



# High Frequency Words in Sounds-Write

The term 'common exception words' is not used in the Sounds-Write manual, but it is used by the Department for Education (DfE). Common exception words, as exemplified in the National Curriculum for Years 1 and 2 and referred to in the Reading Framework, are **words that contain code which has not yet been taught**. That is how we like to refer to them in Sounds-Write, as we think the term 'common exception word' is rather opaque.

High frequency words are simply the most frequently used words and are sometimes listed as the first 100, 200 or 300 high frequency words (for example, in *Letters and Sounds* (2007)). Many high frequency words are easily decodable and 32 of the first 100 words in the original *Letters and Sounds* list can be read by the end of the Initial Code. By the end of the Extended Code Unit 26, students will have been taught the code needed to read 233 words from the list of 300 high frequency words.

It is important that these are not considered synonymous with 'sight words' (i.e., words that may in the past have been given to students to memorise by sight rather than to read by decoding).

'Children should not be asked to learn lists of high frequency words.'

From the beginning, our focus is on transparency: that is to say that we teach students a transparent system within which if they can read a word, they can spell it. Nonetheless, the focus on transparency from the beginning can initially restrict students' ability to access text because there are a number of essential single-syllable words whose spelling at this early stage in their learning is not transparent to them. Words such as 'is', 'of' and 'the', for example, cannot easily be avoided when learning to read and write.

Sounds-Write provides a very clear rationale for how teachers and students should approach words containing sound-spelling correspondences not yet taught. When such words are encountered in text, or in dictation, the teacher should take responsibility for these words and introduce them in the manner outlined in the section 'Reading and writing in text' in the 'Introduction to the Initial Code' in the manual. This approach aligns with the National Curriculum which states that 'teachers should still draw pupils' attention to GPCs that do and do not fit in with what has been taught so far' in

terms of spelling.

Children's own names often contain sound-spelling correspondences that have not yet been taught and the same approach should be taken when teaching students to read and spell their own name and those of their peers and school staff.

## Initial Code

By the end of the **Initial Code** students will be able to read thirty-two of the first 100 high-frequency words (see below) shown in the list by decoding them. Until they are covered in the programme, whenever they appear in text, tell the students what sound(s) the unknown spelling(s) represent(s) to allow them to decode the word for themselves. For example, if a student, working in the Initial Code at around Unit 8, is trying to read the word 'back' but hasn't yet been introduced to the spelling alternative < ck > for /k/, the teacher runs their pencil under the < ck > and says, "This is one sound. It's /k/. Say /k/ here."

By following the Sounds-Write programme sequentially all the way through the Initial Code it is possible to have students reading any of the thirty-two words below:

2* <b>and</b> VCC U8	6 <b>in</b> VC U2	10 <b>it</b> VC U1	14 <b>on</b> VC U2
18 <b>at</b> VC U1	20 <b>but</b> CVC U5	21 <b>that</b> CVC U11	22 <b>with</b> CVC U11
25 <b>can</b> CVC U3	27 <b>up</b> VC U5	28 <b>had</b> CVC U4	34 <b>this</b> CVC U11
36 <b>went</b> CVCC U8	41 <b>not</b> CVC U2	42 <b>then</b> CVC U11	48 <b>mum</b> CVC U5
50 <b>them</b> CVC U11	54 <b>dad</b> CVC U4	55 <b>big</b> CVC U3	56 <b>when</b> CVC U11
57 <b>it's</b> VCC U8	64 <b>will</b> CVC U7	66 <b>back</b> CVC U11	67 <b>from</b> CCVC U9
69 <b>him</b> CVC U3	71 <b>get</b> CVC U4	72 <b>just</b> CVCC U8	77 <b>got</b> CVC U3
91 <b>if</b> VC U4	92 <b>help</b> CVCC U8	96 <b>off</b> VC U7	100 <b>an</b> VC U2

*\*The number preceding the words in the list refers to place in which the word appears in the list of 100 high- frequency words in Letters and Sounds. C = consonant, V = vowel and U = Unit in the Sounds-Write programme.*

However, as suggested above, there are words, such as 'the', 'a', 'is', and 'some' that will need to be introduced *before* they are taught formally within the programme. Whether reading or writing these words, we would recommend that you follow the advice contained

in the 'Introduction to the Initial Code' within the manual in the section entitled 'Reading and writing in text'.

By following the Sounds-Write programme sequentially through the Initial Code it is possible to have pupils reading a further 62 words in the list of the next 200 words in order of frequency:

did	man	think	didn't
ran	cat	long	things
has	yes	dog	well
us	fox	stop	must
red	next	lots	that's
fish	bed	still	king
fast (N)**	let's	much	last (N)
am	gran	tell	fun
sat	its	let	which
run	hat	bad	top
fell	box	grandad	end
than	best	hot	sun
<b>across***</b>	wind	wish	eggs
thing	stopped	miss	lived
duck	rabbit	along	plants
dragon	children		

\*\* N or S in parentheses refer (broadly speaking) to northern and southern accents of English.

\*\*\* Letters in bold (e.g., 'across') are schwas.

We expect that most Reception classes will have covered Units 1-11 of the Initial Code by around Easter and that, by the end of the Summer term, the bridging unit will also be covered.

## The Extended Code

By the end of Y1, if teachers are following our recommendations, students should have covered the first 25 units of the Extended Code. In so doing, they will have been taught in the context of sounds and spellings another 133 high-frequency words in the list of 300 high frequency words. This brings the total of high frequency words to just over 230 words (i.e., over seventy-five percent of the three hundred words listed in *Letters and Sounds (2007)*).

Until they are covered in the programme, whenever these spellings appear in text, tell the students what sound(s) the unknown spelling(s) represent(s) to allow them to decode the word for themselves.

Included in the lists are words containing very infrequent spellings. For example, < oh > is a spelling alternative for /oe/ and < eo > in 'people' is a spelling alternative for the sound /ee/, but they are not common spellings and can mostly be taught as they arise in the context of everyday reading and writing.

What we are left with then are 'More Spellings' of some of the vowels and consonants, all of which will be taught in the Sounds-Write programme by the end of Y2.

NB. All the words in the following charts which have been 'greyed out' are words that appear in the first list of '100 high frequency words' in *Letters and Sounds*. All the rest appear in the subsequent list of the 'Next 200 common words'.

## Extended Code

<u>Unit 2</u>	<u>Unit 3</u>		<u>Unit 5</u>	<u>Unit 6</u>	<u>Unit 7</u>	<u>Unit 8</u>	<u>Unit 10</u>	<u>Unit 11</u>
/ae/	/ee/		/oe/	/er/	/e/	/ow/	m/oo/n	/ie/
< ey >	< ee >		< o >	< er >	< e >	< ow >	< o >	< i >
< a- e >	< e >		< o-e >	< ir >	< ai >	< ou >	< ou >	< y >
< ay >	< y >		< o >	< or >	< ea >		< oo >	< i-e >
< ea >	< ey >		< oh >	< ere >	< a >			< igh >
	< eo >		< ow >		< ie >			< eye >
	< oa >							
they	he	keep	so	her	said	out	to	I
came	she	even	go	were	again	down	you	my
day	we	before	no	over	head	now	do	like
made	be	key	don't	after	many	about	into	by
make	me	sleep	oh	never	any	house	too	time
away	see	feet	old	first	friends	how	school	I'm
play	very	queen	going	work		our	who	find
take	people	each	home	different		round	food	I'll
way	eat	green	know	girl		shouted	soon	right
may	tree	trees	only	under		mouse	room	night
say	been	tea	told	better		around		I've
great	sea	floppy	clothes	ever				why
	these	really	boat	birds				cried
	began	please	window	river				inside
	need	he's	snow					eyes
	three	we're	most					white
			cold					liked
			grow					giant
								fly

<u>Unit 12</u>	<u>Unit 14</u>	<u>Unit 16</u>	<u>Unit 18</u>	<u>Unit 19</u>	<u>Unit 20</u>	<u>Unit 21</u>	<u>Unit 23</u>
b/oo/k < oo > < u > < oul >	/u/ < u > < o >	/s/	/l/ < l > < ll > < le >	/or/ < or > < a > < our > < aw > < oor > < au >	/air/ < ere > < eir > < ear >	/ue/ < ew > < u >	/oy/ < oy >
looked	some	house <small>already in /ow/</small>	little	for	there	new	boy
look	come	mouse <small>already in /ow/</small>		all	their	use	
put	other			your	where		
could	something			called	bear		
good	suddenly			saw	air		
would	another			water	there's		
took	jumped			or			
couldn't	mother			door			
book	coming			small			
looking				because <small>already in /o/</small>			
looks				morning			
pulled				horse			

<u>Unit 24</u>	<u>Unit 25</u>	<u>Unit 27</u>	<u>Unit 28</u>	<u>Unit 29</u>	<u>Unit 30</u>	<u>Unit 32</u>
/ar/ accent dependent < a > < ar > < are > < au >	/o/ < o > < a > < au >	More spellings of /æ/ < a >	/d/	More spellings of /ee/	/i/	More spellings of /oe/
<b>are</b>	<b>was</b>	<b>baby</b>				
<b>asked</b>	<b>what</b>	<b>gave</b>				
<b>can't</b>	<b>want</b>	<b>place</b>				
<b>after</b>	<b>wanted</b>					
<b>car</b>	<b>because</b> already in /or/					
<b>garden</b>						
<b>fast (S)</b>						
<b>laughed</b>						
<b>last (S)</b>						
<b>dark</b>						
<b>hard</b>						
<b>park</b>						

<u>Unit 33</u>	<u>Unit 34</u>	<u>Unit 35</u>	<u>Unit 36</u>	<u>Unit 37</u>	<u>Unit 38</u>	<u>Unit 40</u>
More spellings of  /n/ < kn > < ne >	More spellings of  /er/	More spellings of  /v/ < f > < ve >	More spellings of  m/oo/n < ough >	More spellings of  /j/ < g >	/g/	/f/
<b>know</b> <small>(already in /oe/)</small>		<b>of</b>	<b>through</b>	<b>magic</b>		
<b>gone</b>		<b>have</b>				
		<b>gave</b>				
		<b>live</b>				
		<b>I've</b> <small>already in /ie/</small>				

<u>Unit 42</u>	<u>Unit 43</u>	<u>Unit 44</u>	<u>Unit 45</u>	<u>Unit 46</u>	<u>Unit 47</u>	<u>Unit 48</u>
More spellings of  /m/ < me >	More spellings of  /or/ < ough > < ore >	More spellings of  /h/ < wh >	More spellings of  /k/ < ch >	More spellings of  /r/	More spellings of  /t/	More spellings of  /z/ < s > < se >
<b>some</b>	<b>thought</b>	<b>who</b>	<b>school</b> <small>already in m/oo/n</small>			<b>is</b>
<b>come</b>	<b>more</b>					<b>his</b>
<b>something</b>	<b>before</b> <small>already in /ee/</small>					<b>was</b>
						<b>as</b>
						<b>These</b> <small>already in /ee/</small>
						<b>please</b> <small>already in /ee/</small>
						<b>use</b> <small>already in /ue/</small>



<u>Unit 49</u>	<u>Unit 50</u>
Spellings of  /eer/  < ere >	Spellings of 'schwa' /ə/  (accent dependent)
here	the
	a
	children
	around already in /ow/
	garden already in /ar/
	across
	along
	dragon

## Introducing polysyllabic words

In the list of 300 high-frequency words, there are a small number of polysyllabic words. The most effective way of introducing them is clearly set out in Lessons 11, 12, 13 and 14. In the early stages of reading polysyllabic words, the teacher needs to take responsibility for separating the words into their constituent syllables. Having read the word, the student should then write the word in the prescribed manner. When spelling (writing) polysyllabic words, students need to say them very precisely in their syllables, using their spelling voice, and then to write each syllable sound by sound across the syllable or syllable by syllable, depending on whether they are at the level of Lesson 11/12 or Lesson 13/14.

## Polysyllabic words in the list

Most polysyllabic words in the list are relatively easy to present. There are only three in the first list of 100 high frequency words. They are, in order, 'children', 'about' and 'people', though the first two contain schwas and 'people' contains the highly unusual spelling < eo > for /ee/.

In the list of the next 200 words, probably the most awkward are the following, which have been separated into syllables: e|ve|ry|one, e|ve|ry, di|ffe|rent. The reason for this is because we elide syllables in some words. For example, the word 'different', a three-syllable word, is usually said as 'di | ffrent', a two-syllable.

The word 'every', a three-syllable word, is usually spoken in everyday talk as 'e | vry', a two-syllable word. Although we have no wish to change the way people talk, we do want pupils to be able to spell these words correctly. To do this, they may need to use a spelling voice, as recommended in the section on 'schwas' in the 'Introduction to Polysyllabic Words'. There are also problems with sounds that are elided, such as the /n/ in 'government', the spelling of which is greatly helped by saying it precisely in its syllables: 'go' 'vern' 'ment'

Other examples of problematical words might be 'a|ni|mals' and 'na|rra|tor': the first because there is a hint of a sound between the /m/ and the /l/ (a schwa /ə/); the second because people pronounce words differently. I say 'na|rra|tor' with the stress on the first syllable, thus making the two remaining vowel sounds schwas. Other people have begun to stress the middle syllable and to say 'na|rra|tor', making the first and last vowel sounds schwas. It doesn't matter which is preferred. The point is to make pupils aware of what they say and to say the word precisely in its syllables and to use their spelling voice to remember how to spell the schwa.

Finally, there are in the list of high frequency words a few words which, admittedly, can be troublesome to teach. These are: 'one', 'two', 'mr', 'mrs', 'many', 'any', and 'once'. However, an explanation about why they are written in their present form is often helpful. For example, the word 'mr' is an abbreviation of the word 'mister' and 'mrs' is an abbreviation of the word 'mistress'.

'One' is derived from Old English forms 'en' and 'ane', whose pronunciation, by the fifteenth century, had changed to 'won' but whose spelling was retained. Similarly, the word 'two' derives from the Old English word 'twa': linking it to words such as 'twice', 'twelve' and 'twenty' is likely to help children how to remember the highly unusual < tw > spelling of /t/. The words 'any' and 'many' simply reflect the changes in pronunciation with which the spellings have not caught up.