

AVKO Techniques for Teaching Phonics

AS manuscript and cursive is taught

AVKO recommends that you make sure that your students know the difference between the **NAME** of the letter and the different **SOUNDS** they make. The following are statements that you can make **WHEN** (and only when) you get to teaching each of the letters. Do **NOT** do all of these at one time! As each letter is introduced, you will be referred to this page.

- A The NAME of this letter is "AY." When it's a word it is pronounced "uh" as in a house, a dog, a cat, a cup, etc. In all other cases, how the letter A is pronounced depends upon its neighbors.
- B The NAME of this letter is "BEE." Its sound is what you hear at the beginning and ending of the words Bob, Bib, and Bub. (or "buh") You may want to use the techniques developed by Lindamood Bell or other techniques that you know from experience will work with your students.
- C The NAME of this letter is "SEE." Its sound is usually "kuh" when followed by a, o, or u as in cap, cop, or cup. It can also sound as "s-s-s" when followed by e or i as in city or cent.

Special Note: In big words ("FANCY") when the letter **c** is followed by **i** and endings -al, -on, and -ous, the letters **ci** are pronounced "sh-h-h" as in **spe**cial and suspi**ci**on and prec**ci**ous.

- D The NAME of this letter is "DEE." Its sound is what you hear at the beginning and ending of the words dad, dead, deed, died, did, and dud. (or "duh")
- R The NAME of this letter is "AH'R." When a word starts with the letter r its sound is what you hear at the beginning of the words, rat, rip, rot, rug, and room. (or "ruh"). When a word ends in r its sound is what you hear at the end of car, bear, cheer, and sir. (or "ur") Note: Some dialects drop the "R" sound at the ends of words so that the word car is pronounced "KAH" instead of "KAH'r. They also sometime stick in an "r" sound where it doesn't belong as in America being pronounced "uh MAIR uh kur.
- S The NAME of this letter is "ESS." Its sound is what you hear at the beginning and end of the words sis and sass (or "s-s-s").
- T The NAME of this letter is "TEE." Its sound is what you hear at the beginning and ending of the words tat, tot, toot, and tote. (or "tuh")
- Y The NAME of this letter is "W'IE." When it starts a word its sound is what you hear at the beginning of the words yes, yet, yell, yip, yam, yacht, and yummy. When it is at the end of a one syllable word it is pronounced "IE" or EYE as in by, cry, try, sly, fly, and dry. However, if the word has more than one syllable and it ends in y it is pronounced "EE" as in baby, pantry, and laundry. There are linguists and phoneticians who will insist that the sound is that of a short i, but we find it easier to teach both reading and spelling when we call it a long e. As you are the teacher, take your pick.
- E The NAME of this letter is "EE." Its sound (if any) depends upon its neighbors.
- F The NAME of this letter is "EFF." Its sound is what you hear at the beginning of fee, fi, foe, fum, fit, five, fingers, fast, for fun or at the ending of calf, Jeff, stiff, off, and stuff. (or "fuh")
- G The NAME of this letter is "JEE." Its sound is either soft or hard. When it's hard it's the sound you hear at the beginning and ending of the words gag and gig. (or "guh") When it's soft it's the sound you hear at the beginning of words such as gym, gee, George, gem, and gentle. (or "juh")
- H The NAME of this letter is "AY'ch." Its sound is usually what you hear at the beginning of words such as hat, hard, hot, ham, his, and hut. (or "huh") When h is preceded by c, g, s, t, or w it becomes part of a digraph. See digraphs below. When the letter h follows a vowel and ends a word it is silent but functions as a signal letter for the "AH" or "OH" sounds as in bah and oh.
- W The NAME of this letter is "DUBBLE YOO. AVKO considers the single u and the double u (w) to be like naughty identical twins who like to switch identities just as the I and Y do. Sometimes the vowel u takes on the role of the consonant w. Sometimes the consonant w takes on the role of the vowel u. When the w is a consonant its sound is what you hear at the beginning of words such as water, wall, win, will, and was ("wuh"). When the letter u is a consonant it has the same sound. Examples are suite ("sweet") and suede ("swayed"). When the double u (w) is at the end of a word it is always part of a vowel digraph such as aw, ew, and ow.

- I The NAME of this letter is “AH’ee” or EYE. Its sound (if any) depends upon its neighbors.
- N The NAME of this letter is “EN.” Its sound is what you hear in front and back of the words Nan, nine, and nun (or “nuh”).
- J The NAME of this letter is “JAY.” Its sound is what you hear at the beginning of words such as Jim, June, Judy, joy, and jump (or “juh”). Note: If the word has a Spanish derivation, it’s sound is “huh” as Jose (“hoh ZAY”), Jesus (“Hay Zoo-ss”) and La Jolla (“luh HOY yuh”).
- K The NAME of this letter is “KAY.” Its sound is what you hear in front of the words kick, Kate, and kin and what you hear at the end of words such as back, sick, tock, and stuck. (or “kuh”)
- L The NAME of this letter is “ELL.” Its sound is what you hear in front of words such as lip, lot, little, Lulu, lone and loon and what you hear at the ends of words such as ball, tell, still, gull, and coal (or “luh”).
- M The NAME of this letter is “EM.” Its sound is what you hear in front and back of mom and mum (or “muh”).
- O The NAME of this letter is “OH.” Its sound (if any) depends upon its neighbors.
- P The NAME of this letter is “PEE.” Its sound is what you hear at the beginning and ending of pop, pope, and pup (or “puh”).
- Q The NAME of this letter is “KYOO.” It’s sound is what you hear at the beginning of words such as cat, Kate, and quick (or “kuh”). Q almost always is followed by the letter *u* which in this one case almost always has the sound of “double u” (w) as in beginning sounds of the words wit, wad, walk, win and won. There are no words in the English language that use the letters *kw*. But there are lots of *qu* words with that sound as *kw* such as quit, quite, quack, quiz and quarrel. In words straight from Arabic the *q* is pronounced as /k/ as in Iraq.
- U The NAME of this letter is “YOO.” Its sound depends upon its neighbors.
- V The NAME of this letter is “VEE.” Its sound is what you hear at the beginning of the words van, very, voodoo, and voice and at the ending of the words have, cave, stove, love and live (or “vuh”). Notice that we just don’t like to end words with the letters *u* and *v*.
- X The NAME of this letter is “EK-ss.” When it starts a word other than X-ray, its sound is what you hear at the beginning of words such as xylophone xylocaine, and zoo. Most of the time it has the same sound as a *k* followed by an *s* and the ends of words such as mix, (Mick’s), tax (tacks), and lox (locks).
- Z The NAME of this letter is “ZEE.” When it starts a word, its sound is what you hear at the beginning of the words, zip, zap, and zoo. When it ends a word it sounds like what you hear at the ending of fuzz, does, and was!

There are a number of good ways to teach the sounds of each letter. If you want to use the traditional concepts of short vowels (a, e, i, o, u), long vowels AY, EE, YH (eye), OH, and YOO, it shouldn’t hurt too many students, but... Technically, one of the long vowels does NOT say its name, and that is the long *u*. The long vowel is OO as in “Ooh, I knew who was singing that tune in the Blue Moon.” When we have words like *cute* (“kYoot”), *few* (“fYoo”), and *beauty* (“bYOO tee”), the vowel does say its name (“YOO”) only because there is what we like to call an “invisible *y*.” If we can have silent letters, why not invisible letters? (See “The Case of the Invisible *Y*” in *The Teaching of Reading & Spelling: a Continuum from Kindergarten through College*)

AVKO also would prefer that you teach vowels as **sounds** and not just as the names of letters. Teachers and books normally say A, E, I, O, U, and sometimes Y and W are called vowels. But that is NOT quite true. Check your dictionary as to the real definitions of vowels and consonants. After you’ve done that and got yourself confused with all the linguistic jargon, here is a translation into plain simple English: **Vowels are grunts**. When man first developed a form of speech it was from simple grunts. Aaaaa, ahhhh, ohhhh, oohhhh, Ayyyyy, etc. **Consonants are shapers**. Put a **t** shaper at the end of the aaaaa grunt and you get the word **at**. Put an **m** shaper in front of **at** and you get the word **mat**. Depending upon the linguist you are talking to, you will get different answers to the question, “How many vowels are there in English?” Some will say 13, others will say 21 or more. AVKO uses a pragmatic fiction of 14 because we found it quite convenient for arranging words by patterns. AY, EE, IE, OH, OO are the long vowels; a, e, i, o, u (and the schwa) are the short vowels. AW, OW, OY, and UU (as in put) are the other vowels that are neither long nor short. As the r-controlled vowels can easily be handled within the fourteen vowel structure, we do it that way. There are some teachers who feel they must teach **–are** as in **care** separately from the LONG A families, because in truth the **a** in **care**, **stare**, and **mare** does not say its name. The sound is precisely a SHORT E. Ouch! That’s a bit confusing. It may be technically incorrect, but it’s more understandable to young students to treat the **–are** as a member of the VCe family. The same is true with the E, I, O, and URE families. As there are so many English dialects, we have tried to

stay as close to the Standard American TV dialect as possible. Perhaps the most noticeable differences in dialects are in the vowel sounds. We know that there are even distinguished professors of phonics such as Professor Patrick Groff who has claimed in a personal letter to the author that *Don* and *Dawn* are homonyms (homophones) as well as *dock* and *dark*! We respectfully disagree. We respect his dialect but not his assumption about Standard American TV dialect. Except in a very few dialects such as the Cockney dropping of h's and the Limerick substitution of /t/ for /th/, the consonant (shapers) are nearly identical. That is why we at AVKO do not spend a great deal of time on individual sounds of vowels but a great deal of time on the **vowel sounds in patterns** which include the highly consistent consonants (shapers).

Examples of just the letter **a**'s consistency and supposed inconsistencies.

The word "**a**" is pronounced "uh" (the ubiquitous schwa) as in "a house."

The letter **a** in ALL small words ending in the letter **a** such as **ma, pa, spa, ha, fa, la, ta-ta, cha-cha** and **Zha Zha** is pronounced "AH." In some dialects it is "AW", especially in those dialects that do not discriminate between "ah" and "aw" as in Don and Dawn.

The ending letter **a** in almost ALL big words is pronounced "uh" as in **mama, papa, Cuba, America, Asia, Indonesia, Alexandria, pasta**, etc. Big or Fancy Words are those words that cannot be reduced to one meaningful syllable. Fisherman can be reduced to "fish" but official cannot. Hence fisherman which has 9 letters we consider to be a small word ("simple") and official which has 8 to be a big or fancy word. In some dialects the ending letter **a** ("uh") is pronounced "ur" as in "Hah' vud's" pronunciation of Cuba as "kyoo bur."

The letter **a** in ALL small words (CVC) ending in **-ag** is a "short a" and so all **-ag** words rhyme. Examples: **bag, rag, brag, lag, flag, gag, hag, shag, nag, snag, tag, stag, sag, wag**, etc.

The letter **a** in ALL small words (CVCe) ending **-age** is a "long a" and so all small words ending **-age** rhyme with **cage, page, rage, stage**, etc.

The letter **a** in ALL big words (FANCY) ending **-age** is pronounced as a "short i" or as "AH". Big words ending **age** either rhyme with **bridge** as does **message** or **Taj** as does **massage**. They never rhyme with **page**.

The letter **a** in ALL small words (CVVC) ending **-ain** is a "long a" and so all small words ending **-ain** rhyme with **pain** such as **do rain Spain main plain**.

The letter **a** in most big words (FANCY) ending **-ain** is pronounced as a "short i" and big words ending **-ain** usually rhyme with **tin** as in **mountain, certain, fountain, captain**, etc.

The letter **a** in ALL small words ending **-ace** is a "long a" and so small words ending **-ace** rhyme with **chase** as in **face, space, lace**, etc.

The letter **a** in almost ALL big words ending **-ace** is pronounced as a "short i" and big words ending **-ace** usually rhyme with **miss** as in **palace, furnace, menace**, etc.

The letter **a** followed by double l's in ALL small words is pronounced "AW" and words ending **-all** rhyme with **crawl** as in **all, small, tall, and wall**.

The letter **a** in Almost all OA words is silent (a signal letter) making the oa sound as "OH" as in **boat**.

The letter **a** in EA words is silent (a signal letter) making the ea sound as "EE" as in **meat** or "AY" as in **steak** or "EH" as in **sweat** or **swear**. Note: The letter **e** is often sounded "AY" and in fact that is its name in French, Spanish, and German.

The letter **a** in AU and AW words is pronounced "AW" as in **taught** and **crawl**.

The letter **a** in EAU and EAUX and AUX words has no sound of its own. These letter combinations produce "OH" except in the words **beauty** and **beautiful** in which case the letters **ea** sound as /y/ and the **u** as /oo/.

The letter **a** when followed by the letter **r** (R-Control) has the "AH" or "AW" sound depending upon one's dialect. In other words, words such as **car, far, jar** rhyme with the name of the letter R with one exception. **See W-Control 2.**

W-Control 1: Whenever the letter **w** precedes the letter **a**, the **a** is pronounced "AH" as in **wad, swaddle, waft, waffle, wallow, swallow, Guam, wan, swan, wand, want, swap, wasp, water, squad, squat,**

swat, swatter, etc. (Note: The letter u usually becomes the consonant /w/ when it is followed by the letter a.)

W-Control 2: Whenever the letter r follows the letters **wa-** we have a "**WAR**" between the W- and -R controls and a compromise is made. **War** words rhyme with the word **OR** as in **war, wart, ward, warm, swarm, quart**, etc.

This should be sufficient to demonstrate that the letter **a** does not have "one" consistent sound within all words but does have consistent sounds depending upon the word pattern (or its **neighboring** letters).

Rationale for Exposing Students Immediately to a Variety of Fonts—Including Cursive

Since AVKO's beginning in 1974, we have dealt almost exclusively with older students and adults who, despite the best of traditional teaching methods and materials, had severe reading and spelling problems. It was from analyzing how these problems came about and from analyzing what we did to overcome them, we have come to the conclusion that all students should be taught to quickly and automatically respond to letters (or combinations of letters) as sounds that make up words that have meaning.

We feel that both sight methods and analytic phonic methods can create problems. We have had students who could read the Dolch word *goes* when it was flashed to them on a card but could not read the word **goes** when it was in a sans serif font such as Arial or hand printed *goes* or written in cursive as *Does*. Often the word was misread as does. Does **goes** look like **does** or **GOES**, *goes*, *goes*, *goes* and *goes*? See what we mean?

Here at the AVKO Reading Clinic we have conducted simple demonstrations that clearly show that fonts make such a difference that poor readers or non readers can not successfully handle a very simple word recognition test such as the following: Because you are a good reader, you can circle the two words that are the same in each line. But give this to one who is not a good reader and watch what happens!

NEXT	<i>Nest</i>	NEXI	Nest	NETS
STAMMER	<i>stammar</i>	SLAMMER	Slammer	SHEMMER
LADLES	<i>Ladlz</i>	LADIES	ladus	<i>ladies</i>
FLICEKR	<i>Flicker</i>	FLCIKER	Flicker	FLICKRE
FASTER	<i>Easter</i>	FASTFR	FASTEN	EASTER