Debbie Hepplewhite's simple to complex Alphabetic Code overview

- <u>Slash marks</u> /ai/ denote *units of sound* (phonemes or combined phonemes). *Letters* and *letter groups* (graphemes) appear in <u>single apostrophes</u> **'ay'**.
- References to <u>short</u> vowel sounds relate to the sounds as in '**a**pple, **e**gg, **i**nsect, **o**ctopus, **u**mbrella' denoted as: /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/ - said in a 'staccato' manner - as opposed to references to the <u>long</u> vowel sounds commonly denoted as: /ai/, /ee/, /igh/, /oa/, /yoo/ as in '**ai**d, **ee**l, n**igh**t, **oa**k, stat**ue**'.

Key to the 12 units of Debbie's online synthetic phonics programme, Phonics International:

units 1-5	simple code with some spelling alternatives	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th		
6-12	/air/, /eer/, /zh/, split digraphs, complex code	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th

simple code	complex code							teaching points
units of sound (phonemes and combined phonemes)	graphemes: spelling variations which ARE CODE FOR the 44+ phonemes and combined phonemes such as /k+s/ and /y+oo/ and key words							Debbie's programme introduces a simple code of at least one letter/s-sound correspondence for each of the 44+ sounds of speech of the English language. It then expands to teach further spellings and their pronunciation variations.
/s/	s snake	-ss glass	-ce palace	-se house	ce ci cy cents certain city circle bicycle lacy	sc scissors scythe ascent	-st- castle ps pseudonym	*Short* words ending with the /s/ sound with *short* medial vowel sounds usually end with double letters 'ss' - as in 'glass'. *Sound out double consonant letters 'ss' as one sound only. *Double consonant letters alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its *short* sound (see 'a' below re 'glass') *Letters e, i or y alert the reader that the preceding 'c' will represent the /s/ sound. (This is often described as 'soft c'.)
/a/	a apple							*For 'a', teach, "Try the *short* vowel sound /a/ first, if that does not sound right then try the *long* vowel /ai/ sound". *Some people pronounce the 'a' in some words as if it were /ar/: e.g. path p-*ar*-th; glass g-l-*ar*-s
/t/	t tent	-tt letter	-ed skipped					*Double consonant letters 'tt' alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its *short* sound. *Past tense of verbs leads to 'ed' graphemes for /t/, /d/, /e+d/.
/i/	i insect	*-y sunny	-y cymbals	*-ey monkey	*-ie movie			*Letters 'i' and 'y' and the sounds they represent have very close links. Here the letter 'y' acts as a vowel-letter and vowel-sound. * End graphemes 'y', 'ey' and 'ie' sound between /i/ and /ee/.

/p/	p pan	-pp puppet						*Double consonant letters 'pp' alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its *short* sound.
/n/	n net	-nn bonnet	kn knot	gn gnome	-ine engine				*Double consonant letters 'nn' alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its *short* sound. *Some people would refer to 'silent k' or 'silent g'; others prefer to say that 'kn' and 'gn' **are code for** the /n/ sound.
/k/	k kit	c cat	-ck duck	ch chameleon	qu bouquet	que plaque			*Letter 'c' represents a /k/ sound when preceding the letters '**a**', '**o**' and '**u**'. *Short* words with **short** vowels usually end with 'ck' and this grapheme never begins words.
/e/	e egg	-ea head	-ai said						*When reading short unknown words with single letter 'e', teach, "Try the *short* vowel /e/ sound first, if that does not sound right then try the *long* vowel /ee/ sound".
/h/	h hat	wh who							*When letter names are taught, point out that the **name** for the letter 'h' is pronounced "aitch" – not "haitch".
/r/	r rat	-rr arrow	wr write	rh rhino					*Some people would refer to 'silent w' or 'silent h'; others prefer to say that 'wr' and 'rh' **are code for** the /r/ sound (phoneme).
/m/	m map	-mm hammer	-mb thumb	-mn column	-me welcome				*Double consonant letters 'mm' alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its *short* sound. *Some people would refer to 'silent b' or silent 'n'; others prefer to say that 'mb' and 'mn' **are code for** /m/.
/d/	d dig	-dd puddle	-ed rained						*Double consonant letters 'dd' alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its *short* sound. *Past tense of verbs leads to 'ed' graphemes for /t/, /d/, /u+d/.
/g/	g girl	-gg juggle	gu guitar	gh ghost	-gue catalogue				*Double consonant letters 'gg' alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its *short* sound. *Letter 'u' in 'gu' acts as a block between the letters 'g' and 'e', 'i' or 'y' indicating the 'g' is code for /g/ and not /j/.

							Notes
/o/	o octopus	wa watch	qua qualify	alt salt				*For 'o', teach, "Try the *short* vowel /o/ sound first, if that does not sound right then try the *long* vowel /oa/ sound". *Alert the reader that the graphemes 'w' or 'qu' preceding a single letter 'a' can indicate that 'a' **is code for** the /o/ sound.
/u/	u umbrella	o son	-ou touch	ough thorough				*For 'u', teach, "Try the *short* vowel /u/ sound first, if that does not sound right then try the *long* vowel /**yoo**/ sound". *The letter 'u' is sometimes code for a long /**oo**/ sound: e.g. flu, judo, truth, Ruth, Pluto.
/l/	l ladder	-ll shell						*To make the /l/ sound, roll up the tongue and say "ul". *Short words with *short* vowels usually end with 'll' as in be**ll**. *Double consonant letters 'll' alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its *short* sound except '-all' (/or+l/).
schwa /ul/		-le kettle	-il pencil	-al hospital	-el camel			*Teach the 'schwa' effect involving /l/ through words such as: litt**le**, tab**le**, pup**il**, cymb**al**, lab**el** (pronounced close to "**ul**"). Teach that **literal sounding out when reading**, however, helps with spelling: e.g. h-o-s-p-i-t-**a**-l.
/f/	f feather	-ff cliff	ph photo	-gh laugh				*Double consonant letters 'ff' alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its *short* sound. *Short words with *short* vowel sounds usually end with 'ff' as in o**ff** and cli**ff**.
/b/	b bat	-bb rabbit	bu building					*Double consonant letters 'bb' alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its *short* sound.
/j/	j jug	-ge cabbage	ge gi gy gerbil giraffe gymnast	-dge fridge				*Letters e, i or y alert the reader that the preceding letter 'g' **might** represent the /j/ sound. (This is often referred to as 'soft g'.) *Words *ending* with the /j/ sound are spelt with '**ge**' or '**dge**' ('dge' follows single letter, short vowel sounds like 'fri**dge**').
/y/	y yawn							*Teach early on that letter 'y' represents 4 sounds as in '**y**es, m**y** mumm**y**' and 'c**y**mbal'. It is often interchangeable with the the letter '**i**' and the sounds /**i**/, between /**i** and **ee**/, and /**igh**/.

Sound									Notes
/ai/	ai aid	-ay tray	a table	-ae sundae	a-e cakes	-ey prey	eigh eight	-ea break	*The 'a-**i**' as in 'bak**i**ng' alerts the reader to pronounce /ai/. *Grapheme '**ea**' as code for the /ai/ sound is rare. Note the three common root words: **break**, **steak**, **great**.
/w/	w web	wh wheel							*Letter 'w' preceding vowel graphemes should alert the reader to different possible pronunciations'; **(w)a** - wasp, wag; **(w)ar** - warm, wary; **(w)or** - work. Note: '**wha**t'
/oa/	oa oak	ow bow	o yo-yo	-oe oboe	o-e rope	ough dough	-eau plateau		*The 'o-**i**' as in 'pok**i**ng' alerts the reader to pronounce /oa/.
/igh/	-igh night	-ie tie	i behind	-y shy	i-e bike	ei eider			*The 'i-**i**' as in 'lik**i**ng' alerts the reader to pronounce /igh/.
/ee/	ee eel	ea eat	e emu	*-y sunny	e-e concrete	-ey key *monkey	-ie chief *movie	-ine sardines	*The 'e-**i**' as in 'compet**i**ng' alerts the reader to pronounce /ee/. *The 'y' in 'sunny' is between the sound /i/ and /ee/. Similarly, so is 'ey' in 'monkey' and 'ie' in 'movie'. [Also in /i/ row.]
/or/ or /aw/ dependent on regional and national accents	or fork	aw dawn	au sauce	-al chalk	oar oars	-oor door	ore snore	-our four	*Letter 'w' preceding grapheme 'ar' alerts the reader to say the sound /or/: **(w)ar** - war, warn, wart, warder. *Sound /w/ as in 'qu' [/k/+/w/] also alerts reader to pronounce 'ar' as /or/: **(qu)ar** - quart, quarter, quartz, quartile.
		war warm	quar quarter	augh caught	ough thought				*Double consonant letters 'zz' alert the reader to sound out the preceding vowel with its *short* sound. *Short words with *short* vowel sounds end with 'zz' - ja**zz**.
/z/	z zebra	-zz jazz	-s fries	-se cheese	-ze breeze	x xylophone			*The grapheme 'ng' can be pronounced differently according to regional accent and dependent upon the particular word. *In some words, the 'n' and 'g' are pronounced separately
/ng/	-n gong	-n jungle		/ngk/	-nk ink	-nc uncle			*Teach 'nk' as if it was **one sound unit** for reading and spelling purposes even though it is really two; that is: /ng/+/k/. This combined 'sound' may be denoted as **/nk/**.

/v/	v	-ve							*Teach that words ending with the /v/ sound end with the grapheme 've'.
	violin	dove							
short /oo/	oo	oul	-u						*Teach the two sounds represented by the grapheme 'oo' at the same time; short /oo/, long /**oo**/.
	book	should	push						*Progress to linking the /**oo**/ as in 'moon' with the spelling and pronunciation variations of 'ew', 'ue' and 'u-e' - all of which can represent both the long /**oo**/ sound and the /**yoo**/ sound.
long /**oo**/	oo	-ue	u-e	-ew	-ui	-ou	-o	ough	
	moon	blue	flute	crew	fruit	soup	move	through	
/ks/	-x	-ks	-cks	-kes		/gz/	-x	-ggs	*Teach the letter 'x' as if it was **one sound unit** /ks/ whereas it is really two sounds /k/+/s/.
	fox	books	ducks	cakes			exam	eggs	Provide word lists of '**-x**' words, '**-ks**', '**cks**' and '-**kes**' words to compare: e.g. fox, boxes, looks, beaks, ducks, likes.
/ch/	ch	-tch				/chu/ schwa		-ture	*Grapheme 'tch' indicates a preceding *short* vowel sound; e.g. d**i**tch, f**e**tch, th**a**tch, n**o**tch, h**u**tch, w**a**tch.
	chairs	patch						picture	*Grapheme 'ch' follows *long* vowel sounds (bl**ea**ch, p**oo**ch, r**ea**ches); but also some common words with *short* vowels which need to be noted: **rich**, **which**, **such**, **much**, **touch**.
									*Grapheme 'ch' follows consonants; e.g. mu**l**ch, wre**n**ch, pi**n**ch.
/sh/	sh	ch	-ti	-ci	-ssi				*Draw attention to 'ti', 'ci', 'ssi' graphemes in long words.
	sheep	chef	station	magician	mission				*Provide words in groups with the same 'chunk' endings: -tion, -cian, -cial, -ssion, -cious.
									Progress to the phoneme /zh/ as in 'televisi**on'.
unvoiced /th/	th								*Teach unvoiced /th/ and voiced /**th**/ together.
	thistle								*Compare the sounds /f/ and /v/ and study mouth movements of these sounds carefully. Pronouncing /th/, /f/ and /v/ frequently causes confusion because of their similarities and the influence of regional accents.
voiced /**th**/	th								
	there								

/k+w/	qu queen								*In English, the letter 'q' is always followed by the letter 'u' and together they **are code for** two sounds /k/+/w/. Treat as **one sound unit** /**kw**/ for both reading and spelling purposes when teaching in the **early** stages. ['qu' can be code for /k/]
/ou/	ou ouch	ow owl	ough plough						*The *grapheme* 'ou' as code for the sound /ou/ is never found at the end of a word. *'ough' is a rare grapheme as an /ou/ sound: bough, plough.
/oi/	oi ointment	oy toy							*The *grapheme* 'oi' is never at the end of a word except in 'coi carp'.
/y+oo/	-ue statue	u unicorn	u-e tube	ew new	eu deuce				*Point out that the graphemes 'ue', 'ew' and 'u-e' are also spellings for the long /**oo**/ sound. *The 'u-**i**' as in 'amus**i**ng' alerts the reader to pronounce /yoo/.
/er/	er mermaid	ir birthday	ur nurse	ear earth	wor world	schwa /er/ or /u/ mix**er**	-our humour	-er theatre	*Letter 'w' preceding 'or' alerts the reader to say "wer…" as in: worm, work, worth. *'er', 'our', 're' may sound like /er/ or schwa /u/ dependent on accent: sist**er**, col**our**, cent**re**.
/ar/	ar artist	alm palm	alf half	alv calves	-a father				*Mention early on that some people pronounce some words with the 'a' grapheme as the /ar/ sound rather than the /a/ sound: path p-*ar*-th, glass g-l-*ar*-s.
/air/	air hair	-are hare	-ear bear	-ere where					*Teach /air/ along with phoneme /eer/ (below) as there are so many similar or identical graphemes representing /air/ and /eer/ phonemes. Teach the word 'th**eir**' as 'their things'.
/eer/	eer deer	ear ears	-ere adhere	-ier cashier					See /air/ above.
/zh/ televi**si**on	-si vision	-s treasure	-z azure	g courgette	-ge collage	note: *-y, *-ey, *-ie are pronounced between /i/ and /ee/ when these graphemes are word-endings so they appear in both /i/ and /ee/ rows.			**Progress to this sound from lessons in the /sh/ sound and its spelling variations. There are no words with the grapheme 'zh' and the letters zh are used to denote the *phoneme* only.

The complexities of the English Alphabetic Code include:

1. one sound (phoneme) can be represented by one, two, three or four letters: e.g. **k**, **sh**, **igh**, **eigh**

2. one sound can be represented by different spellings (graphemes): e.g. /oa/ is represented by: **o**, **oa**, **ow**, **oe**, **o-e**, **eau**, **ough**

3. one spelling can represent multiple sounds: e.g. '**ough**': /oa/ th**ough**, /or/ th**ough**t, /oo/ thr**ough**, /ou/ pl**ough**, /u/ thor**ough**

These complexities are taught explicitly and the Alphabetic Code is taught systematically with Debbie's online *Phonics International* programme:

General advice for teaching the Alphabetic Code:

- Choose an **order of introduction** of letter/s-sound correspondences to create a version of a **simple code**. (See left-hand column for Debbie's version). Teach around 2 - 5 correspondences per week. Provide a **cumulative word bank** (for the simple code) for modelling **blending** all-through-the-word for reading, and **segmenting** all-through-the-spoken-word for spelling. The 'simple code', in effect, is part of the complex English code but it is just a 'first step' of introducing the complexities of the English writing system for reading and spelling based on the 44+ phonemes (smallest identifiable sounds of speech).

- Keep the simple code revised and begin to introduce **spelling and pronunciation variations** of the complex code at a rate appropriate to the age and stage of the learner. With effective direct teaching, the rate of learning can be surprisingly fast-paced but use professional judgement as to the pace.

- The Alphabetic Code is not an 'exact science' and **accents need to be taken into account** at all times along with the notion of 'tweaking pronunciations' when decoding to reach the regional or preferred pronunciation of the target word. Simply explain the concept of 'accents' to the learners.

- Tweaking, or modifying, pronunciations also helps to **raise awareness of the 'schwa effect'** (unstressed syllables) whereby in reality a sound close to /u/ is the spoken translation of the written code in words such as 'sof**a**' (sofu), 'fast**er**' (fastu), 'litt**le**' (littul), '**a**round' (uround). The reverse of this is the need to be aware of the spelling possibilities when segmenting spoken words for writing - particularly with regard to the schwa effect. The ability to spell accurately relies on a growing knowledge of **word associations** (that is, **spelling word banks** - noting words with the same spelling and sound variations) and this knowledge takes much longer to acquire than learning to decode well for reading. Always emphasise the **relationship between sounds and graphemes** when teaching spelling *rather than* relying on visual memory of **letter order**. Letter *names* are **used only to relay** an accurate spelling from one person to another and this is *not the actual spelling skill* of most literate adults. Even adults spell with a *sound-to-print* process (identifying the sounds all-through-the-spoken-word) followed by choosing correct graphemes from beginning to end for the specific word. Tell learners explicitly that phonics for reading and for spelling are adult skills, especially for new and difficult words. *Phonics is for adults* and not just for teaching beginners or infants.