

English sounds: IPA guide

British English (traditional RP teaching model) | 1. Vowels

IPA means International Phonetic Alphabet. It shows sounds, not spelling.

The tables give a sound, two example words and the pronunciation of the **first** word.

Single vowel sounds

Sound	Examples	First word
/i:/	green, sleep	/gri:n/
/ɪ/	fish, milk	/fɪʃ/
/e/	desk, pen	/desk/
/æ/	bag, map	/bæg/
/ɑ:/	star, park	/stɑ:/
/ɒ/	clock, sock	/klɒk/
/ɔ:/	door, walk	/dɔ:/
/ʊ/	book, good	/bʊk/
/u:/	blue, food	/blu:/
/ʌ/	sun, bus	/sʌn/
/ɜ:/	bird, turn	/bɜ:d/
/ə/	about, banana	/əˈbaʊt/

Gliding vowels (diphthongs)

Sound	Examples	First word
/eɪ/	rain, late	/rein/
/aɪ/	bike, time	/baɪk/
/ɔɪ/	coin, toy	/kɔɪn/
/əʊ/	home, boat	/həʊm/
/aʊ/	cloud, mouth	/klaʊd/
/ɪə/	ear, near	/ɪə/
/eə/	chair, hair	/tʃeə/
/ʊə/	cure, pure	/kjʊə/

A diphthong glides between two vowel positions within one syllable.

Accent note: /ʊə/ is a traditional pronunciation. Many speakers use /ɔ:/ in words such as cure. Other vowels also vary by accent.

How to read the symbols

// surround sounds: **fish** /fɪʃ/ has three sounds.

: marks a long vowel, as in **green** /gri:n/. Vowels differ in quality as well as length.

' comes before the stressed syllable: **about** /əˈbaʊt/ stresses the second syllable.

/ə/ (**schwa**) is a weak, unstressed vowel: the first sound in **about**.

This is an English learning chart, not the complete IPA. Pronunciations differ across regions.

Listen to examples: dictionary.cambridge.org/pronunciation (choose UK audio).

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British English (traditional RP teaching model) | 2. Consonants

Say the example words aloud. Listen for the target sound at the beginning, middle or end.
The final column gives the pronunciation of the **first** word.

Sound	Examples	First word
/p/	pen, cup	/pen/
/b/	bag, cab	/bæg/
/t/	tea, cat	/ti:/
/d/	dog, bed	/dɒg/
/k/	key, back	/ki:/
/g/	go, big	/gəʊ/
/f/	fan, leaf	/fæn/
/v/	van, live (verb)	/væn/
/θ/	thin, teeth	/θɪn/
/ð/	this, mother	/ðɪs/
/s/	sun, rice	/sʌn/
/z/	zoo, nose	/zu:/

Sound	Examples	First word
/ʃ/	shop, fish	/ʃɒp/
/ʒ/	vision, measure	/ˈvɪʒən/
/tʃ/	chair, watch	/tʃeə/
/dʒ/	juice, bridge	/dʒu:s/
/m/	moon, room	/mu:n/
/n/	name, ten	/neɪm/
/ŋ/	sing, long	/sɪŋ/
/h/	hat, home	/hæt/
/l/	leaf, feel	/li:f/
/r/	red, rain	/red/
/w/	wet, away	/wet/
/j/	yes, yellow	/jes/

Useful things to notice

Voicing: Touch your throat gently. Compare /s/ in **sun** with /z/ in **zoo**.

Your voice vibrates for /z/. Other pairs include /f/-/v/, /θ/-/ð/ and /ʃ/-/ʒ/.

/j/ is the sound in **yes**, not the sound of the letter name J.

/ŋ/ is the last sound in **sing**; do not add /g/ in this word.

/tʃ/ and /dʒ/ each represent one consonant sound, written with two IPA symbols.

/r/ is the usual dictionary symbol for the English r sound. In this British model,

r is not normally sounded in **car** on its own, but it is in **red**.

Use audio alongside this chart: dictionary.cambridge.org/pronunciation (UK audio).