

Year 2 · Free resource

Year 2 common exception words

Year group: 2

Source: DfE, *English Appendix 1: Spelling*, National Curriculum for England (2013) — Year 2 exception words

Curriculum requirement: Statutory

Introduction

Year 2 common exception words are words that cannot be reliably spelled using the phonics patterns taught so far. Each one has a "tricky part" — a letter or letter combination that doesn't behave as expected.

The key teaching principle: **identify the tricky part, don't treat the whole word as a mystery.** Most of these words are almost entirely phonically regular except for one or two letters. Teach children to find the tricky part and focus their attention there.

(Approach recommended by: Ofsted Research Review Series: English (2022); Letters and Sounds (DfE, 2007))

The statutory Year 2 exception word list

door · floor · poor · because · find · kind · mind · behind · child · children · wild · climb · most · only · both · old · cold · gold · hold · told · every · everybody · even · great · break · steak · pretty · beautiful · after · fast · last · past · father · class · grass · pass · plant · path · bath · hour · move · prove · improve · sure · sugar · eye · could · should · would · who · whole · any · many · clothes · busy · people · water · again · half · money · Mr · Mrs · parents · Christmas

(Verified against DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013))

Grouped by tricky pattern

Group 1: -oor and -oor (unexpected vowel)

Word	Tricky part	Note
door	oo = /ɔ:/	not the /u:/ of <i>moon</i>
floor	oo = /ɔ:/	same as <i>door</i>
poor	oo = /ʊə/ or /ɔ:/	rhymes with <i>sure</i> in some accents

Memory: **door** and **floor** rhyme — learn them as a pair.

Group 2: -ild, -ind, -old families (/aɪ/ and /oʊ/ before two consonants)

Normally, a vowel before two consonants is short. These words are exceptions — the vowel is long even before the consonant cluster.

-ild family:

Word	Pronunciation
child	/tʃaɪld/ – long /aɪ/
children	/'tʃɪldrən/ – note: <i>child</i> shortens in <i>children</i>
wild	/waɪld/ – long /aɪ/
mild	/maɪld/

-ind family:

Word	Pronunciation
find	/faɪnd/ – long /aɪ/
kind	/kaɪnd/
mind	/maɪnd/
behind	/biˈhaɪnd/
blind	/blaɪnd/

-old family:

Word	Pronunciation
old	/oʊld/ – long /oʊ/
cold	/koʊld/
gold	/goʊld/
hold	/hoʊld/
told	/toʊld/
bold	/boʊld/
most	/moʊst/ – related pattern
both	/boʊθ/
only	/'oʊnli/

Memory: the *-ild*, *-ind*, and *-old* families are genuine patterns — teach the whole family, not individual words. Knowing *kind* helps with *find*, *mind*, *behind*.

Group 3: -ost pattern

Word	Pronunciation
most	/moʊst/ – o = long
also	(connected – also o = long)

Group 4: Silent letters and unexpected sounds

Word	Tricky part	Note
climb	silent <i>b</i>	same as <i>lamb, bomb</i>
whole	silent <i>w</i> ; <i>wh</i> = /h/	also <i>o</i> = /oʊ/
who	<i>wh</i> = /h/, <i>o</i> = /u:/	unusual spelling
hour	silent <i>h</i>	from French <i>heure</i>
half	silent <i>l</i>	Old English <i>healf</i>
eye	unusual spelling	Old English <i>ēage</i>

Group 5: *ou* = /ʌ/ (French-origin words)

Word	Note
could	<i>ou</i> = /ʊ/ – the <i>l</i> is also silent
should	<i>ou</i> = /ʊ/ – silent <i>l</i>
would	<i>ou</i> = /ʊ/ – silent <i>l</i> ; <i>w</i> = /w/
young	<i>ou</i> = /ʌ/

Note: these are different patterns. *could/should/would* have *ou* = /ʊ/ with a silent *l*. The *l* was in Old English *sculan* and *willan*.

Group 6: ea = unexpected sounds

Word	ea sound	Note
great	ea = /eɪ/	not the usual /i:/ of <i>eat</i>
break	ea = /eɪ/	same family as <i>great</i>
steak	ea = /eɪ/	a cut of meat
pretty	e = /ɪ/	unusual vowel

Memory: **great, break, steak** all rhyme — they share the *ea = /eɪ/* pattern.

Group 7: -ath, -ast, -lass (Southern British accent words)

In Southern British English, these words have a long /ɑː/ vowel. In Northern British English, they have a short /æ/. The spelling is the same regardless of accent.

Word	Southern /ɑː/	Northern /æ/
after	/ˈɑːftə/	/ˈæftə/
fast	/fɑːst/	/fæst/
last	/lɑːst/	/læst/
past	/pɑːst/	/pæst/
class	/klɑːs/	/klæs/
grass	/grɑːs/	/græs/
pass	/pɑːs/	/pæs/
path	/pɑːθ/	/pæθ/
bath	/bɑːθ/	/bæθ/
plant	/plɑːnt/	/plænt/
father	/ˈfɑːðə/	/ˈfæðə/

These are not spelling exceptions — the spelling follows regular rules. They are accent-based variations. Teach children: the spelling is the same regardless of how you say it.

Group 8: Miscellaneous – must be learned individually

Word	Tricky part	Memory hint
because	<i>bec-</i> + <i>ause</i>	"Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants"
beautiful	<i>eau</i> = /ju:/	French <i>beau</i> (beautiful)
pretty	<i>e</i> = /ɪ/	unusual middle vowel
busy	<i>u</i> = /ɪ/	<i>business</i> is its related word
people	<i>eo</i> = /i:/	Old English <i>peoply</i>
water	<i>a</i> = /ɔ:/	<i>w</i> before <i>a</i> changes the vowel sound
sugar	<i>su</i> = /ʃ/	unusual <i>s</i> + <i>u</i> making /ʃ/
sure	<i>su</i> = /ʃ/	same as <i>sugar</i>
again	<i>a</i> = /ə/	unstressed first syllable
money	<i>o</i> = /ʌ/	French origin; same as <i>monkey</i> , <i>honey</i>
many	<i>a</i> = /ɛ/	unusual vowel
any	<i>a</i> = /ɛ/	same as <i>many</i>
every	three syllables: <i>ev-er-y</i>	often reduced in speech
move	<i>o</i> = /u:/	French origin <i>mouvoir</i>

Word	Tricky part	Memory hint
improve	<i>o = /u:/</i>	<i>im- + prove</i>
prove	<i>o = /u:/</i>	same family as <i>move</i>
clothes	<i>th = /ð/, es swallowed</i>	pronounced /kloʊðz/
Christmas	<i>Ch = /k/</i>	Greek origin <i>Christos</i>

Teaching order

Don't teach all 64 words at once. The research recommends a pretest-teach-retest approach:

Pretest the class — which words do children already know?

Focus on the unknown — concentrate practice on words individuals can't spell

Group by pattern — teach the *-ind* family together, the *ea = /eɪ/* family together

Return and revisit — words taught this week reappear in tests next week and next month

(Source: Dymock & Nicholson (2017). Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties.)

Dictation sentences

Because the **water** was **pretty** cold, the **children** chose not to swim.

Every child in the **class could find** their **whole gold** star.

Mr and **Mrs** Williams **told** the **people** to **move** away from the **floor**.

She **would climb** the **old path** to **find beautiful** wild **plants**.

Half the **class knew** that **Christmas** was **only** a **few busy days** away.

Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). The Year 2 exception word list is reproduced exactly as published in the statutory document.