



# Phonograms Pyramid

## Parent & Reading Tutor User Manual: Cumulative Word Decoding Made Simple

Published by Phonogram University • Author: Mark Boline • Website: [phonogramuniversity.com](http://phonogramuniversity.com)

### 1. The Science of Cumulative Word Decoding

Welcome to Phonograms Pyramid! This tool is designed to give parents, tutors, and early educators an easy-to-use, research-grounded way to teach children how to decode words sound by sound without guessing, struggling, or memorizing whole-word shapes.

#### The Neurological Solution: Orthographic Mapping & Cumulative Blending

Skilled readers do not read words by shape; their brains instantly link the written letters (graphemes) to the individual speech sounds (phonemes) they represent. This neurological process is called orthographic mapping. Once a word is mapped sound by sound, it enters permanent sight memory—meaning it can be read accurately in less than 1/20th of a second.

The Reading Pyramid teaches orthographic mapping in the most natural, low-stress way possible: by revealing one sound at a time from left to right:

- **Tier 1 (Initial Sound):** The child reads only the first speech unit (e.g., 'sh').
- **Tier 2 (Continuous Blending):** The child reads the familiar first sound and slides the second sound onto it (e.g., 'sh' + 'i' = 'shi').
- **Tier 3 (Word Synthesis):** The child adds the final sound and reads the complete, meaningful word (e.g., 'shi' + 'p' = 'ship!').

#### Why the Pyramid Relieves Working Memory

**Beginning readers have very limited working memory. If asked to sound out 's-t-o-p', by the time they reach 'p', they have often forgotten the 's' and 't'. By building the word cumulatively row-by-row, the child rehearses and cements the blend at every tier, eliminating memory drop-off.**

#### Visual Learning Anchors Built Into the App

- **Multi-Letter Phonograms are Underlined:** English has 70 common phonograms, many consisting of 2, 3, or 4 letters representing a single sound (e.g., 'sh', 'th', 'ck', 'oa', 'igh', 'dge'). In

this app, multi-letter phonograms are housed in a single square card tile with an underline. This visually trains the child's eyes: 'Two letters, one sound!'

- **Prior Sounds in Red:** On each new tier of the pyramid, earlier sound units turn red. This color anchor signals: 'You already mastered this part—now just attach the new black sound at the end.'
- **Dotted Underline for Silent 'e':** Silent 'e' tiles feature a distinct dotted underline to signify that the letter makes no sound of its own, but performs an important spelling job.

## 2. Quick Setup & Device Installation (PWA)

Phonograms Pyramid runs in any modern web browser on smartphones, tablets, iPads, Chromebooks, Macs, and Windows PCs. It is built as a Progressive Web App (PWA), meaning you can install it to your home screen and run it 100% offline with zero internet connection.

### Installing on iPhone & iPad (iOS Safari)

- **Step 1:** Open Safari and navigate to your Phonograms Pyramid web link.
- **Step 2:** Tap the Share button (the square icon with an upward arrow) in the Safari toolbar.
- **Step 3:** Scroll down the action list and tap 'Add to Home Screen'.
- **Step 4:** Tap 'Add' in the top-right corner. The app icon will appear directly on your home screen.

When opened from your home screen, the app launches in full-screen standalone mode without URL bars, tabs, or notifications—creating a distraction-free learning environment for your child.

### Installing on Android, Chromebook & Windows (Chrome / Edge)

- **Step 1:** Open the app link in Google Chrome or Microsoft Edge.
- **Step 2:** Click the 'Install' button in the app header (or tap the 3-dot menu > 'Install App' / 'Add to Phone').
- **Step 3:** Confirm the installation prompt.

### Adjusting Primer Text Size

In the top header, you will find font-size stepper buttons ('A-' and 'A+'). The default size is calibrated for Primer Print (100%), which provides optimal spacing and letter proportions for early readers. You can scale the text larger (up to 130%) for preschool and kindergarten learners, or smaller (85%) for older remedial students.

## 3. Practice Modes: Word Bank & Custom Builder

You can switch between two dedicated modes using the underline tab bar at the top of the app:

### Mode A: Pre-Loaded Phonics Library (Word Bank)

The Word Bank is ideal for quick, daily practice. It includes pre-loaded, graded words categorized by synthetic phonics concept:

- **CVC Short Vowels:** Core 3-sound short vowel words (cat, bed, pig, fox, sun, map). Perfect for early kindergarten blending.

- **Consonant Digraphs:** Words with common 2-letter consonant teams (ship, fish, chop, rich, church, moth, thick, duck, whip, sing).
- **Blends & Digraphs:** Words with 4- and 5-sound blends (black, frog, stop, plant, brush, clock, drift).
- **Vowel Teams & Diphthongs:** Vowel digraphs and gliding sounds (rain, boat, feet, moon, book, play, coin, meat).
- **Vowel Teams & Trigraphs:** Advanced 3-letter phonograms (night, light, catch, match, bridge).
- **Silent Final e (5 Rules):** Words governed by the 5 phonetic rules of silent final e (time, same, have, blue, chance, charge, little, are).

### How to Practice a Word from the Bank:

- **1. Filter by Category:** Select the phonics pattern you are currently teaching from the Category dropdown.
- **2. Search (Optional):** Type into the 'Search Word' box to find a specific word instantly (e.g. 'ship' or 'rain').
- **3. Pick Word:** Choose the target word from the dropdown selector.
- **4. Build & Read:** Click 'Build & Read Pyramid' to launch the interactive pyramid reader.

## Mode B: Custom Phonogram Builder

The Custom Builder allows parents and tutors to enter ANY decodable word to match classroom spelling lists, homeschool readers, or specialized speech therapy lists.

- **One Sound Unit Per Box:** Enter each phonogram in its own box. For multi-letter units, type the letters together into one box (e.g. Box 1: 'ch', Box 2: 'ar', Box 3: 'g', Box 4: 'e').
- **Adding & Removing Boxes:** Click '+ Add Box' or '- Remove Box' as needed. The builder supports words containing between 2 and 7 sound units.
- **Spacebar Advancement:** When typing in a box, pressing the Spacebar or Tab automatically moves your cursor to the next box (or creates a new box if at the end).
- **Silent Final 'e' Checkbox:** If the final box contains an 'e', a red 'Silent e' checkbox appears directly beneath it. Checking this box adds the dotted underline and links it to the 5 Rules guide.

## 4. The 5-Minute Daily Tutoring Routine

Reading stamina is built through brief, joyful, daily sessions. Five to ten minutes per day of focused pyramid reading produces vastly better retention than long, exhausting sessions.

### The 'Sound It, Blend It, Read It' Script

Use this parent-tested 3-step script with every word:

**Parent & Child Reading Script****Step 1 (First Sound):****Parent:** [Reveals Tier 1: 'sh'] 'What sound does this tile make?'**Child:** 'sh'**Step 2 (Continuous Blending):****Parent:** [Clicks 'Next Sound' - reveals Tier 2: 'sh' in red, 'i' in black]**Parent:** 'Great! Say the red sound, then slide the new sound on.'**Child:** 'sh... i... shi.'**Step 3 (Complete Word Synthesis):****Parent:** [Clicks 'Next Sound' - reveals Tier 3: 'sh' and 'i' in red, 'p' in black]**Parent:** 'Now add the last sound and say the whole word!'**Child:** 'shi... p... ship!'**Parent:** 'You decoded ship! What does a ship do? It sails across the ocean!'**Step-by-Step Mode vs. Show Full Pyramid Mode**

- **Step-by-Step View (Default):** Hides upcoming tiers until clicked. Best for children who feel overwhelmed when looking at full words, or who tend to guess based on initial letters.
- **Show Full Pyramid View:** Check the 'Show Full Pyramid' toggle in the top bar to display all tiers simultaneously. Excellent for practicing smooth left-to-right eye movement and cumulative speed. It can also be used with silent final e so the child can see it is present.

**Error Correction without Frustration**

- **Don't Say 'No, That's Wrong':** Instead, guide their attention back to the phonogram: 'Let's check this tile. What sound does /sh/ make?'
- **Use Continuous Voicing:** If your child says 'sh - i - p' but can't blend them into 'ship', model continuous voicing: don't pause between sounds! Sing 'ssshhhiiiiipp' like a continuous song.
- **Always End on Success:** Conclude every practice session with a word your child read easily. Celebrate their hard work and give a high five!

**5. Mastering Silent Final 'e': The 5 Phonics Rules**

Most phonics programs only teach Rule 1 (often nicknamed 'Magic E' or 'Bossy E'). But when children encounter common words like 'have', 'blue', 'dance', or 'little', the 'Magic E' rule fails, leading to confusion and guessing. In English, silent final 'e' performs five distinct spelling jobs:

| Rule # | Rule Name                    | Sample Words                         | Why the 'e' is There (Child-Friendly Explanation)                                                                      |
|--------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1      | Long Vowel Sound             | time, same, lone, cede, pure         | The 'e' reaches over one consonant to make the previous vowel say its long sound (its name: /I/, /A/, /O/, /E/, /U/).  |
| 2      | No Words End in V or U       | have, give, live, blue, true         | English words never end in the letters 'v' or 'u'. The 'e' is added as a 'cover-up' so the word doesn't end in v or u. |
| 3      | Soft C and Soft G            | chance, dance, charge, large, page   | The 'e' sits behind 'c' or 'g' to make them say their soft sound: /s/ as in chance, and /j/ as in charge.              |
| 4      | Every Syllable Needs a Vowel | little, middle, table, uncle, candle | Every written English syllable must have a vowel. In 'lit-tle', the second syllable needs the 'e' so it has a vowel.   |
| 5      | No-Job 'e'                   | are, come, some, were                | This 'e' has no active phonetic job today. It is a historical leftover preserved in spelling. We call it 'No-Job e'.   |

| Rule # | Sample Words                 | Explanation                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1      | same, cede, time, lone, pure | The e goes back and makes the vowel say its long sound. In <i>time</i> the e is responsible for making the <i>i</i> make its second (or long) sound.                        |
| 2      | have, blue                   | English words do not end with <i>v</i> or <i>u</i> . The e is there to cover up the <i>v</i> or <i>u</i> at the end of words.                                               |
| 3      | chance, charge               | The e comes at the end of these words to make the <i>c</i> and <i>g</i> say their own second sound. You've already learned the spelling rules related to these two letters. |
| 4      | little                       | All English syllables must have a written vowel. <i>Little</i> could be sounded out correctly without the final e but then the second syllable wouldn't have a vowel.       |
| 5      | are                          | This is no job e. It is in the word, but it has no job like the first four do. It is just no job e.                                                                         |

Figure 1: The 5 Rules for Silent Final 'e' visual teaching chart accessible within the app.

## 6. Keyboard Shortcuts for Rapid Tutoring

When tutoring a child on a laptop or desktop computer, keyboard shortcuts allow you to maintain rapid lesson flow without clicking a mouse:

| Key / Shortcut              | Action             | Tutoring Context & Purpose                                                |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spacebar or Right Arrow (→) | Next Sound         | Advances to the next tier of the cumulative pyramid as the child reads.   |
| Left Arrow (←)              | Previous Sound     | Backtracks one step if the child needs to re-hear or re-blend.            |
| Plus (+) or Equal (=)       | Increase Text Size | Enlarges tiles on the fly for younger children or distance viewing.       |
| Minus (-) Key               | Decrease Text Size | Reduces tile size for longer words or smaller displays.                   |
| Escape (Esc)                | New Word           | Returns immediately to the Word Bank or Custom Builder for the next word. |

## 7. Recommended Phonics Scope & Sequence

If you are wondering which order to practice words in, follow this proven developmental sequence:

- **Stage 1 (CVC Short Vowels):** Master single consonants and short vowels (cat, pig, sun). Ensure continuous blending is fluid before introducing multi-letter units.
- **Stage 2 (Consonant Digraphs):** Introduce 2-letter consonant teams (sh, ch, th, ck, wh, ng). Point out the tile underline and emphasize that two letters represent one voice sound.
- **Stage 3 (Consonant Blends):** Practice 4- and 5-sound words with adjacent consonants (stop, frog, plant, brush). Pay special attention to nasal blends like -nt, -mp, and -nd.
- **Stage 4 (Vowel Teams & Diphthongs):** Introduce vowel teams (ai/ay, ee/ea, oa/oe, oi/oy, oo). Children love seeing these in the pyramid reader because the vowel sound stays unified.
- **Stage 5 (Trigraphs & Quadgraphs):** Advance to 3- and 4-letter units (igh, tch, dge). The tile underline prevents children from trying to sound out 'd - g - e' individually.
- **Stage 6 (Silent Final 'e' Rules 1-5):** Systematically practice words across all five Silent 'e' rules, using the teaching chart to clarify why the 'e' is present.

## 8. About Phonogram University

Phonogram University was founded by reading specialist and former educator Mark Boline to equip parents, tutors, and teachers with evidence-based tools for explicit phonics instruction.

Our mission is to take the mystery out of English spelling and reading. By understanding how the 70 basic phonograms and core spelling rules work together, any child can become an accurate, fluent, and confident reader.

- **Website:** <https://phonogramuniversity.com>
- **Parent Learning Hub:** Diagnostic reading assessments, decodable stories, and instructional videos.
- **Tutoring & Consultation:** Personalized reading coaching and tutor training programs.

Thank you for using Phonograms Pyramid! May this tool bring confidence, joy, and breakthrough to your child's reading journey.