



Decoding Tips for Parents

5 common word reading errors
and how to help

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Decoding Tips for Parents
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Five Common Word Reading Errors and How to Help

All children benefit from learning how spoken sounds are mapped onto letters as they begin to read. Children who struggle with reading words and spelling, like those with dyslexia, need to be directly taught letter-sound relationships, and they need lots of practice decoding words (using their knowledge of vowels and consonants to pronounce a word) to become skilled readers.

Accurate word reading is a critical step in understanding what is read! Focus on the words being read so you can give support in correcting reading mistakes. Don't encourage your child to use pictures to figure out how to say a word. You can use pictures to confirm words they already read correctly. Don't use "guessing games" to help your child figure out a word. Guessing how to read a word based on pictures or beginning letter-sounds encourages habits that work against skilled reading. Don't use context clues to decode a word. Context can be used to help with the meaning of a word that has already been read correctly.

Listen carefully to the words your child misreads. You may want to jot the word down along with how it was misread. After your child finishes a phrase or sentence, pause and think about how to help your child read missed words correctly.



Here are some common word reading errors and how you can help your child improve decoding skills.

Using this guide

Each type of error will be labeled, and an example of what that particular error sounds like and looks like is given.

Guiding steps are provided to help you give supportive and corrective feedback to your child. These steps help you and your child work together to break apart the word, focus on letter-sounds, and then blend the parts together to read the word smoothly.

This guidance includes prompts you would say to your child, and what your child should say or repeat is noted in blue.

The bottom of each page provides bonus tips with more information about each type of word reading error.

ERROR 1: Guessing a word based on the beginning or ending letter-sounds

Your child guesses a word based on the beginning and/or ending letter-sounds.

Child reads *wait* as *went*.

- Help your child read through the whole word.
- Break the word apart into its individual sounds. /w/ /ā/ /t/
- Emphasize the vowel sound. **Tell your child the two letters *ai* make the one /ā/ sound.**
- Model blending the sounds together with an emphasis on the misread part of the word. /w/ /aaaaaaaa/ /t/
- Read the word again smoothly. **wait**
- Re-read the phrase or sentence that contained the word.

We wait for the bus.

Long and short vowel sounds

Throughout this planning guide, you will see marks on words to help you know how to pronounce them. Some marks are used to denote if a letter corresponds to a long or short vowel sound.

Short Vowel Sounds

A breve is used to indicate when a letter corresponds to a short vowel sound.

păt
fětch
trĭp
cŏt
hŭnch

Long Vowel Sounds

A macron is used to indicate when a letter corresponds to a long vowel sound.

cāke
bē
līne
gō
hūge

ERROR 2: Reads the letter-sounds in a word out of order

Your child reads the letter-sounds in a word out of order.

Child reads *strap* as *taps*.

- Help your child read through the whole word.
- Make sure your child knows the meaning of words that will help them use decoding skills, such as *first*, *last*, *before*, and *after*.
- Ask your child to point to the first letter and say each letter name in the word.
s t r a p
- Ask your child to point again to the first letter, and tell them to read all the way through the word from the first letter-sound to the last. /s/ /t/ /r/ /ă/ /p/
- Model as needed, slowly reading each letter-sound. /s/ /t/ /r/ /ă/ /p/
- Read the word smoothly. **strap**
- Re-read the phrase or sentence that contained the word.

The strap is too loose.

My child mixes up *b* and *d* letter-sounds

Giving ‘tricks’ such as having your child draw a word picture of a bed, imagining a bat and ball, or recalling which letter has a belly or a diaper takes your child out of the reading or writing moment and can add more stress to their working memory load.

Keep your child in the reading moment with an emphasis on the letter-sound relationship.

For the letter *b*, help your child notice that the line comes first in this letter. Ask them to make their mouth into a line by pressing the lips together. This prepares the mouth to make the sound of the letter *b*, /b/. Have your child say the letter name and its sound each time it is corrected.

For the letter *d*, help your child notice that the round part comes first in this letter. Ask them to round their tongue up to the roof of the mouth. This prepares the mouth to make the sound of the letter *d*, /d/. Have your child say the letter name and its sound each time it is corrected.

This takes consistency and many repetitions to correct! Use the same error correction cues every time, and focus on over-correcting one letter-sound before emphasizing the other.

ERROR 3: Gets stuck on vowel sounds

Your child gets stuck on vowel sounds.

Child reads *coin* as *cone*.

- Reinforce the parts of the word they read correctly. **Yes, the c says /k/ and the n says /n/**
- Model the vowel sound (*oi* says /oy/). **The two letters *oi* make the sound /oy/.**
- Have your child name the letters and say the sound. ***oi* says /oy/**
- Ask your child to sound out the whole word and reblend. **/k/ /oy/ /n/, *coin***
- Re-read the phrase or sentence that contained the word.

The old *coin* was rusty.

Vowel patterns can be tricky

When a vowel sound is produced in speech, the chin drops as air flows from the mouth. Try it with the long and short sounds for vowel letters *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*: feel your chin drop as you make these sounds.

Every spoken syllable has a vowel sound. Vowel sounds can be represented in writing by one or more letters. Vowel teams can be tricky because two or more letters can make one sound (*ai* = /ā/), or they can combine to make an unexpected sound (*au* = /aw/, *ou* = /ow/). Children need to be taught these patterns directly, and then they get lots of practice reading them in words and sentences.

Here are some common vowel teams and example words for the sounds they make:

ai	<i>rain</i>	oa	<i>boat</i>
au	<i>launch</i>	oi	<i>join</i>
aw	<i>saw</i>	oo	<i>book / moon</i>
ay	<i>day</i>	ou	<i>out / soup</i>
ea	<i>each / bread</i>	ow	<i>cow / grow</i>
ee	<i>feet</i>	oy	<i>boy</i>
ew	<i>new</i>	ur	<i>turn</i>
igh	<i>sight</i>		

ERROR 4: Mixes up short, high-frequency words

Your child mixes up short, high-frequency words.

Child reads *from* as *for*.

- Your child should use decoding skills on all words, even words they may have been taught to recognize as whole words (often referred to as “sight” words).
- Reinforce the parts of the word that make their expected sounds. **The f says /f/, the r says /r/, the m says /m/**
- Tell your child the unexpected sound if it is an irregular word. **The o in the word *from* makes the /ü/ sound.**
- Ask your child to sound out the word and reblend. **/f/ /r/ /ü/ /m/, *from***
- These high-frequency words require lots of practice and repetition. Re-read them as single words (***from***), as parts of phrases (***from the store***), and in sentences (***He got a drink from the store.***)

High-frequency word reading is important

High-frequency words (often called sight words) are taught because children see these words a lot when they read. Reading these words correctly and quickly helps your child become a fluent reader, and it supports their understanding of what they are reading. Children may be taught to memorize these as whole words instead of using their letter-sounds to read them, but that is not the best way to read these words. Many of these words have regular letter-sound patterns and can be sounded out like any other word (after your child has learned each pattern). If the words are not regular, there’s usually only one letter-sound that needs to be explained and memorized.

The following are some high-frequency words divided into two lists: those that can be fully sounded out and those that have an irregular pattern exception.

Regular Words			Exception Words	
and	he	out	could	they
at	her	she	from	to
am	him	that	have	was
be	in	then	of	what
but	it	up	one	
for	little	with	said	
go	look	you	their	
had	not			

ERROR 5: Misreads Long Words

Your child misreads long words.

Child reads *athletic* as *athlick*.

- Help your child break the word into its parts (syllables). **ath let ic**
- Read through each syllable separately as needed. **The first syllable is /ă/ /th/, ath. The middle syllable is /l/ /ě/ /t/, let. The last syllable is /ĭ/ /k/, ic.**
- Slowly blend the syllables back together, modeling and emphasizing particular parts as needed. **ath-let-ic**
- Ask your child to read it the smooth way. **athletic**
- Re-read the phrase or sentence that contained the word.

She participated in many athletic events.

Common syllable division patterns

Written syllables are organized around a vowel sound. There are six common syllable types. Knowing their patterns can help children predict the vowel sound and help them break longer words into chunks. Here are the six common syllable types:

closed	cat	the vowel is followed by one or more consonants, the vowel sound is short
open	no	one vowel at the end with no consonants after it, the vowel sound is long
silent-e	time	one vowel followed by a consonant ending with a silent e, the vowel sound is long
vowel team	rain	two vowels (or a vowel and a consonant) that combine to make one sound
r-controlled	stern	er, ar, ir, ur, or
consonant -le	handle	at the end of the word

Long words can be divided into their individual syllables so each part can be read and then blended back together into the whole word. Every syllable has a vowel sound. Identifying the vowel sounds and the consonants between them will help you divide long words for accurate reading.

VC/CV	in/sist
V/CV	me/ter
VC/V	rob/in
V/V	di/et
VC/CCV	com/plete
VCC/CV	pump/kin

In Summary

You can best support your child's decoding skills by helping them focus on the letter-sounds and spelling patterns with the words. You'll probably notice that your child often makes the same types of errors, so you will be able to emphasize the particular decoding tips that best match their needs.

Learning to read individual words accurately is one very important part of the reading process, and that is the focus of this guide. Here are other important ways to support your child's reading development:

- Model reading out loud with expression and a smooth pace.
- Discuss the meaning of words and how they are used in context.
- Ask questions, summarize, and make connections after reading individual sentences, paragraphs, and pages.



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