

## INFORMATION SHEET – THE FORTY FOUR PHONEMES

A *phoneme* is a distinct unit of sound that distinguishes one word from another. A *grapheme* is the letter or letters used to represent a particular phoneme. Because English has adopted spelling conventions from many sources and many other languages, most English phonemes are represented (spelled) in multiple ways. Such is part of the character and difficulty of the language.

Phonemes are not necessarily the same across all languages; the distinction between the **b** and **p** sounds in English, for example, is not made in some east Asian languages. Transcribing phonemes is therefore not always straightforward and numerous schemes are in use for different purposes (not all have 44 sounds).

The table below sets out the scheme of *synthetic phonemes* recommended by the National Curriculum and used widely in British schools. Note that the list includes the most common graphemes for each phoneme, but not necessarily all of those that apply.

Phoneme	Grapheme	Examples
<i>Consonant sounds</i>		
1	/b/	b, bb <b>big, rubber</b>
2	/d/	d, dd, ed <b>dog, add, filled</b>
3	/f/	f, ph <b>fish, phone</b>
4	/g/	g, gg <b>go, egg</b>
5	/h/	h <b>hot</b>
6	/j/	j, g, ge, dge <b>jet, cage, barge, judge</b>
7	/k/	c, k, ck, ch, cc, que <b>cat, kitten, duck, school, occur, antique, cheque</b>
8	/l/	l, ll <b>leg, bell</b>
9	/m/	m, mm, mb <b>mad, hammer, lamb</b>
10	/n/	n, nn, kn, gn <b>no, dinner, knee, gnome</b>
11	/p/	p, pp <b>pie, apple</b>
12	/r/	r, rr, wr <b>run, marry, write</b>
13	/s/	s, se, ss, c, ce, sc <b>sun, mouse, dress, city, ice, science</b>
14	/t/	t, tt, ed <b>top, letter, stopped</b>
15	/v/	v, ve <b>vet, give</b>
16	/w/	w <b>wet, win, swim</b>
17	/y/	y, i <b>yes, onion</b>
18	/z/	z, zz, ze, s, se, x <b>zip, fizz, sneeze, laser, is, was, please, Xerox, xylophone</b>

Phoneme	Grapheme	Examples
Consonant digraphs		
19	/th/ (not voiced)	th <b>thumb, thin, thing</b>
20	/th/ (voiced)	th <b>this, feather, then</b>
21	/ng/	ng, n <b>sing, monkey, sink</b>
22	/sh/	sh, ss, ch, ti, ci <b>ship, mission, chef, motion, special</b>
23	/ch/	ch, tch <b>chip, match</b>
24	/zh/	ge, s <b>garage, measure, division</b>
25	/wh/ (with breath)	wh <b>what, when, where, why</b>
Short Vowel Sounds		
26	/a/	a, au <b>hat, laugh</b>
27	/e/	e, ea <b>bed, bread</b>
28	/i/	i <b>if</b>
29	/o/	o, a, au, aw, ough <b>hot, want, haul, draw, bought</b>
30	/u/	u, o <b>up, ton</b>
Long Vowel Sounds		
31	/ā/	a, a_e, ay, ai, ey, ei <b>bacon, late, day, train, they, eight, vein</b>
32	/ē/	e, e_e, ea, ee, ey, ie, y <b>me, these, beat, feet, key, chief, baby</b>
33	/ī/	i, i_e, igh, y, ie <b>find, ride, light, fly, pie</b>
34	/ō/	o, o_e, oa, ou, ow <b>no, note, boat, soul, row</b>
35	/ū/	u, u_e, ew <b>human, use, few, chew</b>
Other Vowel Sounds		
36	/oo/	oo, u, oul <b>book, put, could</b>
37	/ōō/	oo, u, u_e <b>moon, truth, rule</b>
Vowel Diphthongs		
38	/ow/	ow, ou, ou_e <b>cow, out, mouse, house</b>
39	/oy/	oi, oy <b>coin, toy</b>
Vowel Sounds Influenced by ‘r’		
40	/a(r)/	ar <b>car</b>
41	/ā(r)/	air, ear, are <b>air, chair, fair, hair, bear, care</b>
42	/i(r)/	irr, ere, eer <b>mirror, here, cheer</b>
43	/o(r)/	or, ore, oor <b>for, core, door</b>
44	/u(r)/	ur, ir, er, ear, or, ar <b>burn, first, fern, heard, work, dollar</b>