



# Handouts for Conversation Partners: Pronunciation

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## The International Phonetic Alphabet

ɪ READ	ɪ SIT	ʊ BOOK	uː TOO	ɪə HERE	eɪ DAY	John & Sarah Free Materials 1996	
e MEN	ə AMERICA	ɜː WORD	ɔː SORT	ʊə TOUR	ɔɪ BOY	əʊ GO	
æ CAT	ʌ BUT	ɑː PART	ɒ NOT	eə WEAR	aɪ MY	aʊ HOW	
p FIG	b BED	t TIME	d DO	tʃ CHURCH	dʒ JUDGE	k KILO	g GO
f FIVE	v VERY	θ THINK	ð THE	s SIX	z ZOO	ʃ SHORT	ʒ CASUAL
m MILK	n NO	ŋ SING	h HELLO	l LIVE	r READ	w WINDOW	j YES

### Why learn the phonetic alphabet?

You can use this packet (and most pronunciation resources) without learning the phonetic alphabet. However, the phonetic alphabet is beneficial when learning English. It offers a consistent way to know how a word is pronounced even if the spelling isn't phonetic. It is a universal system for understanding pronunciation. For example, if we know the phonetic alphabet, we know that all of these words have the same vowel sound:

Bow            thou            loud            crowd

Here's how these words would be written in the phonetic alphabet:

baʊ            ðaʊ            laʊd            kraʊd

Now it's easy to tell that the words all have the same diphthong (blended vowel sound).

Here are some useful terms to know when thinking about pronunciation. If you know where to put your tongues, lips, and teeth, it helps distinguish similar sounds.

*Linguistics Vocabulary:*

Voiced sounds (usually sounds that vibrate in your throat): v, z, dg, dʒ, ð, ʒ

Nasal sounds (vibrate in your nasal cavities): m, n, ŋ

Labio-dental (teeth touch the bottom lip): f, v

Interdental (teeth touching between the teeth): th, ð

Bilabial (both lips move): m, w, b, p

Flap: “t” as in “butter”

Glottal: “uh-oh”

Diphthongs: These are blended vowel sounds, such as: boy, how, loud, day, beer, cure. Diphthongs are long vowel sounds.

## Mouth Movements: A Visual Guide

The vowels below progress from high to low:

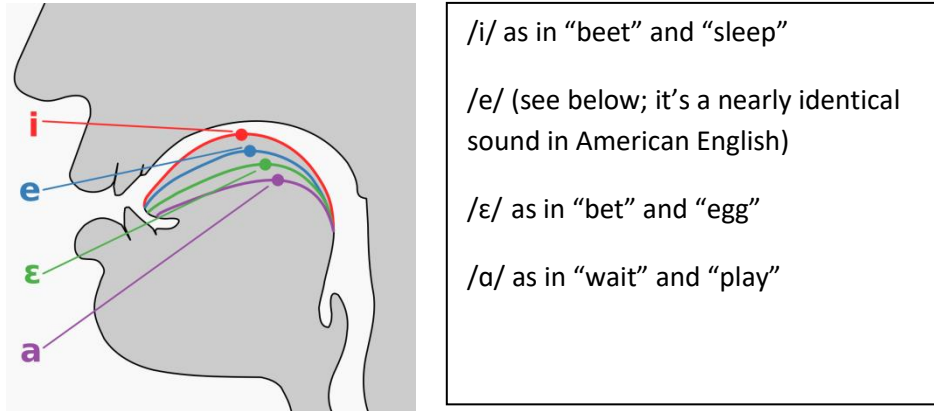


Image Source: Wikipedia

Here are some (but not all) vowel and consonant sounds and their corresponding mouth movements:

u as in “boot” or “blue”

ah as in “lot” and “otter” and “water”

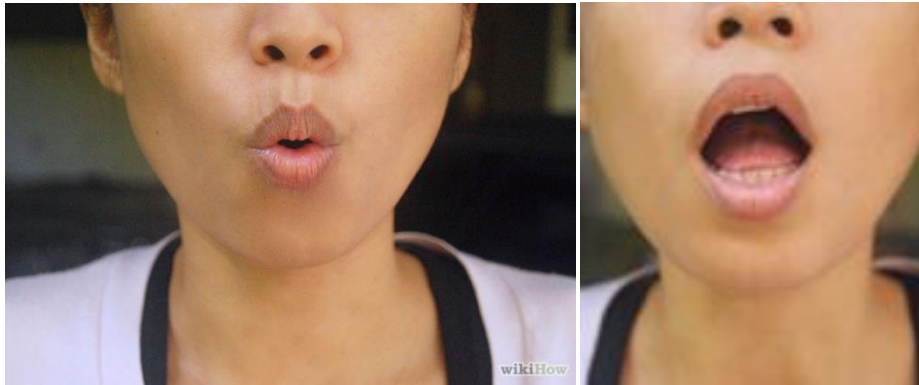
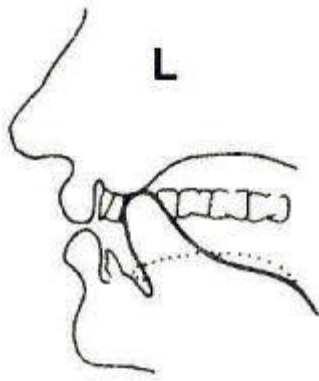


Image Source: WikiHow.com

L as in “love” and “live”



R as in “road” or “harbor”



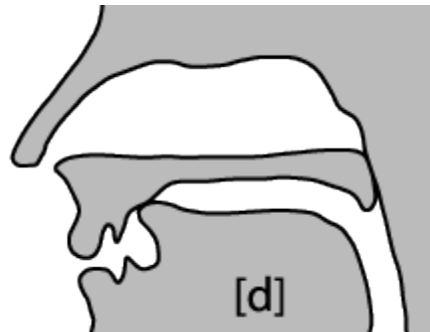
Source: [www.learnenglish.de](http://www.learnenglish.de)

θ as in “thin” and “think”



[www.speechook.com](http://www.speechook.com)

n as in “need” and “bone”



[www.indiana.edu](http://www.indiana.edu)

## L/r Minimal Pairs List

*Pronunciation Tip:* For the /l/ sound, the tongue goes on the ridge behind your upper teeth. Your lips do not move. For the /r/ sound, your tongue does NOT touch the roof of your mouth. Your lips move inward.

### *Intermediate*

Fleas freeze

Glow grow

Lake rake

Lip rip

Loot root

Laid raid

Loyal royal

### *Advanced*

Blues bruise

Dial dire

Leer rear

Loaves roves

Jelly Jerry

Holler horror

Splint sprint

### **3 or more syllable words:**

Hologram

Allergic

Allegory

Gregarious

Folklore

### *Tongue Twister:*

*Rory the warrior and Roger the worrier were reared wrongly in a rural brewery.*

## /tʃ/, /ʃ/, and /dʒ/ Minimal Pair List

/tʃ/ ch as in “cheese” or “chop”

/ʃ/ sh as in “she’s” or “shop”

/dʒ/ j or g sound as in “gym” or “judge”

*Pronunciation Tip:* If you are having trouble with /ch/, try saying “meet ship” really fast. Eventually, it will sound like “me chip.”

### Intermediate

/ch/	/sh/	/dʒ/
chore	shore	George
chop	shop	job
chip	ship	jip
cheap	sheep	Jeep
batch	bash	badge
chair	share	Jared
cheer	shear	jeer
leach	leash	ledge (vowel sound is different)
watch	wash	



### Advanced

2 or more syllables:	satchel	shackle	jackal
	cherry	sherry	Jerry
	cheese	she’s	jeez (slang used to show annoyance or surprise; sometimes spelled “geez”)

Difficult Words: In the words below, /tʃ/ acts as /ʃ/ (in other words, the “ch” becomes an “sh” sound)

- Crochet
- Niche
- Pistachio
- Quiche
- Michigan
- Michelle

Ch as /k/:

- Chemistry
- Choir
- Psychology
- Ache
- Chrome

Other Exceptions: Loan words from foreign languages (such as Italian) might not follow typical English pronunciation patterns.

**Ch:**

Cello

Cappuccino

*Tongue Twister:*

*If Charlie chews shoes, should Charlie choose the shoes he chews?*



## **/b/ and /p/ Minimal Pair List**

*Pronunciation Tip:* Hold a piece of paper lightly in front of your face. When you say “b,” the paper should not move. When you say “p,” which is a voiced sound, the paper will move.

### *Intermediate*

Braille	pail
Batch	patch
Bit	pit
Bunch	punch
Bore	pore
Bowl	poll
Bane	pane

### *Advanced*

2 ore more syllables:

Barbara	Penelope
Embezzled	puzzled
Able	apple

### *Tongue Twister:*

*Betty Botter had some butter,  
"But," she said, "this butter's bitter.  
If I bake this bitter butter,  
it would make my batter bitter.  
But a bit of better butter--  
that would make my batter better.*

## ***/θ/, /ð/, and /t/ Minimal Pairs List***

/θ/ “th” as in “thin” or “think”

/ð/ “th” as in “there” or “brother”

Pronunciation Tip: The “t” sound requires you to place your tongue on the ridge of your mouth. The “th” sound requires you to put your tongue on the edges of your top front teeth.



### *Intermediate*

Thank	tank
Path	pat
Panther	banter
Three	tree
Thought	taught

### *Advanced*

Voiced and unvoiced “th”:

(al)though	through
This	thistle
Rather	wrath

## Double “t” (hard and soft “t” in English): How does the sound change for double “t”?

The “t” sound changes to a flap (see page 2) or soft, fast “t.” If you’re having trouble with the flap, try substituting the double “t” for /d/.

Let	letter
Bet	better
But	butter
Set	setter

*The hard “t” sound* usually happens if the “t” is next to a consonant or at the beginning or end of a word

- After
- Actor
- Practice
- Shift
- Can’t
- Take
- Tint
- Lift

*The soft “t” sound* usually happens if words are linked together or if the /t/ is between vowels, especially in words with “er” endings.

Do you want to come over?

Want to → wan’to or wanna

Waiter

Water

Cater

## S, Z, and /ʒ/ sounds in English

The English /s/ sound can also occur with /c/ as in words like lice, mice, science, or cyst.

The English “zh” sound is represented in the phonetic alphabet as /ʒ/

### **S patterns:**

vowel-consonant-vowel:

Ice, lice, mice, vice

Mace, lace, pace

Before or after unvoiced (non-vibrating) consonants:

Books: /k/ is unvoiced

Spoke: /p/ is unvoiced

At the beginning of most words before a vowel:

Sat, save, set, see, sit, site, sod, soap, soup, sunk

Before “c”:

Science, scissors

Other exceptions:

Receive, deceive, perceive, reception, deception, perception

Center, cycle, civics, cyber

### **Z patterns:**

Usually with plurals after a long vowel sound or a diphthong (blended vowel sound):

/aɪ/ Ties, lies, cries, surprise, rise, demise

/ɔɪ/ boys, toys, ploys, noise

/i:/ cheese, please, bees, measles

/u:/ choose, lose

/əʊ/ goes, pose, chose, close

After voiced (vibrating) consonants (especially vowel-consonant-vowel pattern):

Judges: /dʒ/ is a voiced sound

Loves: /v/ is a voiced sound and it follows the vowel-consonant-vowel pattern (O-V-E). So does drives and lives.

After vowels (except for silent “e”):

Buys, cries, snows, has, etc.

**/ʒ/ patterns with common suffixes:**

“ual” endings

Visual, casual (but NOT sensual)

“ure” endings

Measure, pleasure, treasure, closure, seizure

Some “ge” endings (particularly French loan words):

Beige, rouge, garage (but not *age*, *rage*, or *cage*)

“sion” endings:

Delusion, illusion, vision, derision, supervision

**Advanced:**

**Note that these are not minimal pairs, but words with similar vowel sounds or vowel-consonant-vowel patterns.**

<i>/s/</i>	<i>/z/</i>	<i>/ʒ/</i>
caustic	causal	casual
vice	visor	visual
mace	maze	measure
lace	laze	leisure

Tongue Twisters

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*She uses scissors to construct visual illusions.*

*You can choose beige, rouge, or azure colors for your drivers.*

## Short and Long vowels

### *Short and long “e”*

Help            heap

Bet             beat

Bled            bleed

### *Short and long “i”*

Pick            pike

Lift            alive

Rift            rife

### *Short and long “a”*

Lack            lake

Rack            rake

Black           brake

### *Short and long “o”*

Hog            home

Bond           bone

On             own

### *Short and long “u”*

Cut            cute

But            brute

Hug            huge

## **/w/ and /v/ Minimal Pairs List**

Pronunciation Tip: For /v/, the two front teeth should touch the bottom lip (similar to /f/, but with vibration). For /w/, the teeth do not touch anything.

wail	veil
wane	vane
wiper	viper
wine	vine
while	vile

### Tongue Twisters

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*Wild vines make fine vintage wines.*

*Which is worse verse, Wendy's verse or Wayne's verse?*

## “r” sounds

Other common words with “r”:

Carl	curl	earl	girl	gnarl	hurl
pearl	snarl	squirrel	surly	twirl	unfurl
world	whorled	whirled*			

Note: Whorl usually refers to a swirling pattern, such as a fingerprint. “Whirl” refers to movement, such as a dancer whirling around on the dance floor.

## Other tongue twisters:

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She whirled around the world.

Which wristwatches are Swiss wristwatches?

Freshly fried flying fish.

Clean clams crammed in a tin can.

A big black bug bit a big black bear, made the big black bear bleed blood.

Please pay promptly.



## Homonyms

Homonyms include words that are identical in spelling and/or pronunciation but have different meanings. There are two main types of homonyms:

- Homophones
- Homographs

**Homophones** are words that sound *exactly* the same but are spelled differently. Below are some common examples from each letter of the alphabet:

bear/bare	hear/here	meet/meat	see/sea
dear/deer	I/eye	pear/pair	too/two/to
eight/ate	jeans/genes	Q/queue	where/wear
fur/fir	know/no	read/red	you/ewe

**Homographs** are words that are spelled the same. Many of them share the same pronunciation, but some do not.

Shared spelling and pronunciation:

baseball <b>bat</b>	vampire <b>bat</b>
<b>Bank</b> of America	river <b>bank</b>
Turn <b>left</b> .	He <b>left</b> the building.

Same spelling and different pronunciation:

Tie your shoes in a bow. (“bow” sounds like “low”)

Please bow to your hosts. (“bow” sounds like “cow”)

The Sahara Desert receives minimal rainfall. (stress on first syllable: *desert*)

If a soldier deserts the army, it is considered a grave offense. (stress on second syllable: *desert*)

He didn’t shed a tear at the funeral. (“tear” sounds like “ear”)

If you tear that dress, you can’t return it. (“tear” sounds like “wear”)

**Exercise 1: Which words are homophones or homographs? Which words are neither? (answers on p. 18)**

whirled—world      hair—hare      breathe—breath      peer—pair  
fought—thought      set—seat      rare—rear      threw—through

**Exercise 2: In each sentence, change the incorrect words to their correct homonyms. (Answers on p. 18)**

1. Read Riding Hood stopped and picked sum flours.
2. Snow White eight the read apple.
3. The princess could knot sleep at knight on the lumpy mattress.
4. The Prince kissed Sleeping Beauty and asked her if she wood merry him.
5. Independence Hall is the cite where the original Declaration of Independence was signed hear in Philadelphia.
6. The Emperor was to vane two admit he could knot sea his knew close.
7. The which tried to fatten up Hansel and Gretel two put sum meet on there bones.
8. The wolf blue down the houses of the first too pigs.
9. Their was a bare sitting on root 95.
10. The peace of pi is four my grandmother.

*Answers to Exercise 1:*

*Homonyms include: whirled/world, hair/hare, threw-through*

*These words are not homonyms because one sound is different in each pair: fought and thought, breathe and breath, set and seat, rare-rear, peer-pair*

*Answers to Exercise 2:*

*1. red, some, flowers*

*2. ate, red*

*3. not, night*

*4. would, marry*

*5. site, here*

*6. too, vain, to, not, see, new, clothes*

*7. witch, to, some, meat, their*

*8. blew, two*

*9. there, bear, route*

*10. piece, pie, for*

## Syllable Stress

Some words look the same and have the same pronunciation, but the stress changes. Below are some common examples.

For nouns: stress is on the first syllable

For verbs: stress is on the second syllable

- convict (noun): He's an ex-convict.
- convict (verb): He was convicted of a crime.
  
- Convert (noun): He's a Jewish convert.
- Convert (verb): He converted from Christianity to Judaism.
  
- Conflikt (noun): the Syrian conflict, the drug conflict, etc.
- Conflict (verb): He has conflicting priorities.
  
- Record (noun): He keeps the employee records in a filing cabinet.
- Record (verb): Are you going to record the opera on TV tonight?
  
- Permit (noun): Do you have a driver's permit?
- Permit (verb): I can't permit anyone beyond this area due to safety hazards.
  
- Object (noun): The object was round and small, but I couldn't identify it.
- Object (verb): Does anyone object to me eating the last slice of cake?

### Other examples:

Rebel	recall	insult	combat	compress
Reject	contractproject	extract	commune	refuse
Produce	contest	present	desert	indent
Suspect	content*(adjective)	subject	insert	

*Read these sentences for practice.*

1. They will *rebel* against the *rebels*.
2. She *contracted* a virus at the workplace, but she can't sue the company due to their *contract*.
3. They *projected* that the *project* would be finished in three months.

4. I *object* to her being the *object* of your affections.
5. This country can't *produce* enough *produce* to keep up with the demand.

Now, try without the stress in italics.

6. I can't present a present at Christmas this year.
7. I recalled that her memory recall was superb.
8. The results of the contest were contested.
9. Vanilla extract is made by extracting the flavors from vanilla beans.
10. The soldier deserted the army in the desert after engaging in hand-to-hand combat.
11. She lives in a hippie commune, where she regularly communes with artists and freethinkers.
12. Throw the old papers in the refuse pile.
13. I suspected that she was a suspect in the crime.
14. Did you insert this sales insert in the newspaper?

### Other Resources:

Sounds of English ([www.soundsofenglish.org](http://www.soundsofenglish.org))

Finegan, E. (2008). *Language, its structure and use*. (5th ed.). Boston: The Thomson Corporation.

Tongue Twisters: [50 Tongue Twisters to Help Improve English Pronunciation](#)