Basic Phonics Rules:

- **Short vowels:** When there is a single vowel in a short word or syllable, the vowel usually makes a short sound. Short vowels usually appear at the beginning of the word or between two consonants. Examples of short vowels are found in the words: cat, pig, bus.
- **Long vowel:** When a short word or syllable ends with a vowel/consonant /e combination, the vowel is usually long and the "e" at the end of the word is silent (this rule doesn't apply in all cases). Examples of vowel/consonant/e combinations are: bake, side, role. Here's another rule with long vowels: when a word or syllable has a single vowel and it appears at the end of the word or syllable, the vowel usually makes the long sound. Examples are: no, she.
- **Consonant blends:** When two or three consonants are blended together, each consonant sound should be heard in the blend. Some examples of consonant blends are: **bl**ack, **gr**ab, **st**op.
- **Consonant digraphs:** A combination of two consonants sounds that together represent a new sound. Examples of consonant digraphs are: **sh**op, **ch**in, **ph**oto.
- **R-controlled vowels:** When a vowel is followed by the letter "r," the vowel does not make the long or short sound but is considered "r-controlled." Examples are: b**ir**d, c**or**n, n**ur**se.
- **Vowel diphthongs:** The term "vowel diphthong" refers to the blending of two vowels sounds – both vowel sounds are usually heard and they make a gliding sound. Examples include: m**oo**n, s**aw**, m**ou**th.

How can we tell if a student is proficient at phonetic decoding?

The two most common tests of decoding skill are asking students to translate printed regular words into sounds (i.e., word identification skill) and asking students to translate printed nonwords or printed unfamiliar words into sounds (i.e., word attack skill). We can measure the student's decoding accuracy—by counting the number of times the student makes the correct sound—or the student's decoding speed—by counting the number of correctly decoded words per minute. High proficiency is indicated by a high rate of accuracy and/or speed.

First, please read the following words aloud: *dog, table, granny*. This is an example of decoding regular, commonly used words, i.e., words frequently found in printed material.

Second, please read the following words, aloud: *blud, wight, frish*. This is an example of decoding nonwords which are pronounceable based on phonics rules but are not real words. Another task involves asking students to read words that they have never seen before—i.e., unfamiliar words.