

# Debbie Hepplewhite's simple to complex Alphabetic Code overview

- Slash marks /ai/ denote *units of sound* (phonemes or combined phonemes). *Letters and letter groups* (graphemes) appear in single apostrophes 'ay'.
- References to short vowel sounds relate to the sounds as in 'apple, egg, insect, octopus, umbrella' denoted as: /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/ - said in a 'staccato' manner - as opposed to references to the long vowel sounds commonly denoted as: /ai/, /ee/, /igh/, /oa/, /yoo/ as in 'aid, eel, night, oak, statue'.

## Key to the 12 units of Debbie's online synthetic phonics programme, Phonics International:

units 1-5	simple code with some spelling alternatives	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th		
6-12	/air/, /eer/, /zh/, split digraphs, complex code	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th

simple code		complex code						notes		
units of sound (phonemes and combined phonemes)	graphemes: spelling variations which ARE CODE FOR the 44+ phonemes and combined phonemes such as /k+s/ and /y+oo/ and key words								Debbie's programme introduces a simple code of at least one letter/s-sound correspondence for each of the 44+ sounds of speech of the English language. It then expands to teach further spellings and their pronunciation variations.	
/s/	s snake	-ss glass	-ce palace	-se house	ce cents	ci certain	cy city	sc scissors	-st- castle	
					bicycle	circle	lacy	ps pseudonym		
/a/	a apple									
/t/	t tent	-tt letter	-ed skipped							
/i/	i insect	*-y sunny	-y cymbals	*-ey monkey	*-ie movie					

/p/	p pan	-pp puppet							
/n/	n net	-nn bonnet	kn knot	gn gnome	-ine engine				
/k/	k kit	c cat	-ck duck	ch chameleon	qu bouquet	que plaque			
/e/	e egg	-ea head	-ai said						
/h/	h hat	wh who							
/r/	r rat	-rr arrow	wr write	rh rhino					
/m/	m map	-mm hammer	-mb thumb	-mn column	-me welcome				
/d/	d dig	-dd puddle	-ed rained						
/g/	g girl	-gg juggle	gu guitar	gh ghost	-gue catalogue				

/o/	o octopus	wa watch	qua qualify	alt salt					
/u/	u umbrella	o son	-ou touch	ough thorough					
/l/	l ladder	-ll shell							
schwa /ul/		-le kettle	-il pencil	-al hospital	-el camel				
/f/	f feather	-ff cliff	ph photo	-gh laugh					
/b/	b bat	-bb rabbit	bu building						
/j/	j jug	-ge cabbage	ge gi gy gerbil giraffe gymnast	-dge fridge					
/y/	y yawn								

<b>/ai/</b>	ai aid	-ay tray	a table	-ae sundae	a-e cakes	-ey prey	eigh eight	-ea break	
<b>/w/</b>	w web	wh wheel							
<b>/oa/</b>	oa oak	ow bow	o yo-yo	-oe oboe	o-e rope	ough dough	-eau plateau		
<b>/igh/</b>	-igh night	-ie tie	i behind	-y shy	i-e bike	ei eider			
<b>/ee/</b>	ee eel	ea eat	e emu	* -y sunny	e-e concrete	-ey key *monkey	-ie chief *movie	-ine sardines	
<b>/or/</b> or <b>/aw/</b> dependent on regional and national accents	or fork	aw dawn	au sauce	-al chalk	oar oars	-oor door	ore snore	-our four	
		war warm	quar quarter	augh caught	ough thought				
<b>/z/</b>	z zebra	-zz jazz	-s fries	-se cheese	-ze breeze	x xylophone			
<b>/ng/</b>	-n gong	-n jungle		/ngk/	-nk ink	-nc uncle			

/v/	v violin	-ve dove							
short /oo/	oo book	oul should	-u push						
long /oo/	oo moon	-ue blue	u-e flute	-ew crew	-ui fruit	-ou soup	-o move	ough through	
/ks/	-x fox	-ks books	-cks ducks	-kes cakes		/gz/ exam	-x exam	-ggs eggs	
/ch/	ch chairs	-tch patch				/chu/ schwa		-ture picture	
/sh/	sh sheep	ch chef	-ti station	-ci magician	-ssi mission				
unvoiced /th/	th thistle								
voiced /th/	th there								

/k+w/	qu queen								
/ou/	ou ouch	ow owl	ough plough						
/oi/	oi ointment	oy toy							
/y+oo/	-ue statue	u unicorn	u-e tube	ew new	eu deuce				
/er/	er mermaid	ir birthday	ur nurse	ear earth	wor world	schwa /er/ or /u/ mixer	-our humour	-er theatre	
/ar/	ar artist	alm palm	alf half	alv calves	-a father				
/air/	air hair	-are hare	-ear bear	-ere where					
/eer/	eer deer	ear ears	-ere adhere	-ier cashier					
/zh/	-si television	-s treasure	-z azure	g courgette	-ge collage	note: *-y, *-ey, *-ie are pronounced between /i/ and /ee/ when these graphemes are word-endings so they appear in both /i/ and /ee/ rows.			

## The complexities of the English Alphabetic Code include:

1. one sound (phoneme) can be represented by one, two, three or four letters: e.g. **k**, **sh**, **igh**, **eigh**
2. one sound can be represented by different spellings (graphemes): e.g. /oa/ is represented by: **o**, **oa**, **ow**, **oe**, **o-e**, **eau**, **ough**
3. one spelling can represent multiple sounds: e.g. '**ough**': /oa/ **though**, /or/ **thought**, /oo/ **through**, /ou/ **plough**, /u/ **thorough**

These complexities are taught explicitly and the Alphabetic Code is taught systematically with Debbie's online *Phonics International* programme:

## General advice for teaching the Alphabetic Code:

- Choose an **order of introduction** of letter/s-sound correspondences to create a version of a **simple code**. (See left-hand column for Debbie's version). Teach around 2 - 5 correspondences per week. Provide a **cumulative word bank** (for the simple code) for modelling **blending** all-through-the-word for reading, and **segmenting** all-through-the-spoken-word for spelling. The 'simple code', in effect, is part of the complex English code but it is just a 'first step' of introducing the complexities of the English writing system for reading and spelling based on the 44+ phonemes (smallest identifiable sounds of speech).
- Keep the simple code revised and begin to introduce **spelling and pronunciation variations** of the complex code at a rate appropriate to the age and stage of the learner. With effective direct teaching, the rate of learning can be surprisingly fast-paced but use professional judgement as to the pace.
- The Alphabetic Code is not an 'exact science' and **accents need to be taken into account** at all times along with the notion of 'tweaking pronunciations' when decoding to reach the regional or preferred pronunciation of the target word. Simply explain the concept of 'accents' to the learners.
- Tweaking, or modifying, pronunciations also helps to **raise awareness of the 'schwa effect'** (unstressed syllables) whereby in reality a sound close to /u/ is the spoken translation of the written code in words such as 'sofa' (sofu), 'faster' (fastu), 'little' (littul), 'around' (uround). The reverse of this is the need to be aware of the spelling possibilities when segmenting spoken words for writing - particularly with regard to the schwa effect. The ability to spell accurately relies on a growing knowledge of **word associations** (that is, **spelling word banks** - noting words with the same spelling and sound variations) and this knowledge takes much longer to acquire than learning to decode well for reading. Always emphasise the **relationship between sounds and graphemes** when teaching spelling *rather than* relying on visual memory of **letter order**. Letter *names* are **used only to relay** an accurate spelling from one person to another and this is *not the actual spelling skill* of most literate adults. Even adults spell with a *sound-to-print* process (identifying the sounds all-through-the-spoken-word) followed by choosing correct graphemes from beginning to end for the specific word. Tell learners explicitly that phonics for reading and for spelling are adult skills, especially for new and difficult words. *Phonics is for adults* and not just for teaching beginners or infants.