

The lesson here is about creating a generative tool called the Consonant Start and End Cards.

The lessons regarding the Consonant Start and End Cards are a method of having students *generate* initial and final consonant clusters. When learning about legal clusters, there can be a tendency to randomly select initial ones only. Having students generate their own clusters and apply them to their reading and spelling helps them observe and understand the statistical properties of words and their constraints within the writing system.

This is a far richer exercise than simply teaching decontextualized, pre-determined “clusters”. See blog post “Round the Cluster” on the Lifelong Literacy website for more information on consonant clusters and clustering.

## The Consonant Start Card

Give each of your students a piece of *lined 6" X 4"* (152mm X 102mm) card. This kind of card is also known as an index card and can be bought in large packs from newsagents and stationery stores.

Have your students write the title "Consonant Start Card" as the title.

Then have them write all the consonants in the alphabet across the top line and the digraphs underneath.

Digraphs have two-letters but one-sound.

### Consonant Start Card

b c d f g h j k l m n p q r s t v w x y z

ch, gn, kn, ph, sh, th, wh, wr

"Now we're going to figure out the two-consonant clusters that can go at the beginning of words. Let's start with the first consonant, the letter <b>. Look along your row of consonants and tell me what can follow <b> at the beginning of words." (THE FIRST LEGAL CLUSTER IS *BL-*)

This might be a quick process, this might be slow, depending on what your students already know.

What is important here is that they start to observe the **patterns**, i.e. that there is a small, limited set of word-initial consonant clusters with an even smaller, limited set of second consonants (l, r, w for all consonants, excepting a slightly bigger set with the letter s). Why do you think this is? What do you notice about those second consonants?<sup>1</sup>

On the next line have them work out the following clusters:

bl, br, cl, cr, dr, dw, fl, fr, gl, gr, pl, pr

and on the next line these clusters:

sc, sk, sl, sm, sn, sp, st, sw, tr, tw

and the uncommon clusters

chr, phl, phr, thw

There are, arguably, other possible ones, such as *vl* and *tz* but I haven't included them as they comprise a tiny family of English words, usually borrowed from other languages (such as Russian) where such clusters are common.

### Consonant Start Card

b c d f g h j k l m n p q r s t v w x y z

ch, gn, kn, ph, sh, th, wh, wr

bl, br, cl, cr, dr, dw, fl, fr, gl, gr, pl, pr

sc, sk, sl, sm, sn, sp, st, sw, tr, tw

chr, phl, phr, thw

<sup>1</sup> The consonants *l*, *r* and *w* can also be classified as *semi-vowels* or *glides*, due to the nature of their articulation. They are “frictionless”, that is they can be articulated continuously and so lend themselves to clustering with other consonants in the second position.

## The Consonant End Card

### Consonant End Card

-b -c -d -f -g -k -l -m -n -p -que -r -s -t -v -x -z

-ff, -ll, -ss

-ch -sh -th -ph -ck -ng

-ct -ft -lf -lk -lm -lp -lt -mp -nd -nk -nt -pt

-sc -sk -sp -st

### WHY THIS CARD LOOKS THE WAY IT DOES

There are other legal consonant clusters, including three-letter ones. You can also add the letter –s to many of these endings to form a plural noun (lamps) or a third person singular verb (costs). I have not included this as it is a suffix, and we will come to it later.

I have not included graphemes such as –dge (edge) or tch (witch). They are valid, but not the point of this exercise.

It is very easy to over-complicate these exercises and to produce confusing, almost endless charts of possible spellings.

HOW TO WORK THE CARDS TOGETHER

Students can work the two cards together, creating words such as *stamp*.

They can use the ending cards independently, creating words such as *ask*.

Students are asked to make their cards themselves. Pre-printed cards will take away their opportunity to process the letters. Just make sure they are legible and accurate.

You can even go through the alphabet with them and get them to suggest possible endings and example words. They can then have these cards in front of them on the desk for subsequent lessons.