



The sounds of English

If you come across unfamiliar words when you're reading it's important to have a strategy for dealing with them. The strategy you choose depends on many things, including:

- The text and how difficult it is.
- Your reason for reading the text and whether it's important to be quick and/or accurate.
- What strategies work best for you.

For example, if you're reading a contract that requires your signature, you could use a dictionary or ask a colleague what a particular word means. But if you're reading the local paper to find out what's going on in your area, you might decide to ignore the word and read on in the hope that you're able to guess its meaning from the rest of the article. In some contexts it may not matter if you can't guess the word (when reading for enjoyment, for example).

Another strategy to help your understanding is to try and **decode** the word from the letters and groups of letters within it and the sounds they make. Some words are easy to decode because the letters match the sounds in patterns you recognise (for example, in the paragraph above, words like **enjoyment**, **matter**, **particular**, **need**). So if you break these down, sound by sound, you may be able to read the whole word.

Silent letters

But the sounds of English aren't always easy to work out. For example, the sounds and letters may not match in a way you have come across before; or there may be letters that make no sound at all (silent letters).

Some silent letters at the beginning and ends of words

gn-	-gn	kn-	wr-
gnash	foreign	knee	wrap
gnaw	resign	knickers	wrestle
gnat	sign	knitting	wrinkle
gnome	sovereign	knot	wrist

Compound words

Some words are made up of other words - these are called compound words. Another reading strategy is to break words down into smaller words to make them easier to read. For example, there are three compound words in the sentence below:

The **teenage** player in the **football** game hit the **goalpost**.

teen + age = teenage foot + ball = football goal + post = goalpost

