

Year 1 · Free resource

# The *un-* prefix and Year 1 common exception words

Year group: 1

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

Curriculum requirement: Statutory

## Part A: The *un-* prefix

The prefix **un-** means "not" or "the reverse of." It is added to the **beginning** of a word. The spelling of the base word never changes.

*happy* → **unhappy** (not happy)

*lock* → **unlock** (reverse of locking)

*do* → **undo** (reverse of doing)

*kind* → **unkind** (not kind)

### Key points:

*un-* always uses one *n*

When the base word starts with *n*, you get a double *n*: *un-* + *natural* = **unnatural**; *un-* + *necessary* = **unnecessary**

The base word is spelled exactly as it normally would be

**un- word examples for Year 1**

<b>un- word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<b>unhappy</b>	<b>not happy</b>
<b>unkind</b>	<b>not kind</b>
<b>untidy</b>	<b>not tidy</b>
<b>unfair</b>	<b>not fair</b>
<b>unlock</b>	<b>reverse of lock</b>
<b>undo</b>	<b>reverse of do</b>
<b>unwell</b>	<b>not well</b>
<b>unsafe</b>	<b>not safe</b>
<b>unpack</b>	<b>reverse of pack</b>
<b>unzip</b>	<b>reverse of zip</b>
<b>unable</b>	<b>not able</b>
<b>unclear</b>	<b>not clear</b>
<b>unfit</b>	<b>not fit</b>
<b>unusual</b>	<b>not usual</b>
<b>unhelpful</b>	<b>not helpful</b>



## Part B: Year 1 common exception words

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These words are called **common exception words** because they cannot be spelled reliably using the phonics patterns taught so far. They contain tricky parts — unusual grapheme-phoneme correspondences — that children need to learn to recognise on sight.

The DfE statutory list for Year 1 must be taught before the end of Year 1.

*(Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013), Year 1 exception word list)*

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### The statutory Year 1 exception word list

The, a, do, to, today, of, said, says, are, were, was, is, his, has, I, you, your, they, be, he, me, she, we, no, go, so, by, my, here, there, where, love, come, some, one, once, ask, friend, school, put, push, pull, full, house, our

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### Grouped by tricky pattern

Words where the vowel doesn't follow phonics:

Word	Tricky part	Why
<b>said</b>	<i>ai</i> = /ɛ/	not the usual /eɪ/ of <i>rain</i>
<b>says</b>	<i>ay</i> = /ɛ/	not the usual /eɪ/
<b>was</b>	<i>a</i> = /ɒ/	not the short /æ/ of <i>cat</i>
<b>are</b>	<i>are</i> = /ɑ:/	the <i>e</i> is silent
<b>were</b>	<i>ere</i> = /ɜ:/	unusual vowel
<b>love</b>	<i>o</i> = /ʌ/	not the short /ɒ/ of <i>lot</i>
<b>come</b>	<i>o</i> = /ʌ/	same pattern as <i>love</i>
<b>some</b>	<i>o</i> = /ʌ/	same pattern
<b>one</b>	<i>o</i> = /w/ + vowel	very unusual pronunciation /wʌn/
<b>once</b>	<i>o</i> = /w/ + vowel	same as <i>one</i>
<b>school</b>	<i>sch</i> = /sk/	Greek origin
<b>friend</b>	<i>ie</i> = /ɛ/	not the usual /i:/ of <i>field</i>
<b>here</b>	<i>ere</i> = /ɪə/	different from <i>were</i>
<b>there</b>	<i>ere</i> = /eə/	different again
<b>where</b>	<i>ere</i> = /eə/	rhymes with <i>there</i>

Word	Tricky part	Why
house	<i>ou</i> = /aʊ/	this is regular but worth highlighting
our	<i>our</i> = /aʊə/	rhymes with <i>hour</i>
your	<i>our</i> = /ɔ:/	different sound from <i>our</i>

Words where letters are silent:

Word	Silent letter
ask	no silent letter – /æsk/ is regular; but often confused
push	regular – worth noting <i>sh</i> digraph
pull	regular – <i>u</i> = /ʊ/ not /ʌ/
full	regular – <i>u</i> = /ʊ/
put	<i>u</i> = /ʊ/ not /ʌ/

**Teaching strategies for exception words**

- 1. Identify the tricky part.** Don't treat the whole word as strange. Isolate which phoneme is unexpected: in *said*, the *ai* = /ɛ/ is the only tricky part.
- 2. Read, cover, write, check** — but with understanding. The child should be able to say *why* the word is tricky, not just attempt it from memory.
- 3. Sentences in context.** Exception words must be seen and used in sentences, not just on lists. "The word *said* has *ai* that makes the short *e* sound — like *said* she said something."

**4. Group words by pattern.** *Love, come, some* all have *o* = /ʌ/ — teach them as a family, not three separate words.

**5. Frequent, short practice.** A few words, many times, over many weeks. Not 44 words in January and never again.

### The *love/come/some/one* family

These four words all have the letter *o* making the /ʌ/ sound:

*love* → /ʌv/

*come* → /kʌm/

*some* → /sʌm/

*mother* → /mʌðə/

*brother* → /brʌðə/

*wonder* → /wʌndə/

*word* → /wɜ:d/

Teach this as a recurring pattern: *o* often says /ʌ/ in Old English words, especially before *m*, *n*, *v*, and *th*. This is not random — it's a historical pattern.

## Dictation sentences (Year 1 exception words in context)

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My **friend** was at **school** today and **said** she **loves our** class.

He went **to the house** but **no one** was **there**.

She **said some** kind **words** and **we were** all happy.

**Here is your** book — **put it where** it **was** before.

**They come once** a week and **do some** good work for **us**.

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*Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). The Year 1 common exception word list is reproduced exactly as published in the statutory document.*