

A
Grammatical Institute
OF THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

COMPRISING

An easy, concise, and systematic Method of

EDUCATION,

Designed for the Use of *English* Schools

IN *A M E R I C A*

IN THREE PARTS.

P A R T I.

CONTAINING,

A new and accurate Standard of Pronunciation

BY NOAH WEBSTER, A. M.

Usus est Norma Loquendi.

CICERO.

H A R T F O R D.

PRINTED BY HUDSON & GOODWIN,

FOR THE AUTHOR

Note from International Publisher: Donald L. Potter

March 13, 2007

Previous to this 1783 edition, I published Webster's 1908 *Elementary Spelling Book* as a scanned copy. About a year later, I published Webster's 1824 *American Spelling Book* for parents and private schools to use to teach reading and spelling. The 1824 edition has become very popular on the Internet. In February 2007, Mr. Gene Roth sent me a beautiful facsimile edition of Webster's original 1783 *Spelling Book*, at that time entitled, *A Grammatical Institute, of the English Language, Part I*. The first edition has some feature that I believe will be of interest to teachers using Webster's approach to beginning reading and spelling. I have taken the liberty of converting the "long s," that is easily mistaken for an "f," with the modern "s" in all cases. This work, like all my previously published editions of Webster are published for **practical purposes** of placing in the hands of educators an easy-to-read edition. All my editions of Webster are published for free download on the *Education Page* of my web site: www.donpotter.net.

It is with much trepidation that I made changes to the format of Webster's great work; nevertheless, the essence of Webster's work is contained herein in its entirety and purity. In many cases, I converted Webster's footnotes into endnotes. For those who wish to see the original, a magnificent facsimile edition has been published by Paladin Commercial Printers for the Noah Webster House, Inc. and Museum of West Hartford History, West Hartford, CT. This is the edition I have been using as the basis for this easy-to-read edition.

Last additions and revisions: March 28, 2009, January 13, 2011.

ADVERTISEMENT

The author, sensible that in the works of this kind, many errors will escape the most critical observation, requests his friends to be free in offering him their remarks upon this first edition, and promises to make use of them in correcting errors, supplying defects and retrenching superfluities.

The second and third parts are preparing for the Press, and will be published as soon as they are ready, unless an unfavorable reception of the first should prevent.

As the whole will be published under the protection of a law of this state, entitled, “An Act for the encouragement of Literature and Genius,” all Printers and Booksellers will take notice of this information, and not incur the penalties of that Statute.

INTRODUCTION

To attach deep rooted prejudices and oppose the current of opinion, is a task of great difficulty and hazard. It commonly requires length of time and favorable circumstances to diffuse and establish a sentiment among the body of people; but when a sentiment has acquired the stamp of time and the authority of general custom, it is too firm to be shaken by the efforts of an individual: Even error becomes too sacred to be violated by the assaults of innovation.

But the present period is an era of wonders: Greater changes have been wrought, in the minds of men, in the short compass of eight years past, than are commonly effected in a century.

Previously to the late war, America preserved the most unshaken attachment to Great-Britain: The kind, the constitution, the laws, the commerce, the fashions, the books, and even the sentiments of Englishmen were implicitly supposed to be the *best* on earth: not only their virtues and improvements, but their prejudices, and their errors, their vices and their follies were adopted by us with avidity. But by a concurrence of those powerful causes that effect almost instantaneous revolutions in states, the political views of America have suffered total change. She now sees a mixture of profound wisdom and consummate folly in the British constitution; a ridiculous compound of freedom and tyranny in their laws; and a few struggles of patriotism, overpowered by the corruptions of a wicked administration. She views the vices of that nation with abhorrence, their errors with pity, and their follies with contempt.

While the Americans stand astonished at their former delusion and enjoy the pleasure of a final separation from their insolent sovereigns, it becomes their duty to attend to the *arts of peace*, and particularly to the interests of *literature*; to see if there be not some errors to be corrected, some defects to be supplied, and some improvements to be introduced into our systems of education, as well as into those of civil polity. We find Englishmen practicing upon very erroneous maxims in politics and religion; and possibly we shall find, upon careful examination, that their methods of education are equally erroneous and defective.

The British writers remark it as one of the follies of their nation, that they have attended more to the study of ancient languages and foreign

languages, than to the improvement of their own. The ancient Greek and Roman languages, and the modern French and Italian, have generally been made a necessary part of a polite or learned education; while a grammatical study of their own language, has, till very lately been totally neglected. This ridiculous practice has found its way into America; and so violent have been the prejudices in support of it, that the whispers of common sense, in favor of our native tongue, have been silenced amidst the clamor of pedantry in favor of Greek and Latin.

The consequence is, that few attempts have been made to reduce our language to rules, and expunge the corruptions that ignorance and caprice, unguided by any standard, must necessarily introduced. It is but a short time since we have had a grammar of our own tongue, formed upon the true principles of its Saxon origin: And those who have given us the most perfect systems, have confined themselves chiefly to the two last branches of grammar, Analog and Syntax. In the two first, Orthography and Prosody, that is, in the spelling and pronunciation of words, we have no guide, or none but such as lead into the numerable errors. The want of some standard in schools has occasioned a great variety of dialects in Great-Britain and of course, in America. Every country in England, every State in America and almost every town in each State, has some peculiarities in pronunciation which are equally erroneous and disagreeable to its neighbors. And how can these distinctions be avoided? The sounds of our letters are more capricious and irregular than those of any alphabet with which we are acquainted. Several of our vowels have four or five different sounds; and the same sounds are often expressed by five, six or seven different characters. The café is much the same with our consonants: And these different sounds have no mark of distinction. How would a child or a foreigner learn a different sound of *o* in these words, *rove, move, dove*, or of *oo* in *poor, door*? Or that *a, ai, ei*, and *e*, have precisely the same sound in these words, *bare, laid, vein, there*? Yet these and fifty other irregularities have passed unnoticed by authors of Spelling Books and Dictionaries. They study the language enough to find the difficulties of it – they tells us that it is impossible to reduce it to order – that it is to be learnt only by the ear – they lament the disorder and dismiss it without a remedy.

Thus the pronunciation of our language, tho' the most important and difficult of grammar, is *left* to parents and nurses – to ignore and caprice – to custom, accident or nothing – Nay to something worse, to coxcombs, who have a large share in directing the *polite taste* of pronunciation, which of course is as vicious as that of any other class of people. And while this is the case, every person will claim the light to pronounce most agreeably to his own fancy, and the language will be exposed to perpetual fluctuation.

This consideration gave rise to the following little system, which is designed to introduce uniformity and accuracy of pronunciation into common schools. It cost me much labour to form a plan that should be both *simple* and *accurate*. The one here adopted seems to unite these two articles; at least so far as to prevent any material errors. A more accurate method might have been invented; but it must have been too complicated to be useful. The rules for ascertaining a just pronunciation are so simple and concise, that flatter myself that they fall within the comprehension of the most indifferent capacity. Some may possibly be too indolent to study them; and others, from a principle of self-sufficiency, may affect to despise them. The former will be modest enough neither to approve nor condemn what they deem beneath their attention; and I would inform the latter that after I had devoted and I had devoted nine years to acquisition of knowledge, three or four of which were spent in studying languages, and about the same period in teaching English, I was astonished to find myself a stranger to its principal beauties and most obvious faults. Those therefore who disdain this attempt to improve our language and assist the instruction of youth, must be either much more or much less acquainted with the language than I am. The criticisms of those who know more will be received with gratitude; the censure or ridicule of those who know less, will be inexcusable.

The principal part of instructors are illiterate people, and require some early guide to the *standard* of pronunciation, which is nothing else but the customary pronunciation of the most accurate scholars and literary Gentlemen. Such a standard, universally used in schools, would in time, demolish those odious distinctions of provincial dialects, which are the objects of reciprocal ridicule in the United States¹.

In order to render the sounds of words easy and natural for children, it was necessary to alter the customary method of dividing syllables. This is done with deliberation and diffidence; but with full conviction that both necessity and utility demanded an alternation. Besides this, I am supported by the authority of some of the most eminent literary characteristics in America, and the best English Grammarians. Mr. Dilworth has endeavored to establish general and arbitrary rules for division of syllables, and has divided his tables according to them, without any regard to the proper sounds of words, which is the only just rule in this matter. This single circumstance has led learners into more errors in articulation, than all other causes whatever².

As Mr. Dilworth's New Guide (which by the way, is the *oldest* and most imperfect guide we use in schools) is commonly used and his authority become as sacred as the traditions of the Jews, or the Mahometan bible, I shall take the liberty to make some remarks upon it, with that plainness that is due to truth.

It is an unerring rule in our language, that when the accent falls upon a consonant, the foregoing vowel is short, and when the accent falls on the vowel, it is long.

The words *cluster*, *habit*, Mr. Dilworth divides *clu-ster ha-bit*; according to which, a child naturally pronounces the vowel in the first syllable, long. But the vowels are all short; the accent is on the first syllable and not only so, but particularly on the consonants *s* and *b*. Here then, according to his plan of dividing syllables, the accent, which is on the first syllables, the accent, which is on the first syllable, falls upon a consonant that is joined to the last. Into such monstrous absurdities was he driven by his zeal to establish general rules. In order to obviate this difficulty, he has placed a *double accent* this *clu''ster, ha'' bit*. If by double accent he meant, a union of two accents, this is not true, for there can be but one. If by double accent be meant, the sound of the consonant repeated that is – this is, the sound joined to the first and to the last also, this is not true: For if fifty consonants of a same kind were joined together, no more than would could be sounded. I appeal to the most accurate ear, whether, in ordinary pronunciation, there be the least different in the sounds. Of these words, *hab-it, hab-bit, habb-bit*: And if there be not, then double accent is a term without meaning, and the use of it is only an addition circumstances to puzzle children. Had Mr.

Dilworth attended to the foregoing rule, he could not have blundered into so gross an error. But this is not so surprising when we reflect that the authors of dictionaries have made the same mistake. I do not recollect to have seen more than one dictionary, that takes the notice of the important distinction between an accented vowel and an accented consonant., Let words be divided as they ought to be pronounced *cluster*, *hab-it*, *nos-tril*, *bish-op*, and the smallest child cannot mistake a just pronunciation. The only reason why we divide syllables for children, is to lead them to the proper pronunciation of words; and the easiest and most natural way to do this, in spite of the most venerable authority, must eternally be the best way.

Mr. Dilworth tells us that *ti* before a vowel, sound like *si* or *sh*; but here are so many exceptions to this rule, that it would better have been omitted. There are several hundred words, in which *ti* before a vowel retains their proper sound. But they do not sound like *si*, for them *nation*, *motion*, must be pronounced *na-si-on*, *mo-si-on*. The proper sound of *ti* is *sh*. Then if we make three syllables of these words, they will stand thus, *na-sh-on*, *mo-sh-on*, and we have one syllable without any vowel and consequently without any sound. But they are not words of three syllables and are not considered as such, except in the old version of the psalms. However the might be pronounced formerly, *tion*, *tia*, &c. are now by universal consent pronounced in one syllable and so are written by all the poets. In compliance with universal custom and the settled propriety of the language, I have ventured to consider them as one syllable, as will be observed in the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, and 27th tables.

Mr. Dilworth tells us that *b* sounds like *t* in *subtle*, and *t* like *s* in *whistle*, *thistle*. This is so far from being true, that, in these words they have no sound at all; and in all words where *b* is not mute, it has one invariable sound. He has twelve and fifteen pages devoted to English, Scotch, Irish towns and boroughs. Whatever purpose these may serve in Great-Britain, they are certainly useless in America.

His Grammar, being founded entirely upon the principles of the *Latin* language, is in fact worse than none, as it is calculated to lead into error. The only circumstance that renders it tolerably harmless, is that it is very little used and still less understood.

In short, though his Spelling Book was a great improvement upon former methods of education, yet almost every part of it was originally defective; and is rendered still of so by the improvements that have been made in our language since it was first published. But the late revolution has rendered it still more improper for America; and yet ten thousands of these books, are annually reprinted and find rapid sale, when one half of the work is totally useless and the other half defective and erroneous.

In the following work, have begun with easy monosyllable, and proceeded to easy words of four syllables; because it seems a great error to admit difficult words in the lessons for children. Some of our hardest words to pronounce are monosyllables; these I have reserved till children have gone through easy words of four syllables, when they will in some measure be fitted for engaging with the more difficult tables. I have endeavored to associate words of the same class in the same table, that persons may know where to find them and learn their true pronunciation; I have been careful to arrange them in such a manner that their sounds might be represented by the smallest possible number of figures. To effect this, in some short tables I have wholly disregarded the order of the Alphabet; and in all I have paid no regard to this order, further than the first letter. Particular care has been taken to collect the words, which cannot be comprised in the rules I have laid down, being principally derived from the French or Greek, and to shew their pronunciation in distinct columns.

The names of domestic articles, animals, fruits, &c. are collected for the use and pleasure of children, who are usually taught to be better acquainted with all the words in the language, than with the written names of articles with which they are most familiar.

The advantage of publishing, in a work of this kind the names of the United States, the counties in each, &c. will not be disputed by any American. The accounts from several states, are yet imperfect: but care will be taken to collect, by the best means of information, such accurate accounts from the several states, as to correct any errors and supply any defects, that the present imperfect and fluctuating state of geography in this country may unavoidably occasion.

In spelling and accenting, I have generally made *Dr. Johnson's* dictionary my guide; as in point of orthography this seems to be the most approved authority in the language³.

It will be observed, that in all the easy lessons, taken from scripture, the name of Deity is generally omitted. The reason of this omission is important and obvious. Nothing has greater tendency to lessen the reverence which mankind ought to have for the Supreme Being, than a careless repetition of his name upon every trifling occasion. Experience shows that a frequent thoughtless repetition of that sacred word, which, in our Spelling Books, often occurs two or three times in a line, renders the name as familiar to children as the name of their book, and they mention it with the same indifference. To prevent this profanation, such passages are selected from scripture, as contain some important precepts of morality and religion, in which that sacred name is seldom mentioned. Let *sacred things* be appropriated to *sacred purposes*⁴.

The easy dialogues, familiar phrases, stories, &c. are calculated not only to entertain; but to inspire the minds of youth, with an abhorrence of vice, indolence and meanness; and with a love of virtue, industry and good manners.

The reason why no grammar is annexed to the Spelling-Book is very obvious. Children commonly wear out more than one book before they are able to read, much less to study grammar; in such hands a grammar is thrown away. For this reason it is proposed to publish a grammar, founded on the true principles of our language, in a separate volume with rules for reading and a collection of historical and moral essays, selected from the best authors as exercises for reading and speaking. These will make the second and third part of this work. – This will serve as a general explanation of the outlines of this institute. The author's intention is certainly good – he wishes to render the acquisition of our language easy and the pronunciation accurate and uniform. The necessity of reforming our present method of instruction, was suggested by his own experience; and the plan here adopted here has been pursued with increasing conviction, that, if well executed, it would be extensively useful. He feels diffident of his own abilities in this arduous and delicate undertaking; but is induced, by the opinion of better judges, to hazard an edition and submit the performance to the public scrutiny. Whatever innovations are admitted into the work are warranted by reason, experience, or the authority of eminent scholars: On these the author rests the work and hopes for a favorable reception. Mankind are always startled at *new things*; they believe a thing *right* and *best*,

because they have never suspected otherwise, or because it is the general opinion. But *custom*, or *the run of opinion* is only presumptive evidence that a thing is *right* and no proof at all that it is *best*. A person of *sense* must have *better* evidence before he believes either. Those who rail so much at *new things* ought to consider, that every improvement in life was once *new*; nay their favorite Dilworth was once a *new thing*: And had *these* and other *new things* never been introduced, we should have all, this moment, been pagans and savages.

The author feels the danger to which he exposes himself by this publication: He foresees that some will find fault with it, because they think it has merit, others, because they think it has none: Some perhaps from worse motives and not a few, who seldom look further than the title page, will gravely enquire, with the harmless Israelite of old. *Whether any good thing can come out of Nazareth?*

So much may be relied on, that whoever studies the language with half the attention the author has, will be convinced, there is room enough for amendments, in every part of Grammar.

Books of this kind have generally been ushered into the world under patronage of great names. The author sincerely laments the necessity of this practice; and is determined to adopt it only in part. The favorable sentiments of a few Gentlemen of eminence, offered to the public another channel, will be sufficient to excite their attention to the performance: Then if it have merit, it will make its own way in the world; if it have not, the author chuses (chooses) not, by any means, to use the authority of respectable names to impose a worthless production upon his countrymen. He chooses rather to see it buried in universal neglect. The plan has the approbation of some principal literary characters, not only in Connecticut, but in the States of New-York, New-Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

The author wishes to promote the honour and prosperity of the confederated republics of America; and cheerfully throws his mite into the common treasure of patriotic exertions. This country must in some future time, be distinguished by the superiority of her literary improvements, as she is already by the liberality of her civil and ecclesiastical constitutions. Europe is growing old in folly, corruption and tyranny – in that country laws are perverted, manners are licentious, literature is declining and human nature debased. For America in her

infancy to adopt the present maxims of the old world, would be to stamp the wrinkles of decrepid age upon the bloom of youth and to plant the seeds of decay in a vigorous constitution. American glory begins to dawn at a favorable period, and under flattering circumstances. We have the experience of the whole world before our eyes; but to receive indiscriminately the maxims the maxims of government, the manners and literary taste of Europe and make them the ground on which to build our systems in America, must soon convince us that a durable and stately edifice can never be erected upon the mouldering pillars of antiquity. It is the business of *Americans* to select the wisdom of all nations, as the basis of her constitutions – to avoid their errors, -- to prevent the introduction of foreign vices and corruptions and check the career of her own – to promote virtue and patriotism, -- to embellish and improve the sciences, - to diffuse an uniformity and purity of *language*, - - to add superior dignity to this infant Empire and to human nature.

Endnotes for Webster's 1783 INTRODUCTION

¹Not to mention small differences, I would observe that inhabitants of New England and Virginia have a peculiar pronunciation which affords much diversion to their neighbors. Or the other hand, the language of the Middle States is tinged with a variety of Irish, Scotch and German dialects which are justly censured as deviations from propriety and the standard of elegant pronunciation. The truth is *usus est Norma Loquendi*, general custom is the rule of speaking, and every derivation from this must be wrong. The dialect of one State is as ridiculous as that of another; each is authorized by local custom; and neither is supported by any superior excellence. If in New-England we hear a flat drawling pronunciation, in more Southern States, we hear the words *veal*, *very*, *vulgar* pronounced *weal*, *wery*, *wulgar*; *wine*, *winter*, &c. changed into *vine*, *vinter*; *soft* becomes *saft*; and *raisins* and *wound*, contrary to all rule and propriety, are pronounced *resins* and *woond*. It is the present mode of the Southward to pronounce *u* like *yu*, as *virtyue* and *fortyune*, &c. and in a rapid pronunciation, these become *virchue*, *forchune*, as also *duty*, *duel*, are changed into *juty*, *juel*. The advocates for this pronunciation pretend, that this is the English sound of *u*; but this cannot be true; because they do not give *u* the sound *yu*, to one word originally English. It seems to arise rather from an imitation of French, which has been a remarkable folly of the English nation; or perhaps it originated in a fondness for singularity which, has corrupted the language more than all the ignorance of the vulgar. But every innovation of this kind ought to be discountenanced.

It would be much more for the reputation of Americans to unite in destroying provincial and local distinctions, in resisting the stream of corruptions, that is ever flowing from ignorance and pride and in establishing one uniform standard of elegant pronunciation; than to blend two different languages together by applying French sounds to English words, to suffer the structure of our language to be constantly changing and its beauty to be disfigured by every coxcomb.

²“A good articulation consists in giving every letter in a syllable its due proportion of sound, according to the most approved custom of pronouncing it; and in making such a distinction, between syllables, of which words are composed, that the ear shall without difficulty acknowledge their number, and perceive at once to which syllable each letter belongs. Where these points are not observed, the articulation is proportionally defective”. Sheridan on Elocution Lect. 2.

³There seems to be an inclination from some writers to alter the spelling of words, by expunging the superfluous letters. This appears to arise from the same pedantic fondness for singularity that prompts to new fashions of pronunciation. Thus they write the words *favour*, *honour*, &c. without *u*. But it happens unluckily that, in these words, they have dropped the wrong letter – they have omitted the

letter that is founded and retained one that is silent; for the words are pronounced *onur, favor*. They may with the same propriety drop *u* in *pious, virtuous, &c.* and a thousand other letters. Thus *e* omitted in *judgement*; which is the most necessary letter in the word; it being that alone which softens *g*. Into these and many other absurdities are people led by a rage for singularity. Our language is indeed pronounced very differently from the spelling; this inconvenience we regret, but cannot remedy. To attempt a progressive change, is idle; it will keep the language in perpetual fluctuation without an effectual amendment. And to attempt a total change at once, is equally idle and extravagant, as it would render the language unintelligible. We may better labor to speak our language with propriety and elegance, as we have it, than to attempt a reformation without advantage or possible success.

⁴The same objection occurs against the frequent use of the Bible as a school book. See this matter considered in the Essay prefixed to the third part of this work.

A S C H E M E

Exhibiting the deficiency, redundancy, and irregularities, in the orthography of the English Language.

No. I

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
a	e	i	o	u	y	a	au	oi
hate,	here,	time,	note,	tune,	yes,	ask*,	cause,	voice,

10	11
oo	ou
noon,	loud.

Here are eleven distinct sounds to be expressed by only six characters. So that there are wanted five simple characters to represent the English vowels.

No. II

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
b,	d,	f,	g,	h,	j,	k,	l,	m
but,	done,	fine,	give,	hand,	jest,	king,	like,	more
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
nice,	pine,	rife,	fame,	time,	vine,	zeal,	chafe,	shall

19	20	21
th	th	si

Here are twenty-one consonants to be expressed by only fifteen different characters. To supply this deficiency we use double letters as, ch, sh, th, and the letters united lose the sounds of the simple letters, and represent

*This sound of *a* seems to arise from the following consonant; but it is really a sound by itself. I is as long as *a* in *name*, but a very different sound; for which cause, I have considered it, as a different vowel.

another distinct simple sound. They are therefore to be considered as simple consonants, and as such ought to have names peculiar to themselves. The sound of *si* in *delusion* is best expressed by *zy*, *deluzuon*; but perhaps we ought to consider it a simple sound, belonging to the last syllable; and as such we have no character for it in the alphabet. It will be observed that I have omitted *c*, *q*, *w*, *x* in the foregoing scheme: The reason is they have no powers but what are expressed by other letters. *C* is always *k* or *s*; *q* is always followed by *u* and answers to *kw*; *w* is the same as *oo*; and *x* is always found as *gz*, *ks*, *z*. Here we see, that for thirty-two sounds, we have but twenty-two letters of different powers of sounds. If to this we add the short quantities of the sounds *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, *oo*, which really require different characters to be expressed accurately, we have thirty-eight distinct qualities of sound, to express which we have but twenty-two letters; the deficiency therefore is fifteen.

Let us now attend to the redundancy of the language.

No. III

	1	2	3	4	5
A	fate	hat	halt	ask	
E	here	let	there	her	
I	time	tin	fir	fatigue	
O	note	not	prove	love	gone
U	cube	tub	bush	busy	

Here every vowel has four or five sounds.

there	here			
rove	move	dove		
four	your	lour		rough
who	go			
door	poor	blood		stood
bear	hear	head		heart

Here different sounds are marked the same way.

1 st or long <i>a</i>	1 st or long <i>e</i>	3 rd or broad <i>a</i>	1 st or long <i>o</i>
a hate	e here	a hall	o go
ai fair	ee meet	au cause	ow blow
ay day	ea heal	aw law	oe foe
ey they	ie field	oa groat	ou four
ei vein	ei deceive	ou ought	oo door
au gauge	i machine	o gone	oa groan
1 st or long <i>u</i>	2 nd or short <i>u</i>	<i>oo</i> long	<i>oo</i> short
u cube	u bud	oo room	oo root
eu feud	oo blood	o move	o wolf
ew new	ou tough	ou tour	ou would
ue true	o dove	y liquid	u bush
ieu lieu	i bird	y your	
eau beauty	e her	I million	
iew view			
ui fruit			

Here it is to be observed the same sound often expressed in six, seven or eight different ways.

Consonants

C has two sounds

k as in café
s as in cellar

F is represented by
two other combinations
of letters

ph Philip
gh laugh

G has two sounds

hard go
soft gentle

G has the same sound

as soft g joy

S has two sounds s this

z rise

X has three sounds

gz example
ks wax
z Xenophon

Th has two sounds

soft think
hard thou

Ch has three sounds

ch chase
sh chaise
k chorus

Ti and ci sound like sh

nation
vicious

The cause of this irregularity and confusion in the orthography of our language is doubtless this: The foundation of the language is Saxon, and our Saxon ancestors had proper characters to express every sound in their native tongue. During the dark ages, learning was confined to the Romish clergy, who spake and wrote the Latin language; but the body of the people in England continued to use their native Saxon. After the revival of learning and the invention of printing, these two languages were gradually incorporated into each other; most of the Saxon words continue in use to this day and form the language of the common people; at the same time a vast number of Roman words were introduced; and adapted to the Saxon termination and at present form the poetic and elevated styles. There were several sounds in the original Saxon, that were unknown to the Romans; notwithstanding this, the Saxon characters were thrown aside and the Roman Alphabet introduced. How much the language has suffered by the change will be understood by the foregoing scheme. It is too late to cure the disorder; the most we can do is render it as little troublesome as possible. The design of the foregoing scheme is to show the difficulties of our language, and the astonishing neglect of all our Dictionaries, Grammars, and Spelling-Books and the necessity of a reformation.

Further OBSERVATIONS on the ENGLISH ALPHABET and the EXPLANATION of the PLAN OF PRONUNCIATION introduced in this work; with which every Master and Mistress, who uses it, ought to be perfectly acquainted.

A *LETTER* is a *mark* or *characters* used to form words.

There are *twenty-six* of these *letters* or *characters* in English.

Seven of the letters, viz. a, e, i, o, u, y, w, are *vowels*: *The others are called consonants*¹.

A *vowel* is a *simple sound*, formed by opening the mouth in a certain manner, without touching the parts of it.

There are eleven *distinct separate* sounds or vowels in English, which may be expressed by the following letters.

a,	e,	i,	o,	u,	y,	au,	oi,
name,	here,	time,	note,	tune,	yes,	taught,	voice,

ou,	oo,	a
found,	tool ² ,	ask

But as these sounds have different quantities; that is, are pronounced in different spaces of time; and as these same characters express different sounds in different words, and the same sounds are often expressed by different letters I shall represent the several sounds and their quantities, as nearly as possible, by figures in the following manner:

[21]
INDEX

	First Sound.	Examples
Long.		1 1
	a	name, fate.
	e or ee	here, feet.
	i	time, find.
	o	note, fort.
	u or ew	tune, new.
	y	my, comply.
	Second Sound.	
Short.		2 2
	a	man, hat.
	e	men, met
	i	thin, pit
	o	not, fop
	u	tun, but
	y	glory, Egypt.

	Third Sound.	Examples
<i>au</i> or broad <i>a</i>		3 3
	a	bald, tall.
	au	taught.
	aw	law, draw.
	ou	fought.
	o	gone, cost.
	Fourth Sound.	
	4 4	ask, gape.
<i>oi</i> proper	Fifth Sound.	
		5 5
	oi	voice, noise
	oy	boy, joy
<i>oo</i> long	Sixth Sound.	
		6 6
	oo	room, boot
	o	move, prove.

Seventh Sound.	Examples.	Ninth Sound.	Examples.
	7 7		9 9
<i>oo</i> short	oo book, flood. o wolf. ou would, could. u bush, bull.	<i>u</i> short	i fir, bird. o come, love e her.
	Eighth Sound.		Tenth Sound.
	8 8		10 10
<i>oo</i> proper	ou found, loud. ow now, cow.	<i>a</i> long	e there, where. ey prey, they. ei vein, veil. ai laid, fail. ay day, pray.

N. B. The 2nd sound of *u* and the 9th sound being precisely the same, the figures 2 and 9 will stand indifferently over *u*. The 1st of *a* and the 10th are the same, and therefore that sound of *a* may be marked by either 1 or 10.

EXPLANATION of the INDEX.

A figure represents a certain sound or quantity of sound, whether that sound or quantity be expressed by one letter or by two. The figure 1 represents the long sound or quantity of six vowels. The figure 2 represents the short quantity of the same. The long quantity is double in time of the short; thus requires double time to

pronounce the word *made*, that it does to pronounce the word *mad*. These sounds are so easy and natural that they can not be easily mistaken. The figure 3 represents the broad sound of *a*; tho' the same be expressed by several different letters or combinations of letters. And in general the learner is directed, whenever he finds a figure placed over any vowel in the following tables, to turn to the Index, and look for the same vowel and he will find the true sound of that vowel, in the examples.

All silent letters are printed in Italic characters. (But *s* in an Italic character is sounded like *z*.) Thus in the words *head*, *goal*, *build*, *people*, *dumb*, *taught*,

the letters in Italics are *silent* or *mute*, and the figures show the sound of quantity of the vowel that is pronounced.

It must be observed that *e*, at the end of words of more than one syllable, is always silent (Except in a few words of Greek and Latin origin, as *Penelope*, *epitome*, *catastrophe*, *recipe*, in which *e* is sounded.) but it is of use to answer the following purposes; First, to lengthen a foregoing vowel, as *bid*, *bide*; *can*, *cane*: Second to soften *c* and *g* as *rac*, *race*; *rag*, *rage*: Third, to change the sound of *th*, as in *bath*, *bathe*; *cloth*, *clothe*.

Some instructors have absurdly taught their pupils to pronounce *y* at the end of words like long *e*. But they mistake the true sound; for at the end of monosyllables it is sometimes long *i* as in *thy*; at the end of words of more syllables than one, it is always *i* long or short; *y* and *i* being only different characters of the same sound.

CONSONANTS

A Consonant is a letter that cannot be sounded without a vowel.

Those consonants which have no sound of their own are called *Mutes*; their names of which begin with a consonant, viz. *be*, *ce*, *de*, *ge*, *ja*, *ka*, *pe*, *cu*, *gte*, *ve*.

Those consonants which have an imperfect sound of their own, are called *half-vowels*; the names of which are begin with a vowel, viz. *el*, *em*, *en*, *ar*, *ef*, *es*.

The four first, *l*, *m*, *n*, *r*, are also called liquids, because of that smooth, easy sound with which they glide away after a mute; as *l* after *b* in *blem-ish*.

The sound of the half-vowels is obvious in the words *feeble*, *baptism*, *heaven*, *lucre*, *half*, *sphere*, which are pronounced nearly *feabl*, *baptisem*, *heavn*, *lurk*, *haef*, *esphere*, not giving *e* its full sound.

Some people, finding a little difficulty pronouncing the half-vowels, give the full sound of *e* before them, thus *feeble*, *heaven*, &c. which is an error that ought to be corrected in infancy.

The consonant *c* is hard like *k* before *a, o, u, l, r*, and at the end of words, as *cap chord, cup, cloth, crop, public*; but always soft like *s* before *e, i, y*; as *cellar, civil, cypress*.

G is also hard before, *a, o, u*, as *gat, got, gum*; but sometimes hard and sometimes soft before *e, i, y*.

H is only an aspiration or breathing and is often silent, as in *hour*.

S often sounds like *z* and then it is printed in an Italic character, as *devise*; which is sounded *devize*.

X at the beginning of words is sounded like *z*. as in *Xenophon*, in the middle and end of words, like *ks*, as *wax Xerxes*.

Ch is often sounded like *k*, See Table 25, Lesson 2.

Gh are always silent or sounded or like *f*. Whenever *gh* in this book, are printed
4 3 2
in Roman characters, they are sounded like *f*, as in *laugh, cough, tough*.

Th has two sounds; the first as in *thing, bath*; the other, as in *this, that*. These sounds are distinguished by the numbers 1, 2.
1 1 2 2

SYLLABLES

A syllable is one letter or so many letters as can be pronounced with one impulse of the voice., as *a, hand*.

Spelling is the art of dividing words into their proper syllables in order to find their true pronunciation.

GENERAL RULE

The best way of dividing words for children, is to divide them so as naturally to lead the learner into a right pronunciation. (This is Dr. Lowth's idea of spelling and the sentiment of several Literary Gentleman in America, upon whose authority I have ventured to reject all particular rules and to divide the syllables just as the words are pronounced. See the Introduction.)

Monosyllables are words of one syllable

Disyllables are words of two syllable.

Trissyllables are words of three syllables.

Polysyllables are words of many syllables.

Accents stress or force of voice that is laid upon any syllable of a word; as de-**liv**-er where the accent is on the second syllable.

Emphasis is the stronger force or percussive of the voice laid upon some significant word in a sentence.

The emphatic words are printed in Italics.

Cadence is a lower or weaker expression of the voice at the close of a sentence.

Quantity is the time of pronouncing a syllable.

The *unaccented* syllables of words are pronounced in half the time of the long accent.

When the accent falls on a *vowel*, it is *long*, as in **glo-ry**, **ho-ly**.

When the accent falls on a *consonant*, the vowel of that syllable is *short*, as in **cred-it**, **clus-ter**.

All the vowels in the unaccented syllables, are short, as in *fu-tu-ri-ty*, where all the vowels, except *u* in the second syllable, are short.

N. B. Children when they first begin, are not capable of using rules or figures. But by the time they are six or seven years of age, they may be taught to know the sound of each figure, and it may be well to call figures, not *one, two, three, four, &c.* but by the sounds that they represent in the Index.

They may also learn very early to distinguish the silent letters. And it may be well to teach them to sound the Italic *s, ez*; which name will very naturally lead to its proper sound in words.

But the principal advantage of this plan will be, to teach the Instructors of children a right pronunciation. There are very few men of letters, who have acquired accuracy of pronouncing *sentences*; while the greater part of Instructors are illiterate men and women, who are wholly ignorant of rules respecting *both*. If it should be thought that the following tables are too long, some of those, that consist

of easy words, may be omitted. But I would not advise this; I rather recommend that a child be able to spell the whole, before he leaves this volume. **Spelling is the foundation of reading and the greatest ornament of writing.** As soon as a child can spell all the tables, with the help of his book, let him divide his time: Let him spend one part of the day in reading the easy Lessons, and the other part in getting the tables by heart. Let him begin with the first tables and proceed to the last; learning a certain number of words by heart at each lesson, so as to be able to spell them readily, as soon as the master puts them to him. This will afford a pleasing variety to the child, who is apt to grow dull by being kept too long upon the same study.

Endnotes to the SCHEME

¹The letters *y* and *w* are sometimes ranked among the consonants; but very erroneously. Neither of them has any property of a consonant though both have every property of a vowel. *Y* is in every respect the same as *i*.

(There is a lot of interesting information here which I shall supply shortly. 3/22/07)

I hope to work on the Tables of words during the summer vacation 2009.

It is now 1/13/12, and I am finally returning to working on this document. It was a question posed to me by Gina Cook on her LEXI blog concerning the date of Webster's statement, "**Spelling is the foundation of reading and the greatest ornament of writing.**" that motivated me to return to working on this document. The date 1773 had been circulating around on the Internet a popular essay written by authorities in the field. Gina noticed that I had the same quote on my website but attributed it to Noah Webster's first spelling book published in 1783. The 1773 date seemed too early to Gina and her students because Webster would have been only 15 years old at that time, hardly old enough to have published the quote. I was able to provide the original source from my facsimile of the 1783 edition. Obviously, the 1773 date was a simple typo for 1783. It is unfortunate that the wrong date has now become the most referred to date for the quote.

I will see if I can get back to typing the rest of the book in this year. I am mainly fascinated by the way that Webster approached the analysis of the sounds and the encoding-decoding process. He was on the right track even if we may question some of the details. I believe that students who learned to read from his spelling book would have been a very good reader. In our search to improve reading instruction today, I believe we should take a closer look at Webster's Way and see if it may explain why reading today is so decidedly inferior to reading among the educated class when Webster's books held sway in education.

I will post updates on my Webster blog:

<http://phonicsfirstsyllablesalways.wordpress.com/>

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