed by **e**. Sometimes the **e** is part of the vowel_ **e** ending for a long vowel sound (*cave, gave, hive*) and sometimes it isn't (*give, love, have*).

7. Spelling the /z/ sound

When you hear /z/ at the start of a word it will almost always be written with **z**. When you hear /z/ at the end of a word it is often written with **s** (*his, as, was, does*).

N.B. There are other rules for this but they aren't relevant for beginners.

8. Spelling the short /u/ sound

When you hear a short /u/ sound and it has its own clap (it is a syllable by itself), write it with **a** – *a, around, again, about, par/a/chute, car/a/van*. If it doesn't have its own clap, write it with **u**.

In some words the short /u/ is written with **o** – *mother, month, Monday, some, done* etc.
Sometimes we use an **a** to spell the short /u/ on the end of words too – *pizza, panda, gorilla*.
We never spell the short /u/ with **a** if it is part of a syllable – *un/der, un/cle, um/brell/a, fun, rub*

9. Spelling long vowel sounds

If you hear a long vowel sound inside a syllable or at the beginning of a syllable, it is usually written with a long spelling pattern – two vowels, either together (*train, green, leaf, thief, ceiling, soap, spoon, fruit*), or split - the vowel_e pattern (*cake, these, like, home, cute, move*).

N.B. The long /i/ is slightly different because it has the **igh** pattern as well (*night, sight*) and sometimes is just written with a single **i** inside a syllable (*child, kind*).

10 Spelling the /oy/ sound

When you hear the /oy/ sound at the end of a word or syllable, use **oy** (*boy, toy, royal*). When it is at the start of or inside a word or syllable, use **oi** (*ointment, choice, noise*).

N.B. Words that contain 'oil' mostly use **oi**, which often sounds like more than one syllable (*boil, coil, toilet*).

11. Spelling the /ow/ sound

When you hear /ow/ at the end of a word or syllable, use **ow** (*cow, now, pow/er, show/er*).

When you hear /ow/ at the start of, or inside a word or syllable, use **ou** (*ounce, house, loud*).

BUT: If the word rhymes with *down* (*frown, clown, town*) or *owl* (*howl, towel, growl*) we usually use **ow**.