

# The Survival List March 20, 2020

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My goal is to teach all of my students to read and write fluently. To do this, I have a list of words they need to learn as a priority. It's called the Survival List and it constitutes some of the most common words in the English language.

There are plenty of lists readily available, such as the Dolch or Fry lists, but they contain a mixture of simple and complex patterns. For instance, in the Dolch list, the word *big* (a simple 1:1 CVC pattern) is right there with *away* (a two-syllable word containing a digraph) and *said* (an unusual pronunciation of the digraph <ai>, which only really occurs in this word and in some accents in the word *again*, but which follows the grammatical/etymological pattern of *lay* and *pay*).

The amount of times I see children being given homework requiring them to learn this mishmash of random patterns astonishes me. This is whole word learning and not viable for many children.





As a solution, I have extracted words that don't have a simple code structure and have placed them in families containing similar patterns. I use a simple marking system that I teach to my students so that they become aware of the words' structure and they practise the words in various ways.


This list is called the Survival List for two reasons:

1. Because knowing how to read and spell the words on this list will help them become fluent readers and writers as quickly as possible and
2. Because the techniques used to learn these words can extend to other words with complex patterns that students can teach themselves, thus helping them to survive the onslaught of increasing complexity and expectation as their academic career unfolds.

Compiling any Survival List depends on the answers to three essential questions:

1. Does the unusual pattern in this word occur in other words?
2. Does this word belong in a **close** family?
3. Is there a memory trick that's not too complicated?

	Word	Pattern	Family	Marking/mnemonic
1.	could	Unusual vowel sound, silent <l>	would, should	"Oh u lucky ducky". Nessy does a YouTube video on this that will drive you insane but your students won't forget it.
2.	was	The W-Effect: when <w> precedes <a>, the <a> often makes an /o/ sound (see illustration)	wash, wand, want, wander, wasp	An arrow pointing from the <w> to the double underlined <a>. 
3.	to	Belongs to a small family where the letter <o> makes an /oo/ sound	do, who, lose, shoe, move, prove, canoe	Double underline. 
4.	once	Builds up from the spelling of <i>one</i> , with the insertion of <c>, like the <c> in <i>twice</i> .	one, twice	A cross under Final Silent <e> with an arrow to show it making <c> say its second sound, /s/. Say letter names for spelling. 
5.	said	<ay> to <aid> in the past tense	lay, pay	Double underline unusual sound of <a-i>. lay → laid pay → paid say → said
6.	they	<ey> making an /ay/ sound	grey (non-US), hey, obey, prey, convey, survey	Double underline to show <ey> making an uncommon sound. 
7.	bought	<ough>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bring brought</li> <li>• buy bought</li> <li>• fight fought</li> <li>• seek sought</li> <li>• think thought</li> </ul>	Underline <ough>
8.	autumn	ending with -mn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hymn, column, solemn, condemn, damn</li> </ul>	You don't hear the <n> in the base but you do when you add a vowel suffix.

9.	does	Unusual vowel sound, -es third person singular suffix.	• goes	go → goes do → does
10	library	Collapsing syllable		"There's a <i>bra</i> in the library!"  <b>li-bra-ry</b>
11	eye	Another supremely sticky word that doesn't bear sounding out.	A rare instance of a lone existence. Just draw this picture and get students to practise saying the letter names.	
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