

‘Exception Words’– Common words with unusual spellings

There are around 100 common words seen frequently in print with unusual spellings. They can be decoded in the usual way, except for the odd spelling pattern(s). No word is spelled so irregularly that all letter patterns are undecodable. These words are taught within their sound category but are always trickier to learn as the spelling is rare.

A few words belong to small groups. These have been starred* in the chart below.

<p>/a/ plait plaid* salmon</p>	<p>/e/ said any friend leopard bury</p>	<p>/i/ pretty women busy sieve</p>	<p>/o/ because gone cough yacht honest honour</p>	<p>/u/ a address again the does blood flood* thorough</p>
<p>/a-e/ straight break great steak* they grey*</p>	<p>/ee/ people</p>	<p>/i-e/ eye bye dye* I height either aisle island isle</p>	<p>/o-e/ though sew shoulder boulder smoulder soul*</p>	<p>/u-e/ beauty cue feud* queue</p>
<p>/ool (moon) shoe canoe* to do two who whom whose move prove* through</p>	<p>/ool(book) should would could* wolf</p>	<p>/owl bough drought</p>	<p>/arl/ are laugh aunt heart hearth* clerk</p>	<p>/er/ were centre acre metre* leisure measure pleasure treasure*</p>
<p>/aw/ broad abroad* door floor poor moor*</p>	<p>/air/ their there where* they're scarce</p>	<p>/h/ who whom</p>	<p>/w/ one once</p>	<p>/v/ of</p>

The list of exception words is taken from Diane McGuinness, Early Reading Instruction, MIT 2004, p58.

Useful ‘Whole Words’

These words are printed in italics on the charts or bold on the worksheets; the only words that may be taught as ‘whole words’ are shown below:

the one once two who are eye of here

Even they are taught within their sound category, as all words can be decoded:

/w/ one, once /oo/ otwo, owho /i-e/ eye /ear/ ehere
/t/ two /h/ hwho /v/ vof

‘High Frequency’ words within SRS

Exception words raises the question of the 300+ ‘high frequency’ words often taught in random order as ‘sight’ words over a three – four year period in school. ‘High frequency’ words are not the same as exception words. ‘High frequency’ words are included within the SRS programme but under the corresponding sound category and can be easily taught during the first years of learning to read - or at ‘Catch-up’ in a few months. These words do not cause any problems if the logic of the Sound Reading System approach is maintained.

‘Sight words’ imposed as such, undo the ‘synthetic phonic’ approach detailed below: sound + sound + sound = word. They also create memory stress for some children and the needless confusion of muddling the shape of one word with another. Teachers will recognise this when a child confuses words such as: ‘of’ ‘off’ ‘from’ ‘for’ or ‘this’ ‘that’ ‘there’ or ‘where’ ‘what’ ‘when’ etc.

Here are a few examples of ‘high frequency’ or ‘sight words’ and how they are included in a sound category within the SRS programme.

said again = sound /e/

we she he see been tree three these = sound /ee/

play day way may came made name take they = sound /a-e/

The Sound Reading System teaches the learner to recognise the multiple spellings for a sound through interactive, multi-sensory activities that support the memory:

*“The brain cannot cope with randomness...
and very little active memorisation is necessary when learning
is based on exposure to predictable patterns.”*

Diane McGuinness, p59, Early Reading Instruction, MIT Press 2004.

Spelling Rules

English spelling conforms to spelling patterns and tendencies rather than rules. Spelling ‘rules’ only stand up for part of the time, therefore they are not rules. **“Children cannot remember rules, much less apply them”** (Diane McGuinness, p.44 Early Reading Instruction, MIT Press 2004). If children are taught to notice these patterns and tendencies from the outset, and are able to compare them, they will also notice the ‘odd ones out’. It is worth remembering that there are only 44 sounds that have around 176 common spellings: this accounts for the code that needs to be taught within a logical and systematic framework. Many children have struggled to memorise the three hundred or so random ‘high frequency’ words, also known as ‘sight’ words. This struggle has stood in their way and they have not learnt to read easily.

Synthetic Phonics

SRS falls into the ‘synthetic phonics’ category of teaching reading. ‘Synthetic phonics’ simply means that we must account for each sound in a word and to synthesise, blend or push together the sounds to make a whole word. The learner needs to be taught the spellings that represent the sounds. It is diametrically opposite to asking children to recognise ‘whole’ words and memorise them. Instead children learn the code and apply it, using the skills of segmenting and blending. This is also known as the ‘simple view’ of reading, the ability to decode.

Diane McGuinness used the term ‘**linguistic phonics**’ to emphasise the complete nature of the spelling code. A code that represents the spoken sounds of English.