

## Word Sorting

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### Introduction

This tutorial guide discusses the definition, approaches, types, benefits, and misconceptions of word sorting.

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### What is Word Sorting?

Word sorting is the process of grouping sounds, words, and pictures into specific categories. Word sorting is the heart of *Words Their Way™: Word Study in Action*. It includes teacher-directed instruction and independent student learning.

Teachers begin word sorting by demonstrating how to sort pictures or word cards by sound or pattern. As students sort word cards or picture cards on their own, teachers help them make discoveries and generalizations about the conventions of English orthography, or spelling. Finally, students will compare and contrast word features such as consonants and digraphs so they can discover similarities and differences within the categories.

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### Approaches to Sorting

Word study experts in the professional development resource *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* explain two different approaches to word sorting: teacher-directed and student-centered. *Words Their Way: Word Study in Action* incorporates both of these approaches. Most introductory word sort tasks are teacher-directed, or closed, sorts. In teacher-directed sorts, teachers define the categories and model the sorting. In student-centered, or open, sorts, students create their own categories with a set of words. The directions are open for students to sort using one of several methods.



### Types of Sorts

There are three types of sorts that correspond to the three layers of English orthography: alphabet, pattern, and meaning.

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## Alphabet




In an Alphabet sort, students compare and contrast words by sound. They do this so they can categorize similar sounds and associate them with letters and letter combinations, syllable patterns, and spelling conventions. For example, words spelled with *-op* like *top*, *pop*, and *hop*, are compared with words spelled with *-ot* like *hot*, *cot*, or *pot*.

Word Families -op, -ot, -og

-op	-ot	-og

Sort 8: Word Families -op, -ot, -og

Word Families -op, -ot, -og

-op	-ot	-og
		
top	pop	pot

Sort 8: Word Families -op, -ot, -og

## Pattern

Next, students compare and contrast words by looking at consistent spelling patterns. For example, words spelled with *-oi* like *join* or *coin*, are compared with words spelled with *-oy* like *joy* or *annoy*. Both sets of words have the same sound, but each follows a unique spelling pattern.

Diphthongs oi, oy, ou, ow

oi	oy	ou	ow
point	boy	sound	brown

Sort 6: Diphthongs oi, oy, ou, ow

Diphthongs oi, oy, ou, ow

Sort 6

soy	join	clown
cloud	found	growl
joy	soil	owl
ground	spoil	toy
crown	pound	ploy
coil	shout	moist
drown	decoy	enjoy
frown	count	coin

Sort 6: Diphthongs oi, oy, ou, ow



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## Sorting Misconceptions

One misconception regarding sorting is that it's hands-on and voices off. Sorting is hands-on, but it's certainly not voices off! Students use oral language and vocalize sorts independently, with partners or as a whole group. This helps cement their learning of word sorts.

Another misconception is that words can only be sorted one time. Actually, mastery is proven by increased speed and accuracy within a sort. Sorts can and should be used multiple times.

The last misconception about sorting is that there must be a specific feature for each sort. While there can be a specific feature or focus for a sort, student-directed or open sorts are a great way to tap into student thinking. These sorts will help teachers gain a greater understanding of your students' thinking and learning.

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## Review

This guide looked at the definition, approaches and types of word sorts: alphabetic, pattern, and meaning. The benefits and misconceptions of word sorting with *Words Their Way: Word Study in Action* were also discussed.

For more information on *Words Their Way: Word Study in Action*, please look for the other tutorials on [myPearsonTraining.com](http://myPearsonTraining.com).