

Year 1 · Free resource

The split digraph (magic e)

Year group: 1

Source: DfE, *English Appendix 1: Spelling*, National Curriculum for England (2013) — Year 1

Curriculum requirement: Statutory

The rule

When a word has the pattern **vowel – consonant – e** at the end, the final e is silent — but it changes the vowel sound before the consonant from **short** to **long** (the vowel "says its name").

cap (short /æ/) → **cape** (long /eɪ/) — the e makes the a say "ay"

pin (short /ɪ/) → **pine** (long /aɪ/) — the e makes the i say "eye"

hop (short /ɒ/) → **hope** (long /oʊ/) — the e makes the o say "oh"

cub (short /ʌ/) → **cube** (long /juː/) — the e makes the u say "you"

pet (short /ɛ/) → **Pete** (long /iː/) — the e makes the e say "ee"

The e is called a **split digraph** because it works with the vowel before the consonant, even though they are "split" by the consonant between them.

The five split digraph patterns

a-e (makes /eɪ/ – "ay")

Short vowel	Split digraph
cap	cape
mat	mate
hat	hate
tap	tape
mad	made
plan	plane
can	cane
man	mane
fat	fate
rat	rate
sam	same
gap	gape

***i-e* (makes /aɪ/ – "eye")**

Short vowel	Split digraph
pin	pine
bit	bite
kit	kite
Tim	time
rid	ride
hid	hide
rip	ripe
fin	fine
dim	dime
win	wine
strip	stripe
grip	gripe

o-e (makes /oʊ/ – "oh")

Short vowel	Split digraph
hop	hope
mop	mope
not	note
rod	rode
cod	code
glob	globe
con	cone
ton	tone
wok	woke
pol	pole
hol	hole

u-e (makes /ju:/ – "you" or /u:/ – "oo")

Short vowel	Split digraph
cub	cube
tun	tune
dun	dune
hug	huge
cut	cute
rut	rude
jul	rule
mus	muse

e-e (makes /i:/ – "ee") – less common

Short	Split digraph
(pet name)	Pete
(them)	theme
(com-)	compete
(ext-)	extreme
(com-)	complete

Why does the split digraph work?

In Old English and Middle English, the final *e* was actually pronounced — it was a separate syllable. *Name* was pronounced "NAH-meh" (two syllables). As English evolved, the final *e* stopped being pronounced, but it kept its effect on the preceding vowel. The *e* is silent in sound but active in function — it reaches back over the consonant to change the vowel.

This is why it's called a **split digraph**: a digraph is two letters making one sound. Here the two letters (*a* and *e* in *name*) are split by the consonant between them but still work together.

Common mistakes

Wrong	Right	Issue
<i>plane</i>	pine	<i>i-e</i> not <i>ia-e</i>
<i>hoep</i>	hope	<i>o-e</i> – <i>e</i> goes at the end
<i>caep</i>	cape	<i>a-e</i> – <i>e</i> goes at the end
<i>cube</i> (when meaning the 3D shape)	cube	<i>u-e</i> split digraph needed
<i>mad</i> (when meaning <i>made</i>)	made	<i>a-e</i> split digraph
<i>hid</i> (when meaning <i>hide</i>)	hide	<i>i-e</i> split digraph

Word sort

Add the magic e and write the new word. What does the new word mean?

Short word	+ magic e	New word meaning
cap	cape	a cloak / a headland
kit	kite	a flying toy
hop	hope	to wish for
cub	cube	a 3D square shape
mad	made	past tense of make
bit	bite	to use teeth
not	note	a written message / a musical sound
fin	fine	well; a money penalty
rid	ride	to travel on
hat	hate	to strongly dislike

Dictation sentences

She flew her **kite** from the **cape** in the bright summer sunshine.

He had a **huge** piece of **cake** and **made** a wish as he ate.

The **pine** tree cast a **wide** shadow across the **lane**.

Time and **tide** wait for no one, as the old saying goes.

She had **hope** that the **note** would arrive by **nine** o'clock.

Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). The split digraph is a statutory Year 1 spelling pattern. All examples verified against Year 1 statutory content.