

HARD WORDS

Finding the Stressed Vowel Sound

1. We have found the stressed syllable, but how do we know which vowel sound is there? [\[LINK\]](#) [\[LINK\]](#) [\[LINK\]](#)

It is definitely harder to predict the stressed vowel sound than the stressed syllable. Do not hesitate to use a translator/dictionary to identify the stressed vowel sound in a word. However, let's try to do it without help – on sight. Each word is divided into syllables. Each syllable has a vowel spelling representing *one* vowel sound. One of the vowel sounds in a word is stressed, while the other vowel sounds in the other syllables are weak, e.g.

2-syllables:	nor mal	'or' = long or	'a' = schwa	
3-syllables:	i lle gal	'i' = weak i	'e' = long ee	'a' = schwa

There are a number of rules and patterns that we rely on to work out the stressed vowel sound. See also: [\[LINK\]](#).

2. VCC rule: In one-syllable words, a single vowel letter will be short, e.g. 'hot', 'sit', 'net'. In longer words, if a vowel letter is followed by two or more consonant letters, the vowel sound will be short, e.g. 'event', 'debt', 'hobby'. Exceptions which form groups can be learned separately, e.g. 'ball', 'fall', 'tall', 'wall' (Lesson 7).

3. VCV rule: If a vowel letter is followed by a consonant letter then a vowel letter, the first vowel letter will be long and say its 'alphabet name'. [\[LINK\]](#) For example: 'label', 'refund', 'ice', 'hope', 'usually'. Sometimes we see vcv but the stressed vowel sound is short. This can be because:

- the stressed vowel sound is followed by two or more unstressed syllables (**short + 2 weak**). For example: 'generally', 'national', 'valuable', 'vegetable'.
- the words are exceptions (Lesson 7) – irregular words that we have to learn as **sight words**, e.g. vcv words which have a short vowel sound, like 'busy', 'ever', 'metal' and 'project'.

4. When looking at the vowel sound spellings in the stressed syllables, we can see three distinct patterns, which narrow down the range of sounds available to us:

- two vowel letters together is a **vowel digraph**. [\[LINK\]](#) The first vowel letter is usually pronounced as its 'alphabet name', while the second is silent, e.g. 'oa' in 'boat' and 'ai' in 'train'. Each digraph can be pronounced in several different ways. For example: the digraph 'ea' is usually pronounced as long ee: 'meat', 'wheat', and 'heat', but can also be pronounced as short e, as in: 'head', 'bread', and 'read'. In different words, 'ea' can be ei in 'great' and iy in 'meal'.
- vowel + r** – these combinations can be pronounced in several different ways. Remember that 'r' is often part of the vowel spelling, not a consonant letter, and is silent – not pronounced. It is there to help represent the vowel sound. For example, 'ear' can represent the sound ar in 'heart' but also iy in 'hear', while the spelling 'or' denotes both or in 'fork' and er in 'word'.
- vowel + other consonant letter** (g, gh, h, l, w, y). Each combination can be pronounced in several different ways. For example: 'eigh' can be ei in 'weight' and ai in 'height', while 'ough' represents at least six different sounds, from eu in 'though' to or in 'bought'. Remember that these consonants are silent.

In each case you should refer to the chart [\[LINK\]](#) and learn the possible sounds that each spelling can represent.

5. There are other tried and trusted spelling/sounds rules too. Here are a few, but others can be easily found:

- a vowel at the end of a word can say its 'alphabet name': 'ago', 'emu', 'go', 'he', 'hero', 'menu', etc.
- 'i' and 'y' sound like ai at the end of a one-syllable word with no other vowel letter: 'hi', 'fly', 'try', etc.
- 'e' at the end of a word is usually silent. d) Double consonants are **not** pronounced twice, e.g. 'hobby'.