Little Wandle Rapid Catch-up: Tricky words
Information for parents and carers

'Tricky words' are words that cannot easily be decoded ('sounded out' and read). This is because some of the sounds in the words are spelled in an unusual way. We teach these words early on as they are among the most common words in English.

Children will practise the words in school until they can read them automatically. They will also read the tricky words in the decodable books that they bring home.

This document lists the tricky words that your child will learn in each phase of their Little Wandle reading programme and explains why the words are tricky.

Some of the tricky words will become decodable later in the programme as children learn different spellings for the sounds. The words in shaded rows have rare spellings and remain 'tricky' throughout.

Terminology

Phoneme: The smallest unit of sound that can be identified in words. We also use the term 'sound'. There are 44 phonemes or sounds in the English language.

Grapheme: A letter or group of letters used to represent a sound in writing. The way graphemes are used to represent sounds in our written language is known as the alphabetic code.

Decode: To break down ('sound out') a written word into sounds then blend the sounds together to read the word.

Digraph: A grapheme made of two letters that represent one sound. An example is the 'sh' in 'shop'. Your child may use the mantra 'two letters, one sound' when they spot a digraph.

Schwa: This is the name for the most common sound in English. It is the unstressed sound that we find in many words and can be spelled in many ways. It makes an 'uh' sound, which varies according to accent. Examples include: th*e*, bett*er*, carr*o*t, b*a*lloon.

Split digraph: A vowel digraph that is split by a consonant. Examples include 'a–e' as in 'cake' (**ai** sound); 'e–e' as in 'athlete' (**ee** sound), 'i–e' as in 'time' (**igh** sound), 'o–e' as in 'bone' (**oa** sound) and 'u–e' as in 'tube' (**yoo** sound).

Trigraph: A grapheme made of three letters to represent one sound. An example is the 'igh' in 'sight'. Your child may use the mantra 'three letters, one sound' when they spot a trigraph.

Phase 2 tricky words

Tricky word	Tricky part(s)	Why it is tricky?
and	nd	Your child has not yet learned how to blend together adjacent consonants.
I	i	The 'i' makes the sound **igh**. **Learning so far:** For 'i', your child has learned the sound **i** as in 'pin'.
the	th e	Your child has not yet learned the digraph 'th' or the schwa sound made by the 'e'.
is as has his	s	The 's' makes the sound **z**. **Learning so far:** For 's', your child has learned the sound **s** as in 'sat'. They will learn that 's' can make the sound **z** later in Phase 2.
her	er	Your child has not yet learned the digraph 'er'.
put* pull full push	u	The 'u' makes the sound **oo** (as in 'book'). **Learning so far:** For 'u', your child has learned the sound **u** as in 'cup'.
go no	o	The 'o' makes the sound **oa**. **Learning so far:** For 'o', your child has learned the sound **o** as in 'dog'.
to into	o	The 'o' makes the sound oo (as in 'food') or the schwa sound, depending on context. **Learning so far:** For 'o', your child has learned the sound **o** as in 'dog'.

© 2022 Wandle Learning Trust. All rights reserved.

Tricky word	Tricky part(s)	Why it is tricky?
we me be he she	e	The 'e' makes the sound **ee**. **Learning so far:** For 'e', your child has learned the sound **e** as in 'egg'.
of	f	The 'f' makes the sound **v**. This is a rare spelling for this sound. **Learning so far:** Your child has learned the sound **f** as in 'fish'.

*Depending on regional pronunciations, not all children will be taught these words as tricky words.

Phase 3 tricky words

Tricky word	Tricky part(s)	Why it is tricky?
was	a	The 'a' makes the sound **o**. **Learning so far:** For 'a', your our child has learned the sound **a** as in 'cat'.
you	ou	Your child has not yet learned the different sounds made by the digraph 'ou'. Here, it makes the sound oo (as in 'food').
they	ey	Your child has not yet learned the different sounds made by the digraph 'ey'. Here, it makes the sound **ai**.
my by	y	The 'y' makes the sound **igh**. **Learning so far:** For 'y', child has learned the sound **y** as in 'yap'.
all	a	The 'a' makes the sound **or**. **Learning so far:** For 'a', your our child has learned the sound **a** as in 'cat'.
are	whole word	This is a rare spelling of the sound **ar**.
pure	ure	The 'ure' makes two sounds (**yoo** plus the schwa sound).
sure	whole word	The 's' makes the sound **sh**. The 'ure' makes two sounds (**yoo** plus the schwa sound).

Phase 4 tricky words

Tricky word	Tricky part(s)	Why it is tricky?
said	ai	The 'ai' makes the sound **e.**
so	o	The 'o' makes the sound **oa**. **Learning so far:** For 'o', your child has learned the sound **o** as in 'top'.
have	ve	Your child has not yet learned the digraph 've', which makes the sound **v**.
like	i–e	Your child has not yet learned the split digraph 'i–e', which makes the sound **igh**.
some come love	o–e	Your child has not yet learned the split digraph 'o–e'. Here, it makes the sound **u**.
do	o	The 'o' makes the sound oo (as in 'food').
were	ere	The trigraph 'ere' makes the sound **ur**.
here	ere	Your child has not yet learned the trigraph 'ere'. Here, it makes the sound **ear**.
little	le	Your child has not yet learned the digraph 'le', which makes the sound **l**.
says	ay	The digraph 'ay' makes the sound **e**.
there	ere	Your child has not yet learned the trigraph 'ere'. Here, it makes sound **air**.
when	wh	Your child has not yet learned the digraph 'wh'. Here, it makes the sound **w**.
what	wh a	Your child has not yet learned the digraph 'wh'. Here, it makes the sound **w**. The grapheme 'a' makes the sound **o**. **Learning so far:** For 'a', your child has learned the sound **a** as in 'cat'.

© 2022 Wandle Learning Trust. All rights reserved.

Tricky word	Tricky part(s)	Why it is tricky?
one	whole word	The grapheme 'o' makes the sounds **w-u**. The digraph 'ne' makes the sound **n.**
out	ou	Your child has not yet learned the different sounds made by the digraph 'ou'. Here, it makes the sound **ow**.
today	today	The word 'today' has two tricky parts: the 'o' is an unstressed oo (as in 'food') that makes the schwa sound; the digraph 'ay' is not yet decodable.

Phase 5 tricky words

Tricky word	Tricky part(s)	Why it is tricky?
their	eir	The 'eir' makes the sound **air**.
people	eo le	The 'eo' makes the sound **ee**. Your child has not yet learned the digraph 'le'.
oh	oh	The 'oh' makes the sound **oa**.
your	our	Your child has not yet learned the trigraph 'our'. Here, it makes the sound **or**.
Mr Mrs Ms	whole word	These are abbreviations in common use as words.
ask*	a	The 'a' makes the sound **ar**. **Learning so far:** For 'a', your child has learned the sound **a** as in 'cat'.
could would should	oul	Your child has not yet learned the trigraph 'oul', which makes the sound **oo** (as in 'book').
our	our	The trigraph 'our' makes the sound **ow** followed by the schwa sound.
house mouse	se	Your child has not yet learned the digraph 'se'. Here, it makes the sound **s**.
water	a	The 'a' makes the sound **or**. **Learning so far:** For 'a', your child has learned the sound **a** as in 'cat'.
want	a	The 'a' makes the sound **o**. **Learning so far:** For 'a', your child has learned the sound **a** as in 'cat'.
again*	ai	The digraph 'ai' makes the sound **e**. **Learning so far:** For 'ai', your child has learned the sound **ai** as in 'rain'.
any many	a	The 'a' makes the sound **e**. **Learning so far:** For the grapheme 'a', your child has learned the sounds **a** as in 'cat' and **ai** as in 'paper'.
where	ere	Your child has not yet learned the trigraph 'ere'. Here, it makes the sound **air**.
who	wh o	The digraph 'wh' makes the sound **h** and the 'o' makes the sound oo (as in 'food'). **Learning so far:** For 'wh', your child has learned the sound **w** as in 'when'.
whole	wh o–e	The digraph 'wh' makes the sound **h**. Your child has not yet learned the split digraph 'o–e'; here is makes the sound **oa**. **Learning so far:** For 'wh', your child has learned the sound **w** as in 'when'.
two	wo	The digraph 'wo' makes the sound oo (as in 'food').
school	ch	The digraph 'ch' makes the sound **c**. **Learning so far:** For the grapheme 'ch', your child has learned the sound **ch** as in 'chip'.
call	a	The 'a' makes the sound **or**. **Learning so far:** For the grapheme 'a', your child has learned the sounds **a** as in 'cat' and **ai** as in 'paper'. (They will learn that 'a' can make the sound **or** later in Phase 5.)
different*	er	The digraph 'er' makes the sound **r** (with no schwa sound before it). **Learning so far:** For the digraph 'er', your child has learned the sound **ur** as in 'bigger'.
thought	ough	The 'ough' makes the sound **or**.
through	ough	The 'ough' makes the sound oo (as in 'food').

© 2022 Wandle Learning Trust. All rights reserved.

Tricky word	Tricky part(s)	Why it is tricky?
friend	ie	The digraph 'ie' makes the sound **e**. **Learning so far:** For the digraph 'ie', your child has learned the sounds **igh** as in 'pie' and **ee** as in 'shield'.
work	or	The digraph 'or' makes the sound **ur**. **Learning so far:** For 'or', your child has learned the sound **or** as in 'sort'.
once	o	The 'o' makes the sounds **w-u**.
laugh	au gh	The word 'laugh' has two tricky parts: the digraph 'au' makes the sound **ar** (depending on regional pronunciation) and the digraph 'gh' makes the sound **f**.
because	au	The digraph 'au' makes the sound **o**.
eye	whole word	The trigraph 'eye' makes the sound **igh**.
busy	u	The 'u' makes the sound **i**. **Learning so far:** For 'u', your child has learned the sounds **u** as in 'cup', oo as in 'put' and **yoo** as in 'unicorn'.
beautiful	eau	The trigraph 'eau' makes the sound **yoo**.
pretty	e	The 'e' makes the sound **i**. **Learning so far:** For 'e', your child has learned the sound **e** as in 'egg' and **ee** as in 'be'.
hour	h our	The word 'hour' has two tricky parts: the 'h' is not pronounced and the trigraph 'our' makes the sound **ow** followed by the schwa sound.
parents	a	The 'a' makes the sound **air**. **Learning so far:** For the grapheme 'a', your child has learned the sounds **a** as in 'cat', **ai** as in 'paper' and **ar** as in 'father'.
shoe	oe	The digraph 'oe' makes the sound oo (as in 'food').
move improve	o	The grapheme 'o' makes the sound oo (as in 'food'). **Learning so far:** For 'o', your child has learned the sound **o** as in 'dog' and **oa** as in 'go'.

*Depending on regional pronunciations, not all children will be taught these words as tricky words.

© 2022 Wandle Learning Trust. All rights reserved.