



Strategies for learning words

Learning Words 1

(including revision of Phase 5c)

Objectives:

To be able to spell words containing:

- The /dʒ/ sound spelt as ge and dge at the end of words, and sometimes spelt as g elsewhere in words before e, i and y
- The /s/ sound spelt c before e, i and y
- The /n/ sound spelt kn and (less often) gn at the beginning of words
- The /r/ sound spelt wr at the beginning of words
- The /aɪ/ sound spelt -y at the end of words
- The /i:/ sound spelt ey
- The /ɔ:/ sound spelt a before l and ll

Subject knowledge / Conventions

Strategies for learning words

There are a wide range of strategies that different people use to learn how to spell words. Children can't be expected to know strategies for learning words explicitly unless they are taught how to. This unit aims to introduce a selection of strategies. Children need to be constantly encouraged to reflect on which strategies work best for particular words and which strategies work best for them personally. Most letters in most words can be worked out simply using phonics and so don't need to be learned. Strategies can therefore focus on learning the unexpected bit(s) in the word.

Revision of specific spelling patterns already introduced in Phase 5c

- The /r/ sound spelt **wr** at the beginning of words
- The /n/ sound spelt **kn** and **gn** at the beginning of words

These spelling patterns are now digraphs but in the past each letter was pronounced individually.

- The /aɪ/ sound spelt **y** at the end of words **try, fly, cry**
- The /i:/ sound spelt **ey** – **key, monkey, trolley**
- The /s/ sound spelt **c** before **e, i** and **y** – Using **c** to represent /s/ largely came from French.

After the Norman invasion in 1066, the job of writing important English manuscripts (including the Domesday Book) was given to French scribes. There was a lot of variation in the language already at that point and in trying to make sense of it, the French scribes had a tendency to use French graphemes e.g. **c** for /s/

- The /dʒ/ sound spelt as **ge** and **dge** at the end of words, and sometimes spelt as **g** elsewhere in words before **e, i** and **y**, **dge** is usually used after a short vowel sound, **ge** tends to be used after a long vowel sound (or after a short vowel sound and a consonant).

NB. **ge** is also found in longer words ending in the letter string **age** e.g. village, package, baggage etc. The ending **age** is French in origin and therefore at one point these words may well have been pronounced with a long vowel sound (as they are if you try pronouncing them with a French accent).

- The /ɔ:/ sound spelt **a** before **l** and **ll** – **walk, talk, fall, ball**. The **l** used to be pronounced in words like walk and talk

- The /z/ sound spelt **s** – **treasure, pleasure, television, vision, revision, usual, unusual**, This is an unusual phoneme and mostly occurs in the letter strings **sure, sion** and **sual**
NB. **sure** and **sion** endings are tackled again in the Y3/4 objectives.

- The /ʌ/ sound spelt **o** **mother, worry, love, some**

Some of these examples came about because of difficulties in reading medieval handwriting. The letter **u** was made up of two short vertical strokes called minims. It became hard to read when **u** was next to another letter that was also made of two or three minims e.g. **m, n, v, w**. To make it easier to read, scribes swapped the **u** for an **o** (which was more of a diamond shape). Other words just happened to originate from a word spelt with **o**.

Children should already be able to:

- Read words containing graphemes that can have alternative pronunciations (as in Phase 5b)
- Segment words, including Phase 5 words
- Distinguish between vowel and consonant phonemes
- Know the names of all the letters in the alphabet (not in order)

Revisit, assess and adapt – suggested activities

Give children 5 words each that they can't already spell. Tell them they have 10 minutes to learn how to spell them. Ensure they have access to paper, pens/pencils, whiteboards, scissors, glue, coloured pencils etc but try not to imply that they should use anything in particular. Stand back and watch what different children do. What strategies do they know? Which are most popular? Are they using strategies for 'learning' how to spell the word or do they focus on 'rehearsing' straight away?

Ask children what strategies they already know for learning how to spell unfamiliar words and which strategies they like the best. Begin to build up a list of possible strategies.

Letter name assessment (could be tackled in a handwriting session and used to assess letter formation at the same time). Say the name of each of the letters of the alphabet (in a muddled up order) and ask children to write the small case letter and upper case letter. Before you start, ask children to listen out for any letters that are vowels and to put a star next to the vowel letters. At the end discuss any letter names that proved tricky to remember. Make a note of any that need more rehearsal.

Play some Phase 5b games looking at the graphemes **ey, c, g** and **y** PhonicsPlay subscribers could use [Acorn Adventures](#) or [Cheeky Chimps](#) from phonicsplay.co.uk.

Rehearse the ability to distinguish between long and short vowel phonemes.

[Long or Short](#)

Informal white board tests of a selection of Phase 5c words and HFW that contain the spelling patterns to be tackled in this unit. **my, by, fly, apply, monkey, trolley, cell, acid, ginger, magic, huge, bridge, walk, ball, all, vision, usual, some, come.**

Supporting and extending



To support – look back to
Phase 5c

To extend – look ahead to
Learning Words 2



Teach & Practise – suggested activities

The following activities introduce ways to learn to spell words. Children will also need to rehearse these words to have the best chances of retaining them. At regular intervals, teach children new rehearsal games and activities. See the rehearsal games section of the website for ideas. Once children know how to play a selection of these games, they can then be easily used in any unit with any words.

Learn the word strategy – Spelling speaking – speaking a word as it is spelt - kn/gn/wr/

Look at a selection of words with unsounded consonants **write, wrench, wrong, wrap, wreck, knot, knee, knit, knight, knife, gnome, gnat, gnashed, gnarled, gnaw**. Rehearse reading these words by soundtalking and blending and confirming that children know what each word means. Help children identify that **wr, kn** and **gn** are digraphs (one sound represented by two letters). Share with children that in the distant past, each of the letters would have been pronounced. Pretend to travel back in a time machine and practise saying these words by pronouncing the tricky bits as they are spelt.

[Strategy Shop – Spelling speaking](#)
[Printable flashcards available](#)

Learn the word strategy – Tricky bits (Colours)

Recap the best guesses for spelling the /igh/ phoneme. Recall that the best guess for spelling /igh/ at the end of a word is **igh**. However, there are some very common words that use the

spelling **y**. We need to find ways to teach ourselves to remember that these words need the **y** spelling.

Look at **try, fly, cry, by, spy, why, my, apply, shy, sky**. Clarify that the meaning of all these words is known. Explain that we want to train our brain to remember that these words end in **y** and that we are all going to make posters where we make the **y** stand out as much as possible by writing the rest of word in one colour and using a different colour for the **y**. We could make it stand out even more by making it bigger, bolder, using bubble writing etc etc. Challenge the children to make the **y** stand out in such a memorable way that they never forget that these words contain a **y**.

[Strategy Shop - Tricky bits](#)

[Printable flashcards available](#)

Learn the word strategy – [Words within words / Visual imagery](#)

Recap the best guesses for spelling the **/ee/** phoneme. [Alternative Spellings /ee/](#) from [phonicsplay.co.uk](#). Recall that the best guess for spelling **/ee/** at the end of a word is **y**. However, there are some words that have the spelling **ey**.

Look at **monkey, key, trolley, turkey, chimney, donkey, jockey, jersey, hockey, honey**.

Clarify the meaning of these. Discuss the fact that we could use the colour method again for all these words to really draw our attention to the **ey** spelling in these words. Model using colour to make **ey** really stand out on each word. Explain though, that there are some other methods that can be used for some of these words. Ask children to look for words within words. Hopefully, children will spot that the word **key** crops up in quite a few of these words. Encourage children to write the words containing **key** and draw a colourful box around the **key** part of the word to highlight it. Explain that these words also give us the possibility to use pictures to help us remember. Ask children to draw pictures to help them remember to use the spelling pattern **key** in each of the words it is within – a jockey/monkey/donkey/turkey with a huge key in his/her hand/mouth/beak or a keyring with a key and a hockey stick attached to it.

[Strategy Shop - Words within words](#)

[Printable flashcards available](#)

Learn the word strategy – [Word shapes](#)

Look at the words **walk, talk, chalk, stalk, small, fall, ball, call, wall, tall**. Soundtalk and blend the words and clarify that all children know what each word means. Ask children to notice that the letter **a** is representing the **/or/** phoneme. Remind children that there are a number of graphemes for the **/or/** phoneme **ough, oor, ore, or, aw, our, au** and no best guess. Ask children what letter (or letters) always follow(s) the **a**. Ask children if there is anything that they notice about the shape of this spelling pattern. Help them identify that there is a very distinctive 'one short then two tall' letter shape at the end of these words which is a rarely occurring shape in words containing the **/or/** phoneme. Ask children to pick one of the words we have looked at (without telling their partner which word they have chosen) and draw boxes relating to the letter shapes (a square for a short letter, a tall thin rectangle sticking up above the squares for a letter with an ascender, a tall thin rectangle sticking down below the bottom of the squares for a letter with a descender). Swap whiteboards with a partner and try to guess the letters and fit them into the boxes based on shape. Repeat.

[Strategy Shop - Word shapes](#)

[Printable flashcards available](#)

Learn the word strategy – [Sorting games / Vowel sounds](#)

(identifying long and short vowel sounds will be a strategy used in almost every unit)

Play **Long and Short**.

Look at a selection of one syllable words ending with **ge** or **dge**. Soundtalk and blend to show that they are pronounced in the same way. Clarify that all children know what each word means. Write the column headings **ge** and **dge** and use a sorting game to sort the words by their spellings. Ask children to look closely at the words in each list and try to identify something that distinguishes between the lists (other than the **d**). Encourage them to look at the letters and also to think about the sounds in the words. Help children to establish that the words ending in **ge** usually contain long vowel sounds whilst those ending in **dge** contain short vowel sounds. In other words, the short vowel needs to be followed by two consonant letters. This is a pattern that will crop up in many different spelling conventions that the children will encounter over the next few years.

Model attempting to spell one of these words. Think aloud to show that you are listening carefully to the vowel sound to determine how to spell the word ending.

Strategy Shop – Pattern hunting (ge & dge)

Printable flashcards, word cards and sorting grids available

Learn the word strategy – **Sorting games / Pattern spotting**

Look at the letter **c** and ask children what the two main pronunciations are for this grapheme – **/c/** as in **cat** or **/s/** as in **acid**. There are other pronunciations but they are very rare and tend to be borrowed from other languages. Give children a selection of words containing both of these pronunciations. Remind children that if they don't know what any of the words mean they should ask someone else. Remind them that if they don't know what the word means, there are almost certainly other people who don't either (or who think they do but actually are mistaken). Play a sorting game with the cards. Look at the resulting lists of words and challenge children to find what words in each list have in common. Give clues if necessary. Establish that the pronunciation is **/s/** when the next letter is either **e, i** or **y**.

Carry out the same investigation but this time using words containing **g** – pronounced **/g/** as in **get** or **/dʒ/** as in **giraffe**. When children have reached their conclusions, help them compare what they found about **g** with what they found about **c**.

Discuss the fact that trying to recall this rule in words isn't especially easy. It usually involves a few moments of head scratching and figuring out and trying to remember which vowels it is that are involved. Our aim isn't really to learn to say this rule out loud, it is to 'know' this rule without really thinking about it. By repeatedly having a go at spelling these words, we can train our brains up to be familiar with words spelt **ci, ce, cy** and **gi, ge, gy**. They will then become automatic whilst incorrectly spelt words will just look and feel wrong to us. Therefore it is, as always, important to play lots of rehearsal games with words containing **c** pronounced **/s/** and **g** pronounced **/dʒ/**.

Strategy Shop – Pattern hunting (soft c and soft g)

Printable flashcards, word cards and sorting grids available

Learn the word strategy – **Letter strings**

Look at the words **vision, television, visual, usual, unusual, usually, treasure, pleasure, measure**. Ask children to group the words together by looking for similarities. Discuss the fact that visual could be grouped with vision, television or it could be grouped with usual and unusual into one of two groups – ask children to decide which group makes most sense to them. Ask children to colour code the bit of the word that is similar for each group and discuss the fact

that, by learning these 3 patterns they can save themselves from having to learn all 9 words individually.

[Strategy Shop - Letter strings](#)

[Printable flashcards and sorting word cards available](#)

Learn the word strategy – Movement (handwriting) and Word origins

Explain that some unusual spelling patterns have come about for interesting historical reasons.

Medieval scribes used a cursive handwriting style. In this cursive handwriting style, quite a few letters were made up of short straight lines (**i** was one line – it didn't have a dot, **n**, **v** and **u** were made up of two short, straight, vertical lines, **m** and **w** were made up of three). When these letters were next to each other, it was hard to read the writing. It just looked like lots of short straight lines. Therefore scribes started to avoid using the letter **u** when it would be near letters like **n**, **v**, **m** or **w**. Instead they used the letter **o** which was easier to read as it looked like a diamond shape. While the spelling changed, the pronunciation didn't.

Some other words just happened to come about from words that were originally spelt with an **o**.

Ask children to read the words **other, mother, brother, another, money, worry, among, love, above, some, come, month**.

Then look at the words one at a time. Hide the word, try writing it on a whiteboard, reveal the original word and check to see that the word on the whiteboard is correct.

Explain that we can use handwriting to help us learn to remember spellings by remembering the movements we make with our hands. Ask the children to concentrate on the feel of the words as they write them. Are the movements long or short, straight or curved, wide or narrow? Write each word several times concentrating on the feel of the word. In particular concentrate on the straight feel of the up and down strokes and the curved feel of the letter '**o**'. Try asking the children to make sound effects to go with the different kinds of strokes. Maybe a short creaking noise for a short vertical stroke or a longer creak for a longer vertical stroke and a 'whee' sound for curve – to accentuate the differences between the different strokes.

[Strategy Shop - History & Movement](#)

[Printable flashcards available](#)

Apply and assess – suggested activities

Show children a small selection of words that they are likely to be unfamiliar with but that are related to curriculum areas that they are currently working on so that they are likely to need to use the words within the next week. Discuss meaning. Ask the children to list as many word learning strategies as they can. Then, discuss with a partner, which of these are likely to be useful strategies for these words, and why. Also ask which strategies children think will work best to help them learn these words and also what will help them to rehearse the words. Make available as many possible resources as you can and ask children to learn these words in whichever way they feel will work best for them. Expect and encourage some very creative solutions – remind the children though that the proof of whether their methods worked will be how successfully they tackle these words in their independent writing.

Carry out informal whiteboard tests (or paper tests if you want to analyse in depth) on a selection of words from this unit. Give instant feedback and ask children to mark each letter in the word and make corrections if necessary. If there are words that are still proving tricky ask children to reflect on why. Was the strategy they used to learn the word a bad choice or was more time needed playing rehearsal games. Challenge children to make a plan for how to go forward and really learn that word (revisit these words in a test once children have had an opportunity to relearn them).

If you send lists of spelling words home – as opposed to giving children homework that involves exploring and investigating spelling patterns – encourage children to think hard about how best to learn their spellings.

Applying across the curriculum

See the section of the website on applying across the curriculum for ideas. Try to build in lots of modelling, planned opportunities and support in the learning environment for applying across the curriculum. Without this, it is easy for children to simply forget what they have learned in spelling sessions.