

Studying the List of Dolch Words Phonetically

In my bag of "Dolch Word Tricks" for teaching these lists of words, I take into consideration teaching them as isolated words, teaching them in phrases, teaching them alphabetically, teaching them in order of frequency, as well as teaching them phonetically. One size does not fit all, and different ways to look at these words, will help assist children in learning them.

Many educators feel that the Dolch list of words are sight words that students need to memorize, because they are difficult to sound out and decode. However, when you break down the words phonetically, or group them by a specific sound, I found that only 31 words, about 19% are toughies and rule breakers that fall under this category. Various other websites and schools of thought differ. This is my list:

any, are, been, buy, could, does, far, full, good, laugh, long,
many, of, once, one, pretty, pull, put, said, saw, start, the,
there, two, very, walk, warm, was, what, where, & would.

However, out of all of these words, I could still categorize all but 3 of them (good, long & of) in a group of words that had similar sounds, and then teach those groups according to that sound.

Children can see which ones they can rely on phonics to sound out, while they are learning the rule breakers and exceptions at the same time. I think this makes learning the words easier, because they all have the same sound.

It makes more sense to me to lump the 3rd grade words **if** & **six**, with other short i words like the pre primer's **in**, **is** & **it**. There are a total of 24-short i words. I truly believe that knowing that these words all have the same sound, will help children remember them more easily.

As instructors, we also teach rhyming words, as well as word family words, along with long and short vowel sounds, so this makes sense to children. Covering just one concept at a time and building from there, is easier for them to wrap their heads around.

Although Dr. Dolch divided his lists through 3rd grade, one needs to remember that this was back in the late 1930's. Currently, for most schools, their goal is to have children reading the list of 220 words by the end of first grade.

As long as I'm looking at this word list as a whole, I think it's important to give students another tool for helping them learn the words. Breaking them down into these groups, might just do the trick in helping strugglers memorize what might seem to be an overwhelming list.

Being able to see the same-sounding rule breakers alongside decodable words that fit a pattern, will also help students figure out other words not on the list, that include weird letter combinations, but have similar sounds. Such as knowing **could** (1st grade list) and **would** (2nd grade list) will help them recognize **should**, which is not on the list.

Why struggle trying to remember **could** and **would** at two different times, because they appear on two different lists, when you can group them together to help retention. This is merely my opinion, but has been very successful in helping my kiddos learn the Dolch sight words more easily and quickly, while equipping them with skills to see similarities and differences that are exceptions to the rules, which is the very basis of why we have a list of sight words in the first place.

I hope you find this helpful for your students as well.

**Dolch
Word
Lists
Phonetically
Broken
Down**

Long A

a
ate / eight
came
gave
made
make
take
thank

Long A

(ay)
may
play
say
they

**Long
single E**

be
because
before
he
here
me
she
these
we

Long ea

clean
eat
please
read

**Long
double ee**

green
keep
see
sleep
three

Long I

I
find
five
like
kind
ride
white
write

Long I

(ight)
light
right

Long I (Y)

buy
by
fly
my
myself
try
why

Long O

both
don't
for / four
go
goes
going
so
no
only
open
or

over
own
those

Long O

(old)
cold
hold
old

Long O

(ow)
grow
know
own
show

Long U

use

Short A

after
all / fall small
always

am
an
and
as
ask
at
away
black

can
fast
had
has
have
laugh
ran
shall
that

Short E

been

best
better

every
get
help
let
never
pretty

red
seven
tell
ten
their
them
then
there
they

very
well
went
when
where
yellow
yes

Short I

big
bring
did
give
him
his
if
in
into
is
it
its
little
live
pick
sit
six
this

Short I cont.

which
will
wish
with
sing / bring
think / drink

Short O

got
hot
long
not
off
on
stop

Short U

but
cut
funny
jump
just
much
must
of
run
under
up
upon
us

KEY

Pre-primer
Primer
First
Second
Third

Tricky Words that can still be grouped

These words have the same sound but are spelled differently.
Group them and have children note the different spellings.

KEY:

Pre-primer

Primer

First

Second

Third

OW sound as in owie!

brown
down
how
now

about
around
found
round
our
out

OO sound like
choo choo train.

blue
do
new
soon
to
today
together
too
two
who
you

Short U –UH- sound like in but,
but does not have a **U** in the word.

again
call
come
does
done
from
once
one
some
the
walk
want
was
wash
what

ER sound as in her

her
were
first
work
your
hurt

ould words

could
would
should*

*Not on the Dolch word list but I teach it here.

The remaining words from each list

(**PP**: said; **P**: are, good, saw; **1st**: any, of, put; **2nd**: many, pull; **3rd**: far, full, long, start, warm.)
can simply be taught separately, as I wasn't able to fit them into a category that I thought would be helpful to students.

Some teachers add these according to their frequency of use, or a sound that they make that doesn't contain that letter, such as the short e sound in *said, any & many*. (That's where I'd group them as exceptions.) *are, far, start & warm* can be taught with controlled r words, and *full, put & pull* could be taught together as another "toughie" group with that particular sound. This only leaves good, of, & long!