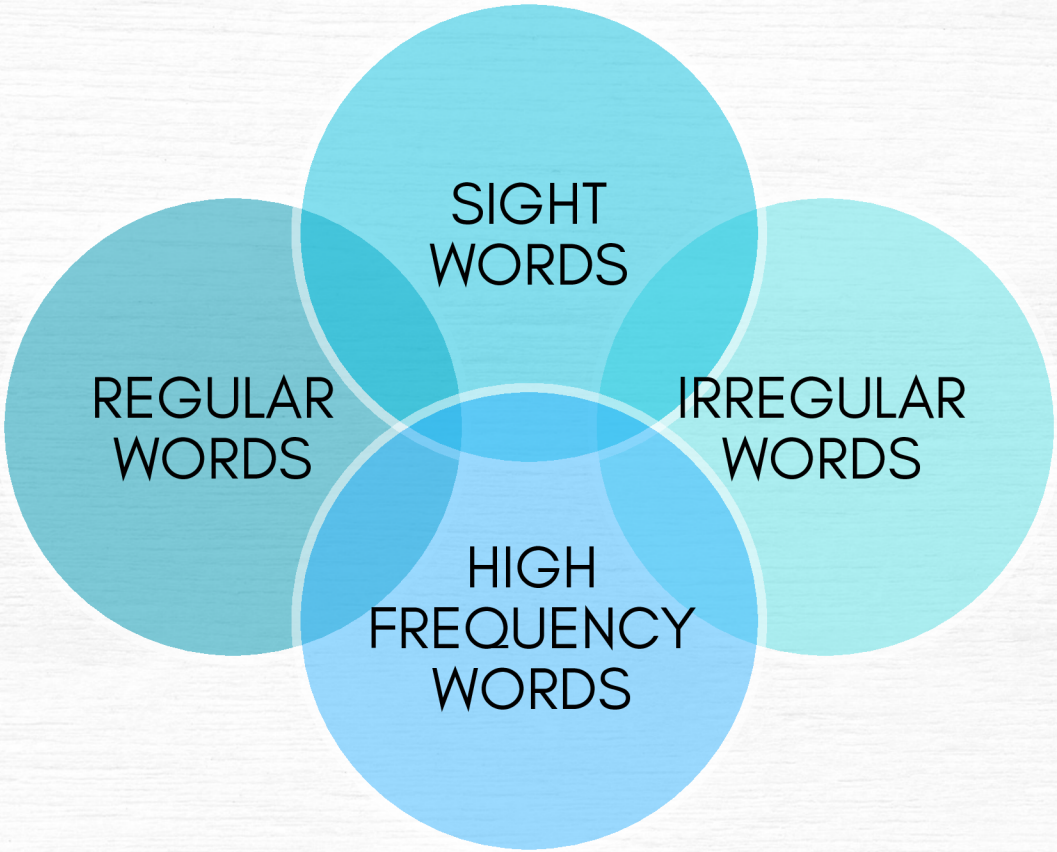
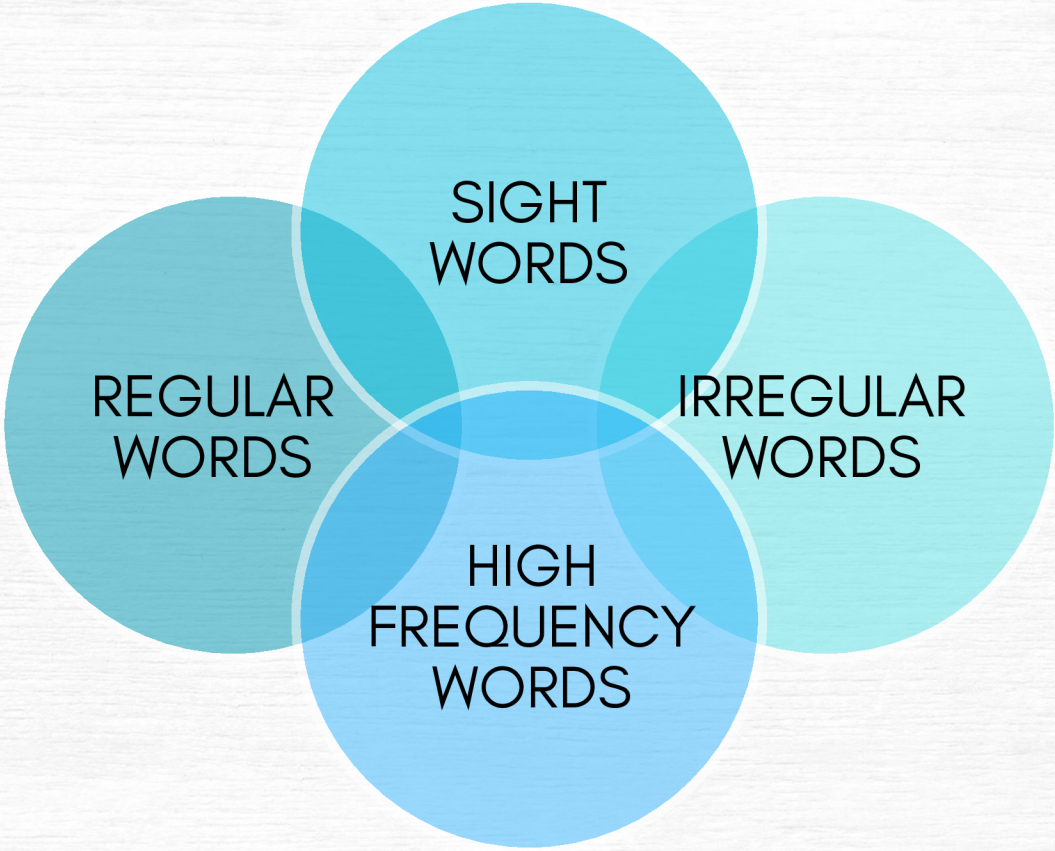
RETHINKING "SIGHT WORDS" TO IMPROVE LITERACY OUTCOMES



2024, 2026

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Goal: Learn to differentiate between these types of words



Purpose: you'll be able to make small changes that will help your students store words more effectively, which means their reading and writing fluency will improve.

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DEFINITIONS

REGULAR WORDS

Regularly spelled words are words that follow conventional spelling rules.

You might be surprised to hear that many, many words are regularly spelled. There are numerous spelling rules that govern English and we likely do not know them all.

I'm sure you agree that *cat* is regularly spelled and that there is nothing complicated about it!

The word *weight*, although it may seem tricky, is also regularly spelled. Knowing that the letters *eigh* represent the long a sound helps us see that *weight* is also a regularly spelled word.

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DEFINITIONS

IRREGULAR WORDS

Irregularly spelled words are words that have one or more irregular letter/sound correspondences.

The word *said* is irregular because *ai* represents the sort e sound.

The words *one* and *of* are also irregular because they do not follow conventional English spelling rules.

Few words are completely irregular. Many irregular words only have one unexpected letter/sound correspondence.

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DEFINITIONS

HIGH FREQUENCY WORDS

High-frequency words are words that appear most often in print.

Think of the Dolch and Fry lists. They are both lists of the most frequently used words in print, although they were created using different sources.

The words on both the Dolch and Fry lists are a combination of regularly spelled and irregularly spelled words.

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DEFINITIONS

SIGHT WORDS

And now for that elusive term, "sight words."

A sight word is simply any word that is instantly recognized, whether it is regular or irregular, high frequency or quite uncommon.

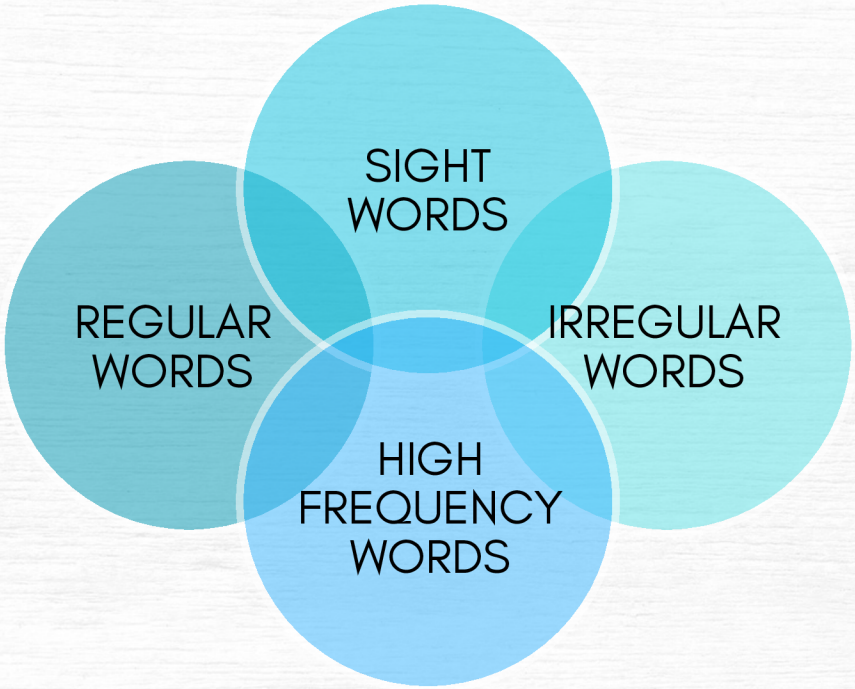
The, *and*, *to* and *I* are common sight words for early readers. At the same time, *educational* and *penicillin* are likely sight words for you.

Whenever you encounter a "sight word" list, it is most likely a list of high frequency words that someone (like a publisher or a teacher) wants students to recognize instantly.

It may feel like we recognize sight words "by sight" or visually, but the truth is that we do not store words in visual memory. We store them through a process called orthographic mapping.

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LET'S TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT THE DIAGRAM.



1. A sight word can be regularly spelled or irregularly spelled. It can also be a high frequency word.
2. An irregularly spelled word can also be a sight word or a high frequency word. It cannot be a regularly spelled word.
3. A high frequency word can be regularly spelled or irregularly spelled and it can also be a sight word.
4. A regularly spelled word can be a high frequency word or a sight word but it cannot be an irregularly spelled word.

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KNOWING WHAT YOU KNOW NOW, WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO TEACH THESE WORDS?

REGULAR WORDS

Align your "sight word" instruction with your phonics instruction.

IRREGULAR WORDS

Use the Direct Mapping technique.

HIGH FREQUENCY WORDS

Teach the regularly spelled high frequency words in alignment with your phonics instruction. Teach the irregularly spelled ones through the Direct Mapping technique.

SIGHT WORDS

With the right strategies, all of these types of words can become sight words!

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WHAT IS DIRECT MAPPING?

Direct mapping is a technique used to help students make connections between the individual sounds within words and the corresponding letters. The teacher asks questions that help students develop essential skills for successful word recognition. Here's how to do it:

First, introduce the word orally. Guide students to segment each sound.

Next, display the word. Ask questions that guide students to analyze the letter/sound connections. Asking questions about the sounds *out of order* forces students to segment the sounds rather than guess.

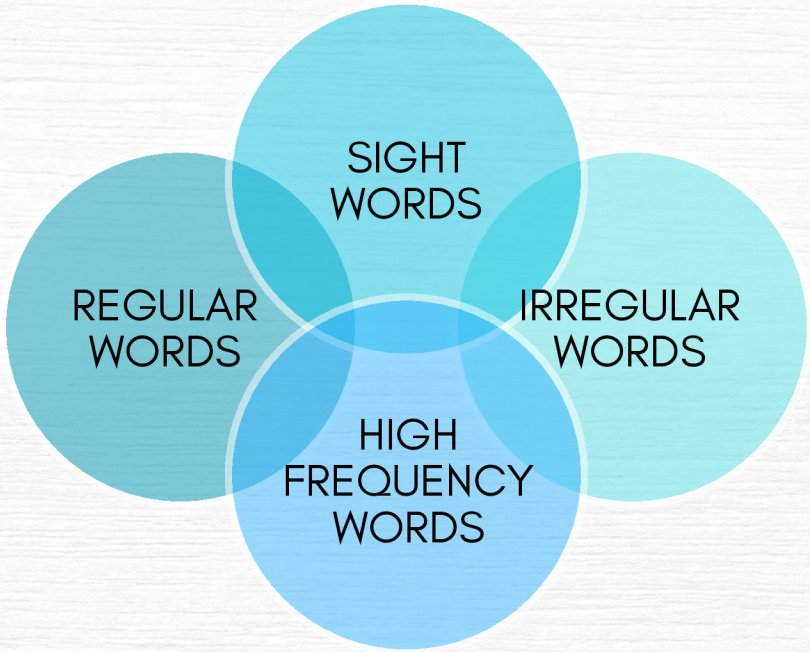


"What letter represents the /d/ sound in *said*?"
"What letter represents the /s/ sound in *said*?"
"What letters represent the /ĕ/ sound in *said*?"

You do not need to call attention to every letter and sound, but definitely address any irregular or tricky parts, such as letter combinations your students have not learned yet.

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NEXT STEPS: DO YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE?



1. Keep learning the rules of English spelling! When you are confident with the rules, it will be easier to teach them to your students. Here's my favorite source for learning the rules.*
2. Dive into etymology, or the study of word origins. Many words that do not follow English spelling rules can be demystified when you read the word's etymology. I frequently check the Online Etymology Dictionary.
3. Read my blogs and follow me on Instagram! I've linked two of my most popular blogs about sight words on the next page.

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*Amazon Affiliate link

NEXT STEPS: DO YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE?





Learn to teach the regularly spelled words...

and the irregularly spelled ones!

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