

# Foundational & Intermediate Sound Rules for Word Ladders

## 1. Vowel-Consonant-e (VCE / Magic e)

- Rule: A silent e at the end makes the vowel long.
- Example: cap → cape → tape → tame

## 2. R-Controlled Vowels (Bossy R)

- Rule: When a vowel is followed by r, it changes the sound of the vowel.
- Common: ar, er, ir, or, ur
- Example: car → bar → bark → dark

## 3. Consonant Blends

- Rule: Two or more consonants where each sound is heard (e.g., bl, cr, st).
- Example: pan → plan → plant → slant

## 4. Consonant Digraphs

- Rule: Two letters that make one sound (e.g., sh, ch, th, wh, ph).
- Example: hat → that → chat → chap

## 5. Vowel Digraphs (Vowel Teams)

- Rule: Two vowels together that make one long vowel sound (e.g., ai, ea, ee, oa, ue).
- Example: mat → meat → meet → feet

## 6. Closed Syllable vs. Open Syllable

- Rule: Closed syllables end in a consonant and have short vowels (e.g., not).  
Open syllables end in a vowel and the vowel is long (e.g., no).

- **Example: man → mane → pane → plane**

## 7. Y as a Vowel

- **Rule: Y can function as a vowel with either a long e or long i sound.**
- **Example: cry → try → fry → dry → prying**

## 8. Silent Letters

- **Rule: Some consonants are silent in certain words (e.g., k in “knock,” b in “comb”).**
- **Example: comb → bomb → limb → climb**

## 9. Suffix -ing / -ed / -s

- **Rule: Adding inflectional endings affects both pronunciation and meaning.**
- **Example: jump → jumps → jumped → jumping**

## 10. Common Prefixes & Roots

- **Rule: Prefixes change the meaning but often not the pronunciation of the root.**
- **Example: view → preview → review → reviewed**

## 11. Schwa Sound

- **Rule: The most common vowel sound in English, often pronounced as "uh" in unstressed syllables (e.g., about, problem).**
- **Note: More advanced, but helpful for multisyllabic decoding.**
- **Example (oral emphasis): sofa → soda → data**

## 12. Soft vs Hard C and G

- **Rule: C/G are soft before e, i, y (e.g., cent, giraffe); hard before a, o, u (e.g., cat, go).**
- **Example: gap → gape → game → gem → germ**

## **Tips for Using These in Word Ladders**

- **Blend reading and vocabulary: Choose high-utility or academic words.**
- **Target specific struggles: If students confuse long/short vowels, focus on those contrasts.**
- **Include context: Let them define or use new words they build.**
- **Use syllables: Break into multisyllabic ladders as students grow more confident.**