Keys to Spelling: Sounds and Syllables

A Spelling Workbook for English Language Learners (Beginning–Intermediate Level)

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To the Student

*Keys to Spelling: Sounds and Syllables* was written to help students relate English vowel sounds to their spellings. Each lesson focuses on one vowel sound—the "key word" sound.

**Distinguish the Sound:** practice hearing the key-word sound as a unique sound—different from other vowels sounds.

**Identify the Sound:** select words with the key-word vowel sound from 16 to 20 pictures with similarly spelled words but with vowel sounds that may differ.

**Learn Common Spelling Patterns:** review words in pattern boxes and observe where the sound occurs in the word, for example, between consonants, at the end of a syllable, before silent *e*, or before some other special consonant such as *r* or *l*.

**Practice Spelling Patterns:** fill in the spelling for words by following pattern guidelines (rules).

**Learn Less Common Spelling Patterns:** review words in pattern boxes for less common spellings or exceptional spellings. Memorize these words. Practice them. Write them. Note their use.

**Practice Spelling Patterns in Context:** fill in spellings for pictured words, words in sentences and words in paragraphs. Write a short story and include some words with the key-word sound.

**Test Your Progress:** Take pre- and post-tests before and after each lesson. Check your answers.

Dialectal differences are noted next to pattern boxes; but, it is not possible to include them all. Keep in mind that vowel sounds are pronounced differently in English dialects around the world. Vowel sounds at the ends of words and before special consonants *r* and *l* vary the most.

English spelling may seem difficult to learn at first, but soon you will notice a number of patterns and rules that apply to most word spellings. Knowledge of French, Greek, Latin or Arabic will help you because English has a large number of borrowed words from these languages. Reading news articles, magazines, journals, or books, will familiarize you with word use and spelling.

To the Teacher

This workbook was written to fill gaps in learning materials. Basic skills such as spelling and handwriting are often expected of language learners but not specifically taught to them. These practices were originally written to help speakers of languages with other sound systems and scripts (Arabic, Vietnamese, Chinese) but may also be useful for native speakers who need some additional help in relating how a word sounds to how a word is spelled. This workbook can be used in class or as supplemental material.

- **Pre tests** and **post tests** are included for assessing the progress of learners.
- **Hear it** sections include similar-sounding word pairs so that learners can demonstrate that they actually hear and can identify the key-word sound. (Pronounce the sounds clearly, and do not change intonation as you read each word in the pair [not: sheep ➔, ship ➔]. Use even intonation [sheep ➔, ship ➔].)
- **Common Spellings** are presented as groupings of words spelled in predictable ways. Present and practice common patterns before introducing exceptions.
- **Spelling practices** are suitable for students needing basic vocabulary spellings.
- **Writing practices** are suitable for students who are more advanced and able to express themselves well enough to describe pictures in sentences.
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Sound Symbols for Vowels

“Long” Vowels

/eɪ/ cake ← a → /æ/ cat

/ɪ/ tea ← e → /ɛ/ bed

/ai/ pie ← i → /i/ pig

/oʊ/ home ← o → /ə/-/ɔ/ hotdog

/ʊ/ blue ← u → /ʌ/ sun

Diphthongs

/ɔɪ/ toys ← /aʊ/ cow

Unstressed

/ə/ schwa/bə'nænə/ banana /ə/ water /'wɔ tər, 'wɔtər, 'waːtər/