



Word Nuts Reading

A SOUND-FIRST READING SYSTEM

The Quick Guide

Every phase, from the very first letter sound to fluent, flowing reading.

Reading starts as something you do together. A few minutes a day, easy and unhurried, is most of what this takes, and it stays with a child for the rest of their life.

This guide covers the whole arc of Word Nuts in six short phases. You do not need to read it cover to cover. Find where your child is right now, run that phase, and come back when they are ready for the next one. Each phase is built to run in about five minutes a day.

One promise runs through all of it. The bolt works the same way on the first day as it does at the summit. The system never changes. Only the sounds get more interesting.

Full video walkthroughs are on the way. Until they land, everything you need to sit down and run a session today is right here.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Five things that make this work

Word Nuts is simple to run once a few habits are in place, and none of them are about teaching. They are about keeping each session short, calm, and frequent enough that the sounds start to stick on their own.

Sounds, not letter names. During a session, ask only for the sound a letter makes. Names show up everywhere else in your child's day and will take care of themselves. Asking for the name and the sound at the same time is one of the main reasons blending feels hard.

Keep the sounds clean. Say “sss,” not “suh.” Say “t,” not “tuh.” Clip the extra vowel off the end. It feels a little silly, which is a good sign. Exaggerate your mouth, and let your whole face carry the sound. A big, expressive face is one of the strongest cues a small child has, and they read it long before they read the letter.

Five minutes, same time, every day. Pick a slot that already exists, after a bath, before dessert, before bed, so the session stops being a decision. Five minutes done daily beats twenty minutes done once in a while, every time.

You do the blending first. Early on, you carry most of the work, and that is exactly right. You tap the sounds, you start the stretch, and your child meets you inside it. Independence arrives on its own, a little at a time.

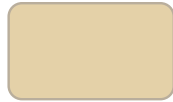
It is never a test. You are building familiarity, not checking knowledge. If your child stalls, give the sound and keep moving. On a hard day, do a few rotations and stop. Ending calm protects the next session more than any single perfect one.

Two more small things that matter more than they look. Pair the bolt with something your child enjoys, the way a favorite dessert or a cozy spot can turn practice into a moment they like. And keep the bolt visible, loaded and sitting where life happens, next to the remote or on the kitchen counter. A bolt in plain sight gets picked up. A bolt in a drawer does not.

THE PIECES

Reading the colors

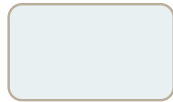
Color is the quiet instruction manual built into the set. Every nut and every card is colored by the job it does, and the colors never change their meaning. Once your child learns that beige starts a word and pink ends it, the bolt begins telling them where each sound belongs without anyone having to say a word.



BEIGE

Launch consonants

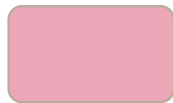
The first sound in a word. Filled with stretchy sounds like m, s, f, and l, so a word can start smoothly. Sits in the first position.



CLEAR

Vowels

The middle of the word. Short vowels to begin with, then vowel teams later on. Sits in the middle position.



PINK

Landing consonants

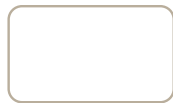
The last sound. Crisp stops that close a word cleanly. Sits in the final position.



CYAN

Consonant cards

The single-letter flash cards your child sounds out before anything goes on the bolt.



WHITE

The ch / sh / th / ph nut

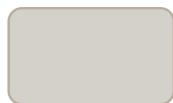
The one nut that floats. It can sit at the start or the end of a word.



GREEN

R-controlled vowels

ar, er, ir, or, ur. Sits in the middle, colored apart because these vowels behave differently.



LIGHT GREY

Sight words and Magic-E

The sight word cards, and the two consonant nuts used to build Magic-E words.



SILK

The Magic-E nut

Covered in e on every face, with its own look and feel. Sits silently at the very end of a word.



PURPLE

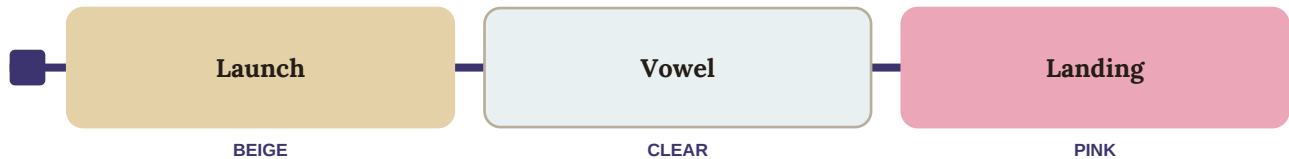
The bolt

The threaded spine that every nut turns on.

How the bolt works

The bolt is the spine of the whole system, and it works the same way on the first day as it does a year in. Nuts thread on with a small gap between them, so each letter stands on its own before your child blends them into a word. Each nut has four faces, which means a single quarter turn produces a brand new word. One end of the bolt is fixed and the other comes off, and that is how you swap nuts in and out as your child grows.

Two things follow from this that are easy to miss. The first is that a small set of nuts holds far more words than it looks. Turning one nut through its faces, then the next, walks through dozens of combinations before you ever change a piece, so you are rarely swapping nuts, just turning to a face you have not used yet. The second is patience. The repetition can start to feel slow to you long before it feels slow to your child, and that steady, unhurried turning is exactly what lodges a sound for good. A child who seems to be tiring of a nut is often a child about to master it.



PHASE 01 · GARDEN OF SOUND · STARTER SET

01 Letter Sounds

Clean, reliable sound recall, one letter at a time. The foundation everything else stands on.

TOOL: SINGLE-LETTER FLASH CARDS (CYAN CONSONANTS, CLEAR VOWELS)

Before a single nut goes on the bolt, your child works with the flash cards. They are plain on purpose. No pictures, because a picture invites a guess, and guessing is the exact habit this system exists to replace. You hold up a card, your child gives the sound. Not the letter name, the sound. That is the whole exercise, and done patiently it is enough.

Sort the cards every couple of weeks

On day one, and then about every two weeks, sort the cards into three piles as you go. **Full Command** for the sounds that come quickly and surely. **Developing** for the ones that are familiar but still wobble. **Still Learning** for the ones that are not there yet. The sort is not a test either. It simply tells you where to spend your minutes. In a five-minute session, most of the time goes to the Developing pile, a quick warm pass over Full Command, and barely a touch on Still Learning.

Work in small groups

Do not run all twenty-six cards at once. Take four or five at a time and let them settle before adding more. A good first handful is the stretchy sounds, **m, s, f, l, n, r**, the ones you can hold and draw out. These are your child's best friends on the bolt, because a sound you can stretch slides smoothly into the next one when blending starts. Tie each sound to a word your child knows: "c, as in cat. What else starts with c? Car. Can." Keep it upbeat, and keep it moving.

Let them trace the shape

While your child says a sound, have them run a finger over the letter on the card, following its shape, a few times in a row. The hand and the voice learning the same letter together makes it hold better than either does on its own. That motion carries straight onto the block later: the finger that traces the c on a card is the finger that finds it on the nut. The tracing now is quietly preparing them for the turning to come.

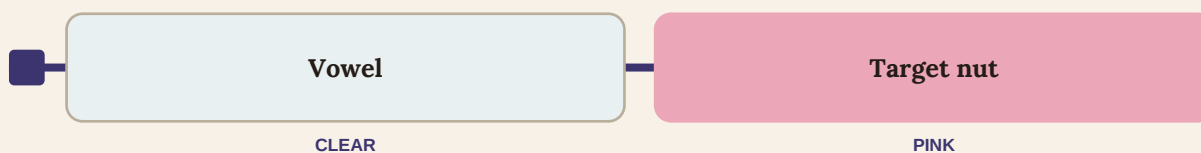
FROM THE SUMMER PILOT

Get to the bolt sooner than you would think

Here is the move that did the most for the children in our summer pilot who started out knowing few sounds or none at all. Pick one nut and look at its four faces. Drill just those four sounds on the flash cards. The moment those four reach Developing, not mastery, just Developing, put that nut on the bolt and start building two-letter words.

The bolt is usually thought of as a blending device for children who already know their sounds. It turns out to be a remarkably good way to learn the sounds in the first place. The turning, the repetition, and seeing the same few letters land inside real words over and over drive them into memory faster than the cards manage on their own.

Here is the setup. Normally the vowel sits in the middle, but for these first two-letter words you move a clear vowel nut to the front and pair it with your one target nut behind it.



Then rotate. Say the four faces on your target nut are t, p, d, and n. Hold the vowel still and turn the target nut through its faces: **at** · **ap** · **ad** · **an**. Each turn is another clean rep on one of your four sounds, now sitting inside a word your child is actually reading. You can also hold the consonant and turn the vowel (a · e · i · o · u) to fold the vowel sounds in too. When those four feel solid, pick the next nut and run it again.

One distinction, so the early bolt and the next phase do not seem to disagree. The two-letter move above is really sound practice wearing the shape of reading, and it can start as soon as a few sounds are familiar. Full three-nut blending is the milestone, and it lands more easily once enough sounds are in place that the bolt never feels like too much at once.

MOVE ON WHEN

Move toward Phase 02 when about sixteen sounds are solid, with at least three of them vowels. You do not need all twenty-six first, but a child who starts blending with only a handful tends to find the full bolt overwhelming.

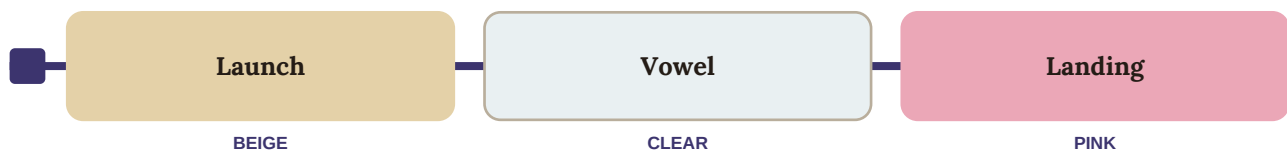
PHASE 02 · BLENDING TRAIL · STARTER SET

02 Blending CVC Words

Three sounds become one word. This is the engine of the whole system.

TOOL: THE BOLT + SINGLE-LETTER NUTS

CVC stands for consonant, vowel, consonant, the shape of simple three-letter words like **map**, **sip**, and **fun**. Three nuts sit on the bolt, one per position, and the short workout below is the core of the Starter Set.



- 1 Build a word.** Three nuts on the bolt. Keep it simple: **s, a, t**. Real words and nonsense words both count. A nonsense word cannot be guessed, so the only way through it is to blend.
- 2 Tap each sound.** Tap the top of the first nut and wait. Give your child a moment to find the sound. When it comes, a warm “that’s right,” then the next nut. You are building the runway, not rushing to the blend.
- 3 Stretch and blend together.** Start the first sound and hold it, “say it with me, sssss,” and wave your child in to join you. They will struggle at first, so move slowly through the whole word, holding each sound, **ssssaaaat**. In time they start joining in, and the instant you hear their voice, drop yours and let them finish alone. Then confirm it cleanly: “That’s right. **Sat**.”
- 4 Rotate one nut, then run it again.** Turn a single nut to its next face and read the new word. One sound changes, everything else holds, then do it again. Which nut you turn, and in what order, is the part that matters most.

The heart of the Word Nuts routine is this:

The order of the turns is the secret, and it runs from the back of the word to the front. Start with the pink ending nut: **sat · sap · sad · san**. The front holds still, so your child tracks only the last sound. Then the clear vowel, the hardest sound of the three: **sat · sot · sit · set**. The beige beginning nut comes last, on purpose, where the magic unfolds: **sat · mat · fat · lat**. By now the ending runs on its own, so each turn lands a whole new word your child already knows, a family of real words read on sight.

MOVE ON WHEN

Move toward Phase 03 when your child runs a full rotation without hesitation and reads three-letter words as whole units, not three separate sounds.

PHASE 03 · DIGRAPH PASS · EXPANDED SET

03 Digraphs and Vowel Teams

Two letters, one sound. The single biggest jump in the system, introduced gently.

TOOL: COLOR-CODED DIGRAPH FLASH CARDS (32 CARDS, FIVE COLOR GROUPS)

Once CVC blending is steady, the set expands, and here is the thing to hold onto: the sounds expand, not the system. Same bolt, same rotations, same five minutes. A digraph is two letters making one sound, s and h together saying **sh** rather than s then h, which is far easier to feel than to explain. The bolt does the explaining, and as always it starts on the cards. There are thirty-two new cards, grouped by the job each sound does: eight beige starter blends, four clear vowel teams, four green r-controlled vowels, four white floating digraphs, and twelve pink ending digraphs, a few of which run to three letters like dge, tch, and nks. Each color matches the nut it will become, so the visual language your child already trusts keeps doing its job.

Start with the bridge you already own

Your child has already met four vowel teams back in the Starter Set: oa, ea, ir, and oo, with their clear cards. Put one of them in the middle position on the bolt, where a single vowel used to sit, and build words around it. When your child blends those bridge teams confidently, two letters landing as one sound without a stumble, that is the signal they are ready for the full digraph set. The ir card does quiet double duty, planting the r-controlled idea long before it needs a name.

From here, bring in the groups a few at a time rather than all at once. This order works well, saving the trickiest forms for last:

ff / ll / ss / zz · ow / oi / ai / ee · tr / dr / bl / cl · ch / sh / th / ph · qu / wh / ps / wr ·
ng / ck / st / ly · er / ar / or / ur · dge / tch / mps / nks

You do not have to wait for mastery to start blending. The moment a group of four lands firmly in the Developing zone on the cards, thread that nut onto the bolt and let the blending carry it toward mastery, exactly the way the first single sounds moved from cards to bolt in groups of four. The cards introduce the sound, and the bolt makes it automatic.

Follow the child. If a group is landing, keep going. If it is not, set it aside and circle back later. Mixing up similar sounds, like th and sh, is a normal part of the work and not a sign that anything is wrong.

MOVE ON WHEN

Within this phase, when your child has solid command of a group on the cards, its nut earns a place on the bolt. That move is Phase 04.

PHASE 04 · DIGRAPH PASS · EXPANDED SET

04 Blending the New Sounds

The new nuts join the bolt your child already knows. Harder words that do not feel harder.

TOOL: THE BOLT + DIGRAPH NUTS

The digraph nuts thread onto the same bolt, in the same positions, run with the same rotation. The system never gets more complicated. Only the sounds do. Ship, chat, and march are harder words than **map**, but the motion is identical, so the difficulty climbs without the anxiety following it along. You may even notice your child blend a word, pause, and try it again a little differently. That is not a mistake. It is a reader checking their own work.

Where each new nut sits

White **ch, sh, th, ph**

The one nut that floats. It can sit at the launch or the landing position.

Green **er, ar, or, ur**

The middle, where the clear vowels sit, but colored apart because r-controlled vowels behave differently.

Clear **ow, oi, ai, ee**

The middle, the same family as the original vowel nuts and the bridge teams. Two letters, one sound.

Pink **ng/ck/st/ly, ff/ll/ss/zz, dge/tch/mps/nks**

The landing position, treated as single team sounds rather than separate letters.

Beige **tr/dr/bl/cl, qu/wh/ps/wr**

The start of the word. The ps and wr faces quietly introduce the silent-partner idea.

Two things to watch for

A couple of things change here that are worth a heads-up. First, start with one digraph nut on the bolt, paired with familiar single-letter nuts, even if your child is comfortable with both flash card quads. Two digraphs at once is a later move, once single-digraph blending is steady, and three at once is too many. Second, the rotations will sometimes land on a combination that is hard to say, or a word you would rather not sound out at the kitchen table. Either way, skip it, turn to the next face, and keep moving. Having to skip at all is itself a sign your child is ready for this phase.

MOVE ON WHEN

Move toward Phase 05 when digraph and vowel-team blending is about as automatic as CVC became, and your child starts meeting words that do not sound out at all.

PHASE 05 · SIGHT WORD BRIDGE · READER SET

05 The Sight Words

The handful of words too common, and too irregular, to sound out every single time.

TOOL: SIGHT WORD FLASH CARDS (HELD THE LONG WAY)

Sight words get taught badly more often than not, as pure staring-until-it-sticks memorization. The words in this set are different in what they are. They are among the highest-frequency words in early reading, the ones that appear so constantly that knowing them on sight works like a freeway on-ramp, getting your child past them fast and clearing space for the words that actually need decoding. When “the,” “and,” “was,” “said,” and “they” are automatic, that freed-up attention goes where it is needed. These cards exist to patch the cracks that phonics alone cannot reach, not to be memorized for their own sake.

How to run them

The sight word cards are held the long way, horizontally, which quietly signals that something different is happening. They run alongside bolt work, not instead of it. Open a session with eight to twelve cards, some phonics and some sight, then move to the bolt. These words do not need the bolt at all. What they need is the relaxed, repeated exposure that taught your child to know a stop sign on sight long before they could read the word on it.

What the sight words unlock

Everything so far has pointed at decoding, and that remains the foundation. Sight words add a second gear: a child who can both sound a word out and know one on sight reads with a confidence that neither skill gives alone. That confidence is what carries them into the final phase. This is also a good moment to start previewing the Magic-E cards, **a_e**, **e_e**, **i_e**, **o_e**, and **u_e**, each said as its long vowel, the a in **cake**, the i in **bike**. Let the idea settle before it becomes physical, and do not rush toward that phase. While these settle, keep digraph bolt work in the rotation and drop in a plain CVC day now and then to firm up everything underneath.

HOW THESE WERE CHOSEN

The set is built around the highest-frequency words a young reader meets, including “the,” “and,” “was,” “said,” and “they.” A few, like “he” and “we,” your child could actually sound out, and if they try, let them, since both paths land in the same place. Others, like “said” and “was,” do not follow the rules, and must simply be known on sight.

MOVE ON WHEN

As these words become automatic, full sentences stop stalling on the small connecting words, and your child's attention is freed for the parts that carry the meaning.

PHASE 06 · MAGIC-E SUMMIT · READER SET

06 Magic-E Words

The silent *e* that reaches back and changes the vowel in front of it, shown instead of explained.

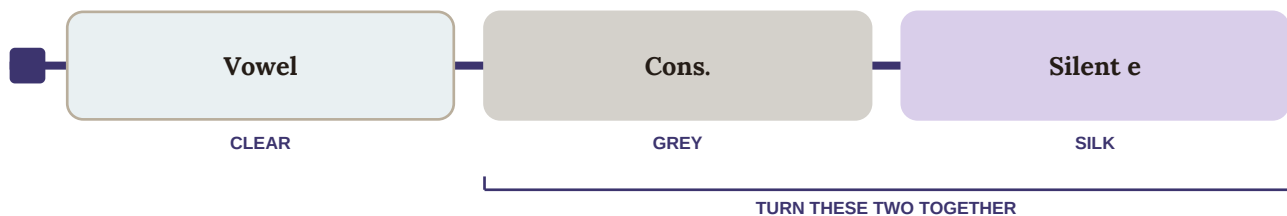
TOOL: MAGIC-E FLASH CARDS + THE MAGIC-E NUTS

Most programs teach Magic-E as a sentence: a silent *e* at the end of a word makes the vowel say its name. The *e* itself stays silent, but it reaches back and turns the short vowel long. **Cap** becomes **cape**. **Hop** becomes **hope**. **Fin** becomes **fine**. Children nod at the rule and then forget it the moment they meet it in a real word, because they were handed a rule instead of shown a change. Word Nuts makes the change happen right in front of them.

Cards come first, as always, and you have likely been previewing them since the last phase. The five cards are **a_e**, **e_e**, **i_e**, **o_e**, and **u_e**, each one a long vowel the silent-*e* pattern produces. The idea gets its time to land before it becomes physical.

The first setup: three-letter words

For Magic-E the bolt is arranged in a new way, though it is still only three nuts. A single clear vowel goes in front, in the launch spot it first took during the early bolt work, only now it will sound long. One grey nut takes the middle, its faces chosen for the most common vowel-consonant-*e* words. The silk *e* nut sits silent at the very end. What you are building is exactly the three-letter pattern on the Magic-E cards, a vowel, then a consonant, then a silent *e*, made real on the bolt. The trick is in the turning: rotate the grey nut and the silk nut together, as a pair, so the consonant changes while the silent *e* stays put behind it.



Hold the front vowel still and turn the grey-and-silk pair through its four faces, four new words like **ate**, **ace**, and **ape**. Then turn the vowel a single face and run the four again. Worked that way, every vowel meets every consonant, and you arrive back where you started without ever pulling a nut off the bolt.

The second setup: four-letter words

Once the three-letter words are steady, you build longer ones by returning to the shape your child knows best. A beige launch consonant, a clear vowel, and a two-letter pink nut whose faces end in a silent *e*: **ke**, **te**, **le**, and the like. Beige **b**, clear **i**, pink **ke**, and the bolt reads **bike**. There are two of

these pink nuts, and they are Magic-E nuts, not digraphs, because that final e is silent structure rather than a sound of its own.



The power here is that your child sees it happen. They watch the vowel change its sound because of a letter they cannot even hear, and seeing it is what makes Magic-E stick where a memorized rule often slips. As everywhere, a nonsense word blended cleanly is the surest sign the pattern has taken. And the silk nut earns its strangeness: it is the only nut covered in e on every face and the only one with its own texture, so when your child picks it up, something is clearly not like the others. That is the point.

Expect a wobble, it is a good sign

One thing to expect here, because almost no one warns about it. As your child learns to tell a long vowel from a short one, they often overshoot for a while and start hearing the long sound everywhere, turning short words long. It looks like going backward. It is the opposite: the overshoot is the discrimination forming, and it settles with practice.

Steady it by folding in plain CVC days, the short-vowel work from early on, which should feel easy now, even a little boring. That is fine. Easy, boring, and correct is exactly what you want sitting under the new skill. Real words and real reading firm up the rest.

MOVE ON WHEN

There is no seventh phase. From here the work turns from sounding words out to chasing what they mean, and that turn has a name in this system: Fluency Falls. The next page has a few ways to help your child make it.

BEYOND THE SUMMIT

Turning reading into meaning

Take a moment here, and look at the ground your child has covered. They started in the Sound Garden with single letters, walked the Blending Trail building their first words, climbed through Digraph Pass into bigger sounds, crossed the Sight Word Bridge, and reached the Magic-E summit. A child who has the sight words down and the essence of Magic-E in hand begins to read Level 1 texts with real ease and confidence. You did that, five minutes at a time, one sound at a time, one rotation at a time, and you have set your child up for an easier road at school and more confidence in their own thinking.

From here the work changes. Your child can decode almost anything, so the goal becomes meaning, turning all that decoding toward what the words actually say. None of what follows needs the full session. They are short and playful, a way to keep the bolt connected to real books. Keep it out and keep coming back. The system is cumulative, and the old work stays warm every time you return to it.

The one-minute word hunt

Hand the bolt over with at least one digraph nut mounted, set a timer for a minute, and have your child turn the faces to find and write down as many real words as they can. When the minute is up, pick a few and look up what they mean together. The hunt rewards decoding, and the writing and the dictionary quietly turn it toward meaning.

Build a sentence

Have your child choose one real word from the hunt and make a sentence around it, out loud or on paper. A word a child can define and use is a word they own, not just one they can sound out.

Spot the pattern in a real book

While you read a favorite book together, ask your child to point out a Magic-E word, or a digraph, or whatever pattern you have been working on. Catching a phase in the wild connects the bolt to the page in a way no worksheet can.

Read it, then tell it back

After a page or a short passage, ask your child to tell you what happened in their own words. Decoding every word and missing the story is common at first. Telling it back moves their attention off the letters and onto what the letters were saying.

And keep asking the question that matters most. In the pilot, right after a word clicked, I would ask: how did that feel? Does it feel good to be reading? The children almost always lit up. That feeling, more than any single sound, is what makes a reader.

QUICK REFERENCE

The whole thing on one page

The five non-negotiables

- Sounds, not names.
- Clean sounds, no “uh.”
- Five minutes, same time, daily.
- You blend first.
- It is never a test.

Bolt setups

- **Simple words (CVC):** beige, clear, pink
- **First two-letter words:** clear, pink (vowel up front)
- **Digraphs:** white floats, green or clear in the middle, pink lands. One digraph nut at first, two only later, never three.
- **Magic-E, short words:** clear, grey, silk (turn grey and silk together)
- **Magic-E, longer words:** beige, clear, pink Magic-E nut (**b-i-ke**)

Rotation order in a session

Landing nut (pink) first, then the vowel (clear), then the launch (beige). Only one sound changes at a time, and a handful of nuts holds dozens of words before you swap a piece.

When to move on

- **To CVC blending:** about sixteen sounds solid, at least three of them vowels.
- **To digraphs:** the bridge teams (oa, ea, ir, oo) blend cleanly in the middle.
- **To Magic-E:** do not rush. Preview the cards first, keep CVC and digraph work going.

If your child gets stuck

- **Guesses a word:** “Let’s check it together,” then tap through each sound before blending.
- **Freezes:** blend it as a team. Stretch the first sound and move your finger across.
- **Says letter names:** model the sound and keep going.
- **Hard or awkward combo:** skip it, turn to the next face.
- **Long-vowel wobble at Magic-E:** normal. Plain CVC days settle it.

Helpful phrases

- “Say it with me.”
- “Stretch the first sound.”
- “Now blend it.”
- “Nice blending.”
- “How did that feel?”

Full walkthrough videos are coming to wordnutsreading.com. Until they arrive, this guide has everything you need to sit down and run a session today.