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Some Rules of English Pronunciation

A “C” is normally pronounced as a “K.” It sounds like an “S” if it is followed by “E” “I” or “Y.”

Example: “circus.” The first “C” is followed by an “I” so it sounds like an “S.” The second “C” is followed by a “U” so it sounds like a “K.” The same principle applies to “cycle.”

The word “accent” follows the same rule. The first “C” is followed by another “C” so it sounds like a “K.” The second “C” is followed by an “E” so it sounds like an “S.”

A “G” sounds like a “J” if it is followed by “E” “I” or “Y.” Examples are giraffe, giant, gypsy, general, raging. Otherwise it sounds like “G” in “goose.” There are some exceptions to this rule, but the exceptions are usually easy words. The most common exceptions come from Germanic roots which don’t have this rule, like give, get, girl, forgive, forget.

If “G” is followed by any letter other than “E” “I” or “Y,” then it is either sounded like the “G” in “goose” or it is silent. I am not aware of any exceptions.

* “Margarine” seems to be an exception, but the correct pronunciation is marGarine, with the G sounding like the “G” in “goose.”

The word “was” is pronounced as it is spelt.

The letter “W” or a “W sound” makes a short “A” which follows it sound like a short “O.” In other words, a “W” changes the sound of a short “A” to a short “O.”

Examples: want, wash, wander, watch, swan, swap, wallet, waddle, wadding, waffle, wallaby.

Quad, quality, qualify, what, quadratic.

The letter “W” usually makes a short “O” sound like a short “U.”

Examples: won, wonder, worry.

There are rules for pronunciation of English words — they are seldom taught.

Here are some myths about the English language and phonics.

- 1 English words are not pronounced as they are written.
- 2 There are no rules to English pronunciation.
- 3 Good readers don’t “sound out” words.
- 4 Sounding out is incompatible with understanding.
- 5 People who learnt to sound out don’t learn a “sight” vocabulary.
- 6 People who sound out are just saying words.

Actually, the majority of good readers sound out **every** word they don’t recognise. In an average text, more than 95% of the words are pronounced as they are written. Of the exceptions, it is usually only one syllable that is irregular. Students who sound out words they don’t recognise when they read, read more accurately because they guess words less often. They quickly develop a sight vocabulary. A large sight vocabulary is not incompatible with phonics.