This month's REAL ENGLISH is offered by Priyanka, a MEXT Teacher Training Scholar from India who has been working on a phonics project in the Faculty of Education at Hirosaki University.

About the Author

My name is Priyanka, and I am a Research Scholar in the Faculty of Education at Hirosaki University, Japan. I come from India, where I work at Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan. I have been working in English education since 2015, with my main focus on Primary English Education. I use teaching aids and games to make learning English easier and more enjoyable for students. As part of my research project at Hirosaki University, I have contributed to the creation of a Phonics Function Chart to support students in their English learning journey. My goal is to make English education more accessible, interactive, and fun for young learners.

Phonics Function Chart

Unlocking Vocabulary Through Sounds and Function Words

Creation of a Memory Tool

INTRODUCTION

When teaching phonics, we often start with *"A for Apple"* and *"B for Ball."* Traditional phonics charts associate each letter with a commonly recognized word — this helps establish a sound-letter relationship. This method also aids students in recognizing and retaining letter sounds, which is essential for reading development.

However, what if we also want to help students recognize the function of these words along with their sounds? I propose a new approach to do both—the Phonics Function Chart. This chart is designed for elementary and middle school students and serves a dual purpose:

a) Reinforcing sound-letter relationships

b) Helping students identify whether a word is a noun, adjective, or verb.

This ensures that learners build a strong foundation in both **phonics** and **grammar**. By following this **integrated approach**, learners associate the sound of a letter with a meaningful word and understand its function in a sentence.

THE CHART

Below is the image of the chart before starting to use:
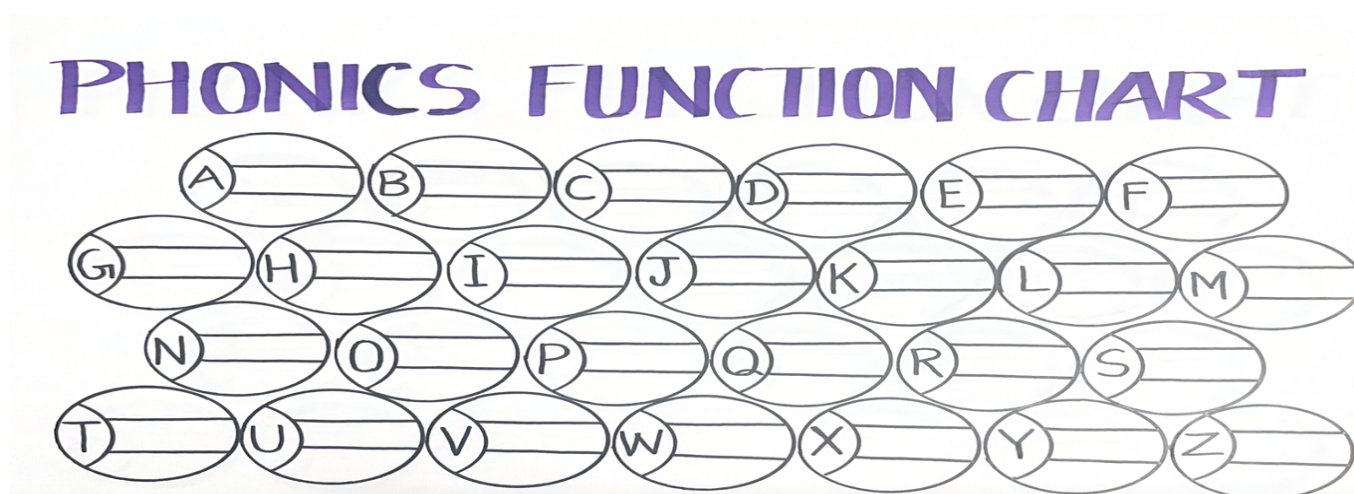
The chart shows the alphabet, from A to Z, with each letter represented by a circle. Students are encouraged to recognize the pattern as the chart expands from A to Z. Additionally, they should notice the three-space structure for each letter. Each letter is represented by a figure divided into three boxes, each serving a specific purpose:

Top Box: For _naming words_ that identify people, animals, places, or things: nouns.
Middle Box: For _describing words_ that express qualities or states: adjectives.
Bottom Box: For _action words_ that describe actions: verbs.

This structured layout can present a diverse range of vocabulary while emphasizing the importance of **fundamental parts of speech** in both spoken and written communication. Rather than using simple naming words like _"A for Apple"_ or _"B for Ball,"_ the chart incorporates words that represent different **grammatical functions**. These words can be drawn from students' daily vocabulary, classroom conversations, interactions with friends, and communication with parents, teachers, doctors, and relatives. For example:

- **A – 'Ask'** (verb) instead of _'Apple'_ (noun)
- **B – 'Beautiful'** (adjective) instead of _'Ball'_ (noun)

By categorizing words according to their grammatical functions, the chart provides a **meaningful framework** that helps students understand language structure and usage. To further aid comprehension, each category can be **color-coded**, making it easier for students to distinguish between nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

The chart would now look like this:

CREATING THE CHART

Creating the Phonics Function Chart in the classroom is an interesting structural process of phonics and vocabulary function. Learning new words becomes exciting when students actively participate in **sorting and categorizing** them. To begin, introduce a theme, such as **"Food"**. Encourage students to **brainstorm** related words and share them with the class. For example, one student might say _avocado,_ while another might say _amazing curry._ While these words start with the same sound, they serve different functions—one is **a noun**, and the other is **an adjective** to curry. Using a Phonics Function Chart, students can place these words into categories based on their function rather than just their initial sounds. This allows them to recognize distinctions such as _sweet potato_ **(noun)** versus _sweet_ **(adjective)** and they begin understanding the structure of language more deeply.

Phonics Function Chart vocabulary can also be expanded with **Visuals.** Once students grasp the categorization concept, introduce visual aids. Show them a picture and prompt them to describe it using a single word. For example, an **illustration of a cake** might prompt words like _delicious_, _chocolate_, or _celebration_. These words are then classified according to their sound and function, reinforcing **skills in describing and skills in explaining**. Encouraging students to suggest **antonyms** for their peers' words adds another layer of vocabulary development.

EXPANDING THE CHART

To take this learning further, students can apply the Phonics Function Chart to Sentence Structure.
Consider the sentence: **"Cakes look delicious."**

- _Cake_ can be placed under **C + Top Box (Noun)**
- _Look_ can be placed under **L + Bottom Box (Verb)**
- _Delicious_ can be placed under **D + Middle Box (Adjective)**

Through this method, students see how nouns are described by adjectives and how verbs connect ideas. This step helps them understand how words function together to form meaningful sentences. As students become comfortable with word classification, encourage them to use the words in conversations and writing exercises.

Have them construct their own sentences using categorized words, helping them to understand how the words function in different contexts. This **hands-on approach** strengthens their confidence in language use.

THE CHART AS A LEARNING TOOL:
CREATIVITY, SELF-ACCESS AND MEMORY

The Phonics Function Chart approach fosters **creative thinking** by helping students connect sounds, meanings, and functions of words. Words are the foundation of communication, and by using this chart, students engage in **active learning**. The Chart not only expands their vocabulary but also strengthens their ability to construct **well-formed sentences**, enhancing their overall language skills. Encouraging students to recognize how words function in both speech and writing builds their confidence as communicators. By integrating this approach into daily lessons, we create a classroom environment where **language exploration** is both engaging, fun and impactful.

This complete chart becomes a **self-accessible resource** for retaining learned vocabulary. The phonics function chart not only supports learning during lessons but also serves as a long-term **memory tool**. Students keep their charts with them in their folder in classroom or at their homes and this collaboratively-created chart acts as a personalized resource for students. It reinforces sound-letter relationships and provides a clear presentation of the vocabulary, categorized by **function—names** *(nouns),* **qualities** *(adjectives),* and **actions** *(verbs).* This chart enables students to independently review the vocabulary at their convenience, making it easier to recall words when needed. By revisiting the chart, students can connect words to their meanings and use them in context, **fostering better retention** over time. Additionally, the consistent practice of creating and using these charts equips students with a structured method to approach vocabulary in future lessons, ultimately building their **confidence and fluency** in English.

2月14日はバレンタインデー。チョコレートをあげるという日本独自の文化となっていますが、私が子どもの頃とはだいぶ様変わりしています。文化の融合といってはおおげさかもしれませんが、身近な季節の行事を少し振り返るだけでも言語を含めた独自の文化の奥行きが見えてきますね。寒さももう少し続きますが、これもまた文化の一部です。

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Next REAL ENGLISH: March!