



DECODING: TRICKY LETTER COMBINATIONS

Introduction

When you come across unfamiliar words in your reading, try pronouncing the words. Think about the way each sound is spelled. Notice any unusual spellings. You may find that some of the words do not sound the way they are spelled.

Note the difference between the spelling and pronunciation of the word *caught*. The letters *g* and *h* are silent. Think about other words you know that are similar in spelling to *caught*.

Suppose a passage that you are reading contains the word *haughty*. You can use what you know about the *augh* letter combination in other words to figure out how to pronounce *haughty*, which means “proud.”

In words with the letter combinations *igh* and *ought*, *gh* is also silent, as it is in the *augh* combination. Study the examples below. (Notice that the vowel sounds in words with the *ought* combination sometimes differ.)

Words with the <i>igh</i> combination	Words with the <i>ought</i> combination
light might high	fought bought drought

Now consider the difference between the spelling and pronunciation of the word *would*. In the *ould* combination, the *l* is silent. Think about other words you know that are similar in spelling to *would*.

Reading Tip

Many English words do not sound the way they are spelled. Use what you already know about words with tricky letter combinations to help you figure out the pronunciations of words that have similar combinations.



Practice

Read the following passage from “Aaron’s Gift” by Myron Levoy.

Aaron thought he understood and then, again, he thought he didn’t. How could she be so happy when there really was no present? And why pretend that there was?

Later that night, just before he fell asleep, Aaron tried to imagine what his grandmother might have done with the pigeon. She would have fed it, and she certainly would have talked to it, as she did to all the birds, and ...and then she would have let it go free. Yes, of course. Pidge’s flight to freedom must have been the gift that had made his grandmother so happy.

- A. Identify words in the passage that have the letter combinations shown below. Write the words below each heading. Say each word aloud. Then write its meaning next to it. If necessary, look it up in the dictionary.

<i>ough</i>	<i>igh</i>	<i>ought</i>	<i>ould</i>

B. Challenge!

In the *ough* combination at the end of words, the *gh* can be silent or it can have the /f/ sound. Write at least one example of each case below.

1. *ough*, in which *gh* is silent

2. *ough*, in which *gh* has the /f/ sound



NAME _____

DATE _____

DECODING: SOUND/LETTER PATTERNS

Introduction

As you explore meaning and pronunciation in your reading, you may have noticed that certain letter patterns produce specific sounds. For example, in the *tion* pattern at the end of a word, *ti* has the sound /sh/, as in *motion* and *direction*.

Words that end with the /shən/ sound are usually spelled with the *-tion* ending. In some cases, this sound can be spelled *-sion*, as in *tension* and *propulsion*, usually when a consonant comes before the /shən/ ending.

Most words that end in a vowel plus *sion* have the /zhən/ sound, as in *decision* and *vision*.

You may have also noticed in your reading that words with more than one syllable whose last, unaccented syllable ends in *-ar*, *-er*, or *-or* have the same ending sound, /ər/. Examples are *dollar*, *offer*, and *monitor*. The /ər/ sound does not change when *-s*, *-ed*, and *-ing* are added to a base word that ends in *-ar*, *-er*, and *-or*, as in *dollars*, *offered*, and *monitoring*.

Another pattern you may have noticed is the /f/ sound produced by *ph* in words you read. The sound /f/ can be produced by the letter pattern *ph* at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of words. Note the examples below.

- /f/ sound made by *ph* pattern at the beginning of a word:
photograph, phrase, physical
- /f/ sound made by *ph* pattern in the middle of a word:
gopher, emphasize, telephone
- /f/ sound made by *ph* pattern at the end of a word:
graph, autograph

Reading Tip

When you discover an unfamiliar word in your reading, first try pronouncing the word. Think about the way each sound is spelled. Look for sound/letter patterns that you are familiar with, such as *tion/sion*, *ar/er/or*, and *ph*. Apply what you already know about sound/letter patterns to the new word. Once you are able to pronounce the word, you may discover that you are familiar with it—even though it may have seemed unfamiliar when you first saw it.



NAME _____ DATE _____

Practice

Read the following passage from “TV’s Top Dogs” by Deborah Starr Seibel.

The star’s handlers were clearly worried. Their anxiety had been filtering through phone and fax lines for more than a week over a request for an important photo session—known in the business as a “cover try.” They were interested, but would their star be on the cover?

Identify words in the passage that have the sound/letter patterns shown below. Write the words below each heading.

Words that end with <i>sion/tion</i> (can include <i>s</i> ending)	Words that have <i>ar/er/or</i> as the second, unaccented, syllable (can include <i>s, ed,</i> and <i>ing</i> endings)	Words in which <i>ph</i> stands for the /f/ sound

Pronounce each word aloud. Which of these words do you use in your everyday speech? What is the meaning of these words?



NAME _____

DATE _____

DECODING: SYLLABIFICATION

Introduction

A **syllable** is a unit of language: it can be a word or part of a word. Each syllable in a word has one vowel sound. As you explore word pronunciation and meaning during your reading, it is sometimes helpful to divide a word into its syllables.

Often, one or more of the syllables is an important clue to meaning. In addition, when you say the word aloud, you may realize that it's one you already use in your everyday speech—and you may not have recognized it by just seeing it on the page. To divide a word into syllables, first listen for the vowel sounds.

Pronounce the words *beat* and *create*. Notice that in *beat*, the letters *e* and *a* together have one vowel sound and one syllable. In *create*, the letters *e* and *a* make two different vowel sounds. *Create* has two syllables: cre ate.

Use these rules to help you divide words into syllables:

1. If a word has two vowel sounds between two consonant letters, divide the word between the two vowels.

ruin	ru in
trial	tri al
react	re act

2. If a word has two consonants between two vowels, divide the word between the two consonants.

injure	in jure
letter	let ter
import	im port

3. If a word has two of the same consonants next to each other, divide the word between the two consonants.

common	com mon
effect	ef fect
approve	ap prove

4. If a word has a middle consonant between two vowels, listen for the accented syllable in the word. The middle consonant is part of the accented syllable.

pretend	pre tend'
melon	mel' on
salute	sa lute'

Reading Tip

Remember to listen for the vowel sounds when you divide a word into syllables.



NAME _____ DATE _____

Practice

Read the following passage from “How to Write a Letter” by Garrison Keillor.

Sit for a few minutes with the blank sheet in front of you, and meditate on the person you will write to, let your friend come to mind until you can almost see her or him in the room with you. Remember the last time you saw each other and how your friend looked and what you said and what perhaps was unsaid between you, and when your friend becomes real to you, start to write.

- A. List eight words from the passage that have two syllables. Say each word aloud to decide how many syllables it has. Draw a line between the syllables of each word.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

- B. With a partner, go through one or two of the selections in your literature book to find at least two more examples of words following each of the rules on the previous page. Then think of words you both use in your everyday speech, and come up with at least one more example for each of the rules. Finally, look through your list and circle any syllables that can stand by themselves as words. Look up the meaning of each of these syllables. Then explain how the syllable contributes to the overall meaning of the word.



NAME _____

DATE _____

RECOGNIZING WORD ROOTS

Introduction

In the English language, many words have a “core” section, or root. Consider, for example, the word *prediction*. *Pre* and *tion* attach to the root, *dic*, which means “say” in Latin. A prediction is something “said before” an event happens.

Some common roots include *dark* in *darkness*, *able* in *ability*, and *cast* in *forecast*. You might say that roots are the building blocks of our language. Roots are an important reading and vocabulary tool, because they can help you figure out the meaning of words that are unfamiliar.

Read the passage below from “Lob’s Girl” by Joan Aiken.

Lob’s owner scolded him and thanked Mr. Pengelly for bringing him back. Jean Pengelly warned the children that they had better not encourage Lob any more if they met him on the beach, or it would only lead to more trouble. So they dutifully took no notice of him the next day until he spoiled their good resolutions by dashing up to them with joyful barks, wagging his tail so hard that he winded Tess and knocked Tim’s legs from under him.

There are several roots in the above passage. For example, notice the word *encourage*. If words like *encourage* are unfamiliar to you, see if they contain a familiar root. In this case, the root of *encourage* is *courage*, which means “bravery” or “confidence.” When you see that root together with the prefix *en-*, which means “to put into,” you can infer that the word *encourage* means “to put confidence into.”

On the chart below, you will see how three words from the passage—*encourage*, *dutifully*, and *resolutions*—are formed from root words. Notice that *dutifully* is formed from the root *duty* and two suffixes: *-ful*, which means “full of” or “having,” and *-ly*, which means “in the manner of.” The word *resolution* is formed from the root *solve*, plus the prefix *re-*, which means “again, anew,” and the suffix *-tion*, which means “a thing that is the result of an action.”

Word	Root	Meaning of Root	Meaning of Word
encourage	courage	bravery, boldness	to put confidence into
dutifully	duty	sense of obligation	in an obedient way
resolutions	solve	loosen, free, find a correct answer to	firm decisions



NAME _____ DATE _____

Practice

Read the following passage from James Cameron's *Titanic*. As you read, look for words in the passage that have been formed from the roots listed in the chart below. Write these larger words in the first column of the chart. Then write the meaning of the root, and think about how knowing the root's meaning can help you understand the meaning of the larger word. Write the meaning of the word in the last column of the chart.

The tragedy has assumed an almost mythic quality in our collective imagination, but the passage of time has robbed it of its human face. Its status in our culture has become that of a morality tale, referred to more often as a metaphor in political cartoons than as an actual event. I set out to make a film that would bring the event to life, to humanize it; not a docudrama, but an experience in living history. I wanted to place the audience on the ship, in its final hours, to live out the tragic event in all its horribly fascinating glory.

Word	Root	Meaning of Root	Meaning of Word
1.	myth		
2.	collect		
3.	image		
4.	pass		
5.	moral		
6.	human		
7.	drama		
8.	horror		



PREFIXES/SUFFIXES

Introduction

A **prefix** is a letter or letters attached to the front of a word or root to create a new word (for example, *disagree*, *inconvenient*, *return*). A **suffix** is a letter or letters attached to the end of a word or root to create a new word (for example, *beautiful*, *readable*).

By adding prefixes and suffixes to existing words, you can vastly expand your vocabulary. Learning the meanings of prefixes and suffixes will also help you to piece together the meanings of some unfamiliar words.

While you are reading, you can often figure out a word you don't know by breaking it down into its parts. For example, suppose you come across the word *uneventful* in your reading. You can decode the word by breaking it down into three parts (*un-event-ful*):

1. *un-*, a prefix meaning "not" or "the opposite of"
2. *event*, a word meaning "happening" or "occurrence"
3. *-ful*, a suffix meaning "full of" or "having"

When you look at the word parts, you realize that *uneventful* means "not marked by any special event," "peaceful," "routine."

The chart below lists several common prefixes and suffixes and explains what they mean. Study the chart so you can recall these meanings when you are reading a textbook or story. Knowledge of prefixes and suffixes will save you a lot of time when you are trying to decode words as you read.

Prefix	Meaning	Suffix	Meaning
<i>be-</i>	completely, excessively	<i>-er</i>	one that performs a certain task
<i>circum-</i>	around, about	<i>-est</i>	the most, forms the superlative degree
<i>dis-</i>	not	<i>-graph</i>	something written or drawn
<i>in-</i>	not; in, into within	<i>-ly</i>	in the manner of
<i>pre-</i>	before, prior to	<i>-ment</i>	action, process
<i>un-</i>	opposite of	<i>-ness</i>	state, quality, degree
<i>re-</i>	again, anew	<i>-ology</i>	science, study
<i>non-</i>	not	<i>-ty</i>	condition, quality



Practice

As you read the passage below from “The Strange Geometry of Stonehenge” by Katherine B. Shippen, suppose that you don’t know the meanings of the words *geology*, *carefully*, *untouched*, and *undoubtedly*. These words are listed on the chart below the passage. On the chart, write any prefix or suffix contained in these words and what the prefix or suffix means. Then figure out the meaning of each word, and write that meaning in the last column of the chart. Use a dictionary if necessary.

Geology was another science that helped find an answer to these questions. Geological study now proved that the sarsen stones of gray sandstone must have been brought from the Marlborough Downs 24 miles away...

Stuart Piggott, an eminent British archaeologist, started to excavate at Stonehenge in 1950. He carefully left more than half the area untouched, for he held that the diggers of the future would undoubtedly develop techniques superior to his own and he did not want to spoil their work.

Word Meaning	Prefix	Suffix	Root
1.			geo-, “earth”
2.			care, “close attention”
3.			touch, “contact”
4.			doubt, “uncertainty”



NAME _____

DATE _____

INFLECTED FORMS: PLURALS AND TENSES

Introduction

An **inflection** is a sound that is added to the end of a word. It changes the word's meaning in some way. Compare the two words *peach* and *peaches*. The sound /iz/ has been added to the stem word *peach* and changes its meaning from singular to plural. "Peaches" is what is called an **inflected form**. The *-es* is the inflection, a special kind of suffix. In English, the sound of the inflections *-s*, *-es*, or *-ies* is used to change many singular nouns to plural nouns.

Inflections are also used to change the tense of verbs. For example, *collect* and *collected*. Notice how the addition of the sound /ed/ changes this verb from the present to the past tense.

There are other uses of inflections in English, but these are two of the most important. Understanding how inflections are used will increase your understanding of grammar and help you be a better writer.

Read the passage below from "Thunder Butte" by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve. Notice that the verbs *walked*, *turned*, *waved*, *quicken*, *whistled*, *swiped*, *practiced*, *dotted*, and *warmed* are all inflected forms.

He walked briskly across the open prairie and turned to wave at his mother, who had come outside to watch him leave. She waved back and Norman quickened his pace. He whistled, trying to echo the meadowlarks who were greeting the day with their happy song. He swiped the willow cane at the bushy sage and practiced spearing the pear cactus that dotted his path. The early morning air was cool, but the sun soon warmed the back of his neck and he knew it would be a hot day.

The stems of the inflected verbs are *walk*, *turn*, *wave*, *quicken*, *whistle*, *swipe*, *practice*, *dot*, and *warm*. The inflected forms let you know that all of the action takes place in the past. The narrator is telling the reader about it.

Inflections are also important in subject-verb agreement. For example, in the present tense you would say "He walks," not "He walked." Notice that the *-s* inflection is used here. This is the same sound used to change some singular nouns to plurals.



NAME _____

DATE _____

Practice

Below is another passage from “Thunder Butte” by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve. Read the passage carefully, and watch for both plural and tense inflections. (Hint: Watch for plural nouns and for verbs in the past tense.)

His fingers found tiny cracks to hold on to. The cane was cumbersome and in the way. . .

Finally Norman spied a narrow opening in the ledge which tapered down to only a few feet from where he clung. He inched his way up until he reached the base of the opening and then he found a use for the cane. He jammed the stout branch high into the boulders above him. Cautiously he pulled to see if it would hold his weight. . .

- A. List two inflected nouns from the passage above. How does the inflection change their meaning?

- B. List five inflected verbs from the passage above. List those with /ed/ sound endings in one list and those with /t/ sound endings in another. How do the inflections change the meaning of the verbs?



NAME _____

DATE _____

CONTEXT CLUES

Introduction

When you read an unfamiliar word, you can use **context clues** to figure out its meaning. Context clues are clues in the text surrounding a word. Look for context clues in the sentence that contains the unfamiliar word or in the phrases or sentences nearby.

Model 1

The following passage is from “Zlateh the Goat” by Isaac Bashevis Singer. Notice how the underlined words might help readers define the word *rapidly*.

The sun was shining when Aaron left the village. Suddenly the weather changed. A large black cloud with a bluish center appeared in the east and spread itself **rapidly** over the sky. A cold wind blew in with it.

Unfamiliar Word	Context Clues	Definition
rapidly	suddenly; blew in	quickly

Model 2

Read the passage below from “Feathered Friend” by Arthur C. Clarke. Study the underlined words to find context clues that help you define the word *regulation*. As you read the passage, create a definition for the word *regulation* in your mind. Then compare your definition with the one in the chart below.

To the best of my knowledge, there’s never been a regulation that forbids one to keep pets in a space station. No one ever thought it was necessary—and even had such a rule existed, I am quite certain that Sven Olsen would have ignored it.

Unfamiliar Word	Context Clues	Definition
regulation	forbids; rule	official rule, law



Practice

Part I

Read the passage below from “Names/Nombres” by Julia Alvarez. Then complete the chart.

Our first few years in the States, though, ethnicity was not yet “in.” Those were the blond, blue-eyed, bobby socks years of junior high and high school before the ‘60s ushered in peasant blouses, hoop earrings, serapes.⁴ My initial desire to be known by my correct Dominican name faded. I just wanted to be Judy and merge with the Sallys and Janes in my class. But inevitably, my accent and coloring gave me away. “So where are you from, Judy?”

“New York,” I told my classmates. After all, I had been born blocks away at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital.

“I mean, *originally*.”

“From the Caribbean,” I answered vaguely, for if I specified, no one was quite sure on what continent our island was located.

4. serapes: Colorful shawls worn in Latin America.

Unfamiliar Word	Context Clues	Definition
ethnicity		
initial		
inevitably		
specified		



NAME _____

DATE _____

Part II

The following passage is from “Orpheus” by Alice Low. As you read the passage, circle the context clues that might help you define the underlined words. Then complete the chart on the next page.

There were nine goddesses called Muses. Born of Zeus and a Titan named Mnemosyne, each Muse presided over a different art or science.

Calliope, one of these sisters, was the inspiration of poets and musicians. She was the mother of Orpheus (a mortal because his father was one) and gave to her son a remarkable talent for music.

Orpheus played his lyre so sweetly that he charmed all things on earth. Men and women forgot their cares when they gathered around him to listen. Wild beasts lay down as if they were tame, entranced by his soothing notes. Even rocks and trees followed him, and the rivers changed their direction to hear him play.

Orpheus loved a young woman named Eurydice, and when they were married, they looked forward to many years of happiness together. But soon after, Eurydice stepped on a poisonous snake and died.



NAME _____ DATE _____

Part II (continued)

Unfamiliar Word	Context Clues	Definition
inspiration		
entranced		
poisonous		