

# IRREGULAR WORDS

(MANY CONSIDERED  
HIGH FREQUENCY WORDS)

Irregular words (also known as heart words or red words) are not fully decodable and must be taught parallel to the structured literacy lessons. As defined on page 31 of the UFLI foundations manual, it states, "irregular words are not easily decoded because either it includes grapheme-phoneme correspondences that are unique to that word or the student hasn't learned all the grapheme-phoneme correspondences in the word just yet (making them temporarily irregular)"

Many of us (including me) thought that trying to teach children to memorize these words was best practice. However, it is shared through several websites and books (UFLI Foundations, Reading Rockets, Orton-Gillingham Online Academy) that it is important to allow students to identify the parts of the word that don't follow the sounds they've mastered (this is the irregular part). Allow them to discuss and identify this, how would the word sound if it was phonetic (fully decodable)? Sometimes the funny sound of a word reminds them how not to spell it.

I personally like the **red** word strategy. In one of my courses in OGOA, we were taught about red words being "red" because red often reminds us to stop. We stop and rethink the spelling or reading of red words because they are not decoded or encoded based on the rules of sounds we've learned/taught. On the next page I will share steps on how to introduce and help students master red (irregular) words.



# HOW TO TEACH IRREGULAR WORDS

## WEDNESDAY

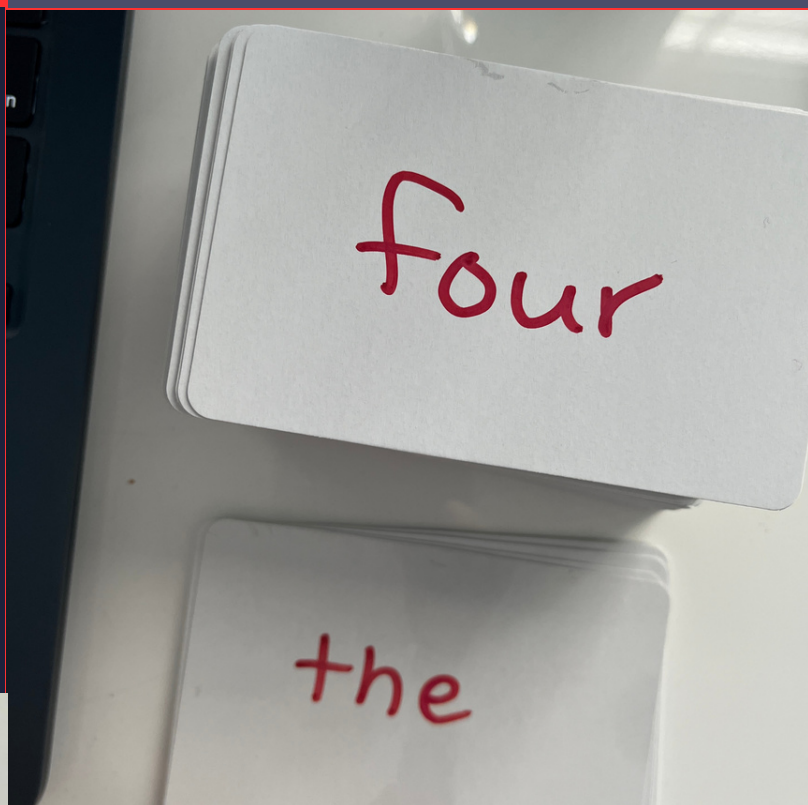


## INITIAL ASSESSMENT

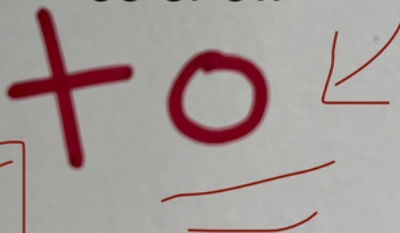
Using a list of irregular words (I've provided a list), have students individually read the words. After have them spell the words they read correctly. This is the most time consuming part. Very worth the time it takes.

## 5 RED WORD CARDS

choose up to 5 "red" words for each student to work on that he/she hasn't mastered, write each on a card (blank cards can be purchased at the dollar store or Amazon)



To decode this, it would sound like the word toe because an open syllable word always has the vowel say it's long sound, in this case the o says "oo or ew"



The sound the t makes in this word is normal

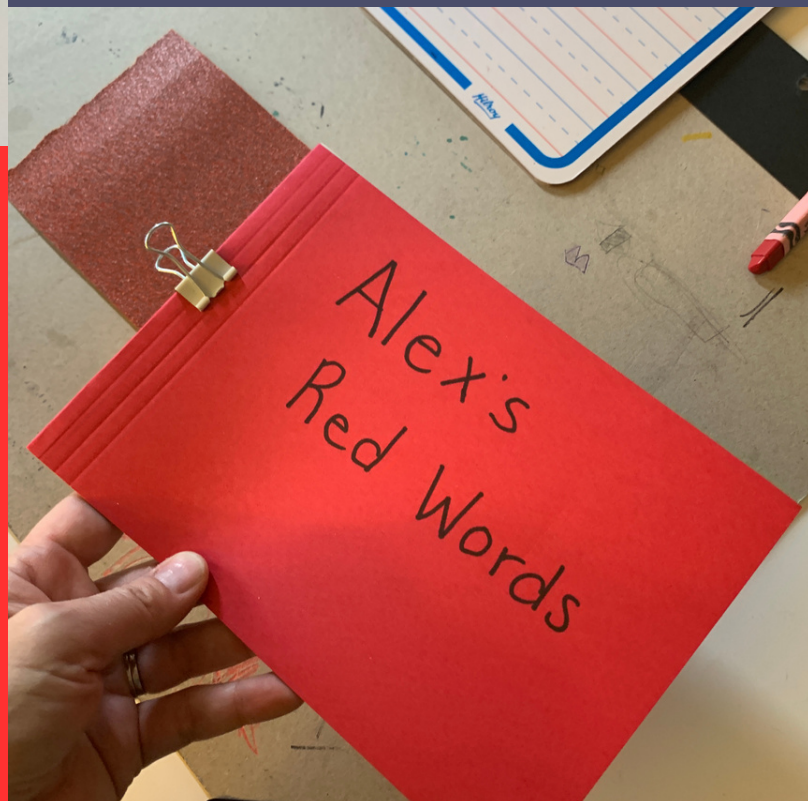
Tara Cooper

## PAIR/SHARE

Have students work with another student or teacher or parent volunteer. Discuss what is irregular about the word and what is not.

## MULTI-SENSORY

Use one to two multi-sensory approaches to help each student spell each word that they get incorrectly when asked to spell them (see next page for details).



Get more ideas at:

**MCKACADEMY.CA**



# MULTI-SENSORY RED WORD IDEAS



## SANDPAPER AND RED CRAYON

This step is recommended for all new red words being introduced. Using a piece of sandpaper under a piece of paper (see the booklet I use) have student use a red crayon to neatly print the word they are practicing (say each letter out loud) - see video beside. (the bumpy crayon words are also fun to trace with the finger for extra multi-sensory experience.

## FINGER IN SAND

Have student print the word 3 or more times in the sand.

[See example here.](#)



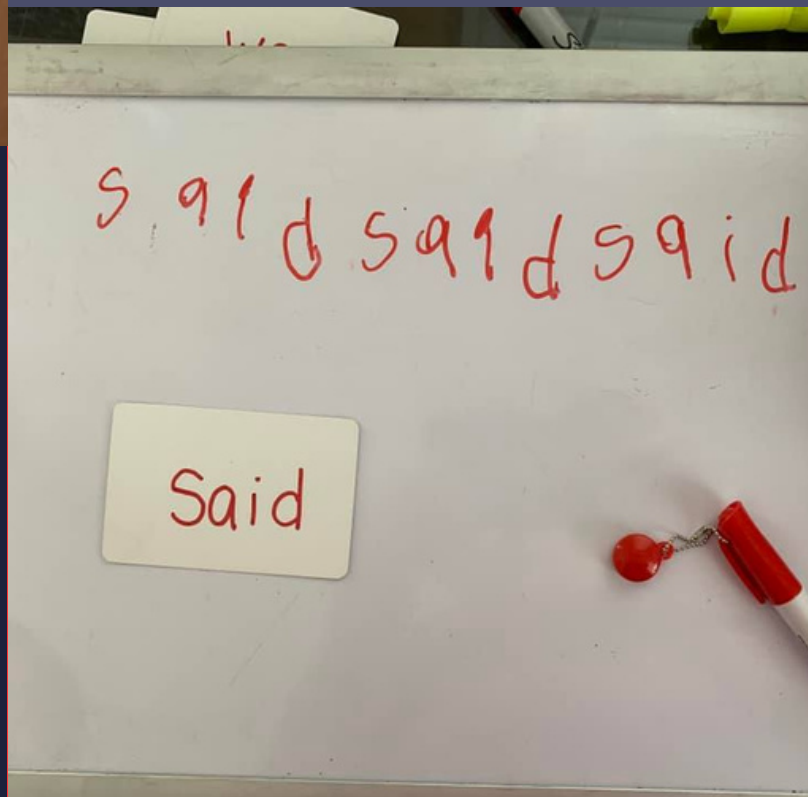
## TAPPING LETTERS

Students will tap the letters 3 times using the hand they write with on the arm opposite. See example 1. See example 2



## WHITE BOARD/RED MARKER

Provide the student with a white board and a red marker. Have them spell the word multiple times on the board while saying the letters



Get more ideas at:

**MCKACADEMY.CA**

This can be a daily drill that only needs to take 5-10 minutes. The strategies above are intended to be practiced for irregular words that haven't yet been mastered. In my Orton-Gillingham courses with OGOA and IMSE, they recommended that a child aims to correctly read and spell the words 7-10 times and then we add them to their mastered pile. It is best to only have 3-5 words they are working on at a time. Once a word is mastered and retired, you add another word. The easiest way to keep track is if the student reads the word correctly and can also spell it accurately, they put a check mark on the back of the card (see example below). Once they've gotten 7-10 checkmarks on the back, they retire the word in their master deck and the teacher adds another one they haven't mastered yet.



**THERE ARE SO MANY RESOURCES ONLINE  
AS WELL WITH REGARDS TO HOW  
TO TEACH IRREGULAR WORDS.**

**HERE IS A GREAT ONE I ALSO FOUND:**



[Reading Rockets shares another routine for  
teaching irregular words](#)

Extra: keep in mind that not all high frequency words are irregular words, Dolch words and Fry words are considered high frequency words that were commonly known as sight words. Some of these words are irregular just simply based on the phonemic rules that many don't follow or students haven't been taught yet. This is why I believe that it is important to have a routine for irregular words within any reading program.