

SYLLABICS: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN PHONICS AND READING

Written English is an alphabetic code that was developed to represent the various sounds of spoken English. When we read, we de-code this written alphabetic code. When we spell, we encode... or put the words back into the original written alphabetic code as recorded in standardized English dictionaries.

In the mid-eighteenth century, British scholars standardized (or coded) the spelling of written English. The introduction of the printing press into England had resulted in a chaotic spelling predicament: no two publishers were in agreement over how words should be spelled. At that time, Samuel Johnson and his committee of helpers systematized the spelling of English for the first standardized English dictionary.

How Was That Alphabetic Spelling Code Devised?

The alphabet familiar in England at that time was used to standardize the spelling of written English... even though that alphabet was not phonetically well-suited for English.

Spoken English has consonant sounds and vowel sounds. Each syllable has a vowel sound. The alphabet had to have letters to represent both consonant sounds and vowel sounds. The familiar alphabet in use in England at the time had letters to represent both consonant sounds and vowel sounds.

The problem: That familiar alphabet –still in use today – does not have even half enough vowel letters to represent every vowel sound in spoken English.

In order for the familiar alphabet to be used, each vowel letter would have to represent several different vowel sounds. To manage that problem, they devised a three-way code that incorporated the three main elements that had to be dealt with.

So, written English is actually three totally different alphabetic codes that we treat as one. When we read written English, we must read these three totally different codes simultaneously - in three totally different ways - and at the rapid speed of conscious thought (or speech...if reading aloud).

Code 1: The first code is a **Phonics Code** used for writing consonant sounds and reading consonant letters. ‘Phonics’ is a popular term for ‘phonetics’. In ‘phonetics’, with very few exceptions, one consonant letter always represents one consonant sound. For instance, the letter ‘b’ always represents the sound /buh/...never /s/, /ruh/, /t/, etc. In brief, **consonant letters and sounds** have a simple, **letter level**, phonetic or phonics relationship and code.

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Code 2: The second code is a **Syllabics Code** (made up of 6 different Spelling Codes) that is used for writing **stressed vowel sounds** and reading **stressed vowel letters**. 'Syllabics' is the study of the relationships between the spelling and the pronunciation codes found in:

1. one-syllable words. (Most one-syllable words have stressed vowel pronunciations.)
2. stressed syllables of multisyllable words.

This 'syllabics' or 'stressed vowel' code is NOT phonetic. Stressed vowels are coded (and decoded) **syllabically**...not phonetically. This very complex code is made up of six spelling/pronunciation codes. **One of these six spelling codes is hidden within each one syllable word and within each stressed syllable of a multisyllable word.**

This hidden spelling code tells readers to read the vowel(s) in that syllable with a long or a short vowel sound, or some other vowel sound. This stressed vowel spelling/ pronunciation code works only for:

1. vowels in one-syllable words.
2. vowels in stressed syllables of multisyllable words.

In brief, **stressed vowel letters and sounds** have a complex **syllable level**... monosyllable or **syllabic** relationship and code.

In the entire English language, there are only six different syllable spelling patterns or codes, and these six spelling codes have predictable vowel pronunciation codes.

Code 3: The third code is a **Homophonics Code**, used for writing **unstressed vowel sounds** and reading **unstressed vowel letters** in multi-syllable words. This unstressed vowel code is neither phonetic nor syllabic. It is homophonic. With few exceptions it does not matter which vowel(s) an unstressed syllable has, and it does not matter which of the six spelling codes the unstressed syllable has, the GENERAL pronunciation for all unstressed vowels in unstressed syllables is /uh/...or the schwa sound: /uh/ as in the word 'up'. Schwa' is the name of the upside down 'e' symbol that most dictionaries use for the /uh/ sound.) For example: in the word: anonymous (**a** NON' **y** mous), there are three sets of unstressed vowels: 1) '**a**', 2) '**y**', and 3) '**ou**'. The unstressed vowels: '**a**', '**y**', and '**ou**' are **vowel homophones**, and we read all three with the same unstressed /uh/ pronunciation: '**a**' is read as /uh/. '**y**' is read as /uh/. '**ou**' is read as /uh/.

Most of the time, we read the vowel(s) in unstressed syllables homophonically, or all the same way: /uh/. Exceptions are specifically spelled, visually recognizable, and predictable.

Examples of homophones:

'c' and 'k' are **consonant homophones** in the word: 'cake'.

(We read 'c' and 'k' with the same consonant sound: /k/.)

'o' and 'u' are **vowel homophones** in the words: 'son' and 'run'.

(We read 'on' and 'un' with the same nasal short vowel sound: /ũh/.)

`i' and `a' are **vowel homophones** in the word: `village.'

(We read `i' and `a' with the same short `i' sound: /i/ as in `igloo'.)

`so', and `sew' are **word homophones** .

(We read both words with the same `consonant + vowel' sound: /sO/.)

In brief, **unstressed vowel letters and sounds** have a **multisyllable, word level**, homophonic relationship and code.

In order to simplify the spelling of unstressed vowel sounds, all unstressed vowels could have been spelled with the schwa symbol for unstressed vowels, ...the upside down `e'...used in most dictionaries and pronounced as /uh/ in `up'. This would have given the reading of unstressed vowels an easier phonetic decoding system. But this also would have compromised the vital vowel/spelling/meaning relationships already established for stressed vowels... particularly in the varying forms of a word.

Example: the letter `i' in the second syllable of the two words: in v_ite and in v_i ta tion. In the unstressed syllable `vi' in *invitation* the `i' could have been spelled with a schwa, the upside down `e', instead of with an `i', but then the vital vowel/spelling/meaning relationship that exists between the words *invite* and *invitation* would have been lost.

Summary: When we read, we decode three totally different alphabetic codes simultaneously:

1. **Phonics Code** for reading consonants. (A **letter-level skill**)
2. **Syllabics Code** for reading vowels in one-syllable words and vowels in stressed syllables. (A **monosyllable-level skill**)
3. **Homophonics Code** for reading unstressed vowels in multisyllable words. (A **multisyllable word-level skill**)

When we are **LEARNING HOW** to read, we do **NOT** need to **LEARN** all three codes at the same time... which is today's common practice. Nor do we need to learn two of these codes at the same time. It is far easier for the beginning reader to tackle **and master** these three different codes just one at a time. This step by step **mastery of definite decoding skills** builds confidence instead of anxiety in the beginning reader's mind...and competence instead of trial and error. ('Abdu'l-Baha says "*error is want of guidance.*") Beginning readers need guidance in order to be spared the needless pain, frustration, and futility of trial and error.

Because they haven't been taught clear-cut vowel reading, or decoding, or pronunciation skills, beginning readers develop compensatory skills such as guessing, memorization, the use of picture clues, the use of context clues, etc. to figure out how to read the vowel letters.

When these unreliable skills are replaced with definite, predictable, reliable vowel reading or decoding skills, the beginning reading student develops confidence in his/her ability to actually 'read' each word. [To clarify: Students may use picture or context clues to help figure out the MEANING of a word ...or to GUESS a word...but these are not reliable skills for learning 'how' to 'read' the vowel letters.]

Letter Level – Consonants - Phonics Code

Students learn to read (pronounce) all the consonant letters and consonant blends. ('b' = /buh/, etc.)

Monosyllable Level – Vowels - Syllabics Code

After students can confidently and competently read all the consonant letters and blends, the only thing left for them to learn to read will be the 5 vowel letters: a, e, i, o, and u. THAT'S ALL!

It is a giant step from the simple procedure of reading the consonant letters at the **Letter Level** to the complex procedure of reading the vowel letters at the **Syllable Level**. NOBODY on our planet can predictably read an isolated English vowel letter correctly. We must look at the **spelling code** within each syllable. **The spelling code within each one-syllable word tells us how to read all the vowels in THAT word.** (The hidden **spelling code** within each stressed syllable of a multisyllable word also tells us how to read all the vowels in THAT stressed syllable.)

How do we read the vowel letter 'a' in the word 'at'?

The **VC** spelling code within the syllable tells us to read the 'a' short: /a/ as in 'apple'

How do we read the vowel letters 'a' and 'e' in the word 'ate'?

The **VCe** spelling code within the syllable tells us to read the first vowel long: /A/ as in 'ape'.

The final 'e' is silent.

How do we read the vowel letters 'o' and 'a' in the word 'boat'?

The **VV** spelling code within the syllable tells us to read the first vowel long: /O/ as in 'overalls'.

The second vowel is silent.

In the entire English language, there are only six different syllable spelling patterns or codes, and these six spelling codes have predictable vowel pronunciation codes.

(When the approximately 8,745* one-syllable words found in most middle-school dictionaries are sorted according to spelling code, there is a total of only 6 spelling codes in the entire language.)

*8,745 words excluding: proper names, geographical terms, foreign words, and taboo words.

6 SPELLING/PRONUNCIATION CODES FOR READING VOWEL LETTERS (The Rules)

1. **VC** Spelling Code: only 1 vowel; ends with a consonant
VC Pronunciation Code: short vowel. (at, sat, that, scratch, bag, beg, big, bog, bug)
2. **V** Spelling Code: only 1 vowel; ends with that vowel
V Pronunciation Code: long vowel. (be, hi, go, flu)
[In one-syllable words, **V** Codes spelled with 'a' = a Specific Exception to the Rule: P_a /ah/.
In multisyllable words, **stressed V** Codes spelled with 'a' follow the Rule: pa' per] /A/.
3. **VV** Spelling Code: 2 vowels together; no other vowels
VV Pronunciation Code: long first vowel, silent second vowel. (play, eat, pie, oak, due)
4. **VCCe** Spelling Code: 1 vowel; followed by 2 or 3 consonants; followed by final: 'e', 'ed', or 'es'.
VCCe Pronunciation Code: short first vowel, silent 'e' (asked, stretched, kicked, solves, judge)
5. **VCe** Spelling Code: 1 vowel; followed by only 1 consonant, followed by final: 'e', 'ed', or 'es'
VCe Pronunciation Code: long 1st vowel, silent final 'e'. (baked, eve, ice, notes, rule)
6. **VVCE** Spelling Code: 2 vowels together; followed by 0, 1, or 2 consonants; followed by final: 'e', 'ed', or 'es'
VVCE Pronunciation Code: long 1st vowel, silent 2nd vowel, silent final 'e' (played, loaves, breathe, juice)

NOTE: There are no **VVV (or VVVCe)** spelling codes. (**VVV** = 3 vowels together) When 3 vowel letters occur together within a syllable or word, there are several factors that can come into play. Here are only 3 examples:

1. One of the vowel letters functions as a consonant letter... Therefore it is not a vowel. It is a consonant. ['view': the letter 'i' sounds like consonant 'y'. 'i' functions as consonant 'y'. In the word 'view', 'i' is a consonant letter.]
2. One of the three vowels is in a different syllable: *glo-ri-ous*.
3. Words borrowed from foreign languages do not follow English spelling/pronunciation patterns or codes: *beau, lieu, queue* = French

Not included in the above Rules are these Exceptions:

1. General Exceptions = vowels followed by: 'm', 'n', or 'r'.
2. Specific Exceptions = 'all', 'ew', 'igh', 'ook', 'ought', 'ow', etc.
3. Memory Syllables = approx. 5% of all one-syllable words that have established spelling codes, but do not follow the established pronunciation codes. These must be memorized.

As you can clearly see, **stressed vowel** 'reading', 'decoding', or 'pronunciation' must be learned syllabically... and to determine the correct way to 'read' these **stressed** vowels is to learn to recognize the 6 syllable spelling/pronunciation codes hidden within each one-syllable word that determine (or predict) how to read all the vowels within that word. (These same codes are hidden within each stressed syllable of a multisyllable word and tell us how to read all the vowels in that syllable.)

How Do I Read Thee, Fickle 'A'?

Come here, kid. For your lesson today,
You must learn to read the letter 'a'.
How do we read thee, Fickle 'A'?
'Let us count the ways'.

So far, we've counted 17 ways
That we can read the letter 'a'.
Guessing is not an easy way
To learn to read the letter 'a'.

To read this 'a',
Look hard and long.
You have 1 chance to guess right;
16 chances to guess wrong.

Memorizing is not an easy way
To learn to read the letter 'a'.
You must memorize at least 5 thousand words,
So memorizing is for the birds.

Letter 'a', by itself, gives you no clue.
But the letters - around 'a' do.
The letters around 'a' form a **spelling** code
To help read the 'a' in 'tad' and 'toad'.

Not one soul on the planet today
Can read an isolated English 'a'.
So: to read the 'a' in 'tads' and 'toads',
We must learn to decode their **spelling** codes.

(...with apologies to Elizabeth Barrett Browning...)

17 WAYS TO READ THE LETTER 'A' [for parents and teachers only...not beginning readers ...
Not all 6 codes and their exceptions are listed here...just the spelling/pronunciation codes for
the vowel letter 'a']. (General Ex. = General Exception; Specific Ex. = Specific Exception.)

Monosyllable Rules (Long, Short, or Silent Vowels):

<u>Sample Word</u>	<u>Spelling Code</u>	<u>Pronunciation Code for 'a'</u>	<u>Rule</u>
1. tad, at	VC Code	short 'a', /a/ as in 'ap'-ple	Rule
2. ate	VCe Code	long 'a', /A/ as in 'ape'	Rule
3. toad	V V Code	long 'o', /O/, silent 'a'	Rule

Monosyllable Exceptions to Rules:

<u>Sample Word</u>	<u>Spelling Code</u>	<u>Pronunciation Code for 'a'</u>	<u>Exception</u>
4. can	VC Code	nasal short 'a', /ă/ as in 'ant'	General Ex.
5. cane	VCe Code	nasal long 'a', /Ā/ as in 'an'-gel	General Ex.
6. ah	VC Code	/ah/ as in 'oc'-topus	Specific Ex.
7. calm	VC Code	/ăh/ as in 'palm'tree	Specific Ex.
8. car	VC Code	/ah ^r / as in 'car'	General Ex.
9. care	VCe Code	/a ^{re} / as in 'air'-plane	General Ex.
10. barn	VC Code	/ăh ^r / + 'r' as in 'arm'	General Ex.
11. bairn	V V Code	/ă ^{re} /, as in 'cairn' (Scotland)	General Ex.
12. all	VC Code	/aw/ as in 'ball'	Specific Ex.
13. lawn	V V Code	/ăw/ as in 'awn'-ing	Specific Ex.
14. wart	VC Code	/aw ^r / as in 'or'-chid	Specific Ex.
15. warm	VC Code	/ăw ^r / as in 'corn'	Specific Ex.

Multisyllable

<u>Sample Word</u>	<u>Spelling Code</u>	<u>Pronunciation Code for 'a'</u>	<u>Rule</u>
16. <u>a</u> -go'	V Code	unstressed V: 'a' = /uh/ as in up	Rule
17. pi' <u>rate</u>	VCe Code	unstressed VCe: 'a' = /i/ as in ig' loo'	Specific Ex.

A new program, ***Word Families and Friends***, has been devised that utilizes this **SYLLABICS** approach to teaching beginning reading. This system follows the natural coding system inherent in written English and the innate human learning practices of categorizing, associating, and sorting. **SYLLABICS** bridges the gap between phonics and fluent reading...in a fraction of the time it has required before now. And it produces competent and confident beginning readers. There is no more struggling with guessing, memorizing, and painful trial and error experiences.

In Level 1: Students learn to read the **Rules** for all 6 Spelling Codes...in one-syllable words. Students learn to read the **General Exceptions** for all 6 Spelling Codes...in one-syllable words. Then they learn to read the **Specific Exceptions** for all 6 Spelling Codes...in one-syllable words. (They memorize each **Memory Syllable** when it is first encountered in their reading.)

In Level 2: Students learn to read **compound words**. Then they learn to read **two-syllable words with common pre-fixes and suffixes**. Then they learn to read **multisyllable words** with stressed and unstressed vowel pronunciations.

In Level 3: For their first real text book, students read ***The Hidden Words*** by Baha'u'llah. We have compiled an alphabetical listing of all multi-syllable words found in ***The Hidden Words***. Each word is divided into syllables with the stress marked. Each stressed syllable is printed in **bold** print for easy identification and decoding by young readers.

*"...**Systematic attention** needs to be given to the eventual elimination of illiteracy from the Baha'i community..."* — The Universal House of Justice, 1989

"Whatever other children learn in one year, let Baha'i children learn in one month."

"Accustom the children to hardship." ... "Bind their hearts to the love of God..."

"Ignorance is want of knowledge." ... "Error is want of guidance." — 'Abdu'l-Baha

It is the job of educators to present 'learning to read' as a serious, mature responsibility for children in order for them to grow into productive adults who can serve mankind. Educators should not deceive beginning readers into believing 'Learning to read' is 'all fun and games'. Life is not all fun and games...neither is learning to read...it is hard work. Be honest! Now, for the first time, students can receive the **correct guidance** for learning to read the vowel letters accurately. Students learn definite, positive procedures that help them to become fluent readers in a few months...instead of years. For the first time, they learn **how** consonants and vowels can be decoded accurately. For the first time, beginning readers can **understand** the reading process. **They know how to read.**

This Syllabics Beginning Reading Program, ***Word Families and Friends*** can be used by:
Native speakers to teach beginning reading to young native English speaking students.
Second language learners as English language lab activities in pronunciation and vocabulary.
Hearing impaired students as a visual approach to teaching beginning reading.
Home-school mothers searching for an efficient, solution for teaching first graders to read.
Anyone of any age who needs to learn how to read.

(Teacher Preparation) All instructions for teachers are written in italics. Students are not expected to read anything written in italics anywhere in the entire program. Things written in italics are for teachers only. Read ALL instructions carefully.

Letter Level – Consonants - Phonics Code

A student still struggling with 'reading the consonants' is NOT READY to learn to read vowels and words.

Get out your flashcards and marker board.

- 1. Drill your young reader over and over asking for the NAMES of all the letters of the alphabet. (in order ...and then randomly.)*
- 2. After the student **masters** step 1, remove the vowel letters (a, e, i, o, u) from the flashcards: Ask the student to 'READ' each consonant letter as you present each flashcard. (in order at first...and then randomly) [READ the letter 'b': **/buh/**... not the NAME of the letter: 'b'.]*
- 3. After the student **masters** step 2, you 'read' the consonant letters randomly. Ask the student to write the consonant letter you read. [You read: **/buh/**... (s)he writes: b.] [Read 'c' as **/k/**. ('c' = **/s/** only before 'e', 'i', and 'y' is an exception to be learned when first encountered.) **/k/** is the default pronunciation for 'c'.]*
- 4. After the student **masters** step 3, make flashcards for the consonant blends: ch, ph, qu, sh, th, wh. Ask the student to 'read' each consonant blend as you randomly present the consonant blend flashcards. (To read the blend 'ch', the student reads: **/chuh/** ...not the names of the letters 'c'-'h'.)*

5. After the student **masters** step 4, you 'read' the consonant blends randomly. Ask the student to write the blend you read. [You read: /chuh/...(s)he writes: ch.]

Make sure your beginning reader makes zero mistakes for all 5 steps at the letter level. If (s)he is struggling with even one letter or blend, drill, drill, drill until (s)he overlearns everything.

Student's Daily Warm-up: Read The Consonants

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

('th' has 2 pronunciations: 1: whispered and 2: voiced.)

Do not try reading words until students make no mistakes reading the consonants and consonant blends - in order at first - and then randomly.

Monosyllable Level – Vowels - Syllabics Code

*After students can confidently and competently read all the consonant letters and blends, the only thing left for them to learn to read will be the 5 vowel letters: a, e, i, o, and u. THAT'S ALL! It is a giant step from the simple procedure of reading the consonant letters at the **Letter Level** to the complex procedure of reading the vowel letters at the **Syllable Level**. NOBODY on our planet can predictably read an isolated English vowel letter correctly. We must look at the **spelling code** hidden within each syllable. **The spelling code hidden within each one-syllable word tells us how to read all the vowels in THAT word.***

(In Levels 2 and 3: Students will learn that these same spelling/ pronunciation codes are true for vowels in stressed syllables...but not true for vowels in unstressed syllables.)

VOCABULARY

TO THE TEACHER:

Please read and explain this part to the students:

Today you will begin building a VOCABULARY to help you for the rest of your life. Your VOCABULARY = the words that you understand and know how to use correctly. Every day you must work on building your vocabulary.

There are 2 kinds of VOCABULARY that you must build:

1. IN-COMING VOCABULARY

(Vocabulary that you understand: listening, reading)

2. OUT-GOING VOCABULARY

*(Vocabulary that you understand and use:
speaking, writing)*

To build a house of blocks, you must work with the blocks.

To build a VOCABULARY, you must work with NEW words.

To work with NEW words, EVERY DAY, you must:

- 1. Learn how to use the spelling code to read each vowel.*
- 2. Learn to 'sound out' all letters to read each NEW word.*
- 3. Learn to spell the word. Ask What letters did you SEE?
(We can 'sound out' words to read them'. We cannot
'sound out' words to spell them because:
(a) Silent letters cannot be 'sounded out'.
(b) Some sounds have more than one way to be spelled
correctly.)*
- 4. Learn meaning for each word. (Ask or use dictionary.)*
- 5. Use the NEW word in a sentence when speaking or
writing. When students are learning to read, they
should focus on reading skills...Most writing can wait.*

THE RULES FOR READING VOWEL LETTERS:

"You already know how to read all the consonant letters and the consonant blends. Now you will learn to read the vowel letters: a, e, i, o, and u."

WE CANNOT READ A VOWEL LETTER BY ITSELF. EACH LITTLE WORD HAS A SECRET SPELLING CODE HIDDEN INSIDE IT TO TELL YOU HOW TO READ ALL THE VOWEL LETTERS IN THAT WORD.

The first secret code that you must learn to read is called: V-C. It is written: VC CODE. You will sing a little song to help you remember how to read words with the V-C Code. The tune is the same as the tune for the ABC Song. (or: Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star)



♪♪ When V-C is spelled with 'a', /a/ like apple, we will say. ♪♪

Reading/Spelling/Vocabulary Procedure For EACH Word:

1. **Reading:** *Students 'sound out' and read the first word.*
2. **Spelling:** (a) *Teacher asks, "What letters did you SEE?"*
 (b) *Students spell the first word orally.*
 (c) *Students write the first word correctly.*
3. **Vocabulary:** *Teacher and students discuss the meaning of the first word and use it in a spoken sentence.*

PRONUNCIATION STANDARD

In this project, the author arbitrarily made every effort to adhere to American Broadcast English as the current standard for pronunciation.

Even though the spelling/pronunciation codes revealed in this syllabic reading program were developed and established 250 years ago according to pronunciation standards set by British royalty at that time, these spelling/pronunciation codes have stayed amazingly intact throughout the English speaking world regardless of the many dialects, accents, and pronunciation standards of spoken English that have evolved worldwide since that time.

WORD FAMILIES AND FRIENDS

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