

A Parent's Guide to Riggs Spelling Markings

In many spelling programs, students are given a list of 20 words on Monday that will be tested on Friday. They are told simply to learn the words. The Riggs phonics program we use goes much deeper than visual memorization. Teachers teach students approximately six words daily. They identify the phonograms (common English spelling patterns) and spelling rules in these words. Knowledge of these phonograms and spelling rules enables students to reason through even the most complex English words. This guide is written to help you understand the markings you may see on your child's spelling practice. Feel free to contact your child's teacher if you have further questions.

Syl·la·ble Breaks:

Spelling words are practiced in syllables because so many of our spelling rules are based on those breaks; for example, the **open syllable rule** states, "Vowels A, E, O, U usually say /A, E, O, U or OO/ at the end of a syllable."

a·pron vs. ap·ple be·tween vs. bet·ter ro·bot vs. rob·ber mu·sic vs. tus·sle

Single Underline:

- We underline **multi-letter phonograms** (Spelling patterns with more than one letter, such as: ar, th, kn, igh, ow) to show our eyes which letters work together to produce one sound in the word.

park, with, knelt, eight, brown, thatch, search

- We underline a **single vowel when it says its name at the end of a syllable**. This marking shows that the open syllable rule is at work: Vowels A, E, O, U usually say /A, E, O, U/ at the end of a syllable. Though I and Y don't *usually* say I, we underline them when they **do** say /I/ at the end of a syllable.

a·pron be·held i·con o·pen u·nit

- We underline **I or O when it says /I/ or /O/ before two consonants** (to emphasize the rule: Vowels I and O may say /I/ and /O/ before two consonants).

wild kind most bold

- We underline certain letters in **silent final e** words. Refer to that section for details.

Double Underline:

- We double underline **silent letters**. See the **silent final e** page for additional markings involved there.

limb happy walkl col·umn

Numbers Above Phonograms

We put a number above a phonogram that makes a sound other than its first (most common) sound (if a rule doesn't already explain why). This step helps us see which sound it is making in that particular word.

2 3 2 4 2 5
them you school touch snow bought

Think to Spell: ^

We put a think-to-spell mark (^) over **phonograms that are not making one of their sounds**. We *say* the word normally, but we *think-to-spell* it differently. "We *think-to-spell* Wed·nes·day, but we *say* /wenz·day/." "We think to spell oth·er, but we *say* /uh·ther/." This strategy helps us spell the tricky part of the word correctly; "We *think to spell* thE, but we *say* thuh."

^ ^ ^ ^
sure ques·tion doc·tor beg·gar

Silent Final E Words & Markings

1. dime₁ (“We underline the vowel that says its name. We underline the consonant that e jumps over. We double underline silent final e, job 1.”)

2. have₂ val·ue₂ (English words do not end with V or U. We underline the V or U, because that is why E is there. We double underline silent final e, job 2.”)

3. dance₃ large₃ (We underline the C or G, because E is there to make it say its second sound: /s/ or /j/. We double underline silent final e, job 3.)

4. ta·ble₄ (English syllables must have a written vowel. We double underline only the silent final e, job 4.)

5. house₅ awe₅ bye₅ (We double underline only the silent final e, job 5.)

There are at least five reasons for a silent final E:

1. E makes the vowel say its name.

Examples: at → ate pet → Pete
pin → pine not → note cut → cute

2. V or U? Job 2! (English words do not end with V or U.)

Examples: love, blue

3. C or G? Job 3!

E makes C say /s/ and G say /j/, their second sounds.
Examples: chance, change

4. “4” every English syllable, we must have a written vowel.

This silent E adds a vowel to a syllable.
Examples: lit·tle, spar·kle

5. Odd Job E: A silent final E that does any other job not covered by the other four.

- Keeps a non-plural word from ending with –s (dense, not dens; diverse, not divers)
- Long ago, printers made main-idea words longer by adding e (awe, rye)
- Makes homonyms look different from one another (or/ore)
- The silent E *used* to be pronounced (giraffe), but is now silent.
- Foreign origin (Usually from French: magazine, automobile, petite)
- Other uncommon reasons