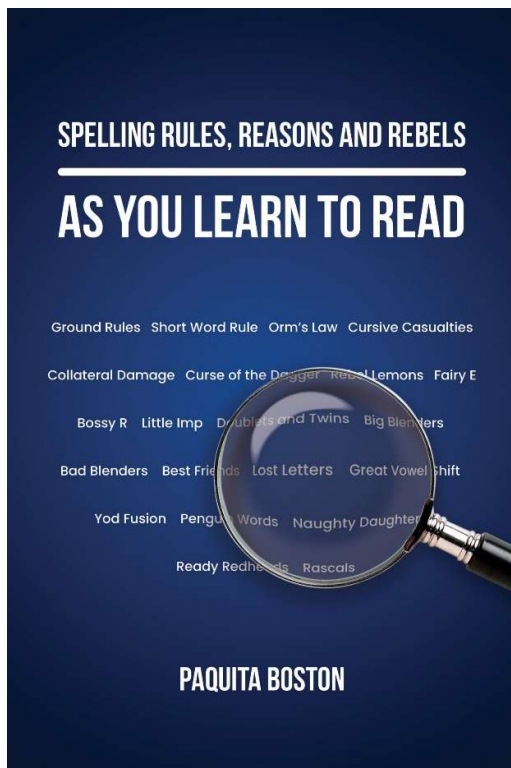




Spelling Rules, Reasons and Rebels as you Learn to Read.

by
Paquita Boston

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Website: www.spellingexplained.com

If you buy the **e-book version** you can investigate a particular word, find it in its list, under its rule, by typing + before the word in the search box, as described in the sample under 'Finding Your Way'.

In the **printed version**, 'Finding Your Way' explains how you can try to find a word by looking for a partial match in the Table of Contents. Or it may be in the Rebel Words, listed alphabetically in the appendix with the number of the rule it breaks. For instance, ARE 3-37, 3-67 means that *are* is a rebel and is discussed twice, once after Rule 37 in Part Three and again after Rule 67 in Part Three. It could also be in the very short list of Rascals.

No matter which version you buy, do remember that jumping ahead, searching out a word before you meet it, on the road to reading, means you miss out on the sequenced layers of rules and reasons which make sense of spelling.

SAMPLE ONLY, FROM THE FIRST PAGE.

Preface

This book explains how to read English. It explains why letters spell different sounds in different situations. For instance, S spells four different sounds in *sit*, *his*, *sure* and *vision*. There are rules for reading these words and all other words. Each rule is explained in the book. It is a huge resource because after each rule is explained, the book does not give mere examples, it lists every word a learner can now read. It lists any exceptions to each rule and explains them too. It answers all sorts of questions about English spelling. It does this in everyday language, adds in a few rhymes and fun terms to make the 'road to reading' enjoyable and suggests dress-ups for events and characters met along the way.

In 1978 I had no answer for "Why hasn't *his* got a zed?". I was scolded with, "Mum, you are making me learn stuff you do not understand." I promised I'd solve that, along with many more spelling puzzles. I felt sure that real teachers would know. I was just a supervisor of correspondence lessons. However the teachers I asked did not know. I searched through the library of a teachers' college, but still no answers. Teachers told me that they are not trained to explain spelling. They are given some spelling rules, but they are not told the reasons behind the rules. My question to an English professor, "Why hasn't *his* got a zed?" drew a blank. So, to keep my promise, I had to find out on my own.

I began with the Oxford Paperback Dictionary and listed all the words like *cat* or *dog*, the simplest words to read, the ones in which single letters spell a single sound, according to the 'Ground

Rules'. The next list built on that first list of three hundred words, after introducing the next rule, and we were off down the road to reading!

I called the first version *Reading with Rules* and finished it in 2009, through support and information from many, especially Professor Cummings in USA. Thanks Don, how I relished my midnight phone calls with you, across the date line, no pun intended. My local librarian Shirley Slatter sourced me books from elsewhere. My sister Ally Lynch mailed me relevant books, as did other friends, as noted in the bibliography.

Thanks for the encouragement from everyone who requested an e-book version. In the process, a lot of changes were made and the name changed. Now, as an e-book, the reader can 'look up' any word, to find it under its spelling rule, rather than wait to meet it on the 'road to reading'.

This book is not just for children. English is easy to speak but hard to read and write, especially if you are dyslexic, autistically logical or used to your own, more readable language, like Italian. Maybe that's why Italy has low levels of dyslexia.

This project has long been dedicated to the memory of Richard Steadman whose youthful enthusiasm for life continues to inspire me. Also, my thanks to his parents, Trish and Ainsley Steadman. Some years into researching, writing and improving the book, I wondered how much longer it would take. "It will take as long as you need to get it right," they advised. This calmed me, but alarmed my husband, Christopher. To Chris, my family, and my friends, thank you for all the comments and for surviving my code-busting obsession.

A Photo Gallery will soon be available on www.spellingexplained.com. It was begun by professional photographer Rachael Steadman and Archer Steadman. Archer assisted me from the beginning, as you will see in the Photo Gallery. Willing to dress up and take on any role to help explain spelling, Archer demonstrates the difference between voiced and unvoiced word-sounds in the Introduction. His enjoyment in, and serious application to, the challenge is evident throughout the Photo Gallery. The gallery also contains many snaps taken by non-professionals, of children in 'dress-ups' along the road to reading.

I apologize in advance for typing errors and any mistakes incurred through my ignorance. My training was in science, not in English. Please let me know of any words I have not listed and I will list them, with their reading rules, and the reasons behind the rules, on my website called www.spellingexplained.com.

Feedback and comments are welcome, via my website. Earlier versions received encouraging feedback. In Carnarvon, Western Australia, our local high school principal Keith Chambers said it was "an extremely valuable reference book and will greatly assist the teaching of reading and spelling." Primary school principal Judith Young wrote, "Every day I experience the need for such a text to support the teaching and learning of the English language in the classroom."

Dr Tom Burton, Adelaide University, South Australia, wrote "The book's very practical approach to apparent inconsistencies in English spelling and its accessible style will appeal both to learners and to their teachers and parents."

Professor Donald W. Cummings, Central Washington University, USA, wrote "Its emphasis on pattern, structure and order is what the teaching of reading and spelling needs. It is a wonderful job of making the rather drab stuff of orthography [orthodox or correct writing of sounds] palatable to teachers and students. Just consider the innovation, the genius of having youngsters dress up and act out useful spelling rules!"

Outline of the journey ahead for those about to learn how to read English words.

The **Table of Contents** is a preview of our journey along the road to reading.
The **Introduction** needs to be read before setting out on the road to reading.

Part One is about sounds spelt with single letters and Twins. First rule takes us 300 words down the road.

Part Two is about consonants blended together. We meet some consonant digraphs too.

In **Part Three** we decode Doublets, meet Fairy E and Bossy R and make paper planes to learn how to glide vowels onto vowels. We investigate Consonant Digraphs and Greek Y too.

Part Four takes us right to the end of the reading road with more letter codes — digraphs for vowels long and short and also for diphthongs (double songs or sounds).

The **Appendix** provides summaries of some of the information supplied along the road to reading. It lists all the rebel words, with reference to the rules they break, then the very unruly rascals. It presents ‘Loose Lists’ of words which share a decoding rule, but occur in a range of lists along the road.

The **Bibliography** lists books I have read about spelling. I refer to some by author’s name and page number during the book. It also lists useful websites.

Abbreviations in this book include Ab’l for (Australian) Aboriginal; *abbrev.* for abbreviation; AD, after Christ was born and BC, before Christ was born; aka for ‘also known as’; BTW for ‘by the way’; ESL for English as a Second Language; *f* next to a Feather Word; GVS for Great Vowel Shift; Δ is after an Irregular Verb; § is after an Auxiliary Verb; OE for Old English; OED for Oxford English Dictionary; OPD for Oxford Paperback Dictionary; *PN* for Proper Noun; USA for United States of America, U.K. for United Kingdom; *VS* for normal vowel shift.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Book is Big.

Finding Your Way

Listening to the Lists

Five main points.

The Forty-three Sounds of English Speech

Reading versus Writing.

The Rules

The Rebels

Frequently Used Words

Getting Started

Part One, sounds spelt with one letter

Ground Rules, *ant* to *zip*.

The Short Word Rule, *axe* not *ax*.

Orm’s Law and Terminal Twins

Zed, ‘Sez’ and Said

Affixes

Feather Words — *love, son, blue, won* — aka Cursive Casualties.

Shifty vowels — *fush ‘n’ chups*

Tall Talk — *all, wall*.

Don’t Let W Muddle You — *quad, was*.

Double Gates and Stressed Starts — *abbot, wetted*.

Terminal Vowels — *balsa, villa*.

Silent letters — *where, there, thug*.

Secret Agent Aitch or Helpful Handy Haitch.

Semi-vowel Y — *by, rye*.

Orm Again — *acne, zebra*.

Plurals — *s, es, en*.

Two syllables and Orm's Law — *apex, legal, zero*.
The Curse of the Dagger — *nasal vs. bison*.
Continental vs. English Sounds — vowels and yods.
Rebel Lemons — *alum, lemon, rebel, wagon*.
Fairy E — *hope vs. hop*
Soft in *City* but not in *Kitty*.
Suffixes which shift stress and shorten vowels, — *acid, vomit*.
Third Syllable from the End — *animal, holiday, veteran*.
Unstressed starts — *banana, tuxedo*.
Terminal Semi-vowel Y — *baddy, any, very, baby*.
Dropping Yods — *ruby, sue*.

Part Two — Consonant Blends and Digraphs

The Bones of Speech — consonants
Clusters — adjacent consonants.
Blending Consonants — *scallop, zestful*.
Blending Unvoiced Consonants
Two Types of Suffixes — Inflexional and Derivational
Bad Blenders — [[b], [d], [g], [j], [v], [th], [z] [zh].
Zorro and Zed
Big Blenders
Idle E — *able, unstable*.
Double gate CK — *cackle, truckle*.
Big Blender R — *adracadabra, umbrella*.
The Can-do suffixes, Ible and Able
M and N, Nasal Consonants — *aplomb, zinc*.
Eng — *along, zing*.
On Going Verbs and Gerunds
King Canute and Silent K — *knack, knuckle*.
Silent T and C — *apostle, muscle*.
Triple Blends — *strut amongst*.
Singular terminal [s] — *dense, copse*.
Blending <ed> to Verbs — *boxed, bagged, batted*.
Old Fashioned and Worn Down Verbs aka Irregular.
Participles participate a lot.
Adding Ends to Blends — *acceptability, unpredictability*
Silent H. — *exhibit, vehicle*.
Secret Agent Aitch aka Helpful Haitch
Digraph <th> — *this, thin*.
Ugh! Digraph <ugh> — *cough, laugh*.
Chat, chasm, chassis — busy Secret Agent H.
Ship Shape with Secret Agent H
Secret Agent H — *alphabet, telegraph*.
Rhonda and Secret Agent H
High and Mighty Secret Agent H.
Silent H in initial GH — *aghast, ghost*
Silent G with M and N — *phlegm, sign*.
Soothing Sonorants and Obstructive Obstruents

Part Three

Doublets — *baa, beet, boot, vacuum*.
Doublet <aa>

Doublet <ee>

Doublet <ii>

Doublet <oo>

Looking Good, <oo> in Wool

Doublet <uu>

Fossil E — *are, some*.

Terminal E speaks out — *abalone, vigilante*.

Silent E in *adaptive, accomplice, advantage*.

French Fossils — *crevasse, rosette*.

Fairy E — *ape, hope, zone*.

Fairy E on Suffixes — *capsule, volume*.

No Magic Action in Baggage

No Magic Action in Alice.

Ruts in the Road, <sive> and <tive>

Colourful R and Fairy E — *here, hire, cure*.

Sure, Sugar.

Tulips mature

Endure Duty.

Azure.

Bossy R, as in *art, fern, bird, torn, urn*.

Digraph <er> — *berg, verb* and *Motherly Other*.

Digraph <ir> — *affirm, zircon*.

Digraph <ur> — *accursed, urn*.

Subsets — *ensure, closure, future, endure*.

Digraph <or> — *abhor, vortex*.

Don't Let W Muddle You in <wor>!

Digraph <ar> — *afar, yarn*.

Terminal <ary> — *binary, wary*.

Collateral Damage — *award, war*.

Suffix <ory> — *accessory, valedictory*.

The Return of — *ible* and — *able* — *convertible, washable*

The Greek Suffix -itis — *tonsillitis*.

Vowels Glide over Syllable Boundaries

Glide and Yap — *bias, violin*.

Little Imp, i, — *alias, venial*.

Glide and Yawn — *apnea, zamia*.

Glide and Roar — *acidifier, vilifier*.

Glide and Skate — *abbreviate, unevaluated*.

Yod Fusions, [sh], [ch], [zh] and [j].

Yod Fusion [sh] — *action, vivisection*.

Yod Fusion [ch] — *actual, virtually*.

Yod Fusion [zh] — *abrasion, vision*.

Yod Fusion [j] — *contagion, soldier*.

The Why's and Wherefores of Wye — *acrylic, acolyte*.

English Y — *crybaby, yucky, drying, typifying*.

Part Four

Old and New Vowels — *wound* noun, *wound* verb.

Short and Long Vowels *A E I O U* and *Y*

Vowel Best Friends, or Vowel Digraphs.

A Digraphs

Digraph <ay> — *may, always*.
Digraph <ai> — *abstain, wraith*.
Bossy R and <ai> — *affair, wheelchair*.
Digraph <ae> — *brae, Raeleen*.
Greek and Latin <ae> — *formulae, minutiae*.
French Aero Club — *aerate, aerospace*.
The Old Digraph <aw> — *awe, yawn*.
Digraph <au> spells [or] — *applaud, vaunt*.
An Aussie Assault on <au>
Naughty Daughters are not French.

E Digraphs

The Pleasing Digraph <ea> — *please, zeal*.
Tear-a-way Rebels, — *tear, bear*.
Yea! The Great Steak Break Dancers.
Ready Redheads
M' hearties! — *hearken, heart, hearth*.
Eleven Pearls — *pearl, yearn*.
Irregular Verbs with <ea> — *beaten, dreamt, meant*.
Continental Digraph <ei> — *abseil, weigh*.
German Digraph <ei> — *apartheid, stein*.
English Digraph <ei> — *ceiling, weird*.
Digraph <eu> — *neutral, pleurisy, therapeutic*.
Bossy R and <eu> — *amateur, secateurs*.
Digraph <ey> in Stem Words — *convey, they*.
Suffix <ey> — *blimey, valley*.
Digraph <ew> — *brew, crew*.

I Digraphs

Digraph <ie> — *achieve, yield*.

O Digraphs,

Digraph <oa> — *coast, toad*.
Bossy R Roars — *boar, soar*.
What does terminal <oe> spell? — *aloe, woe*.
Digraph <oe> and Ethel — *amoeba, subpoena*.
Old English Terminal <ow> — *arrow, yellow*.
Who put the [ow] in bow?
Digraph <ou> inside words — *about, vouch*.
Cold Shoulder Words — *boulder, shoulder*.
Bossy R and <ou> — *arbour, court, your*.
Suffix <ous> — *amorous, wondrous*.
Suffix <uous> — *ambiguous, vacuous*.
Suffix <eous> — *crustaceous, herbaceous*.
Suffix <ious> — *amphibious, victorious*.
French digraph <ou> — *boulevard, group, you*.
R is not bossy Touring in Velour — *tour, velour*.
Mother's Country Cousins — *country, youngster*.
Gruff <ough> — *tough, enough*.
Silent <gh> — *plough, dough, through*.
Digraph <oy> — *annoy, tomboy*.
Digraph <oi> — *anoint, void*.

U Digraphs

Digraph <ui> — *bruise, suit.*

Penguin Words — *anguish, penguin, suede.*

Fossil U — *buoy, built, guard.*

Appendixes

Stress and the Rhythm of Speech

Consonants — Yods, Obstruents and Sonorants

Vowels and Great Vowel Shift.

Punctuation and Grammar

Affixes

Rebels and Rascals.

Loose Lists

Changes to English Over Time

Some Dates and Developments in English and its spelling.

Bibliography

Books

Websites

High Frequency Word Lists

Introduction

The Book is Big.

It's big because it's a sequenced step-by-step road to reading. Words are not listed A to Z because it would take too long to explain how to decode each word individually. This book groups words which use the same reading rule into alphabetical lists. The lists are sequential, simplest words to read, i.e., to decode, are in the first list. Then words which only need one more rule to decode, and so on. English is hard to read, compared to other languages. Its written words are cryptograms, messages in code, but not just one code. English letters operate, or 'play', according to many codes, under various sets of rules, because English is a mixture of many languages. Pure languages, by contrast, control their vocabulary and stick to their own spelling rules.

We start with *cat* and *dog* words but we cannot list *has* with them because it does not spell [has]. It spells [haz], and we find out why when it is listed in 1-3, the third list in Part One. *Was* is not listed with *has*. We learn why it spells [woz] at 1-15. We relish each list and roll along the road to the next list, learning to decode as we go. The lists are not just a few examples to illustrate how a rule works. If a word decodes using this rule, or this rule and other rules which have already been introduced, then I list it. Remember, these are sequenced lists. For example, *tack* is not listed with *tan* in 1-1 because <ck> has not been decoded. *Chick* is not listed with *tick* in 1-19 because <ch> had not been decoded. *Cherish* cannot be listed with *check* in 2-91 but is listed at 2-96 where <sh> is decoded.

This big book gives teachers the detail they need to explain the spelling of every word. Many children are happy to learn spelling by rote, but for those children who like reasons, here they are. If the teacher wishes, the reasons behind well-known rules, like 'I before E except after C', can be taught — or at least explained if asked. Sequenced lists provide a systematic way to teach the reading of English, to young or old, human or robot. The lists can be used to write 'listerature': my word for comic books, story books, essays etc. which only use words already listed, words which the reader already knows how to decode, how to read.

Finding Your Way

Do not be amazed that every word in UPPER CASE has + in front of it. The plus sign is your key to finding a word you want to learn about, before you meet it in its correct sequence. Without the plus sign, you would have to sift through many 'finds'. For instance, search for BECAUSE and it is found

800 times, in all cases and styles. Search for +BECAUSE in any case or style and it will appear 3 times — here, in List 4-12A and in List 4-12B. Although the + makes it possible to find a word in its list, rather than in context throughout the book, the search function will also pick up longer words which start with plus and the word required. For example, a search for +CAT will also find +CATTY and +CATASTROPHE and 44 other instances of +CAT. This is unavoidable but manageable if you search from the beginning of the book, where list words are simplest. When you enter a word in the search box of your e-book make sure you start with + and then add the word straight on, no gap. A few words are listed more than once and so continue the search. Even though each list comes with a rule, you need to start at the beginning of the book to get the full story behind a word's spelling. Clicking (or Control Click) on a topic in the Table of Contents opens a door to that topic, but a full understanding relies on knowledge gained all along the way, along the road to reading.

It's easy to follow if you start at the beginning and take time to enjoy the journey, one list at a time. Words are listed in upper-case, in capital letters. If a word is discussed in the text it is written in *italics*. Each list comes with a rule as well as words which rebel against the rule. The very few 'Rebels' without a valid excuse are called 'Rascals'.

The book unfolds on a 'need to know' basis. You will not be told anything until you need to know it. So, if you ask "But what about...?" wait and see if it comes later, maybe in a list of longer words or after a few more letters have been decoded. If I mention a word before it is listed, I put it in {curly brackets}. {These brackets show that it's coming later, maybe quite soon.} We need rules to decode and read the words in the lists. We shall get each rule as we need it. A 'need to know' approach makes learning to read easy. We might need to use two or even three rules to decode (read) a word. Start at the beginning of the book and that way you will be able to read every word you meet in a list.

You do not need to read the information which starts Not needed but nice to know and ends Now back to things we need to know. History is discussed, but only to explain spelling. The spelling of English words links them to past events. Therefore we enjoy glimpses of British and world history along the road to reading, but they come in no particular order. The appendix gives a time-line of changes to English and its spelling.

Listening to the Lists

Not needed but nice to know. We have a reading machine in our brain. It is a living machine, in three parts, all connected. The sounder, behind the left eye, matches letters to sounds and informs the word analyser (or working memory) behind it. We would be very slow readers if we had to analyse a word each time we read it. Luckily for us there is a third part to our reading machine, further on towards the back of the head, called the automatic detector. Each time we read a word it is loaded into the automatic detector, (Lynch p. 10), until one day it is automatically detected. This frees up the word analyser to analyse or decode more words and, in turn, load them into the auto detector. That is why the more we read the easier it gets. It's like playing the piano, when the fingers themselves seem to 'read' the notes. Reading lists of words out loud is like playing piano from sheet music, for the words, like the notes, become automatic. Current teaching methods insist on reading words in context (i.e. in sentences and stories). They also insist that practice makes perfect. Children are expected to practise reading at home and parents are expected to hear their children read stories. Some parents speak English but cannot read it. Some parents can read but do not 'hear the reading', do not have time to listen and check their children as they read a story. Hopefully they can 'listen to the lists' as they cook or drive. Each list comes with just one new rule and so the whole family can learn to read English together. Now back to things we need to know.

Five main points.

Linguists study everything about language. Some study phonetics and break the spoken word into tiny word-sounds, calling them phonemes. Most word-sounds make no sense on their own. Bigger chunks make sense, like *cat*, and other chunks add sense, like *ty* at the end of *catty*. These

chunks are called morphemes. The complete set of these meaningful units, morphemes, are called the lexicon of a language. How these words and bits of words and word-sounds are represented by letters is called orthography. These terms belong to the vernacular or jargon of linguists.

All we need to know are the following five points.

- A. There are 26 letters **but** 43 word-sounds in English.
- B. Letters are put inside pointy brackets like this: <a>, , <c>, <ph>, which is easy to remember because pens are pointy and we write with pens. The sounds that letters spell are in square brackets like this: [a], [b], [k], [f].
- C. When two letters in one syllable spell one word-sound, the letters form a **digraph**, like <ea> in *teach*, or like <th> in *those*. That's why <ea> in *idea* and <th> in *penthouse* are not digraphs — they are not side by side in the same syllable.
- D. Word-sounds can be sorted in many ways but the simplest way to sort them is into two groups — **unvoiced**, the nine that are spoken without using the voice box, and **voiced**, the rest. The rest use the voice box. They make our fingers vibrate when placed on the voice box. The nine unvoiced word-sounds are all consonants, made with our breath and lips, teeth, palate and throat but not with voice box. They do not vibrate the voice box but they do blow out tissue paper hanging over the mouth. *Con-sonant* means 'with (vowel) sound'. Some vowel sounds, e.g., *I*, *a*, make words on their own. Consonants cannot, as they have to be with vowel sounds to form words, e.g., *me*, *the*, *am*. Archer feels his voice-box vibrate when saying a vowel or a voiced consonant. Then he shows how the nine unvoiced sounds, all consonants, blow out tissue paper.



- E. Stressed syllables are pronounced louder and/or longer than other syllables in a word. When we **stress** a syllable, we give it **strength**. A syllable is a vowel sound, with or without one or more consonants. Words are made of one or more syllables. We break words up into syllables so that we can read them and understand them, but at the same time we do not want to leave our words in pieces. Indeed, the word *syllable* means 'latch together' from Greek *syllabe* in which <syl> meant 'together' and <labe> meant 'latch' and it ends in <le> to match other grammar words like *particle* and *participle*. (There is more about stress in appendix.)

Other languages have other word-sounds, some more than 43, some less. Young infants babble in most sounds of every known language and can recognize any consonant or vowel in any language. However, this ability to discriminate between word-sounds decreases if they do not hear them spoken and by 12 months a child acts as if "deaf" to non-native word-sounds. After that, most children can only repeat them as the most similar sound in their own language, (McGuinness p. 161).

The Forty-three Sounds of English Speech

Don't panic! Only refer to this when you need to. You will meet all these word-sounds gradually. I have only added International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols (between slashes) for those who wish to cross-reference. As most parents and teachers do not know the IPA, I have used ordinary letters in square brackets, here and throughout the book, except for Eng and Schwa symbols.

The Nineteen Vowels are all voiced sounds.

Seven short vowel sounds

[a] is the sound <a> spells in *cat*. IPA /æ/

[e] is the sound <e> spells in *bed*. IPA /e/

[i] is the sound <i> spells in *pin*. IPA /ɪ/

[o] is the sound <o> spells in *top*. IPA /ɔ/, pronounced /ʊ/ in parts of USA.

[u] is the sound <u> spells in *cup*. IPA /ʌ/

[uu] is the vowel in *put* and *book*. IPA /ʊ/

[ə], IPA /ə/, is the small unstressed Schwa sound at the start of *ago*, and the last vowel in *taken*, *pencil*, *lemon*, and *circus*. It has no letter of its own and I rarely use its symbol, Schwa. It's best we pronounce our words as clearly as possible, even unstressed vowels, so that we learn to spell them at the same time as learning to read them.

Five long monophthong vowel sounds (straight vowels).

[ar] is the vowel in *far*, *path*, and *pa*. IPA /a:/

[ee] is the sound <ee> spells in *meet*. IPA /i:/

[or] is the vowel in *for*, *paw* and *talk*. IPA /ɔ:/

[oo] is the sound <oo> spells in *soon*. IPA /u:/

[er] is the sound <er> spells in *her*. IPA /ɜ:/

Note:- Some people pronounce the [r] in [ar] and [or]. They are called 'rhotic' speakers. It can only happen in words using <r>, as in *car* but not for the [ar] in *pa*. It can happen in *for* but not for the [or] in *paw* and *talk*.

Seven long diphthong vowel sounds (bent vowels).

[oi] is the sound <oi> spells in *join*. IPA /ɔɪ/

[ow] is the sound <ow> spells in *cow*. IPA /aʊ/

[ay] is the sound <ay> spells in *say*. IPA /eɪ/

[I] is the sound <i> spells in *idol*. IPA /aɪ/

[oh] is the sound <o> spells in *most*. IPA /əʊ/

[yoo] is the sound <u> spells in *unicorn*. IPA /ju:/

[air] is the sound <air> spells in *hair*. IPA /eɪə/

We shall all learn why AEIOU is pronounced [ay] [ee] [I] [oh] [yoo] in English but [ar] [ay] [ee] [or] [oo] in other languages. Here's a quick summary **for adult ESL students**. In English, these long vowels used to be extensions of the short vowel sounds spelt by those letters all over Europe. Between 1450 and 1650 they changed. The new way of pronouncing long vowels created a point of difference between French, the language which had been the official language of England since 1066, and English. Also, in English, <u> spells [yoo] rather than [oo], as in *use*, *unicorn* etc. This is because the English could not say the long sound that <eu> spelt in French, a high, shortish [oo]. They tried to copy French pronunciation by saying [ee-oo] but found it easier to say [yoo]. U is called [oo] in all but France and England. The French say [oo] in their own way and only the English say [yoo].

Another difference between English and other languages is with short vowels, the way <u> rarely spells the short [uu] in *put*, but, instead, the short [u] in *but*, *hut* etc. This is because <a> used to spell [u] but when the English letter spelling [a] was removed, letter <a> had to spell that too. Its old job of spelling [u] was mostly taken on by <u>.

Twenty-four Consonants.

Fifteen consonants are voiced, of which three vibrate the nose as well as the voice box.

The Liquid consonants

[l] is the sound <l> spells in *leg*. IPA /l/

[r] is the sound <r> spells in *red*. IPA /r/

The Nasal consonants (Fingers vibrate on both nose and voice box.)

[m] is the sound <m> spells in *man*. IPA /m/

[n] is the sound <n> spells in *not*. IPA /n/

[ŋ] is the sound <ng> spells in *sing*. IPA /ŋ/ called Eng.

The Semi-vowel consonants

[w] is the sound <w> spells in *will*. IPA /w/

[j] is the sound <y> spells in *yes*. IPA /j/

These consonants have unvoiced mates.

[z] is the sound <z> spells in *zebra*. IPA /z/

[d] is the sound <d> spells in *day*. IPA /d/

[g] is the sound <g> spells in *get*. IPA /g/

[v] is the sound <v> spells in *van*. IPA /v/

[b] is the sound spells in *bat*. IPA /b/

[θ] is the sound <th> spells in *this*. IPA /θ/ called Edth.

[ʒ] is the sound <s> spells in *vision*. IPA /ʒ/ called Ezh.

[ʃ] is the sound <j> spells in *jam*. IPA /ʃ/

Nine Consonants are Unvoiced, also called Voiceless.

[s] is the sound <s> spells in *sit*. IPA /s/ — Voiced Mate is [z]

[t] is the sound <t> spells in *top*. IPA /t/ — Voiced Mate is [d]

[k] is the sound <k> spells in *kit*. IPA /k/ — Voiced Mate is [g]

[f] is the sound in <f> spells in *fat*. IPA /f/ — Voiced Mate is [v]

[p] is the sound <p> spells in *pen*. IPA /p/ — Voiced Mate is [b]

[h] is the sound <h> spells in *hat*. IPA /h/ — No Voiced Mate

[θ] is the sound <th> spells in *thin*. IPA /θ/ (Theta) — V.M. is [th]

[ʃ] is the sound <sh> spells in *shop*. IPA /ʃ/ (Esh) — V.M. is [zh]

[tʃ] is the sound <ch> spells in *chin*. IPA /tʃ/ — Voiced Mate is [j]

Reading versus Writing.

We decode letters into sounds to read. We encode words into letters to write. This book tells us how to decode, spell out, read words, using Reading Rules. I have added a few writing rules, tips and revelations where relevant, just for your interest. We do not need them for reading.

The Rules

Some say that English spelling has very few rules. Bill Bryson in his 1990 book “Mother Tongue” tells us that 85% of English words follow rules. However, he does not tell us the rules. Many books give us funny and interesting stories about English words, but this book explains them. By the end of this book, you will have met all the Reading Rules and you will find that the rebels to the rules are numbered in hundreds, not thousands. The rules are not there to punish our words. They are there to make it easier for us to read them. English spelling follows rules and just like footy rules they have to do a lot. Football rules have to keep the players safe, make the game flow, not interfere with other rules and some rules follow tradition to reflect the culture of the game, to set it apart from other games. Rules of any game can only change slowly, usually after much discussion. Rules are reassuring, even when a student is too young to fully understand them. Just knowing they exist is a comfort.

The first thing kids say when asked “Do you want to play?” is “Sure, what are the rules?” Reading should be as much fun as any game, taught with just enough rules to start playing and then

the game can be developed with new rules along the way. To be able to give reasons for the rules, when teaching someone to read, shows respect for that person and also builds respect for the teacher.

The dictionary makers decided to use spelling as a code to the past, and they also saw that spelling links “cousin” words together and helps us get their meaning. For instance, *publiscity* is easier to read than *publicity* but we would not see its link to *public* and we might think it meant “pub-loving” or “a lease on a pub”, if written with an *s*. English is spoken all over the world and so if we wrote it down, as it sounded to us, people in another place may not understand what we have written at all. Noah Webster, the man who wrote America’s first great dictionary, said spoken language is like a great river running freely under the rigid covering of winter ice — the icy, rigid, written word.

We play with our language, invent new words and pronunciations, speak in many accents, but in writing we make our message very clear. Rules which cover all situations are general rules, but reading needs a few special rules, too, as do all things. For instance, soccer players cannot touch the ball while in play, but the goal keeper can. Another special rule allows us to drive without a seat belt, if we are reversing. Most airlines have a special rule which lets children under the age of two fly free of charge. Section 51 xxvi of the Australian Constitution says when the Australian Government can make special rules for some people and not for others. Special rules always override general rules. Many complain that English has some really weird spelling rules, until they are explained. So does Aussie Rules football (AFL), e.g., if the ball hits a goal post on the way through the posts, it is not a goal, unlike every other ball game in the world. Explanation? To ensure that a goal is clean and direct, not just a lucky deflection. It rules out mistakes, just like the spelling of *love* and other Feather Words prevents mistakes when reading handwritten words. Reading rules, however outdated, are there to help us read.

The Rebels

Rebels, the words which disobey the rules, usually have good excuses. If not, we call them Rascals. Rebels and Rascals are listed in the appendix, with reference to their place in the book. Rappers are a small group of Rebels which obey their own little rule, a special rule, and we picture them dancing on the roadside in a pattern of their own. For instance, *should*, *could* and *would* are the only words which use <ould> to spell [uud], their own pattern.

The dictionary committee decided that we should spell our words in such a way that we can read them and get their meaning but **also** stay linked to our past, to all the stories of our culture. They wanted our words to ‘carry our culture’, which explains why *mystery* from Greek, uses <y> whilst *history*, from Latin, uses <i>, or why *Christmas*, from Greek via Latin, uses <ch> whilst *kilogram*, from Greek, uses <k>. Eponyms are one way that our words ‘carry culture’. Some carry the names of great inventors, like *Pasteur* who invented what we call *pasteurization*. Words are derived from the names of both good and bad people, e.g., *sadism* after bad Marquis de Sade. Eponyms include verbs like *boycott*, adjectives like *petri* (dish), nouns like *sandwich*. Since personal names do not have to obey spelling rules, many eponyms are spelling rebels, but are rebels with a reason. Other rebels have excuses, too. Some have Diplomatic Immunity. Others have been adopted but not adapted. Many, like *choir*, have been re-spelt by the dictionary committee to reflect their origins. Rebels which are abbreviations of words or slang words are excused because, as such, they do not have to obey spelling rules. Nor do proper nouns and that includes personal names. Proper nouns and personal names which do obey rules have been added to the lists as an added resource. The word *repair* is not listed as a rebel, despite the fact it does not follow its mother *pare*, and siblings *compare*, *prepare*, and cousin word *reparations*. Why not? It is not a reading rebel because it follows another rule, along with *pair*, *chair*, etc., which makes it easy to decode and read out loud. The rebel *colonel* is not an eponym and his excuses for breaking spelling rules are too weak to save him. He’s a Rascal!

Frequently Used Words

We use some words more than others. The words depend on who we are and where we live. The 20 most written words in London are, most to least, *the, of, to, in, and, a, for, was, is, that, on, at, he, with, by, be, it, an, as, his*, (Crystal, 1987, p. 86). Some 'High Frequency Word Lists' are given at the end of Bibliography. Children need to use common words early on, read and write them, so some words are introduced early, in Part One, and then again later, like the word *and* which really belongs in Part Two. *Said*, which is also required early, reappears in Part Four. *Her* and *for* appear early and then again in Part Three. Only about twenty words are introduced early, i.e. out of sequence.

Getting Started

To begin this book, I listed three very little words, see 1-0, and then all the words which are simplest to read, list 1-1. The next easiest became list 1-2 and so on. There are many rules and reasons to explain English spelling but you only need to know a rule at a time. Do not learn all the rules at once. Just learn them as you need them. I will tell you what you need to know as we go along. We go down one road, no branches. At times we have a little look ahead, so that we can read words we see a lot. The other early words, like *she*, come in early if they match simpler words — *she* matches *he*. We meet the rebel *shall* early, when we meet *ball*, because it is the only word in which <all> spells [al]. We meet all the other <sh> words later. When we want to talk about words which we have not yet met, we put them inside {} brackets, which is why, when I say, '*she* starts the same as {*shin*}', I put *shin* inside curly brackets to show we have not met *shin* yet. There are only three types of brackets to remember — the letters <sh> spell the sound [sh] in *she* and {*shin*}.

Part One sets the ground rules, tells us the sounds that the letters usually spell, taken one by one. We all agree that <c> spells [k] in *cat*. We all agree that <a> spells [a] in *cat*. However, we do not all agree that <a> spells [a] in *dance*. This is because we have one way to write English and many ways to speak it. My English is Australian, mid-way between British and American English. Australian speech has very little regional difference and Australians do not use a great variety of words in daily speech. We used to read some words which we never heard pronounced, and so we said them as we saw them. Radio changed that, and used to sound very British. Through TV and film, we learnt that people in England do not all speak English the same way and we've heard many American voices, e.g., some roll [r] in *car* and pronounce <o> in *sob* as the [ar] in *pa*. Australians do not pronounce [r] in *car*, so it rhymes with *pa*. Whilst we often sing like Americans, especially in *lost* [larst] *love* [larv] songs in which we *sob* [sarb] our hearts out, in Australian lingo, *sob* is still [sob] and *love* is still [luv].

Not needed but nice to know. The further north you go in England the more the vowels in *book* and *spook* rhyme. Also, *dance* and *ants* rhyme up north, but, down south, *dance* and *aunts* rhyme. "Why can't the English teach their children how to speak? This verbal class distinction by now should be antique. An Englishman's way of speaking absolutely classifies him. The moment he talks he makes some other Englishman despise him. Hear a Yorkshireman, or worse, hear a Cornishman converse, the Scotch and the Irish leave you close to tears and there are parts where English is painful to the ears. There even are places where English completely disappears. In America, they haven't used it for years!" (Paraphrased from 'Why Can't the English' in the film *My Fair Lady.) It's true, "one common language I'm afraid we'll never get" because English is a living language. * The film was an adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's 1913 play *Pygmalion*. It concerns Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower girl who takes speech lessons from Professor Henry Higgins, a phonetician, so that she may pass as a lady. Now back to things we need to know.

Many children arrive at school able to sing the alphabet song to the tune of Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,

"A [ay], B [bee], C [see], D [dee], E [ee], F [ef], G [jee],
H [aych] or [haych], I [I], J [jay], K [kay], L [el], M [em], N [en], O [oh], P [pee],

Q [kyoo], R [ar], S [es], T [tee], U [yoo], V [vee],
W [dubel yoo], X [eks], Y [wI], Z [zed],
And now I'm off to bed."

or, if you call Z [zee], the song ends with

"Now I know my ABC, won't you come and play with me?"

Children learn the names of letters from the many beautifully illustrated alphabet books available. They will see that letters can be large capitals — upper-case or majuscules — and small, lower-case, minuscules. They might learn how printers kept the little letters close by, in a case on a lower shelf, closer than the big letters which they used less often. These capital letters were kept in an upper-case, on a higher shelf. Maybe they will hear how the alphabet was invented, and why some little letters are not identical to their capital. With or without this information they can begin down the road to reading.

Part One, sounds spelt with one letter

Rule 1-0 No capital letters inside sentences unless they start names, i.e., proper nouns.

Reason. This is a writing rule rather than a spelling rule. Until the 1700's many ordinary nouns had a capital but then printers found it easier to get their metal letters from the nearest, lower case or shelf and only reach up to the upper case for metal capitals for specific names. Wooden letters were used originally, then metal, painted with ink, pressed on paper. Since then, only proper nouns start with capital letters. *Proper* was French *propre*, from Latin *pro privus*, meaning 'for a private individual'. *Noun* means 'name'. Nouns for general use are called common nouns. *Boy* and *girl* are common nouns, but *Bob* and *Kate* are proper nouns. If you want to brush up on grammatical terms like *noun* and *verb*, see 'Punctuation and Grammar' in the appendix.

Rebels: +I and +I'M and +O.

Reason The words *I* and *O* are written as capitals and so they break the 1-0 writing rule. Capitals when on their own spell their names, in this case, [I] and [oh]. The tiny rebel word *I* was hard to read in lower-case, especially back when it had no dot on top. It was almost hidden by the words on either side. So, to make it more visible it was turned into a capital letter. In *I'm* we are looking at a little hook, <'>, which has hooked out the letter <a> of *I am*. We say *I am* so much that we have reduced it to *I'm*. Does it look like a hook to you? It is called an *apostrophe* [ap-ost-roh-fee] and in Greek it means turn away or hook out.

O is usually written as *oh* but, when on its own, is a capital to make it more visible and more important. *O* can only be used in prayers and poetry, e.g., 'O lord, hear us we pray,' or 'O rose thou art sick'. *O* is never followed by punctuation symbols, unlike *oh*, e.g., 'Oh, I think it was red,' or "We waited for, oh, seven hours," or "Oh! You frightened me," (Bryson 2004, p. 149).

In the following 'ground rules', the vowel letters spell short sounds. We shall learn later how to know if they are spelling long sounds.

Ground Rules, *ant* to *zip*.

Rule 1-1 Twenty-five letters spell a single sound. Unless we are told otherwise, that is the sound they spell, as follows:

<a> spells [a] in <i>ant</i> .	 spells [b] in <i>bed</i> .
<c> spells [k] in <i>cat</i> .	<d> spells [d] in <i>dog</i> .
<e> spells [e] in <i>egg</i> .	<f> spells [f] in <i>fan</i> .
<g> spells [g] in <i>gate</i> .	<h> spells [h] in <i>hat</i> .
<i> spells [i] in <i>ink</i> .	<j> spells [j] in <i>jug</i> .
<k> spells [k] in <i>king</i> .	<l> spells [l] in <i>letter</i> .
<m> spells [m] in <i>mat</i> .	<n> spells [n] in <i>net</i> .
<o> spells [o] in <i>orange</i> .	<p> spells [p] in <i>pen</i> .
<q> spells [k] in <i>queen</i> .	<r> spells [r] in <i>rat</i> .
<s> spells [s] in <i>snake</i> .	<t> spells [t] in <i>tin</i> .

<u> spells [u] in *umbrella*. <v> spells [v] in *van*.

<w> spells [w] in *web*. <y> spells [y] in *yellow*.

<z> spells [z] in *zip*.

Reason Long, long ago people drew pictures to write stories. Then they began to draw word-sounds and join them up to make words. How did they write a sound? They drew just a bit of some thing and let it spell the first sound of that thing's name. A was a bit of an ox, just the head of Alph, which is what they called an ox. Then they turned it upside-down, so the horns pointed down. H was a bit of a fence or hedge, in those days called a Het. H is two posts and one rail of a Het. Each letter has a story. Lyn Davies tells each story in her book *A is for Ox*, listed in my bibliography. When people wanted to write with small letters some of the letters changed, like A, which became <a>, and H, which became <h>, but when O was written small, <o>, it did not change. If big, upper-case letters are used or small, lower-case letters are used, they still spell the same sounds.

In order to start reading we need simple decoding rules, ground rules. We can add more rules later for decoding more than just short vowel sounds, for reading additional consonants and for other ways to code word-sounds. If students make their own ground rules alphabet book, please ensure that illustrations show that <u> spells [u] as in *umbrella*. We do not want a picture of a unicorn, not yet!

Note: Two letters, <c> and <k> spell the same sound, [k].

Reason The Romans used <c> to spell [k] in their language which was Latin. They used <k> to spell [k] in the Greek words that they adopted into Latin.

A little driving lesson before we start off down the road of reading.

Readers start by sounding out each letter, like a gear change on each letter. Pretend you are in a car moving a gear stick as each letter spells a sound [a] [m]; [b] [a] [d]; [k] [a] [t]. As you become a better driver your gear changes will get smoother and smoother [a-m]; [b-a-d]; [k-a-t]. One day it will be like driving an automatic car. You will look at the word and your voice will be 'on automatic':- [am]; [bad]; [kat]; you will say. What fun! Then you'll start the next list!

List 1-1 in which letters spell their ground rule sounds.

+AM, +AN*, +AND*, +AT, +BAD, +BAG, +BAN, +BAT, +BED, +BEG, +BET, +BIB, +BID, +BIG, +BIG, +TOP, +BIN, +BIT, +BOB, +BOG, +BUB, +BUD, +BUG, +BUM, +BUN, +BUT, +CAB, +CAD, +CAM, +CAN, +CAP, +CAT, +COB, +COD, +COG, +COP, +COT, +CUB, +CUD, +CUP, +CUT, +DAB, +DAD, +DAM, +DEN, +DIB, +DID, +DIG, +DIM, +DIN, +DIP, +DOC., +DOG, +DON, +DOT, +DUB, +DUD, +DUG, +DUN, +FAB, +FAD, +FAG, +FAN, +FAT, +FED, +FEN, +FEZ, +FIB, +FIG, +FIN, +FIT, +FOB, +FOG, +FOP, +FUN, +GAB, +GAD, +GAG, +GAP, +GET, +GIG, +GOT, +GUM, +GUN, +GUT, +HAD, +HAG, +HAM, +HAT, +HEM, +HEN, +HID, +HIM, +HIP, +HIT, +HOB, +HOD, +HOG, +HOP, +HOT, +HUB, +HUG, +HUM, +HUT, +ID, +IF IN, +IT, +JAB, +JAG, +JAM, +JET, +JIB, +JIG, +JOB, +JOG, +JOT, +JUG, +JUT, +KEG, +KEN, +KID, +KIN, +KIP, +KIT, +LAB, +LAD, +LAG, +LAM, +LAP, +LED, +LEG, +LET, +LID, +LIP, +LIT, +LOB, +LOG, +LOP, +LOT, +LUG, +MAC, +MAD, +MAM, +MAN, +MAP, +MAT, +MEN*, +MET, +MET (office), +MID, +MOB, +MOM (USA), +MOP, +MUD, +MUG, +MUM, +NAB, +NAG, +NAN, +NAP, +NET, +NIB, +NIL, +NIP, +NIT, +NOB, +NOD, +NOT, +NUB, +NUN, +NUT, +ON, +OP*, +PAD, +PAL, +PAN, +PAP, +PAT, +PEG, +PEN, +PEP*, +PET, +PIG, +PIN, +PIP, +PIT, +POD, +POP, +POT, +PUB, +PUN, +PUP, +RAG, +RAM, +RAN, +RAP, +RAT, +RED, +REP. (representative), +REV. (Reverend), +RIB, +RID, +RIG, +RIM, +RIP, +ROB, +ROD, +ROT, +RUB, +RUG, +RUM, +RUN, +RUT, +TAB, +TAG, +TAN, +TAP, +TAT, +TEN, +TIC, +TIN, +TIP, +TIT, +TOG, +TOM, +TOP, +TOT, +TUB, +TUG, +UNCUT, +UNFIT, +UNZIP, +UP*, +VAN, +VAT, +VET, +VIM, +VIZ.*, +WAG, +WEB, +WED, +WEN, +WET, +WIG, +WIN, +WIT, +WOK, +YAK, +YAM, +YAP, +YEN, +YET, +ZED, +ZIP.

You can read these words too.

+AT IT, +BIG TOP, +CUT IN, CUT UP, +DIG IN, +FAT CAT, +A FAT LOT, +FED UP, +FIT IN, +GET AT, +GET ON, +GET IT, +GET-UP, +GET UP, +GUN DOG, +HET UP, +HIP-HOP, +HIT AND RUN, +HIT MAN, +HIT OFF, +HIT ON, +HOB-NOB, +HOP IN, +HOP IT, +HOT DOG, +HOT-POT, +HOT ROD, +HUB-CAP, +JET LAG, +A BAD JOB, +JOB LOT, +JOG ON, +LAP-DOG, +LEG UP, LEG IT, +LET UP, +LET IN, +LET ON, +BAD LOT, +LOG IN, +MID-ON, +MOB-CAP, +MOP UP, +NON-U, +PAL UP, +PIT-A-PAT, +POP-UP, +PUG DOG, +RAM-JET, +RUB ON, +ON TAP, +TIN CAN, +TIN GOD, +TIN HAT, +TIN POT, +TIP TOP, +TOG UP, +TOM-CAT, +TOM-TOM, +ON TOP, +TOP DOG, +TOP HAT, +TOP UP, +ZIG ZAG, ZIP-BAG. Slang +BIG GUN, +BIGWIG, +BOP, +CON, +CON MAN, +DIM-WIT, +FAT CAT, +GAL, +GOB, +GUM UP, +LAV, +MAC (macintosh), +MAG (magazine), +MOG (cat), +MUT (dog), +NON-U, +REV, +TAD, +TOP DOG, +TUM, +TUT-TUT, +WOG (insect), +YEP, +YOB, +YUM, +YUP, +ZAK, +ZAP, +ZIT. Australian words +BOT, +DAG, +DAM, +DOB, +DOG, +GIG, +GUN (shearer), +GUV, +HUM, +JOB *verb.*, +KIP, +LOB IN, +MOB, +MUD MAP, +PAD, +POM, +RUN, +RUM, +TAP (of work). Proper Nouns +BIG BEN, +GOD, +JAG (jaguar car), +MED. (Mediterranean), +ZEN. Names AL, +BEN, +BEV, +BOB, +CAL, +DAN, +DEL, +DOM, +DON, +ED, +HAL, +JAN, +JED, +JEFF, +JIM, +JIM, +KAT, +KEN, +KIM, +LEN, +LIZ, +MAC, +MAL, +MAT, +MEG, +MEL, +NAT, +PAM, +PAT, +ROB, +ROD, +RON, +ROZ, +SAL, +TED, +TIM, +TOM, +VAL, +VIN, +ZAC.

When a word is shortened, e.g., from *operation* to *op.* the full stop shows that this has happened.

Words which have been shortened are called *abbreviations*, or *abbrev.* for short.

**Pep* is an example of a word which was once an abbreviation, of *pepper*, but is now written without a full stop, as in *He gave a pep talk, to pep up the team.*

Many abbreviations are treated as slang words. Some later become accepted as ordinary words, some fade away and some are slang forever. **Abbreviations do not have to obey rules.**

*Nowadays *an* always spells [an]. It used to spell [uun], and [un] too. We use it before a vowel sound and so we say *an egg in a box*. We use *an* before a vowel sound and so we say, '*An M.P.* [em-pee] *sent an S.O.S.*' but we say, '*A U.K.* [yoo-kay] *citizen.*' {Later we shall learn why we say *an umbrella* but *a useful tool* and also *an hour* and *an honest heir.*}

Not needed but nice to know. Long ago, when very few could read and write, King Sound ruled the land. People copied the sounds of words from each other. Words changed quite rapidly in those days. By the time Queen Quill came along and wrote them down some words had changed forever: *an ekename* had become *a nickname*, *an ewt* had become *a newt*, *a nadder* had become *an adder*. *An apron* has been *a napron* like a napkin, *an orange* was once *a narange* (from Arabic *nāranjī*), *an auger* was *a nauger*, and *an umpire* used to be *a nonper*, as in "non-peer", impartial, not paired in any way with any of the players. Now back to things we need to know.

**And* is the only word in this list which has two consonants together.

**Up* is used a great deal. See {*awake*} for more about this very useful little word.

**Viz.* This is a word we read but do not say out loud, as you will soon see.

**Men.* Little children say *two mans*. Why do we say *men*? Why not *two mans*? New English speakers, big and little, are quick to learn this pattern: – *1 pan, 2 pans; 1 pin, 2 pins; 1 pen, 2 pens*. However long ago there was another pattern. That pattern has nearly faded out. It is only left in a few words – *1 child, 2 children; 1 ox, 2 oxen; 1 brother, some brethren*. The word *man* used to belong to that pattern, *1 man, 2 mannen*. However, if you say that often enough you get ready to say [e] and say it for [a] too! That is why *mannen* became *mennen* and then just *men*.

Not needed but nice to know. We say *man* "umlauts" to *men* because it changes its vowel sound. It umlauts to show it is plural. We shall see this again in *mice* and *lice*, *feet*, *teeth* and *geese*. *Umlaut* is German for "switch sound about" for *um* means *about* and *laut* means *sound*. Jakob Grimm, one of the Fairy Tale Brothers Grimm, began using *umlaut* for "vowel change" in words in 1819. He and Wilhelm noticed all the ways people said words as they travelled about collecting folk stories and fairy tales. Now back to things we need to know.

Three words in this list are very old but still in use, from Celtic days, before AD 1. Romans wrote about Celts and other tribes of ancient Britain. In some parts there are Celts still speaking Celtic languages. Look in list 1-1 for *cam* (crooked, as in camshaft), *dun* (a dingy -brown colour) and *tan* (a yellow-brown colour), all old Celt words.

A word which disobeys a rule is called a rebel or an exception to the rule. Some people go around saying “the exception proves the rule” without realizing that *prove* meant *test* when this saying began. Even today we test the yeast in dough by seeing if the bread will rise and we call this proving the bread or the yeast. So, when a word disobeys a rule, it tests the rule. If it has a good excuse for its rebellious behaviour then we cannot say the rule is wrong or useless.

Rebels +I, +I’M, +O, +A, +OF.

Rebels’ Reasons The words *I* and *O* are always capitals and spell the names of these capital letters.

Long ago they spelt long versions of [i] and [o], which were [ee] and [or], but these long vowels changed to their present sounds of [I] and [oh] in the Great Vowel Shift. During the GVS Modern English was born. Before that, A, E, I, O, U were called [ar], [ay], [ee], [or], [oo]. They are still called that in the rest of Europe but in England these long vowel sounds changed to [ay], [ee], [I], [oh], [yoo] and so the names of A,E,I,O,U changed too. The story of how, when and why this happened is an exciting one, as we shall see.

In the tiny rebel word *a*, <a> spells [u]. The little word *a* is used so much that it has become easier to say [u]. This sound, [u], uses fewer muscles than [a]. Try it for yourself. We just have to open our mouth to say [u], whereas we have to raise our cheeks to say [a]. Also, long ago, <a> spelt [u] and <u> spelt [uu] and a runic letter, Ash, spelt [a]. That runic letter was removed from the English ABC after the French conquered England in 1066. Letter <a> had to take over the job of spelling [a] as well as spelling [u] and so <u> helped out and now spells short [u] more often than it spells short [uu].

The rebel word *of* spells [ov]. Long ago the letter <f> spelt <v>. The word *of* is the only remaining word in which this still happens. *Off* and *of* spell [of] and [ov]. *Iff* long ago spelt [if] but, as there was no word [iv], (which would have been written <if>) the word *iff* shortened to *if*. So *of* is the only word left in which <f> spells [v].

Reasons for Rebels *I*, *I’m* and *O* were given earlier.

Slang words do not have to obey rules. We shall only add them to lists if they obey the rules. Their origins are usually very interesting. Some words, like *yob*, are ‘Backslang’, in this case *boy* backwards.

Words with <s> are missing from List 1-1. Why? The letter <s> spells [s] as in *snake*. However, it also spells [z], as in *has*. In fact, <s> is used more often than <z> to spell [z]. It depends where <s> is in a word. It never spells [z] if it starts a word. If <s> starts a word, it initiates it, and we say <s> is “initial”. That is why we call the letters which start each of our names our “initials”.

Rule 1-2 When <s> starts a word it spells [s], unless followed by <h>.

Reason. Letter <s> obeys its ground rule, <s> spells [s] as in *snake*, at the start of words but not always inside words or at the end of words. There is a big group of words which start with <s> with the next letter <h>. All these words start with the sound [sh]. They are not rebels because they follow their own rule, the rule that <sh> spells [sh]. They are words like {*ship*} and {*shut*}, which you will meet later, when we meet Secret Agent H, aka Handy, Helpful H.

Rebels There are only two other words in which initial <s> does not spell [s]: {*sugar* and *sure*} and words made with these words. {} brackets indicate words which will be listed later, and so we shall hear more about these rebels later. Initial <s> does not spell [s] in *Sean* and *Seamus*, but **proper nouns do not have to obey rules.**

List 1-2 Initial <s> spells [s]

+SAC, +SAD, +SAG, +SAP, +SAT, +SET, +SET IN, +SET ON, +SET-UP, +JET SET, +SIC, +SIN, +SIP, +SIT, +SIT ON, +SIT UP, +SIT-IN, +SOB, +SOD, +SOP, +SOT, +SUB, +SUP, +SUM, +SUN. Names +SAL, +SAM, +SID, +SOL.

Rule 1-3 Letter <s> spells [z] at the end of short words, words we can say in one short breath.

Reason Long ago people were afraid of the letter <z> because it was the Sign of the Dagger. So they used <s> to spell [z] and twin <ss> to spell [s]. This meant that *hiss* and *his* looked different and sounded different. Also, boys called *Les* were not called “Less” and girls called *Tess* were not called “Tez”.

It is still the Sign of the Dagger, three zig-zag cuts made with Zag the Dagger. Old words like {*xylophone*} avoid it by using <x> but more recent words, like {*zebra*}, use it. So we do not always avoid it. We will not be afraid of it if we read stories about Zorro. He carved <z> on walls and doors with three quick cuts of his long thin sword. He was a good man, like Robin Hood, who lived in Spanish California. His Zed, or Zee, struck fear only into the wicked hearts of bullies. He only wrote Z to scare bad people. Dress up as Zorro — see website’s Dress Up Gallery — and tell your class mates why we don’t use <z> much.

Not needed but nice to know. The letter <z> was unpopular from earliest times, when it was the sign of the dagger and named “zag” or “zayin”, meaning dagger. Long ago it crept into 7th place in the Roman alphabet to spell a few Greek words and was then thrown out and only let back in hundreds of years later at the very end of the Roman alphabet. For Greeks, the alphabet begins and ends with Alpha and Omega, but for Romans, with Alpha and the Zeta. It’s said to have been the 14th letter of Ireland’s Ogham tree alphabet, a letter named *straif* meaning *blackthorn*. Blackthorns traditionally stood for things getting out of control and beyond help and so the Ogham letter meant bad luck and strife.

The Romans ruled the Celts of Britain for four hundred years but their languages did not mix. The Celts only adopted a few Latin words. By contrast, the Gauls, in what is now France, mixed with Roman soldiers and shopkeepers and adopted many Latin words, during their five hundred years as a Roman colony, plus the Roman aversion to Zed. In Britain, when the Anglo Saxons replaced the Romans, they created a whole new language, English. It had no [z] sound until Norman French arrived in 1066. They changed some English [s] words into [z] words, e.g., *dysig* changed to *dizzy*. The Norman French descended from Vikings who, having never been under Roman rule, were not afraid of <z>. But other French speakers still had the Roman fear, or at least dislike, of <z>. They refused to write it and as they were in charge of written English there were no more words like *dizzy*. The sound [z] was written with <s>, as in *busy* and *cosy*. Hundreds of years later <z> was still unpopular. In 1606 Shakespeare uses <z> to insult a character in *King Lear*: “Thou whoreson zed! Thou unnecessary letter!” It had lots of names. *Zee*, from Greek *zeta*, was one of them and that name was taken to the American colonies but died out in England. Another name for Z was “*izzard*”, meaning “*S hard*”, for it was a hard sounding <s>. *Izzard* was shortened to *zed*. Zed is still the least used letter of written English. It is not just English which avoids using <z>. In Italian, <s> between vowels spells [z]. In French both <s> and <x> spell [z] between vowels. In German, <s> and <ts> can spell [z], and so <ss> spells [s], as in English, and the German letter <ß> is used in place of <ss> after long vowels. As we see, even today, we all go to a lot of trouble to avoid writing <z>. The names Z Force and Special Unit Z still evoke fear in the enemy. Russian tanks in the Ukraine display Z, even though there is no such letter in their alphabet. Now back to things we need to know.

Q. Weren’t people afraid of S for Snake? After all, it looks like a snake!

Ans. No, because the letter S began as the sign of the Tooth! It was not a sharp tooth. It was a back tooth with two round bumps. The letter <s> first of all spelt [sh], because it started *shin*, which is still the Hebrew word for *tooth*. Later on, it was drawn sideways with only one bump, S, and then it spelt [s]. (Davies p.98). The letter N began in Egypt as a drawing of a snake going up stairs, from right to left. The neighbouring Phoenicians called it a fish, which in their language was *nun* and, when the

Greeks copied it, they called it *nu* and made the stairs very steep which turned it into N. So it is nothing like a snake anymore, (Davies p. 88).

List 1-3 Letter <s> spells [z].

+AS spells [az], +AS IF, +AS YET, +HAS spells [haz], +HIS spells [hiz], +IS spells [iz], +‘TIS* spells [tiz]. Names +LES [lez], +ROS [roz], +WES [wez].

*‘*Tis* is an old way of saying “it is”.

Rebels +BUS, +GAS, +PUS, +US, +YES, +YES-MAN, +SIS.

Rebels’ Reasons

Words which are abbreviations do not have to obey rules. *Bus* is short for *omnibus* which means “for all”, Latin *omni* (all) followed by a suffix meaning *for*, (Cummings p. 83). *Sis* is short for sister, and is also a slang word, which is another reason it does not have to obey rules.

Words longer than one syllable can end in <s> spells [s] if they end ‘weakly’, like *tennis* in which we say <ten> louder than <is>. *Gas* comes from a word like that, *chaos*, [kay-os].

Pus is allowed to use a single <s> to spell [s] so that it does not look like *puss*, [puus], an old word for cat.

Us comes from Latin *nos* which in Latin spells [nos], not [noz].

Yes is a combination of *yea so*, ‘Yea, let it be so’, (Hewitt, p. 205). So the <s> in *yes* originally spelt [s] because it started a word.

Rebels? No, +ITS, +IT’S and +LET’S are not rebels. They spell [its] and [lets], because <s> follows a consonant, not a vowel. That consonant is [t], which is a special sort of consonant. Say it with your fingers on your voice box. Do you feel a buzzing, a vibration? No. Now say [d] with your fingers on your voice box. You will feel your voice box vibrate. Look at Rule 1-3 again. It does not say what <s> spells after consonants. The truth is, it can spell [z] after a consonant if that consonant makes voice boxes vibrate. These consonants are called voiced consonants. There are only nine consonants which do not vibrate the voice box. Can you work out which they are by “listening” with your fingers when you speak? This is a good time to find out about Anne Sullivan, a wonderful teacher who taught little Helen Keller to communicate with her fingers because even though she was blind and deaf she could still feel – with her fingers, and with her heart too! There are many books and websites about Helen and Anne. We are lucky for we can hear the [z] in *dogs*, *pubs*, *fogs*, *dens*, and *hams* and we can hear the [s] in *dots*, *pups*, *docks* and *its* and *it’s*. Now we know why <s> spells [z] at the end of some words and [s] at the end of others.

It’s is short for *it is*. The old way to shorten *it is* was ‘*tis*. The newer way is *it’s*. The little hook called an apostrophe pulls out a letter in both ‘*tis* and *it’s*.

Its means “of it” and has no apostrophe because *its* has not had <i> hooked out of it, for *its* was never *itis* – just like *his* was never *hisis*.

Let’s is short for *let us*. The apostrophe has hooked out the <u>.

Words with <q> are missing from List 1-1. That’s because <q> never appears in English words without <u> after it and we need to know that when <u> follows <q> it spells [w].

Rule 1-4 The letter <q> is always followed by <u> and together they spell [kw].

Reason A very old word *gwen* meant ‘woman’ and in England it changed to *cwen* for ‘queen’, [kween]. However, when the French invaded, they said “You can’t spell [kw] like that!” They used <u> to spell [w] and <q> to spell [k], because the French do not like <k>. The French ruled England for hundreds of years and imposed their way of spelling on to the English language. At first <u> spelt [w] in France and then it went silent. Words which arrived from France after that had silent <u> after <q>. So these are rebels to rule 1-4.

Rebels include {+LIQUORICE, +QUICHE and +QUEUE; +LIQUOR, +BOUQUET and +MOSQUITO and all words ending with QUE, like +ANTIQUE}. We shall hear more about each of these words later.

List 1-4 <qu> spells [kw]

+QUID, +QUIN, +QUIP, +QUIT, +QUIZ, +QUOD.

All the words which use <u> to spell [w] are what I call Penguin Words. We shall meet them all on our road to reading. You can see Penguin U in the website's Dress Up Gallery.

There is only one letter which spells more than one sound. That letter is <x>. It was not in the Ground Rules at 1-1 because what it spells depends where it is in a word. At the end of a word it spells [k] and [s], blended together, [ks]. When a letter ends a word, we call it terminal. Terminal <x> spells [ks], as in *ox* and *fox*.

Rule 1-5 Terminal <x> spells [ks].

Reason This is the sound that <x> spelt in the west of Greece, nearest to Rome. Maybe the Romans said "Let's use this letter from Greece. It is easy to carve and saves us carving two letters."

List 1-5

+BOX, +BOX IN, +BOX UP, +COX, +FIX, +FIX UP, +FOX, +FOX *verb.*, +HEX, +LAX, +MAX *abbrev.*, +MIX, +NIX, +OX, +POX, +SEX, +SIX, +TAX, +TUX *abbrev.*, +VEX, +WAX. Names +MAX, +REX, +SAX, +TEX.

The Short Word Rule, *axe* not *ax*.

Over time, the nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs of a sentence have all become at least three letters long, except for *ox*, *do*, *go*, *be*, *am* and *is*. *Ox* is a noun which stayed short. The others are verbs which were longer but shrank right down to just two letters. Some words, like *axe*, added silent <e> in order to gain three letters, while others, like *egg*, repeat the last letter.

Other types of words can be as long or as short as they like. What are the other types? There are the articles *a*, *an* and *the*. Examples of prepositions are *in*, *on* and *at*, conjunctions include *as* and *if*, and there are pronouns like *I*, *me*, *my* and *mine*. Oh, and interjections like *Ah!* *Oh!* and *Wow!* As you can see, these sorts of words can be shorter than three letters, or longer.

Who made the rule that important words, the nouns and verbs, the adjectives and adverbs, have to have at least three letters? No one announced it. All the important words have just sorted themselves out this way. *Axe* was the last noun to join in. It used to be *ax* but after 1885 it gave in and conformed and added a silent <e> as you can see in dictionaries after that date. *Ox* still hasn't conformed. It can be traced back to the prehistoric language from which we think many languages spread, west across Europe, and also east across Asia, as far as India. We call it the Indo-European language. It's extinct now. Many languages started, but this one spread far and wide. *Ox* is a very old word, a 'living fossil', one of the first words to be written. *Axe* is just as old, but modernized by adding an <e>.

The verbs to be and to do and to go are used more than any other verbs. They have been shortened over time, from *beon*, *beom*, *beo*, *bist*, *be-eth*, to *be*; *eom*, *eam* to *am*; *est*, *ist* to *is*; *don*, *doth*, *doeth* to *do*; *gan* to *go*. All except are have shrunk down to two letters.

The Short Word Rule

Rule 1-6 All verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs have three or more letters except for the noun *ox* and the verbs to be and to do and to go.

Reason See above. Three letters or more ensures that nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs stand out on the page. The reason that *ox* has not conformed is maybe that it has two letters but three word-sounds— [oks]. *Axe* also has three word-sounds and it took a long time to obey the rule. We use the verb to be when we say *I am*, *you are*, *he is*, *she is*, *we are*, *you are*, *they are*. Also, when we say *I shall be*, *you will be*, *he will be* or *I was*, *he was*, *you were* and so on. We could write *are* with just two letters, *ar*, because as part of the verb to be, it does not have to obey the Short Word Rule. However, *are* hangs on to its silent <e>, (maybe to show it has shrunk down from the olden days words *aron* and *art*. Maybe, if it shrank anymore, it would look too much like *or*.) This is the first of many words in which <ar> spells [ar] and we shall meet them all later.

Please Note: Your teacher might decide to take you on a shortcut at this stage because now you know that <ar> spells [ar] you can read words like *ark*, *arm*, *bar*, *bark*, *etc* but you can't read *chart*, *sharp*, *large*, *quart*, *warm*, *arthritic*, *etc*. and many other words in which <ar> spells [ar]. If you take

a shortcut, you still need to double back and go the long way or else you will miss out on how to decode <ch>, <ge>, <sh>, <th> and so on.

List 1-6

As we know, +AM spells [am], +IS spells [iz] and +OX spells [oks].

Now we know that +ARE spells [ar].

As we shall see {+BE} spells [bee], {+DO} spells [doo] and {+GO} spells [goh].

Rebels? Are the words we sing for musical scales rebels? No, do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do not disobey the Short Word Rule because they are all abbreviations, clipped from the words in a medieval hymn to which the notes were sung. Abbreviations do not need to obey rules. Babies are also allowed to break the rules it seems, in their own language, baby talk: ma, pa. *Jo* and *An* can break the Short Word Rule too because Proper Nouns need not conform to rules. The little word *id* does not break the Short Word Rule because it comes from “it” in Latin, a pronoun. Psychologists use it to describe the unconscious instinctual force in each of us, each individual’s ‘it’ factor. The word game Scrabble quotes lots of two letter words from a 1998 Chambers dictionary but these words are either very foreign or Scottish or obsolete or misspelt names of the letters of the alphabet, e.g., *es* for the letter S, which we know would spell [ez], not [es], and *ef* for the letter F, which we know would spell [ev]. Whilst it is fun to try to spell the names of letters it is un-necessary.

Let’s call repeated consonants **twins** and call repeated vowels **doublets**.

Vowels can be long or short, as in *hop* and *hope*. Long ago, when English was first written, the scribes put marks above vowel letters when they were long, marks like this ~ or this . Some dictionaries still use them. Sometimes they put marks on top of letters like this to show they were short vowels: ^ ~ ^ . Then the English began twinning consonants after short vowels, if they were stressed. Syllables in short words are all stressed, are all important. In longer words of two syllables, the English stressed the first one.

In about 1150, nearly a hundred years after England was conquered by Normans, from Normandy in France, a Norman scribe noticed this way the English followed short, strong vowels with twins. He made a note of it in his book and, on the cover, he wrote ‘Ormulum’, which meant ‘Orm’s’ — in other words, ‘This book belongs to Orm’. So we know his name and although he did not invent the rule, he did write it down. As far as we know, it is the first English spelling rule to be recorded, and we call it Orm’s Law.

Orm’s Law and Terminal Twins

Rule 1-7 Orm’s Law: Twin consonants spell a single sound and follow a short, stressed vowel. They spell their ground rule sounds.

Reason As explained above, this showed which vowels were to be read out as short stressed vowels. The consonant was said once, not repeated. We can think of the twin consonants as double gates, a strong barrier which blocks the vowel behind from spreading into a long sound. If the vowel in a stressed syllable was short, then scribes twinned the following consonant, as in *sitt*, *sett*, *annd*, *unnder*, (Crystal, p. 126). Although most twins have since been dropped, some remain. Although <s> can spell [z], terminal<ss> always spells just [s]. However, in {*dissolve*, *dessert*, *hussar*, *hussy*, *possess* and *scissors*}, <ss> spells [z].

Rebels {+DISSOLVE, +DESSERT, +HUSSAR, +HUSSY, +POSSESS and +SCISSORS} disobey the rule that <ss> spells [s]. We shall hear their excuses, if any, when we meet each of these words. Scribes got tired of twinning terminal consonants after short vowels and only did so if necessary — necessary to obey the Short Word Rule, necessary to ensure <s> spells [s] and not [z], necessary to ensure that <f> spells [f] and not [v], because <f> used to spell [v] and only <ff> spelt [f].

Sometimes twins are necessary to differentiate words, like *set* and *sett*; *put* and *putt*.

Rebel +BASS [bays]; +PASS. For +TALL, +ALL, +BALL, etc., see Rule 1-14 for explanation.

Rebel’s Reason When we talk about a bass singer, a singer who sings down low, at the base of musical pitch, we pronounce it exactly like base [bays] but write it bass in honour of the great Italian basso singers. There is a fish called a bass fish and this is not a rebel word. It spells [bas] and is in the next list. Some people say pass spells [pas] and some say it spells [pars].

Why? Generally the original sharp [a] vowel was softened to [ar] under French influence which was stronger in the south of England around London. Some even say the London cockneys were the first to exchange [a] for [ar].

Not needed but nice to know. Some twins are never terminal, some rarely and three often. Not all short vowels spelt with one letter are followed by twins because Orm's Law has been weakened. Scribes stopped twinning at the end of most words, but continued to twin inside words after short vowels, which is why we write, peg but pegging. Some words still obey Orm's Law entirely, especially words ending in <ll>, <ss>, and <ff>. You will meet rules for when to use <ll> and when to use <l> at the end of a word, because for <l> is still in the process of change. The change from <ll> to <l> is happening faster in USA than in U.K. and Australia. Although an English twin spells the same sound as its single letter, this is not always so in other languages. In Welsh <ll> spells an [l] without any buzzing of the vocal cords, so it is light and unvoiced, said with lots of breath coming out both sides of the tongue curled up against the palate. Welsh <ff> spells [f] but <f> spells [v].

Relevant Writing Rules A. Words never end in <cc>, <hh>, <jj>, <kk>, <mm>, <pp>, <qq>, <vv>, <ww>, <xx> or <yy>. B. Very few end in <bb>, <dd>, <gg>, <nn>, <rr>, <tt> and <zz> – and then usually just to make words obey the Short Word Rule, as in add, ebb, odd, egg and inn. We shall meet err later. C. Terminal twins come after short vowel sounds spelt with one letter, i.e. [a], [e], [i], [o], [u] and [uu], but not all short vowel sounds spelt with just one letter are followed by twins.

List 1-7 Terminal twins.

+ADD, +BASS, +BELL, +BELLE*, +BILL, +BOLL, +BUFF, +BUTT, +BUTT IN, +BUZZ, +BUZZ OFF, +CUFF, +CULL, +CUSS, +CUT OFF, +DELL, +DILL, +DOFF, +DOLL, +DOSS, +DUFF, +DULL, +EBB, +EFF, +EGG, +BAD EGG, +EGG-CUP, +EGG ON, +FELL, +FILL, +FILL IN, +FILL UP, +FIZZ, +FOB OFF, +FUSS, +FUSS-POT, +FUZZ, +GAFF, +GAFF, +GILL, +GUFF, +GULL, +HELL, +HILL, +HISS*, +HUFF, +HULL, +ILL, +I'LL*, +JAZ, +JELL, +JINN, +JIZZ, +KILL, +KILL OFF, +KISS, +LASS, +LESS, +LET OFF, +LOLL, +LOSS, +AT A LOSS, +LUFF, +LULL, +MASS, +MATT, +MESS, +MID-OFF, +MILL, +MISS, +MITT, +MOSS, +MUFF, +MULL, +MASS, +MUSS, +MUSS UP, +MUTT, +NILL*, +NULL, +ODD, +OFF, +PELL MELL, +PILL, +PISS, +PISS OFF, +POLL, +IF POSS., +PUFF, +PUTT, +QUELL, +QUILL, +QUOLL*, +RILL, +RIP OFF, +RIP-OFF, +ROLL, +ROLL ON, +ROLL OFF, +ROLL UP, +RUB OFF, +RUFF, +SASS, +SELL, +SELL OFF, +SETT, +SILL, +TELL, +TIFF, +TILL, +TIP OFF, +TIP-OFF, +TOFF, +TOLL, +TOSS, +UNLESS, +WELL, +WELL IN, +AS WELL AS, +WELL OFF, +WILL, +YELL. Names +ANN, +BESS, +BIFF, +BILL, +JEFF, +JILL, +KELL, +NELL, +RIPP, +ROSS, +RUSS, +TESS, +TODD.

*Belle ends in a silent <e> to tell us it means a beautiful girl or woman, not the bell we ring for school. Belle is an adjective in French. The French adjective for a beautiful boy or man is "beau". They have both been turned into nouns (the belle and the beau of the ball). They are not adjectives in English. In fact the only adjective which is different for male and female in English is blond and blonde.

*Hiss spells [his], meaning hiss like a snake, and his spells [hiz], as in 'his hat', as we already know.

*I'll spells [Il] because it is short for I will or I shall. The little hook has hooked out <wi> or <sha>.

*Quoll has become a general word for native cat but was adopted from the Guugu-Yimidhirr Ab'l language name for just one sort of spotted marsupial, (Blake, p. 103).

*We no longer use the Old English word *nill*, the opposite of *will*. "Will you, nill you, I will marry you," meant "Want to or not, I will marry you."

Rule 1-8 Terminal <ss> spells [s] and follows short stressed vowels spelt with one letter.

Reason These words obey Orm's rule for writing short vowels.

Rebels +BASS (in music), +GROSS

Rebels' Reasons. Cummings p. 403 says that *bass* and *gross* are the only two words in which <ss> follows a long vowel sound. When *bass* spells [bas] it is a fish, but it can also spell [bays] and then it means 'low'. A bass singer sings down low, at the base of musical pitch, and so we pronounce it exactly like base [bays] but write it bass in honour of the great Italian basso singers. Gross spells [grohs] because it comes from the Old French word for large, grosse. It can be used to

mean 144 items or ‘a dozen dozen’ based on the old French *grosse douzaine* or ‘large dozen’. If spelt *grose* it would spell [grohz], rhyming with *hose* and *grows*. So the French spelling is used.

Where is pull? In the next list, because pull does not spell [pul].

Old Ways in Olden Days.

Rule 1-9 Long ago <u> spelt [uu], and still does in a few words.

Reason. It was [v] said without using lips and teeth. The following words are always said the old way. Some people, especially up north in England, say many more words the old way. The vowel [uu] is a short vowel sound — <u> spells two short sounds, [u] and [uu].

List 1-9 <u> spells [uu]

+BULL, +FULL*, +PULL, +PUT, +PUSS-CAT.

*Sometimes *full* is reduced to *ful* and added onto words, like *wilful*, *fitful*, but <ful> still spells [fuul].

Zed, ‘Sez’ and Said

Rule 1-10 The Terminal Zed Rule: English words do not end in a vowel followed by <z>. Zed twins, <zz>, always follow a short one-letter vowel.

Reason When <z> is used, which is not often, it follows Orm’s twinning rule.

Rebels +FEZ, +QUIZ and VIZ, +{+WHIZ, +TOPAZ}

Rebels’ Reasons *Fez*, *quiz* and *viz* are all foreign words which have been adopted into the English language but their spelling has not been adapted. In other words, their letters have not been changed to fit English spelling rules. These words are ‘adopted but not adapted’.

We call it ‘diplomatic immunity’ when foreign diplomats do not have to obey Australian laws inside their own embassies. We let some foreign letters disobey English spelling rules inside their own words.

Not needed but nice to know. *Viz.* is a faulty abbreviation of *videlicet*, Latin for *namely*. In fact we never read out “viz”. Instead, we always say “namely”. Someone copied a short hand squiggle thinking it was <z>, from a speech Cicero made around 60 BC. Marc Tiro was employed to write his speeches. He used his own shorthand — 4,000 symbols. One of these symbols was mistaken at a later date for a <z>. *Quiz* is made from Latin words, *quis* + *quid*. We shall meet two more rebels which end in a single <z>, *whiz* and *topaz*. Some slang words are rebels too, e.g., *coz*, short for ‘cousin’ or ‘because’, *biz* for ‘business’, *schnoz* for ‘nose’. Now back to things we need to know.

Eye Dialect Rebels

Have you ever seen SEZ in comic books? Maybe you have seen “FOO WOZ HERE” painted on a wall. In books, spellings like *sez* for *says* and *woz* for *was* are used when writing dialog to suggest that the speaker is talking carelessly, even though the pronunciation indicated by those respellings are the usual ones. Such use of unconventional spellings is called “eye dialect”, because although we cannot hear the speaker, we can see he or she is speaking “funny”, in a dialect. Due to the simple spelling, the words appear to come from an uncomplicated or uneducated or casual person.

So the word *sez*, which breaks the terminal <zz> rule, is only used when recording conversations.

We say it [sez] but we have to write it like this:- <says>, unless we are recording conversations such as “I sez to him I sez, if you don’t watch out you’ll be in big trouble. An’ he sez, ‘Sez hoo?’ I wuz that mad I kooda shook him.”

Now that we have learnt to read *sez* we had better learn to read *says*, which is the proper way to write [sez].

Rebel +SAYS We know <s> spells [s] at the beginning of words. The sound [ay] is the same as the name of the letter A. So *say* spells [say]. However, *says* does not spell [sayz]. Instead, it spells [sez]. Because we use it a lot it shrank from long [sayz] to short [sez]. As we know, <s> spells [z] after a short, stressed vowel sound.

We say it many times a day: “Who says that?” “He says that.” We also say the word *say* a lot but it did not shrink its long [ay] sound down to [e] because it is hard for our mouths to end a word in [e]

and in fact there is no word in the English language which ends in the short [e] sound, (Cummings, p. 220). (We also say *plays* a lot, but not as often as we say *says*.)

So +SAY spells [say] and +SAYS spells [sez]. (*Says* is the only word in which <ay> spells [e].)

A related **Rebel**, +SAID.

If you read <sed> you would know exactly how to say it: [sed], like its relation [sez]. However [sed] is spelt <said>. The simplest spelling, *sed*, was already in use, for the Latin word *but*. Normally we add <ed> to show past tense, which would produce <sayed>. Not only do we say this word a lot, we write it a lot and so the long vowel [ay] reduced to [e], as it did in *says*, and the written length of the vowel reduced from three letters, <aye>, to two, <ai>. The letter <i> is often used to replace <y> inside a word, as in *happiness* rather than *happyness*, and this would have produced <saied>. There is a strong English aversion to using three vowels in a row, full vowels, not two vowels split by a semi-vowel, as in *played* and *owe*. This could be why <saied> reduced to <said>. Not only was the spoken vowel shortened but also the written vowel, which saved time.

The letters <ai> spell the sound [e] in only three words, *said*, *again*, {*against*}.

Rebels +SAY, +SAYS, +SAID, +AGAIN, +{AGAINST}

Not needed but nice to know. The proper noun *Said* or *Sa'id* [sar-eed] is a popular Persian and Arabic name in many Australian families, meaning “Happy”. Now back to things we need to know.

Maybe you are still wondering why *says* is not spelt <sez> and why *said* is not spelt <sed>. Letters show the links between words, especially the first letters of a word. So, if we look at *said* and *says* we can guess that they might be linked because they each start with <sa>. If we wrote *sed* and *sez* we would lose their link to *say* and to other related words like *saga*, which is when someone has a very long say, tells a long story. Words link up in this way to words in other languages, too. For instance, *say* in German is *sagen*. Naturally not every word starting <sa> is linked. However, words are linked to each other by their first letters, not their last. It is the opposite for people. As we know, just because we share a first name we are not related. However, if we share a last name, we might be related. Here are a few word pairs for you to investigate for links: *nephew* and *nepotism*; *vapid*, and *vapour*; *parade* and *apparent*.

Rule 1-11 Terminal <s> spells [s] after unstressed vowels.

Reason Such words are longer than one syllable. People got tired of obeying Orm’s Laws. Also, they began saving ink and paper, as well as time. As we know, terminal <s> spells [z] because <z> was so unpopular. Terminal <ss> spelt [s], but to save time, paper and ink, scribes let just one <s> spell [s] at the end of words if the ends of the words were less important than the beginnings. English speakers give more importance to the beginning of most words. English words have strong, stressed, beginnings and weak endings, on the whole. Say *atlas* or *litmus*. Even a big word like *hippopotamus* has a weak ending. The vowel sound at the end of these words has shrunk to a short version of [uu]. Linguists have invented the letter called ‘schwa’ to write that little sound, [ə]. *Schwa* spells [shwar] and comes from a Hebrew word meaning ‘emptiness’. So, they write [at-ləs] for *atlas* and [lit-məs] and [hip-o-pot-a-məs]. Words with shrivelled, unstressed endings use <s> to spell [s]. However, not all words with unstressed terminal syllables have reduced terminal <ss> to <s>, e.g., *cutlass*, *carcass*, *windlass*, and also nearly all words ending [es] have kept the twin <ss>, e.g., *abbess*, *actress*, *mattress*. These <ss> endings are not as weak as <s> endings: *actress* has a stronger ending than *tennis*. We shall meet terminal <s> spelling [s] in words like {*tennis* and *atlas* and *oasis*}, later.

Affixes

Affixes are bits which fix onto stem words to make longer words. Stem words, like *bat* or *do* or *red* or *sit*, grow by adding affixes, as in *batter*, *undo*, *redde*n, *sitting*.

A **prefix** is fixed onto the beginning of a word, is **p**revious to the word. Some words continue **on** by adding a **suffix** on, at the end. Suffix means “on-fix”. A word without a prefix or a suffix is just a

bare stem, a stem word. Some stems cannot stand alone anymore, are no longer **free stems**. They are called **bound stems**, e.g., *fy* in *defy* is a bound stem. Some words are made by joining up two separate words. They are ‘compounded’ or combined into one word and called **compound words**. Two or more consonants side by side are called a **cluster** and they can cluster inside stem words, or where words and affixes join or where stem words join to make compound words. All consonants, except for <s> and <f>, spell the same word-sounds whether single or twinned.

Relevant Writing Rules.

Writing Rule Twins are not welcome in clusters of three or more. This is only a weak rule.

Reason It is probably just to make words easy to read. Prof Cummings, on p. 77, shows that we avoid twins in clusters of three or more. We write *seven*, *seventh* but *eight*, *eighth* not *eightth*, *welcome* not *wellcome*, *also* not *allso*, *already* not *allready*, *fulsome* not *fullsome*.

Writing Rule Letter <l> is always twinned at the end of single-syllable words after a vowel spelt with one letter.

Rebels +NIL and {+GEL} are the only common single-syllable words which disobey this rule.

Rebels’ Reasons They are both abbreviations, of *gelatine* and of *nihil* (Latin).

Writing Rule Suffixes cannot end in <ll>.

Reason The only time we see <ll> at the end of words of more than one syllable is if they are made of two separate whole words e.g., *blackball*, *standstill*, *install*, or a whole word and prefix e.g., *unwell*.

Rebels All words ending in <ful>, +FITFUL, +RUEFUL, +WILFUL, {+USEFUL, +FEARFUL}.

Rebels’ Reason *Full* is treated as a suffix when added to stem words. Note how *will* has dropped <l> to avoid twins in a cluster in *will* + *full*. That is why we do not write *willful*.

Rebels? +UNTIL, +INSTIL and +DISTIL? No, words ending in <til>, e.g., *until*, *instil* and *distil* are not rebels. These are whole English words, without prefixes. *Instil* and *distil* evolved from foreign words with prefixes, and were adopted into English as stem words. English never had a stem word *still* with its old foreign meaning of ‘drip’. *Until* evolved from two Old English words and became one stem word. The two old words, *und* and *til*, are now obsolete, gone from the English language, extinct.

Is +FULFIL a rebel? No. Due to the weak rule against twins in clusters, *full*, in *fulfil*, is written with a single <l> to avoid the cluster <llf>. Now that *fulfil* is no longer made of two whole words, it cannot end in <ll>.

Rebels +THEREWITHAL, +WHEREWITHAL and +WITHAL

Rebels’ Reasons The final word in the compounds *therewithal*, *wherewithal* and *withal* was originally *all*. No other compound words end in <all> or in <al>. Opinion is that by dropping the final <l> the compound is secure, cannot be mistaken for separate words, as in ‘Where, with all that luggage, does she plan to go?’ Contrast with “She has the wherewithal to hire a van and take it to her lovely new home, withal.” Quite different meanings. Note:- In these words <al> spells [orl], whereas terminal <al> in other words spells unstressed [al] or [əl] as in *animal*, except for the British spelling of *appall*, which is APPAL, see 1-14.

Writing Rule Only twin <ff> spells [f] at the end of a word after a vowel spelt with one letter. So, it is *huff* but *leaf*, not *leaff*.

Rebels {+CHEF, +APERITIF, +SERIF, +CALIF, +CLEF}; +IF and +OF.

Rebels’ Reasons They have all been adopted from French but not adapted to English spelling rules except for *if* and *of*. *If* was once spelt *iff*. It was spelt *iff* in Orm’s 1150 *Ormulum* and *iff* in other old books, because <ff> spelt [f] and <f> spelt [v]. There is no word [iv] and so about 300 years ago it was decided a single <f> was all that was needed to write [if], and was quicker than writing *iff*.

Off and *of* both began as one English word, *of*, back when <f> spelt [v]. This word meant *origin*, whether still there or away from that origin, just as Ally is still “Ally of the Glen” although she now lives elsewhere. Then when a thing was taken from its first place, as when it went away, folk started saying that it was ‘of the ship’ but it went ‘off the ship’, until there were two separate words. So we

let *of* disobey the Terminal F rule so that we can tell it apart from *off*. We cannot write *ovv* for [ov] because, as we shall see, <v> cannot end a word, and also <vv> is not allowed because it looks like <w>.

Writing Rule Triplets are not used in English. This is a strong rule. Hyphens are used to keep some words within the law: e.g., “*The cat is bell-less.*” {Later we’ll see *full* become *fully* not *fullylly* to prevent triplets.}

Reason Three letters in a row are hard to distinguish, especially if they consist mainly of down strokes like <l> and <f>, handwritten in the old style, *lll*, *fff*. Return to Reading Rules.

The dot, on <i>, is called a tittle. It did not appear on English <i> until the fifteenth century. Irish writers did not use it and even today you can see Irish place names on Ireland’s road signs without dots. It is thought that the phrase “to a T” derived from the word ‘tittle’. We “dot our *i*’s and cross our *t*’s” when we pay attention to every detail of a task.

Feather Words — *love, son, blue, won* — aka Cursive Casualties.

Rule 1-12 Old <u> before *n, m* or *v* is replaced by <o>.

Reason The scribes of Old England wrote with the rounded letters introduced by the Irish missionaries who brought Christianity back to England. This Insular Style is still used to write Irish Gaelic, (Pyles 1993 p. 49). Each pen was the shaft of a strong feather, sharpened and dipped in ink. Scribes after 1066 used the quicker, cursive style. William the Conqueror insisted they write faster and faster to complete the Domesday Books which held the records of his new English estates. They rounded angular letters, to make them easier to write. This meant that <v> got a round, hand-written bottom, like <u>. They joined the letters of each word. This made the letter *u* before *n, m* or *v* very hard to read. For instance, <wun> resembled <wm> in cursive. The scribes decided amongst themselves to write each <u> before *n, m* or *v* as <o> but still read it as a <u>, (Cummings 1988, p. 246). List words in which <o> should really be <u> will be marked like this: *f*, to show that it is a feather word, written by the scribes with their feather pens. (Latin for *feather* is “penna”.)

Not many people could write and so a few scribes could make this decision for a nation — even kings could not write, (Crystal, 1987 p. 187). Scribes in various regions made additional decisions but this one has stuck. An <o> for <u> only occurs in old words. At this time <u> spelt [uu]. The letter <u> now spells [u] unless we are told otherwise, although in some parts it still spells its old sound [uu]. Australians who come from the north of England still say [hiz] [suun] [wuun] for *his son won*, [hiz] [sun] [wun]. The following are our first Feather Words. This is a gentle name for words which are damaged by cursive handwriting. So I also refer to them as Cursive Casualties. We shall meet many more Cursive Casualties along the road to reading.

Try writing them without <o>, with <u> instead, in cursive ‘running writing’. For instance, *wun*. Can you read it? Is it easier with <o> instead of <u> in *won*?

List 1-12

+SON* *f* [sun], +TON *f* [tun], +WON *f* [wun].

**Son* [sun] meant a boy child, for in the olden days the *sun* was called *sol* or *sigel* or *the day star* or *suwen* which later became *sun*. *Sol* has been retained in *solar*, as in ‘solar radiation’ — sun shine.