



Letter Strings and word families

Letter Strings 1

Objectives:

To be able to spell:

- The /l/ or /əl/ sound spelt -le at the end of words
- The /l/ or /əl/ sound spelt -el at the end of words
- The /l/ or /əl/ sound spelt -al at the end of words
- Words ending -il
- Words ending in -tion
- The /z:/ sound spelt or after w
- The /ɔ:/ sound spelt ar after w
- The /o/ sound spelt a after w

Subject knowledge / Conventions

'W special'

When the letter **a** follows /w/ it is often pronounced /o/

wash, wand, squash, squad

When the letters **or** follow /w/ they are often pronounced /ir/

word, worm, work, worth, worse

When the letters **ar** follow /w/ they are often pronounced /or/

war, wart, warm, warn, award

To avoid confusion, try not to teach the various 'W special' letter strings on the same or consecutive days.

Words ending in -tion

NB At this stage the objective is simply to learn to spell words with **-tion** at the end. Learning about the alternative spellings of 'shən' suffixes **-tion, -sion, -ssion, -cian** is covered in Y3/4 in the new curriculum. Of these suffixes **-tion** is the most common.

information, education, action

Words ending in /l/ or /əl/

By far the most common spelling of this ending is **-le** – especially after a short vowel.

Strange but (often) true – if the letter before the ending has an ascender or descender, the ending is likely to be **-le**.

-al – A lot less common - local, hospital, animal, central, final, royal, natural, normal, metal, equal
-el – Even less common - level, model, travel, panel, label, angel, chapel, tunnel, channel, camel, towel, parcel

Depending on accent some words ending in **-il** may also sound like they end in /əɪ/

-il – Very few words have this spelling pattern - pupil, evil, pencil, fossil, stencil, council

With **-le** endings children can sometimes be confused over whether the consonant that comes before the **-le** should be doubled or not. They can usually work this out by thinking about whether the word contains a long or short vowel phoneme.

If the word contains a short vowel phoneme – there will usually be two consonant letters between the vowel and the **-le** ending. When soundtalking the word to write it, sometimes two consonant phonemes can be heard **sample, twin-kle**. If only one consonant can be heard, it usually needs to be represented by a double letter as in **apple, bottle, bubble** or occasionally by a digraph such as **st** in **whistle** or **ck** in **prickle**.

If the word contains a long vowel phoneme then there is usually only one consonant phoneme letter between the vowel and the **-le** **staple, beetle, doodle** – no double letters needed.

Children should already be able to:

- Segment words, including Phase 5 words
- Split words up into syllables
- Distinguish between vowel and consonant phonemes
- Know the names of all the letters in the alphabet (not just reciting them in order)
- Add **-ing, -ed, -er, -est** and **-y** to words of one syllable ending in a single consonant letter after a single vowel letter

Revisit, assess and adapt – suggested activities

Rehearse splitting words up into syllables.

Revisit distinguishing between long and short vowel phonemes within words.

Play [Long or short](#).

Play phoneme spotter and word sort to revise alternative spellings for the **/or/** and **/ur/** phonemes.

phonicsplay.co.uk, [Alternative Spellings /or/](#), [Alternative Spellings /ur/](#).

Revisit adding the suffixes **-ing** and **-ed** to root words. Concentrate on how to work out when we need to double the consonant letter as children will need a similar skill when working out how to spell words with **-le** endings.

[Verb Vikings](#)

Informal whiteboard tests.

Adapt planning for unit based on observations from these revisit activities.

Supporting and extending



To support – look back to
Phase 5c

To extend – look ahead to
Letter Strings 2



Teach & Practise – suggested activities

'W special'

The following 'W special' activities are best spread out through the unit. Tackling them together could lead to confusion.

Look at the words: **war, wart, warm, warn, award**. Ask children to soundtalk these words and figure out how the grapheme **ar** should be pronounced in these words (**/or/**). Discuss what else these words have in common. Explain that when **w** comes before vowels it can affect the pronunciation of the vowel. Play rehearsal games to practise these words.

[Letter strings countdown](#)

[Printable word cards available](#)

Look at the words: **word, worm, work, worth, worse**. Ask children to soundtalk these words figure out how the grapheme **or** should be pronounced in these words (**/ur/**). Discuss what else these words have in common. Explain that when **w** comes before vowels it can affect the pronunciation of the vowel. Play rehearsal games to practise these words.

[Letter strings countdown](#)

[Printable word cards available](#)

Look at the words **want, wash, wasp, wand, swallow, squash, swap, squad, swamp, watch**. Ask children to soundtalk the words and figure out how the letter **a** should be pronounced in each of these words (**/o/**). Discuss what else the words have in common. Explain that when **/w/** comes before vowels it can affect the pronunciation of the vowel. Play rehearsal games to practise these words.

[Letter strings countdown](#)

[Printable word cards available](#)

Let children know that they will be playing a pirate treasure hunt game at the end of this unit. Encourage them to think carefully about how they spell words beginning with **w** in any writing that they do in school as this could help them to do well in the treasure hunt game.

-tion

Model blending to read the word **action**. Discuss the fact that saying action as **ac/t/i/on** doesn't make sense. Explain instead that the **-tion** ending is pronounced **/sh/ə/n/**. Explain that the **tion** letter string is one that is found in a lot of words and that while it is unusual in general for the **/sh/** phoneme to be spelt **ti**, when the ending of a word sounds like **/sh/ə/n/** then **-tion** is the most likely spelling. Try blending the word again using this knowledge. Repeat with **position**,

station, education. Use the opportunity for modelling the strategies learnt in Phase 5b for working out graphemes that can have alternative pronunciations (such as the **a** in **station**).

Say the word **fraction** out loud, split it into syllables then soundtalk each syllable in turn. Ask the children to repeat and hold up fingers to show how many syllables there are and how many phonemes there are in each syllable. Draw the right number of sound buttons for the first syllable and model soundtalking the first syllable again and putting in the graphemes above the sound buttons. Say the second syllable again and sound talk it. Ask the children what they can remember about words that end with the syllable **/sh/ə/n/**, Model drawing the sound buttons and filling in the graphemes. Remind the children that all through their phonics learning they have encountered tricky phonemes/graphemes. Point out that the **ti** spelling for the **/sh/** phoneme is no different and that they will soon train their brains to get used to it.

Play Rehearsal games with **-tion** words.

Printable word cards available

You may or may not wish to point out at this stage that there are other ways of spelling **/sh/ə/n/** that children will learn in the future but that **-tion** is the best guess.

/ə/ endings

Explain that lots of words **prickle, kettle, camel, metal** have a final syllable that is pronounced **/ə/**. (**/ə/** represents an unstressed vowel or schwa sound).

Play Sound spotter and Word sort to identify the best guess and other conventions for spelling this ending.

The little metal camel – investigating /ə/ endings

Printable resources available

Encourage children to think really carefully about how they pronounce these words in order to help them learn how to spell them. Encourage them to celebrate the fabulous range of accents in use in this country and to be proud of their own. Reassure them that their own accent is just as good as any other, including RP (received pronunciation), they just need to think about how the sounds they say in words match up with the way the word is written. In some southern accents this final syllable is often pronounced as **/əw/** and so children may need to really train themselves to recognise that these are endings that need **l** in them.

The little metal camel – investigating /ə/ endings

Printable resources available

Remind children of the Learn the word strategies (From Learning Words 1) and give them a selection of words ending in **-al**, **-el** and **-il** to learn.

Printable word cards available

Play Rehearsal games with the words learned above.

Printable word cards available

Investigate spelling patterns in words with the **-le** ending. Play a Word sorting game (see the general games ideas page for a range of ways to play word sorting games) with words ending in **-le**. Sort them into words containing two different consonant letters between the vowel sound and the **-le**, a double consonant between the vowel and the **-le**, a single consonant letter

between the vowel sound and the **-le**. Point out that children may find it helpful to think about whether the vowels are long or short.

Printable resources available

Together identify a rule that will help children to know when they need to double the letter before the **-le**. Short vowel sound – there needs to be two consonant letters between the vowel and the **-le**. If you can only hear one sound you need to spell it with a double letter. Long vowel sound – you only need one consonant between the vowel sound and the **-le** – no doubling required.

The little metal camel – investigating /ə/ endings

Play Rehearsal games with **-le** words.

Printable word cards available

Apply and assess – suggested activities

W treasure hunt – With children sitting in pairs, make one child from each pair a member of Team A and the other child a member of Team B. It will make the game easier and fairer to have children with a mixture of spelling abilities within each team on each table. Explain that the aim of the game is to find correctly spelt words beginning with **w** (they don't necessarily have to be 'w special' words). Place two treasure chest sheets on each table (one for each team). There is space on the sheet for each team to decide on the name of their pirate ship. Pirate voices and phrases are entirely optional.

Challenge children to independently hunt through any of their books to find words that they have used (in recent weeks) that begin with **w**. If they are confident that a found word has been correctly spelt, then this is treasure but before they can put this treasure in their treasure chest, they must first show the word to the person sitting next to them on the other team and get them to agree ("Aye aye Cap'n") that it is spelt correctly. If they aren't sure, they can confer with other team members on their table or (if absolutely necessary) check with an adult.

If the word is correct it can be written onto the correct team's treasure chest in the middle of the table.

If the word is incorrect ("Shiver me timbers"), children can confer with their own team, correct it and then show it to the other team again (as many times as necessary until they get it right). Once the word is corrected, it can be counted as treasure.

The same word can be put into the treasure chest more than once as long as it has actually been found in books more than once. At the end of the session, tables should count out how many pieces of treasure (**w** words) are in each treasure chest to determine which team won the challenge for each table. Celebrate all the correctly spelt words and especially celebrate corrected words. Encourage children to share any words that needed correcting and also to share any ideas that they may have for helping themselves to remember how to spell those words next time.

Printable resources available

Use informal whiteboard spelling tests to determine whether children are correctly spelling **-le** words.

Dictate a short text containing a selection of words from this unit.

Useful information

Fluffy the cat likes a little tickle under his chin. Don't be startled if he wants to snuggle up on your lap too. For your own protection, I should warn you that he likes to nibble little fingers.

Printable resources available

Challenge children to create posters/leaflets/books to share what they have learned in this unit.

Applying across the curriculum

See the section of the website on applying across the curriculum for ideas. Try to build in lots of modelling, planned opportunities and support in the learning environment for applying across the curriculum. Without this, it is easy for children to simply forget what they have learned in spelling sessions.