

# Transcription Practice for the International Phonetic Alphabet



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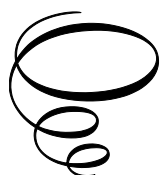
*Exercises for Students of  
English*

By

Konrad Szcześniak

and Andrzej Porzuczek

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Exercises for Students of English

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# Preface

The purpose of this book is to help foreign learners master the transcription of English speech sounds. While there are many excellent transcription coursebooks on the market, we feel that they may not necessarily be ideal for students anxious to get down to learning the phonetic alphabet symbols. That is, all too often they put theory before practice, and before the student can begin transcribing the pronunciation of English, it is first necessary to go through a good deal of technical terminology, discussion of fine points, qualifications and provisos. This book takes a different tack. Here we try to reduce the theory portion to an absolute minimum, confining it to concise paragraphs.

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The bulk of this book consists in brief presentations of important rules and patterns. They are presented in simple tables such as this one.

---

## *Exercise*

...and followed by a variety of exercises.

Where we felt that it may be necessary or interesting to discuss finer points or define technical terms, these are included in boxes like this. Important technical terms like **PHONEME** or **WEAK FORM** are marked in bold capitals.

What we include in boxes is a matter of choice—choice that is obviously subjective and sometimes inevitably controversial. An example of a term whose knowledge is by all means welcome and advisable but not absolutely necessary is the acronym **IPA**, which stands for the **INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET**. Being unaware of the official name of a system one is learning may appear philistine, but it will not make it impossible to use it.

Apart from learning to use the International Phonetic Alphabet to transcribe the sounds of English, students will also benefit by

improving their pronunciation. Wherever possible, we point out important things to bear in mind, which are directly relevant to the actual use of the English sound system. For example, by learning that certain sounds do not occur in open syllables, one can predict that words like *view* or *glue* may only contain long /u:/, and never short /ʊ/ (to take an example of a pair that is particularly problematic to foreign learners of English.) Thus, the idea is to help students benefit doubly by learning to transcribe and making their pronunciation more natural and native-like.





# Getting started

## *Important preliminary points*

While there are some clear correspondences between the symbols used in the phonetic alphabet and the letters of the Roman alphabet, there are more mismatches and important differences. Sometimes the impression might be that learning phonetic transcription is a matter of mastering some correspondences and patterns, as the following sample may suggest.

*It's a big tree.*

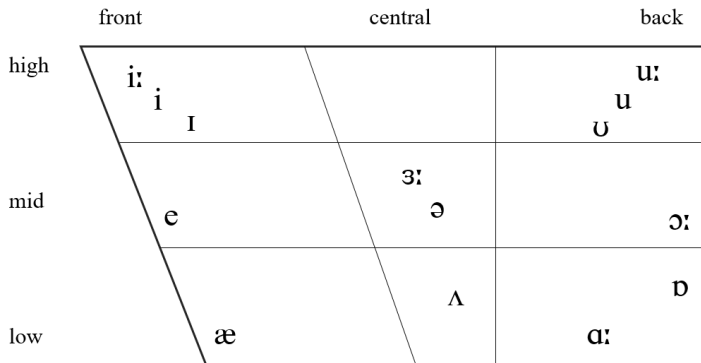
/Its ə big tri:/

However, even a simple sample like this can serve to point out important things to bear in mind:

First, there are no capital letters in phonetic transcription. The sound /ɪ/ in the word *It* does not become different as a result of its being spelled with a capital letter in this sentence.

Second, the correspondences between letters and phonetic symbols are not always one to one. In the word *tree*, there are two letters *e* spelling the vowel sound which in phonetic transcription is represented by the symbol /i/ accompanied by the **DIACRITIC** /:/ to indicate length. The one-to-one correspondences intended in phonetic transcription are between symbols and sounds, so that each sound present in the actual pronunciation is reflected by means of a single symbol (plus a possible diacritic sign) in the transcription. Sometimes we will use what looks like a combination of two symbols, as in the case of the first sound in the word *chat*, transcribed by means of /tʃ/.

Third, there are no punctuation marks in phonetic transcription. Although some dictionaries use dots that look like periods (full stops), they serve to indicate boundaries between syllables, as in /'sɪl.ə.bəl/, but not ends of sentences. These dots will not be used here, except when boundaries between syllables need to be shown clearly. Now it is time to get acquainted with the English vowels (Figure 1) and consonants (Table 1) and their phonetic symbols.



**Figure 1.** English vowels

The labels “Front”, “Central”, and “Back” refer to the part of the tongue. The terms “High”, “Mid”, and “Low” describe the position the tongue assumes for a given vowel. For example, the vowels in *hip*, *heap* and *hippy* are high-front vowels: /hɪp/ /hi:p/ /hɪpi/.

|            | Bilabial | Labiodental | Dental   | Alveolar | Post-alveolar | Palatal  | Velar    | Glottal  |
|------------|----------|-------------|----------|----------|---------------|----------|----------|----------|
|            | -v<br>+v | -v<br>+v    | -v<br>+v | -v<br>+v |               | -v<br>+v | -v<br>+v | -v<br>+v |
| Plosives   | p<br>b   |             |          | t<br>d   |               |          | k<br>g   |          |
| Fricatives |          | f<br>v      | θ<br>ð   | s<br>z   | ʃ<br>ʒ        |          |          | h        |
| Affricates |          |             |          |          | tʃ<br>dʒ      |          |          |          |
| Nasals     | m        |             |          | n<br>ɲ   |               |          | ŋ        |          |
| Liquids    |          |             |          | l        | r             |          |          |          |
| Glides     | w        |             |          |          |               | j        |          |          |

**Table 1.** English consonants

The labels in the upper row (“Bilabial”, “Labiodental”, etc.) refer to the articulator, or part of the mouth involved in the articulation of a consonant. The terms in the column on the left (“Plosives”, “Fricatives”, etc.) describe the manner of articulation for a given consonant. Consonants on the right side in each column are voiced, and the ones to the left are voiceless. For example, the consonant /p/ is a voiceless plosive bilabial.

## IPA

Any student taking a course in phonetic transcription will come across the abbreviation *IPA*, which can stand for one of two phrases, namely the *International Phonetic Alphabet* (which is a set of symbols used to represent the pronunciation of words and longer utterances) or the *International Phonetic Association*, the organization whose aim is “to promote the scientific study of phonetics and the various practical applications of that science” ([www.internationalphoneticassociation.org](http://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org)).

## Primary stress and secondary stress

In words with at least two syllables, a syllable may receive a weaker secondary stress, marked with the diacritic (ˌ). Secondary stress represents a level of prominence lower than primary stress (ˈ), but clearly stronger than in unstressed syllables. For example, in *prepaid* /ˌpriːˈpeɪd/ the first syllable receives secondary stress, while the main primary stress falls on the second syllable. The word *armadillo* has four syllables with at least three different stress levels: /ˌɑːməˈdɪl əʊ/. “The idea is that the syllables between the stressed syllables are unstressed, and thus less prominent than the stressed syllables, but that the syllable with primary stress is more prominent than the syllable with secondary stress.” (Carr 2008: 135)

Secondary stress is found most frequently in multisyllable words, where it breaks up what would otherwise be long sequences of unstressed syllables. In *academicism* /ˌæk əˈdem ɪˌsɪz əm/, after the syllable with primary stress (ˈdem), there are three syllables, and here secondary stress falls in the middle, yielding a sequence of alternating stresses. Similarly, in *capitalism* /ˈkæp ɪ təˌlɪz əm/ the four-syllable sequence is broken up by a secondary stress on the penultimate syllable.

The notion of stress is explained in more detail in Chapter IV.

## Phoneme and allophone

We will sometimes use the technical term **PHONEME**, defined as the “minimal unit in the sound system of a language” (Crystal 2008: 361). As a first approximation, the term “phoneme” can be used interchangeably with the general term “sound”.

One reason why we will prefer the more technical term is that it helps distinguish between so called contrastive and non-contrastive sounds. To take non-contrastive sounds first, note that the /l/ sounds in the phrase *look cool* /lʊk ku:l/ do not really have the same pronunciation. The one in *look* is pronounced with the tip of the tongue touching the ridge behind the teeth (the alveolar ridge). The second /l/ is velarized, i.e. pronounced with the back of the tongue raised toward the velum, the soft part of the palate located behind the hard palate.



Figure 2 Clear 'l' [l]



Figure 3 Dark 'l' [ɫ]

Although most speakers are not aware of the difference, it becomes instantly evident if the two variants were to switch positions. If you pronounced the /l/ in *cool* without raising your tongue, the effect would be a foreign sounding *cool* reminiscent of the French accent. The /l/ in *look* is called a “clear l”, and the other variant is a “dark l”.

Interestingly, most American speakers tend to use the “dark” variety in all contexts. (Newman 2014: 83)

In some cases, exchanging a sound has stronger consequences, which is what happens when two sounds are separate phonemes. Phonemes are said to “have a contrastive function”, which means that exchanging one phoneme for another will completely change the word itself. For example, if the sound /t/ in the word *bat* /bæt/ is replaced with a /d/, the resulting word will be *bad* /bæd/. That is, unlike with the two /l/ sounds in *look* and *cool*, the change from /t/ to /d/ will not result in a strange sounding pronunciation, but a change of the word’s meaning.

To use the technical terminology, the sounds /t/ and /d/ are two different phonemes, which can be imagined as two independent sound entries in the speaker’s inventory of English sounds. On the other hand, the two variants “clear l” and “dark l” are **allophones** of the same phoneme /l/. The two allophones are physically quite different and in transcriptions that capture such details, they are indicated with dedicated symbols [l] and [ɫ] (clear and dark l respectively). Still, allophones are non-contrastive and should be thought of as sub-entries of their phoneme entry, as illustrated in the following abbreviated representation of the inventory:

|                   |     |  |                           |  |         |  |                          |  |     |
|-------------------|-----|--|---------------------------|--|---------|--|--------------------------|--|-----|
| <b>phonemes</b>   | /d/ |  | /t/                       |  | /l/     |  | /p/                      |  | ... |
| <b>allophones</b> | ... |  | ... [t] [t <sup>h</sup> ] |  | [l] [ɫ] |  | ...[p] [p <sup>h</sup> ] |  | ... |

In this course, we will mainly practice what is referred to as **broad transcription**, which only represents phonemes. In this transcription, as you may have noticed, phonemes are enclosed within slash lines //. A more detailed **narrow transcription** is designed to identify allophones, which are shown in square brackets []. This transcription will be used only sporadically here.

### Sources used

|            |                                    |
|------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>CCE</i> | Collins COBUILD English Dictionary |
| <i>CED</i> | Cambridge English Dictionary       |
| <i>LPD</i> | Longman Pronunciation Dictionary   |
| <i>OED</i> | Oxford English Dictionary          |
| <i>MWU</i> | Merriam-Webster Unabridged         |

To transcribe the pronunciation of all words in this book, we use SIL International's font Doulos SIL available at <https://software.sil.org/doulos/>

# I Phonemic symbols

## *Consonant symbols*

Table 1 in the previous section presents all consonant symbols used in English. We have remarked that letter-to-sound correspondence is not always obvious but it is fairly consistent in the case of consonants. Table 2 below presents the most typical relations, but in English we must always be ready for exceptions. Additionally, the letters ‘r’, ‘w’ and ‘l’ often cooperate with vowel letters to indicate long vowels and then there may be no /r/, /w/ or /l/ in pronunciation. We will show how these combinations work while discussing the vowels.

| symbol | letter | example               | remarks   |
|--------|--------|-----------------------|---|
| p      | p      | <i>pit</i>            |   |
| b      | b      | <i>bad</i>            |   |
| t      | t      | <i>ten</i>            |   |
| d      | d      | <i>do</i>             |   |
| k      | k, c   | <i>keep, cat, act</i> | ‘c’ before ‘a’, ‘o’, ‘u’ and consonant letters  |
| g      | g      | <i>go</i>             |   |
| f      | f, ph  | <i>fine, photo</i>    |   |
| v      | v      | <i>vote</i>           |   |
| s      | s, c   | <i>soon, cent</i>     | ‘c’ before ‘e’, ‘i’, and ‘y’  |
| z      | z, s   | <i>zone, busy</i>     | ‘z’ is not used very often in English spelling, so ‘s’ may stand for either voiceless /s/ or voiced /z/ |
| m      | m      | <i>man</i>            |   |
| n      | n      | <i>nine</i>           |   |
| r      | r      | <i>red</i>            | In BrE /r/ is only pronounced before vowels.  |

|    |          |                      |   |
|----|----------|----------------------|---|
| l  | l        | <i>long</i>          |   |
| j  | y        | <i>yes</i>           | before vowels (in so-called rising diphthongs)  |
| w  | w        | <i>went</i>          | before vowels (in so-called rising diphthongs)  |
| h  | h        | <i>hide</i>          | always before vowels  |
| ŋ  | ng, nk   | <i>sing, sink</i>    | ‘nk’ indicates a /ŋk/ combination   |
| ʃ  | sh       | <i>show</i>          |   |
| ʒ  | -si-, ge | <i>vision, rouge</i> | usually in Latin or (esp. ‘ge’) French borrowings, indicated by non-initial ‘si’ typically before /ə/ |
| tʃ | ch       | <i>cheap</i>         |   |
| dʒ | j, dg, g | <i>judge, gem</i>    | ‘g’ never indicates /dʒ/ before ‘a, o, u’   |
| θ  | th       | <i>think, breath</i> | more frequent in content words  |
| ð  | th       | <i>that, breathe</i> | more frequent in function words and (unless word-initial) in verbs                                    |

**Table 2.** Consonant symbols with corresponding letters

It is easy to notice that there are few ambiguous relations between letters and corresponding speech sounds represented by phonemic symbols. For the most part, the letter-symbol correspondences are fairly clear. Only the last seven symbols may not at first be clear to a beginner, and they will be treated in some detail in Chapter III.

### *Single vowel symbols*

The English language uses more or less twice as many vowels as there are vowel letters in the Latin alphabet. That is why new symbols and symbol combinations must be introduced to represent them. Another difficulty is that in the course of a long and complex process of language development, English pronunciation has deviated from the spelling, even though it was obviously initially intended to reflect the way people spoke. Some of those deviations form predictable patterns while others are rather erratic, which certainly makes learning English pronunciation a challenging task.

Table 4 shows the symbols representing English vowels with examples of the most typical corresponding spellings.

|    |                 |             |               |                |               |                        |
|----|-----------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|------------------------|
| i: | <i>tree</i>     | <i>feed</i> | <i>seat</i>   | <i>field</i>   | <i>scene</i>  | lowercase <i>i</i>     |
| ɪ  | <i>fish</i>     | <i>dish</i> | <i>big</i>    |                |               | small capital <i>I</i> |
| æ  | <i>cat</i>      | <i>mat</i>  | <i>rat</i>    |                |               | ash                    |
| ɑ: | <i>car</i>      | <i>part</i> | <i>far</i>    | <i>father</i>  |               | script <i>a</i>        |
| ɒ  | <i>clock</i>    | <i>lock</i> | <i>stop</i>   |                |               | turned script <i>a</i> |
| ɔ: | <i>horse</i>    | <i>law</i>  | <i>door</i>   | <i>brought</i> | <i>fourth</i> | open <i>o</i>          |
| ʊ  | <i>book</i>     | <i>pull</i> | <i>would</i>  |                |               | upsilon                |
| u: | <i>boot</i>     | <i>pool</i> | <i>rude</i>   | <i>blew</i>    | <i>move</i>   | lowercase <i>u</i>     |
| ɜ: | <i>bird</i>     | <i>turn</i> | <i>person</i> | <i>word</i>    |               | reversed epsilon       |
| e  | <i>egg</i>      | <i>red</i>  | <i>head</i>   |                |               | lowercase <i>e</i>     |
| ʌ  | <i>up</i>       | <i>sun</i>  | <i>son</i>    | <i>love</i>    |               | turned <i>v</i>        |
| ə  | <i>computer</i> | <i>soda</i> | <i>arrive</i> | <i>upon</i>    |               | schwa, turned <i>e</i> |

Table 3. English vowels with example words

## Diphthong symbols

Vowels may also appear in combinations. In British English we distinguish closing diphthongs, pronounced with the tongue raised from a lower to a higher position (either /ɪ/ or /ʊ/) and centring diphthongs, where the tongue moves from a more peripheral to the neutral position represented by /ə/. Consequently, their first, prominent element is represented by one vowel symbol which is followed by another, representing one of the three possible tongue destinations. Traditionally, eight such combinations are distinguished in standard British English:

|    |             |             |              |             |  |
|----|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--|
| aɪ | <i>hide</i> | <i>try</i>  | <i>sight</i> |             |  |
| eɪ | <i>say</i>  | <i>wait</i> | <i>lane</i>  |             |  |
| ɔɪ | <i>boy</i>  | <i>coin</i> |              |             |  |
| aʊ | <i>cow</i>  | <i>loud</i> |              |             |  |
| əʊ | <i>go</i>   | <i>show</i> | <i>boat</i>  | <i>rode</i> |  |
| ɪə | <i>beer</i> | <i>fear</i> | <i>here</i>  |             |  |
| eə | <i>air</i>  | <i>dare</i> | <i>bear</i>  |             |  |
| ʊə | <i>poor</i> | <i>sure</i> | <i>tour</i>  |             |  |

Table 4. English diphthongs with example words



Notice that the symbol /a/ is only used in diphthong symbols: /aɪ/ (*eye*) and /aʊ/ (*now, out*).

## Regular differences between American and British transcriptions

Pronunciation and hence transcription patterns differ across the varieties of English, which is more visible in the vowel system. The table below shows typical differences between standard American (column 1) and British pronunciation (column 2). Then column 3 shows transcription conventions used in *Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary of English (MWU)*.

| 1  | 2  | 3   |                              |
|----|----|-----|------------------------------|
| i: | i: | ee  | <i>feed</i>                  |
| ɪ  | ɪ  | i   | <i>sit</i>                   |
| æ  | æ  | a   | <i>rat</i>                   |
| ɑ: | ɑ: | ah  | <i>far</i>                   |
| ɑ  | ɒ  | o   | <i>stop</i> (See note below) |
| ɔ: | ɔ: | aw  | <i>door</i>                  |
| ʊ  | ʊ  | oo  | <i>book</i>                  |
| u: | u: | ooh | <i>fool</i>                  |
| ə  | ə  | euh | <i>alone</i>                 |
| ɜ: | ɜ: | err | <i>turn</i>                  |
| e  | e  | e   | <i>very</i>                  |
| ʌ  | ʌ  | u   | <i>fun</i>                   |

**Table 5.** Vowel symbols. Differences between BrE and AmE transcription conventions.

Although other sounds represented by the same symbols may also differ between British and American varieties, the vowel in *stop* is traditionally represented by /ɑ:/ to reflect its similarity to the one in *far* rather than the British vowel in *stop*. You will notice the other regular difference in the transcription of the diphthong in *boat*.

The following table shows differences between how diphthongs are represented in American and British English. Note the symbol for the sound heard in *oh* or *grow* is /oʊ/ in American English and /əʊ/ in British English to reflect the noticeably different qualities of how

this sound is pronounced by most speakers of the two varieties. In this book, we adopt the symbol /əʊ/ for consistency. The last three items in the table also differ considerably between British and American English. That is, sounds that are centering diphthongs (tending toward /ə/) in British English are not diphthongs in American English, where they are pure vowels followed by /r/.

| 1  | 2  | 3   |              |
|----|----|-----|--------------|
| aɪ | aɪ | uy  | <i>sight</i> |
| eɪ | eɪ | ay  | <i>lane</i>  |
| ɔɪ | ɔɪ | oy  | <i>boy</i>   |
| aʊ | aʊ | ow  | <i>now</i>   |
| oʊ | əʊ | oh  | <i>boat</i>  |
| ɪr | ɪə | ear | <i>here</i>  |
| er | eə | air | <i>bear</i>  |
| ʊr | ʊə | oor | <i>tour</i>  |

**Table 5.** Diphthong symbols. Differences between BrE and AmE transcription conventions.

### *What do vowel letters usually represent?*

Although not always predictable, vowel letters tend to represent more or less strictly specified vocalic sounds. Usually, depending on the context, they either indicate what we may call “long” or “short” pronunciation. The “long” pronunciation, typically indicated by the letter followed by a single consonant letter and another vowel letter (especially “mute” ‘e’), is just the “alphabet name” of the letter, a diphthong in most cases. The “short” pronunciation version, indicated by the vowel letter followed by a final consonant letter or a medial double consonant letter, is a short vowel. Unfortunately, this rule does not apply to all English words (so be careful while doing the exercise below) but at least it may help us avoid a lot of mistakes if we have to predict the pronunciation of a new word. The pattern is illustrated below.

| letter | “long”<br>pronunciation | example     | “short”<br>pronunciation | example    |
|--------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|------------|
| ‘a’    | eɪ                      | <i>hate</i> | æ                        | <i>hat</i> |
| ‘e’    | i:                      | <i>Pete</i> | e                        | <i>pet</i> |
| ‘i’    | aɪ                      | <i>ride</i> | ɪ                        | <i>rid</i> |
| ‘o’    | əʊ                      | <i>note</i> | ɒ                        | <i>not</i> |
| ‘u’    | ju:                     | <i>cute</i> | ʌ                        | <i>cut</i> |

**Table 6.** Long and short pronunciations of spelling letters.

The letter ‘y’ indicates the same vowel or diphthong as ‘i’ does, but, unlike the latter, it typically appears in the word-final position. Notice, that ‘y’ regularly stands for /aɪ/ in stressed syllables and /ɪ/ in unstressed ones.

### Exercise 1.1

Transcribe the following words:

*by, city, deny, simply, imply*

*forget, delete, lever, ever, even*

*manner, mane, manor, flavor*

*bitter, liver, diver, give, five*

*chop, hope, chopper, dove, choke*

*button, mute, stuck, duke, duck*

### Exercise 1.2

Write these words next to the right phonetic symbol in **Table 3**.

*dork, steam, start, week, lurk, spat, food, foot, lark, cool, corn, far, seat, stern, van, sport, scream, seem, harsh, lurk, rude, born, dull, puke, psalm, rock*

### Exercise 1.3

In each row, eliminate the word whose vowel is different from those in the other three. In words with more syllables, the vowel in question is in bold type.

- a. *stick* *myth* *feet* *fit*
- b. *blood* *muck* *tar* *pub*
- c. *roll* *rot* *dot* *gosh*
- d. *son* *run* *fun* *butcher*
- e. *lock* *bottle* *shore* *stop*
- f. *lard* *father* *parent* *jar*
- g. *done* *gun* *fall* *stub*
- h. *sat* *Nazi* *clap* *plaid*
- i. *set* *dead* *heat* *bet*
- j. *sieve* *leave* *meat* *Steve*

### Exercise 1.4

Transcribe the single vowels in the following sentences. (Ignore the consonants, diphthongs and stresses.)

*Love thy neighbor as yourself, but choose your neighborhood.*

/l\_v ðaɪ neɪb\_r əz jəs\_lf bət tʃ\_z jə neɪb\_h\_d/

*If you are not criticized, you may not be doing much.*

/\_f ju ə n\_t kr\_təsaɪzd jə meɪ n\_t bi duɪŋ m\_tʃ/

*Opportunity is missed by most people because it's dressed in overalls and looks like work.*

/ɒpət\_n\_tɪ ɪz m\_st baɪ məʊst p\_pəl bɪkɒz ɪts dr\_st ɪn əʊvər\_lz ən ɪt l\_ks laɪk w\_k/

*I don't think anyone should write their autobiography until after they're dead.*

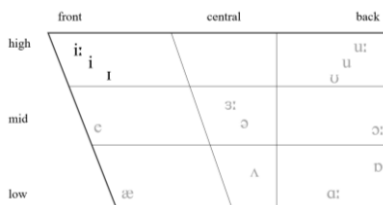
/aɪ dəʊnt θ\_ŋk \_nɪb\_lɪdɪ ʃəd raɪt ðər əʊn baɪəgr\_fɪ ʌnt\_l ðə d\_d/

# II Vowels

In this chapter we focus on vowels. We introduce them in pairs which are frequently confused by learners. We often use **MINIMAL PAIRS** in order to demonstrate the difference between the two vowels. The term minimal pair refers to any two words which differ in meaning when only one sound is changed, e.g. *riff* - *reef* (/rɪf/ - /ri:f/) or *ten* - *tan* (/ten/ - /tæn/). A group of words, each of which differs from all others by only one sound, e.g. *lick*, *lit*, *Lynn*, *lid*, *etc.* is called a **MINIMAL SET**.

## 2A. Vowels /i:/ and /ɪ/

**i:**      **I**



**lowercase i**      **small capital I**

*peat* /pi:t/      *pit* /pɪt/

*feel* /fi:l/      *fill* /fɪl/

/ɪ/ is usually spelled as the letter 'i': *bit, spin, zit, glib, etc.*

/i:/ is often pronounced when spelled as...

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| 'ee'              | <i>bee, greet, meet, leek, reek, see, etc.;<br/>employee, refugee, divorcee, etc.</i>  |
| 'ea'              | <i>bean, beat, heat, league, peace, sea,<br/>weave, etc.</i>                           |
| 'ie' / 'ei'       | <i>achieve, believe, field, piece, ceiling,<br/>receive, conceive, etc.</i>            |
| 'e'-CONSONANT-'e' | <i>athlete, complete, concrete, decent,<br/>Irene, obese, Pete, Portuguese, Steve,</i> |

But there are exceptions:

Looks like /i:/ but is really pronounced as /ɪ/: *sieve, mischief, counterfeit, foreign*

Looks like /ɪ/ but is really pronounced as /i:/: *liter, kilo, police, machine,* and *-ique* words *antique, physique, pique, technique*

There are some tricky cases of Irish names: *Sean* BrE /ʃɔ:n/, AmE /ʃɑ:n/, *Sinead* /ʃiˈneɪd/, *Deirdre* BrE /diːdri/, AmE /dɪrdri/

### Exercise 2A.1

Match and transcribe homophones (words with different meanings and spellings, but pronounced the same). Not all the words have a match!

|              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| <i>piece</i> | <i>sea</i>   |
| <i>see</i>   | <i>weak</i>  |
| <i>beat</i>  | <i>beet</i>  |
| <i>beech</i> | <i>beach</i> |
| <i>meat</i>  | <i>bit</i>   |
| <i>week</i>  | <i>meet</i>  |
| <i>heel</i>  | <i>suite</i> |
| <i>sweet</i> | <i>hill</i>  |
| <i>pick</i>  | <i>heal</i>  |
| <i>mitt</i>  | <i>peace</i> |
| <i>pique</i> | <i>peek</i>  |
| <i>peak</i>  |              |

### Exercise 2A.2

What problem do the words *sheet, beach,* and *piece* pose? Which words should they not be confused with?

### Exercise 2A.3

Transcribe the following

|                        |                       |                         |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>King and Queen</i>  | <i>kith and kin</i>   | <i>speed limit</i>      |
| <i>freaking dimwit</i> | <i>spitting image</i> | <i>feeling of bliss</i> |

## Exercise 2A.4

Provide the spelling for these minimal pairs.

/fi:l/ /fil/                      /sti:l/ /stɪl/                      /bi:n/ /bɪn/  
/ri:m/ /rɪm/                      /di:m/ /dɪm/                      /li:k/ /lɪk/

### Weak i

There is a third /i/ sound, which is used in most dictionaries. Although its use in broad transcription is debatable (because it cannot be considered a phoneme), it does not have a good alternative in either /i:/ or /ɪ/. In the unstressed syllables in the following words, what is heard is a sound realized with the tongue raised to a position between that of /i:/ and /ɪ/.

*Betsy* /<sup>h</sup>betsi/                      *missy* /<sup>h</sup>misi/  
*genius* /<sup>h</sup>dʒi:niəs/                      *cheesy* /<sup>h</sup>tʃi:zi/

As the above examples show, the weak /i/ is realized if the syllable is both unstressed and open, whose typical example is the final syllable in words spelled with a 'y'. In the middle of a word, a vowel can also be a weak /i/ if it is not followed by a consonant. Such is the case of the word *genius*, where the syllable with /i/ is followed by a vowel /<sup>h</sup>dʒi: ni əs/.

In most dialects of English, the most frequent pronunciation of *Betsy* features the weak /i/. It is different from the /i:/ in the final (stressed) syllable in *examinee* /ɪgzæmi<sup>h</sup>ni:/.

## Exercise 2A.5

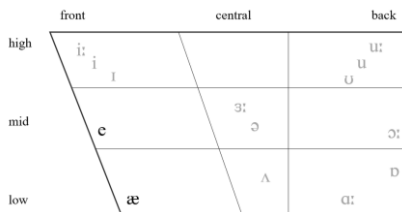
Insert the vowels /i:/, /ɪ/, or /i/ in the following examples.

|                  |                                      |                 |                          |                    |   |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------|---|
| <i>Baily</i>     | / <sup>h</sup> beɪl_/_               | <i>indeed</i>   | /_n <sup>h</sup> d_d/_   | <i>screamingly</i> | / <sup>h</sup> skr_m_ŋl_/_              |
| <i>bailee</i>    | /beɪl_/_                             | <i>listee</i>   | /l_s <sup>h</sup> t_/_   | <i>extremely</i>   | /_k <sup>h</sup> str_ml_/_              |
| <i>menial</i>    | /m_n_ə/_                             | <i>sixteen</i>  | /s_ks <sup>h</sup> t_n/_ | <i>Billy</i>       | / <sup>h</sup> b_l_/_                   |
| <i>fifteen</i>   | /f <sup>h</sup> f <sup>h</sup> t_n/_ | <i>discrete</i> | /d <sup>h</sup> 'skr_t/_ | <i>pinwheel</i>    | / <sup>h</sup> p_nw_l/_                 |
| <i>chickpeas</i> | /tʃ <sup>h</sup> _kp_z/_             | <i>Frisbee</i>  | / <sup>h</sup> fr_zb_/_  | <i>midweekly</i>   | /m <sup>h</sup> _d <sup>h</sup> w_kl_/_ |



## 2B. Vowels /e/ and /æ/

e æ



**lower**

**case e**

*pet* /pet/

*pen*

/pen/

**ash**

*pat* /pæt/

*pan* /pæn/

---

/e/ In a great majority of cases, it is spelled as the letter 'e' before a consonant:

*Ben, bet, bell, beg, best, else, sell, well, went, etc.*

---

In a lot of words with 'ea':

*already, bread, breakfast, breath, deaf, death, head, health, heaven, heavy, instead, leather, measure, pleasure, ready, spread, steady, stealth, thread, threat, tread, wealth, well-read*

---

Special-case spellings

The vowel /e/ has a number of unpredictable spellings:

With 'a': *any* /eni/, *many* /meni/, *Thames* /temz/

With 'ai' / 'ay': *again* /ə'geɪn/, *said* /sed/, *says* /sez/

Miscellaneous:

*bury* /'beri/, *friend* /frend/, *Geoff* /dʒef/, *Leicester* /'lestə/

---

/æ/ In a great majority of cases, it is spelled as the letter 'a' before a consonant: *add, ban, cat, dab, hag, stack, tab, etc.*

---

! But not in sequences *a-* *bane* /beɪn/ *ache* /eɪk/ (See Unit CONSONANT-*e*: 2H)

---

! Not before 'r' *art* /ɑ:t/ *carb* /kɑ:b/ (See Unit 2E)

---

/æ/ possible before 'rr' *carry* /'kæri/ *marry* /'mæri/

---

## Exercise 2B.1

Transcribe the following words and expressions.

*anyone's guess*

*heavy-handed man*

/eniwʌnz \_\_\_\_\_/

*oven-ready* /,ʌvən \_\_\_\_\_/

*deadpan*

*ready, steady, go!* / \_\_\_\_\_ 'gəʊ/

*bury the hatchet* /'beri ðə \_\_\_\_\_/

*treadmill*

*dead end street*

*tread very gently* / \_\_\_\_\_ 'dʒentli/

*heaven-sent*

/eə/ and /ɛr/

In words like *dare*, *bear* or *there*, British English has the diphthong /eə/, which will be treated in Unit 2H. This sound corresponds to /ɛr/ in American English:

|              | BrE   | AmE   |
|--------------|-------|-------|
| <i>dare</i>  | /deə/ | /dɛr/ |
| <i>there</i> | /ðeə/ | /ðɛr/ |

### Exercise 2B.2

Provide the spelling for the following transcriptions.

/ə ˌfrend ɪn ˈniːd ɪz ə ˌfrend ɪnˈdiːd/

/ˈθret əv ˌwepənz əv ˌmæs dɪˈstrʌkʃən/

/ðə ˈbest ˈθɪŋ sɪns ˌslaɪst ˈbred/

/ˌpʊt jə ˈbest ˈfʊt ˈfəːwəd/

### Exercise 2B.3

Transcribe the following expressions.

*ready to wear* /redi tə weə/

*step ahead*

*threadbare defense*

*bear witness to the facts*

*anywhere*

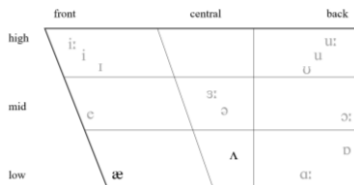
*man's best friend*

*dead and buried*

## 2C. Vowels /ʌ/ and /æ/

ʌ

æ



**turned v**

**ash**

*cut* /kʌt/

*cat* /kæt/

*pun* /pʌn/

*pan* /pæn/

In a great majority of cases, /ʌ/ is spelled as the letter ‘u’ before a consonant:

*bun* /bʌn/, *cut* /kʌt/, *dub* /dʌb/,  
*hug*, *stuck*, *tub*, etc.

The sound /ʌ/ is heard in a number of frequent words spelled with ‘o’:

*one* /wʌn/, *done* /dʌn/, *none* /nʌn/,  
*come*, *cover*, *govern*, *dove*,  
*love*, *glove*, *oven*, *other*,  
*brother*, *mother*, *some*,  
*something*, *nothing*, *money*,  
*monkey*, *onion*, *comfort*, *color*,  
*does*, *London*

! But not in sequences u-  
CONSONANT-e:

*fume* /fju:m/ *mute* /mju:t/ (See  
Unit 2G)

! Not before in sequences r-  
CONSONANT

*urn* /ɜ:n/ *lurk* /lɜ:k/ (See Unit  
2D)

! The letter ‘a’ never stands for /ʌ/  
but /æ/ is nearly always represented  
by ‘a’

*bad* /bæd/, *dab* /dæb/, *lack*  
/læk/, *tap* /tæp/, *sand* /sænd/,  
*van* /væn/

#### Special-case spellings

Some cases of /ʌ/ words to memorize are listed below. Make sure you know how to pronounce these words with 'o': *ton, son, won, front*;  
with 'oo': *blood, flood*;  
with 'ou': *touch, country, cousin, young, couple, double, trouble*;  
with 'ough': *enough, rough, tough*

### Exercise 2C.1

Which words are being contrasted in the following minimal pairs?

|             |             |               |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| /ʌdə/ /ʌdə/ | /gæl/ /gæl/ | /stæk/ /stæk/ |
| /bæn/ /bæn/ | /hæl/ /hæl/ | /stæn/ /stæn/ |
| /dæd/ /dæd/ | /sæk/ /sæk/ | /tæb/ /tæb/   |

### Exercise 2C.2

What homophones do the words *son, won, and none*, have?

#### Homophone

If two words have different spellings and different meanings, but are pronounced the same, they are technically referred to as **HOMOPHONES**. Examples include *lead* (metal) and *led* (past form of the verb *to lead*); they are both pronounced /led/.

### Exercise 2C.3

Transcribe the following

|                            |                              |                                      |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>an ugly cover-up</i>    | <i>son-of-a-gun</i>          | <i>happy-go-lucky</i><br>/ __gəʊ__ / |
| <i>a ton of /əv/ money</i> | <i>bloodbath</i>             | <i>country cousin</i>                |
| <i>a stunning comeback</i> | <i>an unloved son</i>        | <i>number one</i>                    |
| <i>black color</i>         | <i>front man</i>             | <i>bad blood</i>                     |
| <i>troubled young lad</i>  | <i>stuck in the /ðə/ mud</i> | <i>funny monkey</i>                  |

## 2D. Vowels /ɜ:/ and /ʌ/

3:      ʌ

**reversed  
epsilon**

*burn* /bɜ:n/

*curl* /kɜ:t/

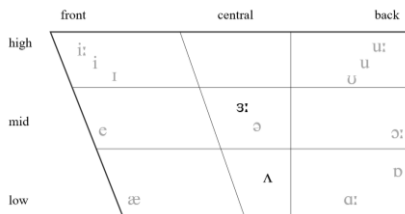
*firm* /fɜ:n/

**turned v**

*bun* /bʌn/

*cut* /kʌt/

*fun* /fʌn/




---

/ɜ:/ Spelled as 'ur' at the end of a word, also before a consonant: *burn, curl, fur, hurt, nurse, purse, surge, Thursday, etc.*

---

'er' *perfect, serve, nerve, herb, herd, nerd*

---

'ir' *bird, dirt, firm, first, girl, sir, thirst*

---

'ear' before a consonant *earth, heard, hearse, learn, pearl, search*

---

'wor' *word, work, world, worm, worse (worsen, worst), wort, worth*

---

/ʌ/ In a great majority of cases, spelled as the letter 'u' before a consonant: *bun, cut, dub, hug, stuck, tub, etc.*

---