

CHAPTER 2

R-CONTROLLED VOWELS

ar er ir ur or

BEFORE BEGINNING INSTRUCTION

In this chapter, students will be exploring the r-controlled vowel speech sounds (phonemes) and their two-letter **ar**, **er**, **ir**, **ur** and **or** graphemes. An ‘r-controlled’ vowel is a vowel that is followed by the letter **r**. The **r** changes/controls the way the vowel is read and pronounced.

Once students are familiar with the different r-controlled vowel speech sounds, begin to introduce the most common phoneme–grapheme connections.

You may like to review the short vowel 1:1 phoneme–grapheme connections in *Nelson Phonics-in-a-Box 1*, and the common two-letter graphemes that represent consonant digraphs in *Nelson Phonics-in-a-Box 2*. Now that students understand that the letters of the alphabet are part of the code that represents written speech sounds, and that these codes represent speech sounds using one or more letters (graphemes), they are ready to explore more complex phoneme–grapheme connections, beginning with the long /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/ and /u/ vowel sounds (as explored in Chapter 1). Now they are ready to begin exploring the more complex ‘tricky’ vowel phonemes, and their common grapheme representations.

Please note: Just as long vowel speech sounds can be confusing for developing readers and writers when decoding and encoding unfamiliar words, the more complex vowel speech sounds such as the r-controlled /ar/, /er/ and /or/ vowel sounds can be even more confusing, especially when attempting to connect these phonemes with their unfamiliar corresponding graphemes (spelling patterns). This is generally due to the way the letter **r** at the end of a one-syllable word changes the sound of the vowel.

Students who are unfamiliar with the r-controlled vowels tend to mispronounce them when attempting to sound out unfamiliar phoneme–grapheme connections in words, or misspell them when attempting to write them. This is because they are generally drawing upon their already acquired ‘short’ and ‘long’ vowel phoneme–grapheme knowledge, which in the case of r-controlled vowels, doesn’t apply.

As developing readers become proficient and fluent with their foundational phoneme–grapheme knowledge, they will come across more unfamiliar words with more complex phoneme–grapheme connections. Therefore, it is important for students to learn about the varied speech sounds associated with r-controlled vowels and their corresponding two-letter common graphemes, in order to be able to read and spell more complex and unfamiliar words.

It is also recommended that you frequently review the most common long /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/ and /u/ phoneme–grapheme connections (spelling patterns) once these have been introduced.

When students are familiar with the short and long vowels and their most common phoneme–grapheme connections, you can then begin to introduce the more complex ‘tricky’ vowel phoneme–grapheme connections, beginning with the r-controlled vowel.

Review Chapter 1 by going through the short and long vowel sounds represented in the one-syllable words on BLM 9: One-Syllable Words (Short, Long and r-Controlled Vowels) (page 120).

Say:

Let’s read the following one-syllable words together.

Ask students what they notice as you read through the one-syllable words.

Additional notes:

- The short /a/ vowel sound is heard in the middle of the word ‘mat’. The long /a/ vowel sound is heard in the middle of the word ‘mate’.
- The one-letter **a** grapheme represents the short /a/ vowel sound in the word ‘mat’ and the two-letter split vowel **a_e** grapheme represents the long /a/ vowel sound in the word ‘mate’.
- The short /e/ vowel sound is heard in the middle of the word ‘met’. The long /e/ vowel sound is heard in the middle of the word ‘meet’.
- The one-letter **e** grapheme represents the short /e/ vowel sound in the word ‘met’ and the two-letter **ee** grapheme represents the long /e/ vowel sound in the word ‘meet’.
- The short /i/ vowel sound is heard in the middle of the word ‘kit’. The long /i/ vowel sound is heard in the middle of the word ‘kite’.
- The one-letter **i** grapheme represents the short /i/ vowel sound in the word ‘kit’ and the two-letter split vowel **i_e** grapheme represents the long /i/ vowel sound in the word ‘kite’.
- The short /o/ vowel sound is heard in the middle of the word ‘got’. The long /o/ vowel sound is heard in the middle of the word ‘goat’.
- The one-letter **o** grapheme represents the short /o/ vowel sound in the word ‘got’ and the two-letter **oa** grapheme represents the long /o/ vowel sound in the word ‘goat’.
- The short /u/ vowel sound is heard in the middle of the word ‘cut’. The long /u/ vowel sound is heard in the middle of the word ‘cute’.
- The one-letter **u** grapheme represents the short /u/ vowel sound in the word ‘cut’ and the two-letter split vowel **u_e** grapheme represents the long /u/ vowel sound in the word ‘cute’.

Direct and Explicit Instruction to Introduce the r-Controlled Vowels

Explicitly introduce the r-controlled vowels by reading the second set of one-syllable words shown on BLM 9: One-Syllable Words (Short, Long and r-Controlled Vowels) together. You may wish to cut the words up as flashcards for this task.

Draw students’ attention to the way the vowel grapheme changes when we replace the last letter of these words with the letter **r**.

Ask students to listen to the new sound. Notice how when the letter **r** comes after a vowel in a word, it takes over the short and long sound of the vowel to create a new sound, known as the r-controlled vowel. The r-controlled vowel can be represented by various graphemes, however, for the purpose of the introduction, we will only be focusing on the two-letter **ar**, **er**, **ir**, **or** and **ur** graphemes. The vowel sound before the **r** is controlled by the **r** grapheme and the /r/ sound.

INTRODUCING AND EXPLORING THE R-CONTROLLED VOWEL /AR/ PHONEME–GRAPHEME CONNECTIONS

Begin by introducing the two-letter r-controlled /ar/ vowel learning intentions and success criteria.

Learning intentions:

We are learning that:

- **vowels** have **short, long** and sometimes **tricky** sounds when spoken
- if the **/r/** sound follows the vowel **a** in a word, the **/a/** vowel does not make a regular short or long vowel sound. The vowel is usually forced to change its sound to the **r-controlled vowel sound**. For example, we hear the **/ar/** sound at the beginning of the word 'arm', at the end of the word 'car' and in the middle of the word 'farm'.
- in most CVC words with the **/a/** vowel in the middle, the vowel makes a short vowel sound, as in 'cat', 'hen', 'sit', 'fox' and 'fun', unless it is followed by the **/r/** sound. For example, 'cat' changes to 'car', 'hen' to 'her', 'sit' to 'sir', 'fox' to 'for' and 'fun' to 'fur'.
- the sound **/ar/** is represented by the two-letter grapheme **ar** as in 'car'.

Success criteria:

- I can *make* the sound for the *r-controlled vowel /ar/*.
- I can *hear* the *r-controlled vowel /ar/* in spoken words.
- I can *find* the two-letter *r-controlled vowel /ar/* grapheme in words.
- I can *write* the two-letter *r-controlled vowel /ar/* grapheme.
- I can *blend* sounds together to read and write words that have the two-letter *r-controlled vowel /ar/* grapheme.

You will need:

- BLM 9: One-Syllable Words (Short, Long and r-Controlled Vowels) (page 120)
- BLM 10: Picture Cards (the r-controlled /ar/ and /er/) (page 121)
- r-controlled /ar/ phoneme–grapheme connection Flashcards
- /ar/ One-Word Reader: **ar**
- r-controlled /ar/ Decodable Story Books: *My Dad, Mark, The Car Yard, The Party in the Park, My Mum, Marley* and *The Star in the Tree*.


Differentiation Note

Refer to page 17 in Chapter 1 for differentiation ideas that can be used throughout this book.

Direct and Explicit Instruction of the r-Controlled /ar/ Phoneme and Various Grapheme Connections

Explain that as explored in Chapter 1, vowels have short and long speech sounds.

Demonstrate by saying the short /a/ as in 'cap', and the long /a/ as in 'cape'.

You could also refer to the  code on pages 6 and 14 to hear a model of the correct pronunciation of these short and long vowel sounds.

Introduce the two-letter **ar** grapheme using the /ar/ phoneme–grapheme Flashcards.

Say:

- The two-letter **ar** grapheme represents the /ar/ phoneme.
- We use the two-letter **ar** grapheme at the beginning of the words ‘arm’, ‘art’ and ‘arch’.
- We use the two-letter **ar** grapheme in the middle of the words ‘barn’, ‘farm’ and ‘park’.
- We use the two-letter **ar** grapheme at the end of the words ‘car’, ‘far’ and ‘jar’.

‘I Do’

Show students the first group of /ar/ pictures on BLM 10: Picture Cards (the r-controlled /ar/ and /er/) (page 121) and state what each of the pictures are (arm, farm and car). Make sure you emphasise the r-controlled /ar/ vowel sound when saying these words out loud. Students might also like to refer to the One-Word Reader /ar/. The words ‘farm’ and ‘car’ appear on pages 5 and 1 of the **ar** One-Word Reader.

Point out that each of these words has the long /ar/ vowel sound.

I can hear the r-controlled /ar/ vowel sound at the beginning of the word ‘arm’.

I can hear the r-controlled /ar/ vowel sound in the middle of the word ‘farm’.

I can also hear the r-controlled /ar/ vowel sound at the end of the word ‘car’.

Now write the words ‘arm’, ‘farm’ and ‘car’ on the board and underline the two-letter **ar** grapheme: ‘arm’, ‘farm’ and ‘car’.

Reinforce that the letter **r** after the vowel is controlling the sound of the vowel in a word.

Explain that the r-controlled /ar/ vowel sound in the words ‘arm’, ‘farm’ and ‘car’ is represented by the two-letter **ar** grapheme (spelling pattern) when written.

Draw students’ attention to the underlined two-letter **ar** grapheme (spelling pattern) in each word.

Explain that the two-letter **ar** grapheme in the words ‘arm’, ‘farm’ and ‘car’ is made up of the two letters **a** and **r**.

Now write some different words with the same two-letter **ar** grapheme on the board, such as ‘arch’, ‘start’ and ‘spark’. Have students come up and underline the two-letter **ar** grapheme in each word.

‘We Do’

Show students the second group of **ar** pictures on BLM 10: Picture Cards (the r-controlled /ar/ and /er/) and state what each of the pictures are (jar, star and scarf). Make sure you emphasise the r-controlled /ar/ vowel sound when saying these words out loud.

Then ask students: *What vowel sound do you hear in all of these words?*

(Students should respond by recognising the r-controlled /ar/ vowel sound that has already been introduced.)

Now write the words ‘jar’, ‘star’ and ‘scarf’ on the board and have students come up and underline the two-letter **ar** grapheme (spelling pattern) in each word.

Remind students that the r-controlled /ar/ vowel sound in the words ‘jar’, ‘star’ and ‘scarf’ is represented by the two-letter **ar** grapheme (spelling pattern) in each of these words when written.