



Spalding

Why doesn't Spalding teach that "y" has four sounds (the long e sound as the 4th sound)?

Mrs. Spalding considered this when she created her method many years ago. Here are some of those reasons.

1) **The letters *y* and *i* can be used interchangeably, but letters *y* and *e* cannot.**

The Spalding Method® teaches students to analyze the *written spelling* of words. Spelling has remained relatively constant over the years while *pronunciations vary* among geographical regions and countries. In the English spelling system, the letters *y* and *i* are used interchangeably, but letters *y* and *e* are not. For example, in the words *gym*, *rhythm*, *system*, we use *y* to represent the first (short) sound of *i*. The first sound of *y* is a consonant sound as in the words *yes*, *yellow*, *yawn*. The second and third sounds of *y* are vowel sounds, /ī/ and /ī/. There is no need to add a fourth sound, /ē/. Every syllable must have a vowel, and sometimes *y* is used instead of *i*, but not *e* in place of *y*.

2) **The pronunciation of accented and unaccented syllables is crucial to correct spelling.**

When teaching students to spell, pronouncing the word *baby* as /bā/ /bī/ helps them to write *y* not *e*. Note that the accent is on the first syllable. When reading the word for speaking, you have a choice: have students pronounce the word as spoken in your region, or maintain the original pronunciation which is consistent with the spelling. Students have no problem with the difference. They understand that pronouncing words two ways helps them spell and read.

Teaching that *y* say /ē/ does not allow students to read those words that end in *y* as they are spelled. There is more of an emphasis on the pronunciation of the second syllable that contains the *y* when, in fact, the accent is usually on the first syllable. That is why the practice of reading words two ways, for spelling and for reading, is essential to clarifying spelling and pronunciation of words.

When reading for spelling, students are reading one-syllable words by sounds and multisyllable words by syllables so they process the sounds or the syllable sequentially as needed for spelling, writing, and decoding unfamiliar words. When reading words for reading, students pronounce the words in normal speech, thus building automatic word recognition, a prerequisite for text fluency. Students quickly learn both the spelling and the pronunciation of words because their speech is more precise.

3) **Teaching students to spell accurately using the phonograms is essential to correcting spelling errors.**

“Never confuse (children) by discussing any other phonogram which might give the same sound in a given word. Keep to the facts about each word being studied. The teacher shares her knowledge of the exact phonograms which the dictionary shows for writing each word. The dictionary is referred to as the standard for spelling.” (WRTR, 1957 edition, page 118)

4) **Avoid confusion in the application of spelling and pronunciation rules.**

Confusion in spelling and applying rules is created when teaching that “y” has a fourth sound /ē/. For example, if a student spells *baby* as *babe*, which is often the case if we teach that *y* says /ē/, difficulty with spelling will occur when the student is asked to form the plural, *babies*. Rule 24 states: “When adding a suffix to a word that ends with a *consonant and y*, use *i* instead of *y* unless the ending is *ing*.” (e.g., *baby* to *babies*) By adding a fourth sound for *y*, there is now an exception to this rule, and it makes explaining a simple rule much more difficult for students to learn.

Another point of confusion for students is created when teaching rules 5 and 6. Rule 5 states: “The letters *i* and *y* can say /ī/, but usually say /ī/ at the end of a syllable. Rule 6 states: “*Y*, not *i* is used at the end of an English word.” If we go back to the statement that “*y* and *i* are used interchangeably, but *y* and *e* are not,” then again, we have created more confusion for students with knowing when to use *y* or *e* at the end of a word. Often an *e* at the end of a word is a silent final *e*, but now we are pronouncing the *e* as /ē/.

Mrs. Spalding recognized, and so does Spalding Education International, that “Almost no spelling rule is absolute. It is well to make this clear and to say that we shall be on the lookout for words that do not conform to the rules. In the first fifteen hundred words used most often, less than 7 percent have parts which do not agree with the sounds on the phonogram cards or with these (Spalding) rules of spelling.” (*WRTR*, 1957, page 105) The point is not to teach exceptions to rules that are not really exceptions. Adding the /ē/ sound to *y* helps adults with an explanation for our pronunciation of words, but it does not help the students learn to spell words accurately.

“This method (The Spalding Method) requires of both teacher and pupil precise pronunciation of each syllable written in the spelling lesson. It clarifies the sounds for children as nothing else can. It can thus counteract the present tendency toward slovenly speaking of our language. The vowel sounds in non-accented syllables should . . . be thought of as they are written. The precise vowel sound is lost to some extent in the rhythm of English speech.” (*WRTR*, 1957 Edition, page 19)

Over Spalding teachers many years of instruction have experienced that using The Spalding Method to teach only three sounds for *y* is essentially all that is needed for helping students spell accurately. The Spalding mission is to develop skilled readers, critical listeners, accomplished speakers, spellers, and writers who are lifelong learners. We can only accomplish this mission by continuing to be precise, explicit, and sequential in our instruction of students to ensure that they become successful learners.

