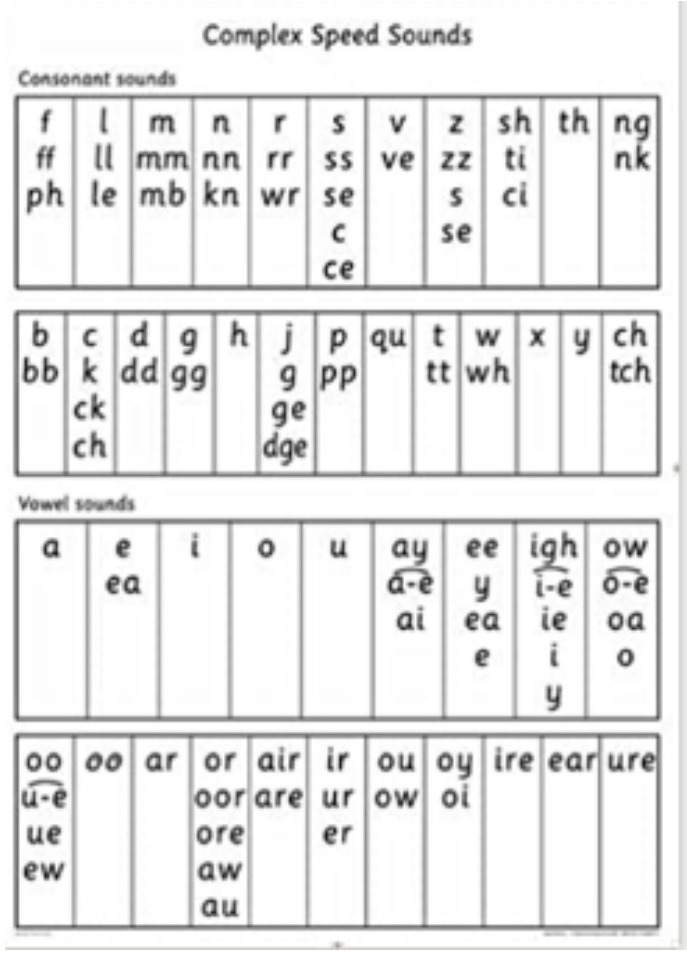
Coley Primary School

Parents' Guide to Spelling



Introduction

The English spelling system is the most complicated in Europe, which is why it always interesting when we see comparisons in the media between children in this and other countries – it's not comparing like with like! There are only 44 sounds (known as ***phonemes)*** in the English language, but there are THOUSANDS of ways of spelling and writing those sounds ***(graphemes)!*** Little wonder that many English speaking children (and adults) find it difficult!



Complex Speed Sounds

Consonant sounds

f ff ph	l ll le	m mm mb	n nn kn	r rr wr	s ss se c ce	v ve	z zz s se	sh ti ci	th	ng nk

b bb	c k ck ch	d dd	g gg	h	j g ge dge	p pp	qu	t tt	w wh	x	y	ch tch

Vowel sounds

a	e ea	i	o	u	ay a-e ai	ee y ea e	igh i-e ie i y	ow o-e oa o

oo u-e ue ew	oo	ar	or oor ore aw au	air are	ir ur er	ou ow	oy oi	ire	ear	ure

This chart shows the (aptly named) 'complex speed sounds' from Read Write Inc. This chart includes all the variations of the different consonant and vowel sounds found in the story books.

The "***schwa***" sound is commonly added to single letters by mistake when people are saying them aloud. It is a sort of "uh", a grunted vowel sound. Here is an example. Say the sound of the letter p. You probably said puh. Now hold a finger up as if it was a candle and pretend to blow it out with a gentle p, using air but no extra sound. This is correct. It is important that we model the sounds correctly when learning phonics and spelling.

Visit our Phonics page and watch the video – **How to say the sounds**
https://coley-primary-school.secure-primarysite.net/phonics-3/

It is important with spelling to remember that the children are never going to learn how to spell every single word in the English language. Therefore, it is vital that the children learn strategies and rules rather than just individual words.

Learning spellings needs to happen in school and at home. There is little evidence that the traditional practise of sending home spellings to learn at home and being tested is effective. However, there is a high expectation within the National Curriculum that children will learn increasingly complex words. Therefore, it is important that learning at home needs to be an extension of the practice in school.

Teaching and learning spelling can be so much more stimulating than simply learning off a spelling list! Here are some fun games, tips and tricks to use at home, to help practice spelling.

Helping Your Child To Spell

SPELLING IS ACTIVE, NOT PASSIVE

Copying words may improve hand-eye coordination but does not foster good spelling strategies. Children need to feel safe to attempt words that they've heard but not seen written and to take risks with their spellings in order to use a better range of vocabulary. This is why we do not mark work for every spelling error.

You can help by:

- Encouraging your child to write and be positive about the content of their work without criticising every spelling. Inventing spellings and writing words as they sound (phonetically) are normal phases of spelling development.
- Encouraging your child to "have a go" and suggesting other words spelt in a similar way that your child already knows. If they are unsure, get them to write the different possibility of spellings and then think about: 1. Any rules that could help and 2. Which spelling looks right? This encourages them to use their reading (and visual recall) to see which one is most familiar.

Helping Your Child To Spell

SPELLING IS A VISUAL SKILL

Children need help to get into the habit of "looking with intent" and noticing details. They also need to train their visual memory.

You can help by:

- Pointing out interesting or unusual spellings all around you indoors or outside.
- Taking an interest in words and phrases as you read together, commenting on similarities and differences, prefixes and suffixes.
- Encourage your child to take a mental "photo" of a word, noting its shape and length and then hold that image in their mind.
- Suggesting they write a word to see if it looks right before telling them the spelling.
- Encourage them to "proof-read" their work and look for misspellings themselves.
- Look together at a few of the words which are nearly right and learning the correct pattern.

MOTOR SKILLS CAN SUPPORT SPELLING

A fast, flowing, joined-up handwriting style is an important aid to good spelling and also helps with muscle memory.

Strategies for Spelling

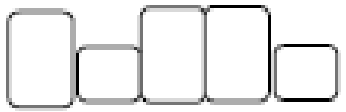
- Can I break it down into phonemes? (c-a-t)(th-e-m)
- Can I break it don into syllables? (re-mem-ber)
- Can I break it down into parts? (dis-satisfy)
- Can I use a mnemonic (memory jogger) to help? (**B**ig **E**lephants **C**an **A**lways **U**nderstand **S**mall **E**lephants - because)
- Is there a word in the same word family? (muscle – muscular)
- Is there a root word I can spell, then add the correct ending? (small – smallest)
- Can you find words within words? (**I am** in Parl**iam**ent)
- Is there a spelling rule I should use? (The letter 'q' in a word is followed by 'u' e.g. quick, quiet, antique)
- Can I use the etymology (Origin of the word) to help me? (bi+cycle = two + wheels)
- Can I use analogy? Does the word I want to spell sound like a word I already know? Can I use a pattern from a word I know to spell a word I don't know? (bright, light, night)
- Try it out, does it look right?
- Say it as it sounds (Wed-nes-day)
- Learn by sight or create a visual memory using Look Cover Say Write Check
- Can I look it up in the dictionary?

Some fun ways to learn and practice spellings

Most of these ways of spelling are ones which your child can do for themselves and are similar to the spelling activities set out in their homework grid every term. It is really important that you check that your child is spelling the words correctly whilst they are doing these activities, they may mis-learn a wrong spelling – and that is hard to undo.

Ways of Practising Spellings

- Writing each syllable of the word in different colours or **styles**. e.g. in-ter-**est**-*ing*
- If a word has a tricky part, draw attention to it by using colour or a **different font**. e.g. sAld, ph**otogra**phy.
- Outline the shape of the word: 

- Can they draw the shape without the word in it. e.g.  = table.
- Visualise the word and its meaning in your mind. e.g. 

- Looking for small words in larger words. e.g. **Satisfactory contains sat, is, fact, or, factory; teacher contains teach, each, ache, her.**
- Looking for patterns in words e.g. patterns of letters - **ation** as in loc**ation**, accommod**ation.**
- Think of other words in the same "family" e.g. "sign" family includes signs, signal, signature, design, resign.

Ways of Practising Spellings

- Draw pictures with the word in them, or turn the word into a picture. e.g. 

- Stare at the word. Now mentally "throw" it at the wall. See the word on the wall. How is it spelt?
- Write the word three times in three different colours.
- Write the word as a pyramid like this adding a letter each time.

w
wa
was
wash
washi
washin
washing

- Write all the vowels in a different colour. Alternatively, do this with some or all of the consonants (depending on which part the child is finding tricky).
- Quick write – using JOINED-UP handwriting, write the word as many times as you can in a minute (this aids muscle memory).
- With your index finger write the word in the air, in sand or flour, on fabric, or on any interesting surface with a finger (pretending to do joined-up writing). Slowly, say each letter. The parent needs to remind the child that they need to be able to 'see' the letters you have written in the air. When they have finished writing the word underline it and say the word again. Now the parent should ask questions about the word. For example, they could ask 'What is the first letter?' 'What is the last letter?' 'How many letters are there?' etc.

Ways of Practising Spellings

- Write the word and cut it into syllables. Then rearrange the pieces to 'make' the word.
- Use bits of paper, counters or small toys to cover up the all the vowels or all the consonants or all the tricky letters in a word. What is hidden?
- Spell the word in the air with a glow stick, torch, light pen or sparkler.
- Spell the word using scrabble letters or magnetic "fridge" letters. Get your parent to mix them up and then see if you can put them back in the right order.
- Write the word (joined-up) with lots of different things e.g. felt tips, wax crayons, paint, ballpoints, coloured pencils…
- For short words – pop bubble wrap, one pop for each letter. For longer words clap or bang a drum or saucepan as you say each and spell each syllable!
- Make the words with sweets or raisins. Then eat them, a letter at a time or starting with the letters you are most sure about and leaving the ones you are less sure about until the end.
- Use pieces of plasticine or pipe cleaners and bend them into shape to make each letter.
- Try finger-writing: while you're THINKING about the word, pretend to write it with your finger, on your desk or on your hand.
- Make up rhymes, chants and acrostics.
- Make up mnemonics (see Mnemonics).
- Carefully pronounce words by breaking them into chunks or syllables. Say each part in a silly or different voice (change pitch, volume, etc).
  e.g.
  el - e – p - hant
  um - brell -a
  vul - ner – able

Ways of Practising Spellings

- Pronouncing the word carefully aloud or inside your head in a way that exaggerates the sound of the correct spelling.

  E.g.

  Wed - nes – day

  rel-e- vant

  Feb - ru - ary
- Listening for patterns in sounds which might be spelled the same e.g. (k sound) **ch**emist **ch**arisma
- Grouping words that rhyme e.g. **train, pain, strain.**
- Use a voice recorder (e.g. on a mobile phone). Say the word, spell the word, listen to the word being played back, repeat the word and spelling - like an echo!
- **AND FINALLY, THE TRIED AND TESTED METHOD FOR PRACTISING SPELLING WHICH IS THE "LOOK - THINK – SAY - COVER - WRITE – CHECK" METHOD.**
  - **LOOK** carefully at the new word. How can you break it into smaller bits? Do any of the smaller bits remind you of the patterns of letters from other words? What is the shape of the word?
  - **THINK** about the parts of the words, which might cause problems - double letters for instance, or a vowel that isn't pronounced as you would expect.
  - **SAY** the word out loud.
  - **COVER** the word but keep it in your mind.
  - **WRITE** the word down without looking back.
  - **CHECK** to see if you're right. If not, look carefully at where you went wrong and try again.

Mnemonics

These are rhymes and phrases which help children to remember tricky words or letter strings. Here are some good ones to practise – but you could make up your own, especially for words they find difficult. Get your child to draw pictures to illustrate them in a special notebook just for mnemonics.

COME: Clean Our Muddy Elephants!
WAS: Worms And Spiders
WANT: Wet Animals Need Towels
SAID: Sally Ann Is Dancing or Smelly Albert Is Dirty
OTHER: Only Tigers Hunt Evil Rabbits!
DOES: Do Owls Eat Sausages?
LAUGH: Laughing Ants Under Green Hats or Laugh At Ugly Gorillas Hopping
BECAUSE: Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants or Big Elephants Can't Actually Use Small Exits!
BEAUTIFUL: Big Emus Always Use Thick Ink For Underlining Letters
THROUGH: Ten Hairy Round Oranges Use Green Hairspray
RHYTHM: Rhythm Helps You To Hum Musically or Rhythm Helps Your Two Hips Move
WITCH: Witches In Their Crooked Hats
YOUNG: Young Orangutans Upset Nice Gorillas!
RIGHT: Ride In Granny's Helicopter Tonight

Mnemonics

-OUGH: Oh U Great Hulk!
-OUND: Oh U Naughty Dog!
OUR: OUR colOURs are bright
-OULD: Oh U Lucky Duck! or Old Uncles Lie Down
-IGHT: I've Got Homework Tonight!
ISLAND: An ISLAND IS LAND surrounded by water!
PIECE: A PIEce of PIE
SEPARATE: There's A RAT in sepARATe
FRIEND: I will be your friEND to the END
MANY: MANy a MAN likes football
MEAT: you EAT mEAT
HEAR: you hEAR with your EAR
NECESSARY: neCeSSary has 1 Collar and 2 Sleeves (or one coat and two shoes)
THEY: tHEY don't eat HAY (ey not ay!)
TOGETHER: if you go TO GET HER you'll be TOGETHER
SPECIAL: the C.I.A. have speCIAl agents
THERE: tHERE is a place like HERE
WHICH: there are 2 H's to choose from, wHicH would you like?
BELIEVE: I don't believe your LIE!
FEBRUARY: BR! It's cold in FeBRuary!
TERRIBLE: My RIB feels terrible
BUSINESS: travelling by BUS is good for BUSiness
SOLDIER: solDIErs sometimes DIE in battle
ACCOMMODATION: 2 Cats, 2 Mice but only 1 Dog.

Other ideas and resources

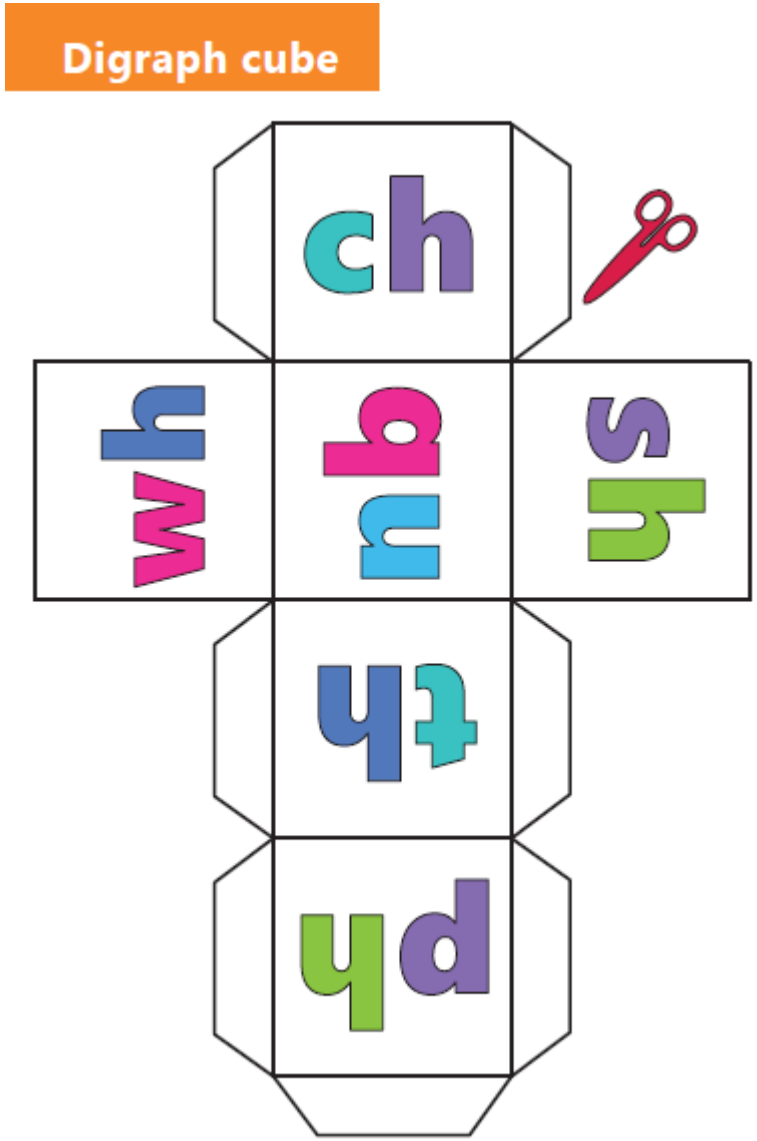
1. Trick

The Word Break Down: Encourage children to sound words out by breaking the word down into phonemes (e.g. c-a-t, sh-e-ll), or dividing the word into syllables and saying each syllable as they write the word (e.g. re-mem-ber).

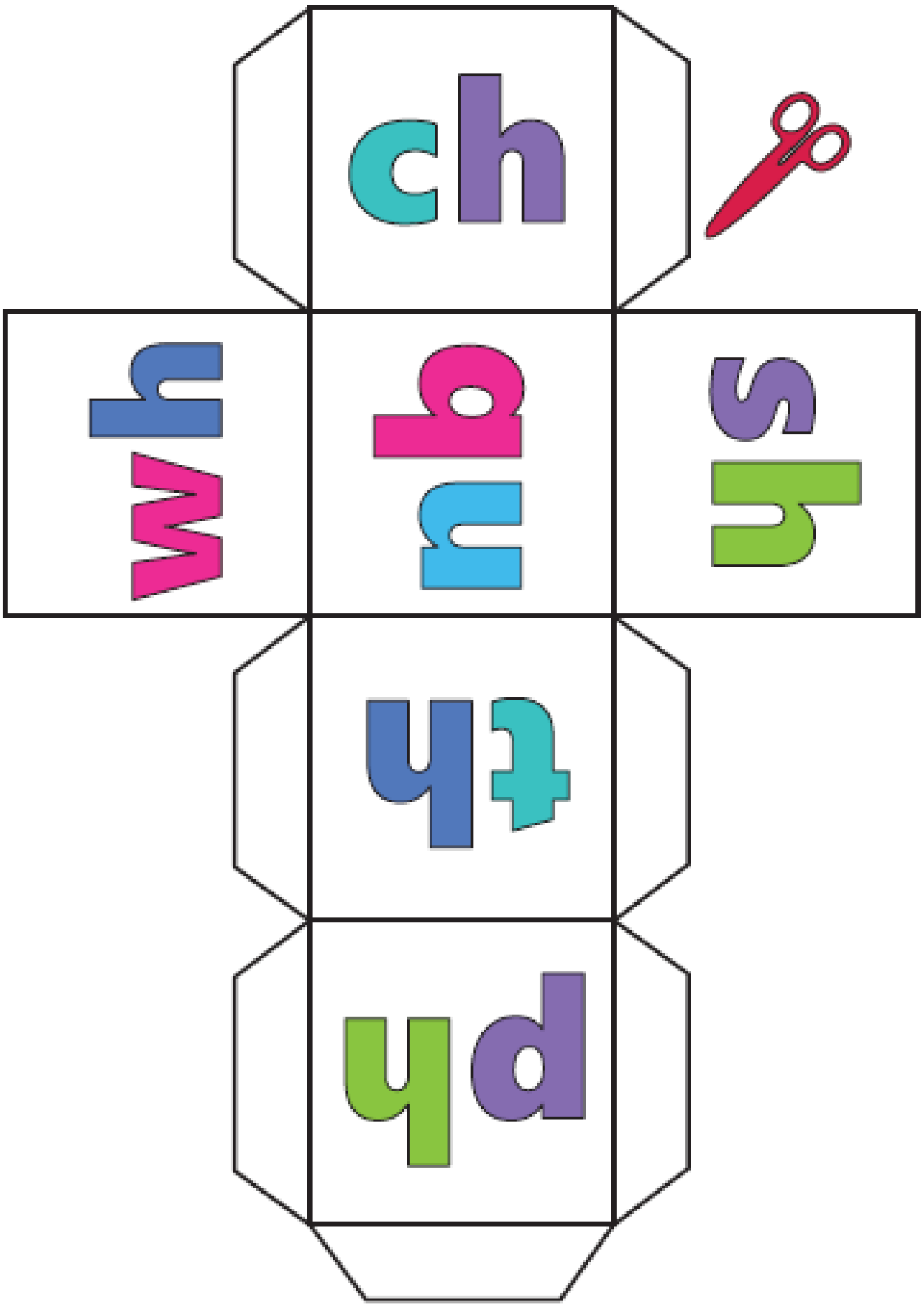
2. Game

Diagraph Cube: Print and cut out the cube on the next slide of this PowerPoint, and stick the tabs together so that you have a digraph die.

As a fun way of reviewing digraphs, get each child to roll the die then come up with a word that uses that digraph at the beginning of a word.



Digraph cube



3. Trick
The ‘look, say, cover, write, check’ strategy: By using mnemonics as an aid to memorising a tricky word, this trick can help boost retention more effectively than simply copying over and over.

4. Game
Diagraph Wheels: Cut out a circle with images correlating to a digraph in the heart of the circle along the outside, e.g. a picture of a sheep, a shell and a shed around a ‘sh’ in the middle. Also, include images with different digraphs, such as a queen. Using ordinary clothes pegs, ask children to peg the images that match the digraph in the middle of the pictures.



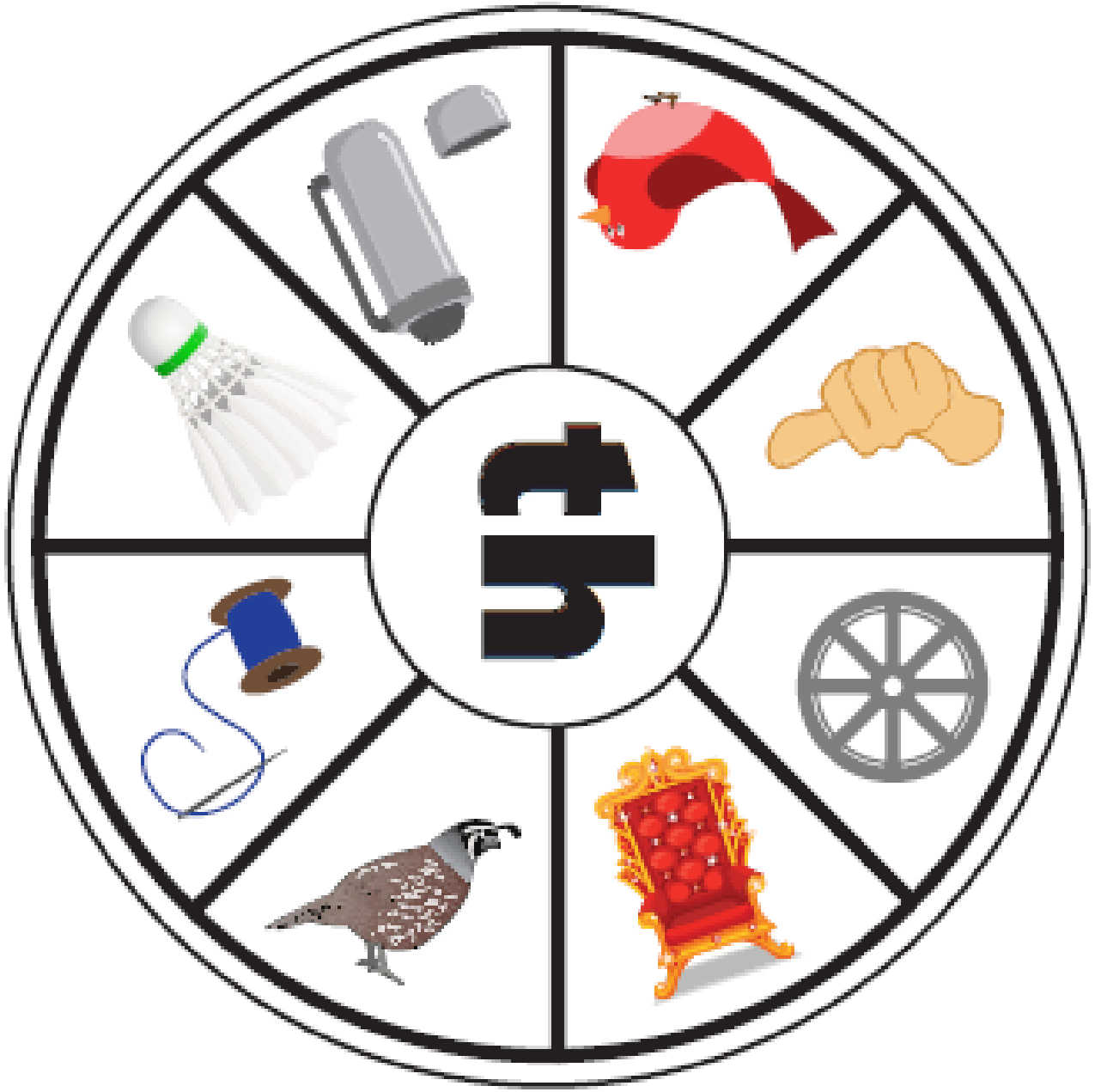
1 Digraph wheels



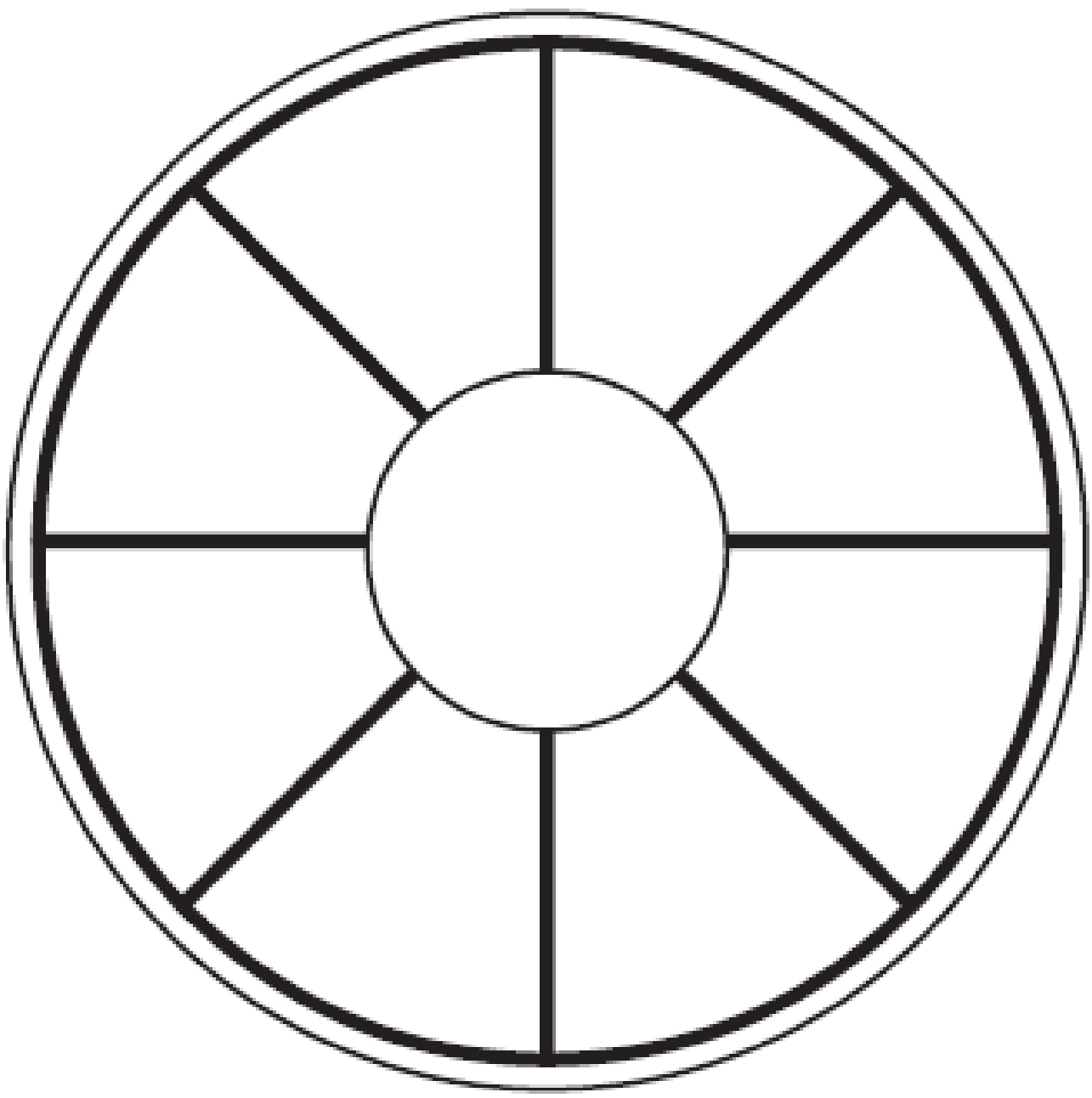
2 Digraph wheels



3 Digraph wheels



4 Digraph wheels



5. Trick
Finding Words Within Words: This of course doesn't work for every word, but certain slightly trickier words like 'mea**sure**s' and 'im**port**ant' it can be a useful way of breaking the word down into manageable chunks.

6. Game
Mix and match spellings: Using small plastic containers, take your word list and write each word, well spaced between each character, out on cardboard. Cut the letters up for each word, and put the letters into the plastic pot. Let the children pick their pot, and work out the spelling. As an extra twist, make it a group activity and encourage them to work together to find out what links the words together (i.e. the same digraph, the same suffix/prefix etc).

7. Trick
Encourage making links between the meaning of words and their spelling (e.g. sign, signal, signature). Looking at the roots of words and seeing how they can inform your understanding of other words gives useful contexts and helps to consolidate learning.

8. Game
The £100 challenge: On a board which can be left to one side of the room for the duration of the challenge, write the alphabet in a list, with the value of each letter next to it, ascending from £1 for the letter 'A', through to £26 for the letter 'Z'. Ask students to independently work out what word they can spell that adds up to £100. You can also ask them to work out the value of their name, and the value of their spelling list, as well as what word is the most/least expensive. Leave it there for however long you like, perhaps offering a prize for the most expensive word made (and spelt correctly!)