



**Readingmate**

**BLOCKS**  
**Multisensory Catch-up**  
**Reading & Spelling Programme**  
**Introduction & Section 1**

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# BLOCKS

A Multi-Sensory Catch-up  
Reading and Spelling  
Programme  
by John Robinson

Blocks is available to download for free.

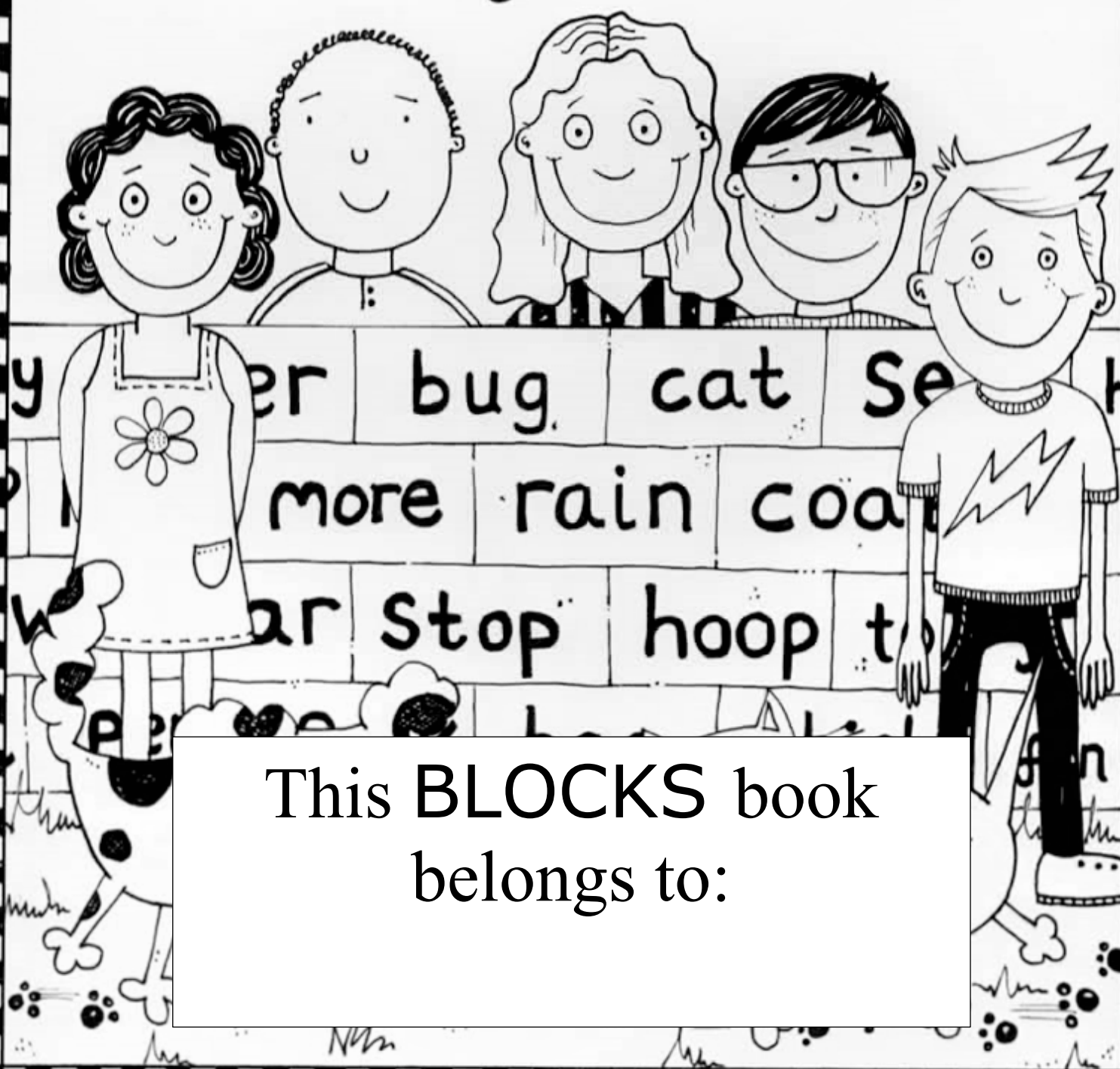
If you have any questions about using the programme or need help with any of the exercises, then please contact me on [blocks@btinternet.com](mailto:blocks@btinternet.com)

Please note I will attempt to answer all queries, but replies may not be immediate.

Please keep all emails polite and positive if you can.

# BLOCKS

by John Robinson



This BLOCKS book  
belongs to:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Started: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

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# BLOCKS

## How to use the programme.

### **This Information for the leading/teaching adult not the student**

The **BLOCKS** programme is designed to be used by students of any age although experience has shown it tends to work best for those aged around 10 and above. The programme supports learners who have basic, but weaker, reading and spelling abilities. Older students and adults may also benefit from the exercises if they wish to improve their basic literacy skills and confidence.

BLOCKS is a highly structured multi-sensory programme designed to help and encourage the student to learn and use knowledge and strategies taught through a series of interesting and non-threatening exercises

The programme is most suitable for students who have basic phonic skills but who persist in repeating the same mistakes when reading and spelling. Often these students lack confidence in their own abilities, and it is for these learners that BLOCKS has been written.

BLOCKS works by limiting the choices that students make when reading and spelling so that they can think more about what they want to say rather than the mechanics of decoding and recoding words.

The programme has proved most successful when used in one-to-one sessions and led by a competent adult reader. **The adult should read and familiarise themselves with the information and instruction guides before each session begins but they do not need to be an expert as BLOCKS provides all the information that is needed**

Each session should last between 15 to 20 minutes with at least three sessions a week if possible. When confident, a student can complete some of the exercises alone. However, all worksheets do need to be checked by an adult so appropriate feedback can be given to the learner.

**John Robinson**, author of BLOCKS (2021).

None of the illustrations for BLOCKS (drawn by Darren McMorran) should be used for any purpose other than to support students using the programme (2021).

# BLOCKS

The student workbook is split into 6 main sections, they are:

- Onsets. What they are and how to use them (page 18)
- The First Five Words (page 34)
- Split Digraphs
- The Second Five Words
- The Third Five Words
- The Last Three Words

At the beginning of each section, help notes are given to explain what the student will be doing, what sounds will be worked on and the different strategies and ideas to be aware of. **It is strongly recommended that each of these help notes is carefully read by the adult leading the session before the relevant section is attempted.**

There are 5 basic concepts behind this programme; they are referred to and used throughout. They are:

## 1. Spelling

Spelling is about sound, and especially distinct units of sound (known as phonemes). It's about representing the speech sounds that we make in letter form in a way that is generally accepted by and readable by an audience. The letters we use simply reflect the sound(s) we want to make. The teaching of spelling has often been all about letters and rules, but for those people who still find spelling difficult this old approach has already failed. One of the basic concepts behind BLOCKS is that many students who appear to be poor spellers are simply people who make the wrong spelling choices e.g., is it "boat" or "bote"? Both say the same thing, but one is generally accepted as a correct spelling and one is not.

## 2. Onset

All words have an Onset, that being any consonant which comes before the first vowel letter of a word. An Onset can be an especially useful device to aid both spelling and reading.

- Some words have a 0 letter Onset (they have no consonant letters before the first vowel)

e.g., **and**, **each**, **initial**, **octagon** and **umbrella**

- Some words have a 1 letter Onset

e.g., **pan**, **hello**, **fence** and **search**

- Some words have a 2 letter Onset

e.g., **stop**, **spool**, **blue** and **crunch**

- Some words have a 3 letter Onset

e.g., **scream**, **splat**, **string** and **scrape**

- No word has more than 3 letters as an Onset.

In a word such as psychology the y makes a vowel sound.

### 3. **Beats** (or syllables)

- All beats of a word must contain a vowel sound and this programme teaches 18 different vowel sounds.
- Students are encouraged to spell and read by splitting words up into beats.
- An example of using the beats can be shown using the word **gaining**.
- It can be split as **gain-ing** or **gai-ning** either way is valid, although the first way is more common as it gives the root word **gain** followed by the suffix **ing**.
- Words are basically split by sound; it is important therefore that the student is encouraged to speak as clearly as possible
- The only rules for breaking words into beats are:
  - Each beat must contain a vowel sound
  - Each beat must be readable (but not necessarily be a known word)
  - An Onset cannot be a complete beat on its own as it does not have a vowel sound.

### 4. **Vowel Sounds**

**There is a difference between vowel letters and vowel sounds.**

- All vowel sounds, when written, **must** begin with a vowel letter but may contain up to 4 letters, including consonants. In BLOCKS, vowel sounds are referred to as:

- **Singles (s)** - when 1 letter makes one vowel sound e.g., **pat**, **bug**, and **trip**.
- **Doubles (d)** - when 2 letters combine to make one vowel sound e.g., **team**, **boat**, and **stew** (note here that w is a consonant letter).
- **Triples (t)** - when 3 letters combine to make one vowel sound e.g., **sigh**, **core**, and **fair**.
- **Blocks (b)** - when 4 letters combine to make one vowel sound e.g., **sleigh**, **through**, and **bough**.
- **Split digraphs (split)** - occur when two letters make one vowel sound but with a consonant letter between them e.g., **make**, **note**, and **cube**. The Split digraph always ends with a letter **e** and basically ensures that the vowel letter which comes before that **e** says its name rather than its common sound e.g., we say **fate** rather than **fat**; the final **e** in the word **fate** is not actually heard it simply changes the sound of the vowel letter that precedes it.

## 5. **Double Consonants:**

- When there is a double consonant in a word its main job is to stop Split digraphs from working (Split digraphs only work when there is one letter between a vowel and the letter **e**). Thus, there is a difference between **super** and **supper** or **diner** and **dinner**.

For most weaker spellers and readers problems can exist with both vowel sounds and consonant sounds although consonant sounds are generally much easier to learn and are far more consistent.

The vowel letter 'a' can on its own make various sounds e.g., **ant**, **table**, **want**, **bath** and **tuna**, whereas the consonant letter "b" makes only one sound e.g., **big**, **bold**, **bright** and **blue**. When problems occur with consonant sounds, they are usually to do with sound discrimination.

**The BLOCKS programme assumes that the student using it is confident with the common sounds made by the individual consonant letters.** Basic consonant Worksheets are included as part of the BLOCKS **programme**, however, if a student experiences problems with these then further work should be undertaken.

BLOCKS itself mainly focuses on the vowel sounds and attempts to teach the most common spellings of each sound. However, consonant sounds and graphemes are still practised throughout BLOCKS and working through the programme will ensure that the student's basic skills and confidence are further improved.

# BLOCKS

## Using the programme

- The exercises in **section 1** involve identifying and using the Onset of given words. Please read the section titled **Onsets how to find them and how to use them** before attempting this section (page 18).
- **Sections 2, 4, 5 and 6** target specific vowel sounds and work in the same way as each other. Each vowel sound is worked on individually with 5 different Worksheets, however, there are 4 vowel sounds for which there are only 4 Worksheets. This is because these sounds are simple to spell and do not have unusual spellings associated with them.
- **Section 3** is slightly different and looks exclusively at Split digraphs

Sections **2, 4, 5** and **6** work like this:

### Worksheet 1

- Consists of a column of 14 words, each of which has the initial vowel sound made in one of the most common ways. This list of words has the letters making the relevant vowel sound (the vowel section) underlined. Firstly the student needs to identify and highlight the Onset for each word.
- The second column asks for the spelling choice. With the cue word **rain** the common spelling choices will be **ai**, **a-e** or **ay**. **Please note** it is possible for the targeted vowel sound to appear twice in the same word e.g. **neatly**, in such as instance it is always the first occurrence of the vowel sound which is being worked on.
- Column three asks, what is it? This means, is the spelling choice a single, double, triple, block or split digraph. These can be written in abbreviated form of **s**, **d**, **t**, **b** or **split**.
- Column four requires the student to read the word. They should use the Onset first, then the vowel sound and the rest of the word should follow.

- The final column asks for the number of beats. That means how many beats or syllables in the given word. Every beat is a vowel sound, so in a word such as **gaining** there are two.

**Please note,** words which end in **ed** can cause some difficulty in terms of beats because of the different ways that this combination of letters can be pronounced, try saying these words out loud to hear the difference, e.g.:

- **potted**, where the ed ending sounds like **ed**.
  - **Walked**, where the ed ending sounds like a **t**
  - **Banned**, where the ed ending sounds like **d**
- For the Blocks programme a general rule is that if a word has an ed ending that ed should be counted as a beat even if it is not always clearly heard as such.

## **Worksheet 2**

- This is completed in the same way as Worksheet 1 only the vowel sections have not been underlined in the given words.

## **Worksheet 3**

- Worksheet 3 consists of nonsense words and shows whether the student has mastered the skill or not.

**Please note, some students find these nonsense Worksheets difficult, especially if confidence in their own reading ability is low. They should be attempted with caution, especially if they cause the student distress or dims their enthusiasm for the rest of the programme.**

- It is completed in a similar way to the first two Worksheets, however, on this Worksheet the given word is rewritten in column 6 using the beats e.g., **gaining** becomes **gain-ing**. The only rules for breaking words into beats are:
  - Each beat must contain a vowel sound.
  - Each beat must be readable.
  - An Onset cannot be a complete beat on its own as it does not have a vowel section

In column 6 of this Worksheet the first seven words have already been broken up to both help the student read them and to give them confidence in completing the remaining seven words.

## **Worksheet 4**

- This is completed in the same way as Worksheets 1 and 2, however this Worksheet concentrates on the more unusual ways of making the vowel sound. With the cue word RAIN, the spelling choices are now **ea**, **a**, **ey**, **eigh** and **ei**.
- **Please note** that this Worksheet is omitted from 4 vowel sounds as they do not have any unusual spellings.

## Worksheet 5

- The student gets to use the knowledge they have gained. There are two Worksheets both consisting of a short passage containing many words which share the targeted vowel sound; many of the words will already have been practised on Worksheets 1, 2 and 4. Note that any Worksheet in this section may contain words from vowel sounds practised earlier in the programme.
- There are two Worksheet 5s for each vowel sound. Worksheet '5a' has been highlighted to show the beats in the words used. Worksheet '5b' has no highlighting.
- To work through these two Worksheets the student needs to: -
  - First read through the text aloud and carefully.
  - Read through again and highlight any word, which contains the targeted vowel sound.
  - Rewrite the highlighted words using the beats.
- This part of the programme allows the student to practise handwriting, reading and spelling and gives them structure to guide them in the future. The system is flexible so that a student could also practise working on a given sound by using a paragraph from any book as if it was Worksheet 5.

Examples of how to complete Worksheets 1 to 5 are given in the BLOCKS programme and can be referred to at any time to help clear up any queries.

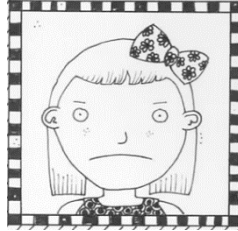
## Self-assessment

On each of the student Worksheet pages there is a small self-assessment section. The student will see this;

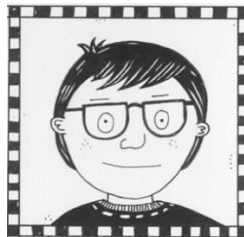


Followed by three pictures showing

A sad face



An OK face



And a happy face



The student simply ticks, circles, crosses out or even colours in the face which they feel best matches how they got on with that section of work. **Please note**; there are three other faces which are sometimes used. There is no self-assessment for each of the second, and more challenging, of the "Using Blocks' skills" Worksheets.

# Consonants

**Instruction guide** (For the Leading Adult)

Here are two simple consonant Assessment sheets:

1. These two Sheets are provided simply to help the adult assess how competent the student is in using the basic consonant sounds.

2. **Please Note.** Throughout the programme letter sounds are always used rather than letter names. Confusion will occur if names and sounds are mixed up.

### 3. **Completing Assessment Sheet 1**

- a. Ask the student to say the sound that each letter makes
- b. If they are correct put a tick in column 2
- c. If they need guidance e.g. if they are unsure of the difference between a letter name and its sound, put a tick in column 3
- d. If they still get the sound wrong, or say they don't know what it is, write their response in column 4
- e. The adult can then use these responses to decide if any further work is needed to ensure that the student has the basic consonant sounds firmly established

**Please Note.** The letters **qu** are combined sounding like **kw**

**Please Note.** The sound of the grapheme **x** is that heard at the end of words such as **fox**, **box** and **six** and sounds like **ks**

**Please Note.** The letters for this Assessment Sheet are not arranged in alphabetical order. They are arranged in an order to highlight any confusion which might occur with particular sounds

### 4. **Completing Assessment Sheet 2**

- a. Assessment Sheet 2 is completed as Assessment Sheet 1.
- b. The letters for Worksheet 2 are known as consonant digraphs. These are two letters which combine to make a single sound. They all contain the letter **"h"**.
- c. The sound of the graphemes **gh** is that heard at the end of words such as **cough**, **rough** and **tough** and sounds like **f**. When **gh** comes at the end of words such as **bough**, **through** and **though** it is actually part of a **Block vowel sound** and is explained later on in the BLOCKS programme.



# BLOCKS

Basic consonant sounds (Sheet 1)

**Remember letter sounds not letter names**

Letter	Correct 1 <sup>st</sup> attempt	Correct with help	Sound made (if incorrect)
<b>p</b>			
<b>b</b>			
<b>t</b>			
<b>d</b>			
<b>f</b>			
<b>v</b>			
<b>s</b>			
<b>z</b>			
<b>k</b>			
<b>g</b>			
<b>c</b>			
<b>h</b>			
<b>j</b>			
<b>l</b>			
<b>m</b>			
<b>n</b>			
<b>qu</b> (combined)			
<b>r</b>			
<b>w</b>			
<b>x</b> (end sound)			
<b>y</b>			
<b>z</b>			

# BLOCKS

## Consonant Digraphs (Sheet 2)

**Remember letter sounds not letter names**

Letter	Correct 1 <sup>st</sup> attempt	Correct with help	Sound made (if incorrect)
<b>th</b>			
<b>wh</b>			
<b>ph</b>			
<b>sh</b>			
<b>ch</b>			
<b>gh</b> (end sound)			

# Suffixes (word endings)

## Instruction guide

These common word endings (known as suffixes) appear in the BLOCKS programme. Not all the suffixes used in the BLOCKS programme are listed here, just those which it is felt may need more explanation.

- **Ed.** For the purposes of **Blocks** an **ed** ending is always counted as a beat even if it is not heard as one. This word ending can make three different sounds and signifies the past tense of the word. E.g.
  - a) potted**ed**, batted**ed** and rutted**ed** where the **ed** ending does sounds like **ed**
  - b) walked**ed**, talked**ed**, and baked**ed** where the **ed** ending sounds like a **t**
  - c) banned**ed**, planned**ed**, and hummed**ed** where the **ed** ending sounds like **d**
- **y**, making the sound **ee**. Adding the **y** turns a noun or a verb into an adjective e.g., misty**y**, runny**y**, and snowy**y**.
- **tion**, sounding like **shun**. This suffix is widely used in words such as **station**, **mention**, and **caution**.
- **le**, sounding like **ul**. This suffix is widely used in words such as **table**, **ladle**, and **tackle**. Sometimes it is preceded by the letter **t**, e.g., **castle**, **thistle**, and **whistle**, in these words the **t** is silent.

# SECTION 1

# ONSETS

HOW TO FIND THEM AND HOW TO USE THEM



# BLOCKS

## Section 1

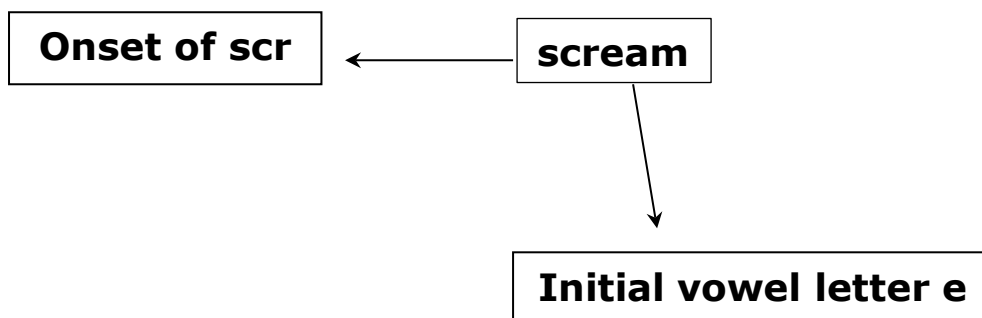
### Onsets how to find them and how to use them.

This section may look a little scary but don't worry it's actually fairly easy.

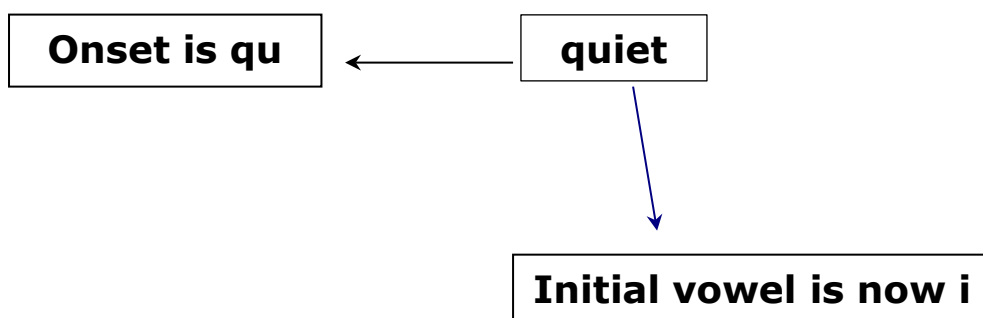
The Onset of a word is any letter(s) which come before the first vowel. Thus, the first thing the reader/speller must be able to do is to identify the vowel sound. This is simple to do as although there are nineteen vowel sounds commonly used in English, they all begin with one of the vowel letters.

**a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes y.**

So, if you wanted to find the onset of the word **scream** all you have to do is identify the initial vowel letter, and everything in front of it is the Onset.



The only time this doesn't work is if the initial vowel letter is **u** following directly behind **q**, e.g., **quiet**.



Once the Onset has been identified it is usually easy to either read or spell.

Remember if you get the Onset wrong, the whole of the word is wrong. If the Onset is right the reading/spelling of the rest of the word is that much easier. Luckily with Onsets the letters involved almost always say their common expected sounds.

Finally, it is worth noting that some words do not have any letters before the first vowel, words such as **ant**, **open**, **each**. However, to keep things standard it is said that these words have a no letter Onset.

The next pages will help identify the most common Onsets in English.

# BLOCKS

Here is a list of the Onsets found in English

## Single letter Onsets

**b** as in bat  
**d** as in dog  
**g** as in get  
**j** as in jam  
**l** as in let  
**n** as in nut  
**r** as in rot  
**t** as in top  
**w** as in wag  
**z** as in zip

**c** as in cut  
**f** as in fish  
**h** as in hat  
**k** as in kit  
**m** as in mat  
**p** as in pin  
**s** as in sit  
**v** as in van  
**y** as in yet

## Two letter Onsets - which make 2 different sounds

**sc** as in scan  
**sl** as in slap  
**sn** as in snap  
**st** as in stop  
**br** as in brim  
**cl** as in clam  
**dr** as in drop  
**fl** as in flag  
**gl** as in glum  
**pl** as in plan  
**tr** as in trot  
**qu** (sounding **kw**) as in quit

**sk** as in skip  
**sm** as in smug  
**sp** as in spot  
**sw** as in swim  
**bl** as in blot  
**cr** as in crop  
**dw** as in dwell  
**fr** as in frog  
**gr** as in grit  
**pr** as in prod  
**tw** as in twin  
**wr** as in write

# BLOCKS

## **Digraphs - Two letter Onsets which make only one sound**

**ch** as in chin or in chef.

A slight difference can be heard between these two Onsets.

**ph** as in phone

**sh** as in ship

**th** as in that or theatre.

A slight difference can be heard between these two Onsets.

Usually it is not a distinction that causes problems.

**wh** as in when

## **Three letter Onsets.**

**scr** as in scrap

**spr** as in spring

**str** as in strap

**spl** as in splash

**squ** as in squid

## **Three letter Onsets containing a digraph**

**chr** as in Christmas note the different sound of **ch** in this Onset

**sch** as in school (note the same sound as above)

**shr** as in shred

**thr** as in threat

**phr** as in phrase

Very occasionally the reader/speller may come across a different Onset, but these are rare

# ONSETS

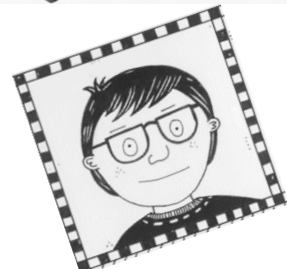
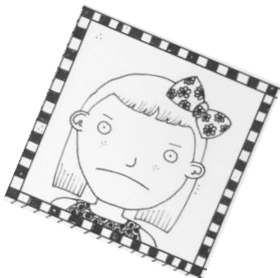
## Student Worksheet 1

**These words all have a single letter Onset**

Remember letter sounds not letter names

Given word	Write the Onset	Say the Onset	Read the word	Given word	Write the Onset	Say the Onset	Read the word
can				hack			
dim				dig			
her				leg			
mat				mutt			
pan				nag			
rip				tick			
tap				sat			
ban				rim			
sit				zoo			
rid				fat			
man				bed			
nod				sock			
jog				ten			
lap				way			

**How did you do?**



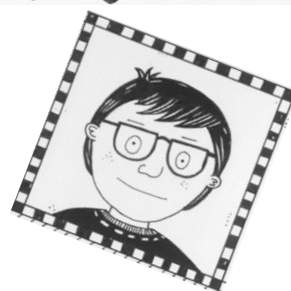
# ONSETS

## Student Worksheet 2

**These words all have a two letter Onset**  
(the Onset letters make different sounds)

Given word	Write the Onset	Say the Onset	Read the Word	Given word	Write the Onset	Say the Onset	Read the Word
scab				click			
skid				clam			
slob				crib			
skip				drag			
slop				drum			
snug				flag			
spot				frog			
speck				glad			
step				grand			
stun				glum			
swim				plan			
blip				prim			
bred				prod			
blag				trot			

**\* How did you do? \***





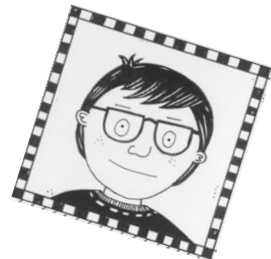
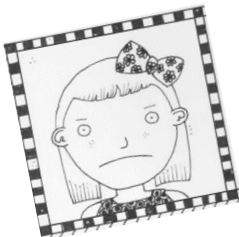
# ONSETS

## Student Worksheet 3

**These words all have a Digraph Onset**  
(two Onset letters making one sound)

Given word	Write the Onset	Say the Onset	Read the Word	Given Word	Write the Onset	Say the Onset	Read the Word
shack				check			
chop				shop			
thick				while			
phone				whirl			
what				chap			
thud				thank			
choose				shock			
think				ship			
phonic				sham			
this				choke			
which				when			
thus				chat			
photo				that			
shun				shed			

 How did you do? 



# ONSETS

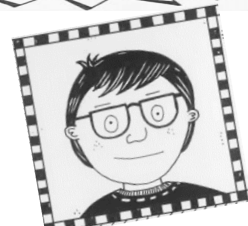
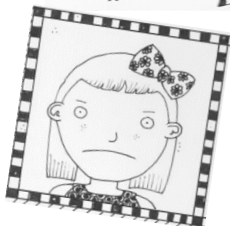
## Student Worksheet 4

**These words all have a three letter Onset**

(making either 2 or 3 different sounds depending on whether or not they also contain a digraph)

Given word	Write the Onset	Say the Onset	Read the Word	Given Word	Write the Onset	Say the Onset	Read the Word
scrap				squib			
split				squeal			
splosh				strip			
sprat				threat			
strap				shrill			
shrug				squash			
scrum				scrunch			
scrub				chrome			
splat				phrase			
splash				throb			
strum				strut			
shrub				squawk			
scram				scheme			
sprig				school			

\* How did you do? \*



# ONSETS

## Onset Grids

### Instruction guide

1. Ask the student how many words they can write using the ONSETS (written in **bold**) and the word ending which is in the centre of the grid.
2. Can they read all the words they have written?
3. Can they say which ones are words they have heard before? Which ones do they think might not be real words?
4. Discuss their work and opinions and, when relevant, check words and meanings in a dictionary
5. **Remember the aim of the exercise is to build confidence as well as learning a new skill. The last two Onset grids are difficult, the adult needs to be the judge of how many of them need to be completed**

Generally, the exercises can be repeated as many times as you like, changing the letters in the centre of the grid each time to come up with a whole range of different words. Simply copy the **Onset grid** and put in your own word ending or use the ones provided at the end of this section

Do beware that generating words in this way may lead to some rude or inappropriate words being created. I suggest that it is made clear at the beginning of these exercises that such words should be avoided if possible and ignored if they do occur.

# ONSETS

## Onset Grids

### Single Letter ONSETS

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

Write your words here:

# ONSETS

## ONSET Grids

### Two Letter ONSETS

	sc	sk	sl	sm	
	sn	sp	st	sw	
br	bl	<b>ot</b>		cl	cr
dr	dw			fl	fr
	gl	gr	pl	pr	
	tr	tw	qu	wr	

Write your words here:

# ONSETS

## ONSET Grids

### Digraph ONSETS

		ch	
ph	ip		sh
			th
	wh		

Write your words here:

# ONSETS

## ONSET Grids

Three letter ONSETS (some of which contain a digraph)

scr	chr	str	thr
phr	<b>at</b>		
			sch
spr	squ	spl	shr

Write your words here:

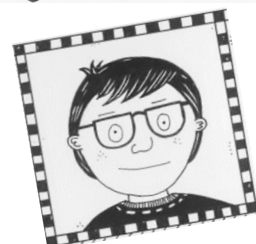
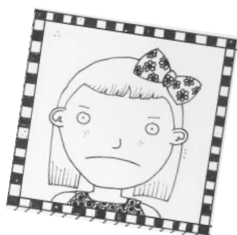
# ONSETS

## Blank Student Worksheet

Write your own words for more Onset practice

Given word	Write the Onset	Say the Onset	Read the word	Given word	Write the Onset	Say the Onset	Read the word

How did you do?



# ONSETS

Below is a list of common CVC word endings which can be copied, cut out and used in the middle section of the various Onset grids.

Do be aware that one of the problems with generating random nonsense words is that occasionally they can be rude. It may be wise to prime any student, completing these exercises, that such words will be ignored.

<b>a</b>	<b>e</b>	<b>i</b>	<b>o</b>	<b>u</b>
<b>ab</b>	<b>eb</b>	<b>ib</b>	<b>ob</b>	<b>ub</b>
<b>ad</b>	<b>ed</b>	<b>id</b>	<b>od</b>	<b>ud</b>
<b>ag</b>	<b>eg</b>	<b>ig</b>	<b>og</b>	<b>ug</b>
<b>am</b>	<b>em</b>	<b>im</b>		
<b>an</b>	<b>en</b>	<b>in</b>		<b>un</b>
<b>ap</b>	<b>ep</b>	<b>ip</b>	<b>op</b>	<b>up</b>
<b>at</b>	<b>et</b>	<b>it</b>	<b>ot</b>	<b>ut</b>