

Pronunciation for English Language Learners

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is a system of phonetic symbols developed by linguists to represent each of the wide variety of sounds (phones or phonemes) used in spoken human language. This includes both vowel and consonant sounds. The IPA is used to signal the pronunciation of words. Each symbol is treated separately below, with examples (like those used in the dictionary) so you can pronounce the word in American English.

Single consonant symbols and sounds

Symbol	Sound	Examples
p	p in pen	pin, play, top, pretty, poppy, possible, pepper, pour
t	t in taxi	tell, time, toy, tempted, tent, tender, bent, taste, to
r or t̚	t in bottle	butter, writer, rider, pretty, matter, city, pity
ʔ or t̚	t in button	cotton, curtain, kitten, Clinton, continent, forgotten
k	c in corn	car, copy, kill, kin, queen, quilt
s	s in sandal	sell, sinful, fussy, so, city, cell, receive
f	f in fan	face, fit, phone, photo, graph, laugh
m	m in mouse	miss, camera, home, woman, dam, bomb
b	b in boot	bother, boss, baby, maybe, club, verb, born, snobby
d	d in duck	dude, duck, daytime, bald, blade, dinner, sudden, do
g	g in goat	go, guts, giggle, girlfriend, gift, guy, goat, globe, go
z	z in zebra	zap, zipper, zoom, zealous, jazz, zucchini, zero
v	v in van	very, vaccine, valid, veteran, achieve, civil, vivid
n	n in nurse	never, nose, nice, sudden, tent, nickel, knife, knight
l	l in lake	liquid, laugh, linger, little, belly, bell, soul, language
y or j	y in yacht	yield, yucky, yesterday, yum, yell, yellow, yawn, yo
h	h in house	happy, house, horse, holiday, heaven, hold, hello, hi
r	r in rabbit	river, forever, riddle, right, write, wrong
ɔ	w in wolf	wonder, winter, witch, which, where

Double consonant symbols and sounds

Symbol	Sound	Examples
ʃ	sh in ship	shock, wish, sugar, machine, mustache
tʃ	ch in chip	chicken, church, children, chick, cheese, chose, chair
θ	th in throw	think, throw, threw, through, thank, theory
ð	th in there	this, the, them, they, thee, rhythm, breathe, father
ʒ	s in treasure	Asian, measure, casual, leisure, pleasure
dʒ	j in jacket	jest, jacket, juice, rejoice, Jim, joy, gym
ŋ	ng in singer	wing, ring, wrong, strong, bang, anger, jungle, finger

Single vowel symbols and sounds

Symbol	Sound	Examples
ɑ	a in father	car, arm, cart, art, jar, awkward, distraught, nod
ɔw	aw in saw	law, thaw, gnaw, dawn, ball, bought, on, frog
i or i:	ee in need	happy, glorious, pizza, read, need, cheese, succeed
u or u:	u in rude	boot, too, to, two, group, shoe, rude, food, proof, cool
e	e in bed	fed, men, bell, motel, hell, farewell, medicine, said
æ	a in bat	cat, bad, trap, have, bass, lamb, plaid, ant, aunt, ask
ʌ	u in up	bus, cup, rut, but, up, drunk, summer, love, cousin
ɒ	o in dog	hot, odd, knot, lot, body, sorry, obvious, fought, wash
I or i	i in bid	kit, bid, kindergarten, sizzle, twitter, zip, jingle, hymn
ʊ or u	oo in wood	would, could, should, look, good, put, push, sugar
ɜ:	i in bird	her, nurse, learn, pearl, circle, nerve, person, service
ə	e in hidden	about, comma, adjust, supply, trust, must, dozen

Double vowel symbols and sounds (diphthongs)

Symbol	Sound	Examples
aʊ or aw	ow in cow	brow, how, bow, vow, now, allow, mouth, announce
Iə	e in here	ear, sear, appear, mere, mirror, beer, peer, we're
ɔi/oy/oj	oy in toys	boil, choice, rejoice, soil, avoid, voice, boy, toy, royal
ei/ey/ej	ai in rain	fate, take, wake, mate, day, break, train, wait, vein
ai/ay/aj	i in kite	bite, price, vice, wine, kind, vine, rewind, bye, my
eə	ai in chair	hair, air, wear, various, care, rare, beware, hilarious
ʊə	ou in tourist	tour, sewer, lure, newer, fewer, viewer, you're
oʊ or ow	oa in coat	goat, show, no, bow, grow, arrow, borrow, dough

Transcribing into IPA

Here are what words look like transcribed into IPA; you match the symbols to their sounds to pronounce them:

tran·scribe: (træn -skraɪb') peo·ple (pi'pəl) psy·chol·o·gy (sai-k ɔ'lə- dʒi)

I am going to my friend's house to study for my history test.

Ei em goʌŋ tu maɪ frendz haʊs tu stʌdi fəʊr maɪ hɪstəʊri test.

Will you please tell me where I can find the Post Office?

Wil ju plɪz tel mi weər ei kæn faɪnd ðə Pəʊst ɔfɪs?

For the trip you will need a camera, hiking boots, binoculars, and a packed lunch.

Fəʊr ðə trɪp ju wɪl niːd ə kæmərə, haɪkɪŋ butz, bɪnəkʊlərz, ænd ə pækt lʌntʃ

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