

The Vowels

Learning a new vowel system can require the learner to modify vowels they already have and to develop new ones. This is especially true of the vowel system of English because English uses an uncommonly large number of vowels. In this book we will identify 16 different vowels. However, English has only five letters to represent these vowels: *a, e, i, o, u*. Obviously this is another challenge for learners: too many vowels; not enough letters. Additionally, many languages have only five vowel sounds. Therefore the total number of English vowels sounds and the insufficient number of vowel letters is a challenge.

The chart below shows the vowel sounds of English. Each vowel sound is represented by one or two letters that will be the symbols in this book for these vowel sounds.*

EE	ER	OO
I	U	
AI	uh UH	OY O
E	AY	OU
A	AH	AW

The Key

Say each of these words.

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Sound</u>
EE	beet	ER	bird	OO	boon
I	bit	uh	<u>a</u> bove	U	book
AI	bay	UH	<u>a</u> bove	OY	boy
E	bet	AY	bite	O	bowl
A	bat	AH	barn	AW	bawl
		OU	bout		

*The phonetic alphabet used in this book is not one of the usual standards. (For a comparison with other common systems, see page 99-100 in the Appendix.) The system in this book was devised because it uses no “strange” letters (such as æ, ʃ, ə) or diacritic marks (˘, ˙), thereby imposing a second alphabet between the learner and the real English alphabet.

These are a few sample pages from **Teaching North American English Pronunciation**,
by Raymond C. Clark and Richard Yorkey, © 2011 Pro Lingua Associates.
The pages from **Part One** explain English phonology - first vowels (pages 2, 12) and consonants (14, 18)
and then the suprasegmental phonology system (25-27).
These are followed by **Photocopiable** handout exercises from **Part Two** (56-57, 65, 81-82) to try out in your classroom.

PART ONE * INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH PHONOLOGY

AY

EE I	ER	U OO
AI E	UH	
A	AY AH	AW

For worksheets, see page 56 in Section Two.

This vowel can be considered to be two vowels blending together (called a diphthong). /AY/ begins with /AH/ and moves very quickly to /EE/. For example, you touch something hot and say *Ay Ay Ay!* Notice how the sound glides from /AH/ to /EE/. This sound is not a huge pronunciation problem for most learners.

There are some spelling considerations. First note the use of *y* as in *my, by, try, fly*. Second, another common spelling is the letter *i* followed by the “silent e”, as in *side, file, smile, time, nice*. And then there is the strange spelling “igh” as in *sigh, fight, slight, and night*.

OU

EE I	ER	U OO
AI E	UH	
A	AY AH	OU AW

For worksheets, see page 57 in Section Two.

This is what you say when you stub your toe or hit your head. Like /AY/, it begins as an /AH/ and then moves toward an /OO/ as in, *Ow!* or *Ouch!* This is not usually a problem sound for learners, although it may be a new sound. The spelling can be troublesome. Like the symbol OU for the sound, there is the spelling *ou* as in *out, bout, pout*.

However, many words follow the “how now, brown cow” spelling of /ow/.

The Consonants

The chart below shows the 24 English consonants:

Labial/Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar
P B		T D		K G
F V	th TH	S Z	CH J SH ZH	H
M		N		NG
W		L R		Y

The Key

Say each of these words.

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Sound</u>
P	pay	F	fan	M	su <u>m</u>
B	bay	V	van	N	su <u>n</u>
T	tie	th	thigh	NG	su <u>ng</u>
D	die	TH	thy	L	lice
K	kill	S	sue	R	rice
G	gill	Z	zoo	W	wield
		CH	cheap	Y	yield
		J	Jeep		
		SH	asher		
		ZH	azure		

The Fricatives

Labial/Labio-dental		Dental	Alveolar		Palatal		Velar	
P	B		T	D			K	G
	F V	th TH	S Z		CH SH	J ZH		H
M			N				NG	
W			L	R			Y	

The next group of eleven consonants is called fricatives because they all are formed by forcing the air through a narrow channel which causes friction. Again we will see that most of these sounds have voiceless and voiced pairs.

S and Z For worksheets, see page 65 in Part Two.

To begin, let's look at a voiceless /S/ and a voiced /Z/. Start out with a hiss, like a snake, /S/, and then switch to a /Z/ like a snore. Note that the lips are open but the teeth remain closed, and as a result the air is constricted and vibrates as it passes by the alveolar ridge and the teeth. Some learners will substitute the /S/ for the /Z/. So you may need to do some work here. One spelling problem here is that some /Z/ sounds are spelled with "s," as in *as*, and *is*.

The "-s" ending on Verbs and Nouns

The "s" that is used for plurals (*dogs*), third person singular verbs (*hugs*), and possessive "s," (*Bill's*) is spelled "s," "es," or "ies" (for words ending in "y"), but there are three pronunciations.

If the word ends in a voiceless sound, the "s" is pronounced /S/ as in *walk* > /WAWKS/, *lip* > /LIPS/.

If the word ends in a voiced sound, the pronunciation is /Z/ as in *beg* > /BEGZ/, *bed* > /BEDZ/, *Bill's* > /BILZ/.

If the word ends in /S/, /Z/, /SH/, /ZH/, /CH/, or /J/, a syllable is added, as in *bus* > /BUHSIZ/, *buzz* > /BUHZIZ/, *wish* > /WISHIZ/, *itch* > /ICHIZ/ *edge* > /EJIZ/.

There is a worksheet on this problem on page 66 in Part Two.

And there are some /S/ sounds that are spelled with a "c," as in *city*.

AY

<i>Vowels</i>	EE I		U OO
	AI E	UH	
	A	AY AH	AW

Listen and Say

i..e	y	i	igh	others
bite	by	bind	tight	tie
five	sky	I	might	dye
life	dry	mild	sight	eye
time	my	kind	fight	buy

Phrases

a wild ride	a fine drive	a dry fly
a bright light	a white wine	a nice price
a mild night	a white pine	a high rise

Sentences

Why does he cry at night?	Try to arrive on time.
Mice are a frightening sight.	White mice like rice.
She cried at the sight of the mice.	Why did it die?
He tried to be kind to the child.	The time was right.

Rhymes

sign	white	my	rice	ride
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

For Fun

As I was going to St. Ives,
 I met a man with seven wives;
 Each wife had seven sacks,
 Each sack had seven cats,
 Each cat had seven kits,
 Kits, cats, sacks, and wives,
 How many were going to St. Ives?

OU

Vowels

EE I	ER	U OO
AI E	UH	
A	AY AH	OU AW

Listen and Say

<u>ou</u>	<u>ow</u>
cloud	ow
south	brown
out	now
house	town
flour	flower

Phrases

a brown cow	about the house
a loud sound	without a doubt
a proud scout	around the town
down on the ground	a pound and an ounce

Sentences

The clown fell down.	The sound in the town was loud.
The mouse was brown.	The brow of the cow was brown.
The cow was found.	The shout from the crowd was loud.

Rhymes

town	out	around	
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

For Fun

Downtown Brown has a brown hound
 That hangs around the town; it thinks it's a clown.
 It makes no sound; it just lounges around
 In the park on the ground.
 The cops came around, put the hound in the pound.
 It cost Brown a pound to get his brown hound
 Out of the pound.

S and Z

Consonants

P B		T D		K G
F V	th TH	S Z	CH J SH ZH	H
M		N		NG
W		L R		Y

Listen and Say

1	2
price	prize
race	raise
Sue	zoo
place	plays
loose	lose
close	close

Phrases

a slow start	a safe speed	a soft song
safe and sound	a loose tooth	nice rice
lazy girls	crazy boys	busy bees
the zebra at the zoo	a dozen daisies	frogs' legs
a crazy place	a priceless prize	the city zoo

Sentences

He received a prize for first place in the race.
 Sally likes to sew dresses. The bees were busy and buzzing.
 She hopes to pass science. The boys were crazy and dizzy.
 Sally wants to see Sammy. The bears were Fuzzy and Wuzzy.

For Fun

In the Gambia, a Zambian musician
 Playing jazz made a fateful decision.
 He picked up the bongo
 And went to the Congo
 Where now he's a famous physician.

Simple Simon met a pieman going to the fair;
 Said Simple Simon to the pieman, "Let me
 taste your ware."
 Said the pieman to Simple Simon, "Show me
 first your penny."
 Said Simple Simon to the pieman, "Sir, I
 haven't any!"

The Suprasegmental Phonology System

As the term suggests, this aspect of phonology deals with the aspect of sound and pronunciation that overlays the individual segments of sound. At its basic level it affects loudness of syllables (stress) and the pitch of syllables (intonation).

As syllables are strung together in flowing speech, vowel reduction and linking take place, and the utterances result in rhythmic phrasing.

Syllabification

For worksheets, see page 79 in Part Two.

Before taking on the first element of the suprasegmental system, it is worthwhile to review the concept of "syllable." Simply put, a syllable is a unit of sound that has a vowel at its core and possible consonants before and after the vowel. A syllable can be simply a single vowel sound (V), for example the *a* in *pro nun ci a tion*, or a consonant and vowel (CV), as in *ci*, or CCV as in *pro*, or CVC as in *nun* and *tion*. The following are common English syllable patterns.

V	C-V	C-V-C	C-C-V-C	C-C-C-V-C	C-C-C-V-C-C
/EE/	/TEE/	/TEEM/	/STEEL/	/STREEK/	/STRENGth/

In multisyllable words it is not always easy to tell where one syllable ends and another begins, so when in doubt consult a dictionary. The main point is that there must be one and only one vowel in every syllable. As we shall see in the next section, stress will fall on that vowel. Break each word in this list into syllables and show the syllable pattern. The first one is done.

___ review	re view	CV CCV
___ column		
___ headline		
___ newspaper		
___ editorial		
___ opinion		
___ classified		
___ political		
___ accident		
___ international		
___ information		
___ advertisement		

Answers on page 101.

Stress

For worksheets, see page 81 in Part Two.

Stress in linguistic terms refers to the amount of energy that a syllable receives when it is uttered. In simpler terms, it is how loud the syllable is. A stressed syllable is louder and usually a bit longer than the other syllables in a word or phrase.

Primary Stress

Remember that a syllable includes one vowel sound with one or more consonant sounds before and/or after the vowel, although a syllable can be just a vowel sound. Say the words below, break them into syllables, and underline the loudest syllable.

- Example: Canada Can a da
- Boston
- Cleveland
- Ontario
- Nebraska
- Minneapolis
- Philadelphia
- Los Angeles

Answers on page 101.

Weak Stress

Now let's take a closer look at two-syllable words in English and observe the stress. Say these words and underline the stressed syllable, for example, Portland.

- listen pencil vowel common purpose English

If you say these words at normal speed, do you notice that the vowel in the second syllable is very weak, even hard to hear?

- . ● . ● . ● . ● . ● .
- LIS uhN PEN suhL VOU uhL CAHM uhn PER PuhS ING LuhSH

THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT FEATURE OF SPOKEN ENGLISH.

Because stressed syllables consume so much energy (long and loud), the syllables that are not stressed lose energy, and their vowels tend to lose their identity and collapse to the mid-central area inhabited by unstressed /uh/. In fact, the unstressed /uh/ has a special name: schwa – a very nondescript sound that is barely audible. In this book we use /uh/ to indicate this sound and call the stress “weak.” Also note that for learners, it can be challenging to develop their listening comprehension skill because so much of what they hear is unstressed and barely audible. *For worksheets, see page 84 in Part Two.*

Secondary Stress

For worksheets, see pages 82 and 83 in Part Two.

Now say these words. Underline the primary stress and notice the second syllable.

Pronoun notebook laptop phoneme email keyboard

In this series of words something different happens. Let’s look at *pronoun*. The “*pro*” is stressed, right? But the “*noun*” is too, agreed? *Noun* is not as loud as *pro*, but it is still loud enough for us to hear the quality of /OU/ in noun. What we have here is secondary stress.

We will therefore consider English to have three levels of stress: primary (●), secondary (●), and weak (•).

Compound Word Stress

You may also have noticed that in the second group of words, there are actually two words joined together to form a new word. This process is called compounding, and most compound nouns follow the stress pattern of primary-secondary.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
PRONOUN NOTBUK LAPTAHP FONEEM EEMEYL KEEBORD

Although this stress pattern is common for nouns, compound verbs (including phrasal verbs) and adjectives often have the reverse pattern:

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
overcome log on look up (a word) far-reaching outstanding

Syllable Stress 1: ● ●

Pronounce the word *teacher*. The word has two syllables: *tea-* and *-cher*. The first syllable has is louder and a little longer than the second syllable: **tea** cher. This is called stress. The longer and louder sound of the first syllable is called PRIMARY stress and the shorter and quieter sound of second syllable is called SECONDARY.

Listen to these words. The first syllable has primary stress. It is printed in capital letters. The big circle represents primary stress. The smaller circle represents secondary stress.



tea cher
Eng lish
lec ture



Mon day
col lege
pa per



morn ing
un der
o ver

Practice saying these names:

Albert	Francis	Kenneth	Paula	Victor
Betty	Georgia	Laura	Quentin	Walter
Carlos	Harold	Michael	Robert	Yuri
Donna	Ingrid	Nancy	Sandra	Zoey
Edward	Jason	Oden	Thomas	

Syllable Stress 2: ● ●

Some words have primary stress on the second syllable. Listen to these words.



a **bove**
re **turn**
sur **prise**



re **peat**
al **low**
mis **take**



a **fraid**
pre **tend**
ap **pear**

There are no rules that are always true for stress, but we can make some general statements.

1. **Most** two-syllable words have primary stress on the first syllable.
2. Two-syllable words that have a prefix are **usually** pronounced with the primary stress on the second syllable.

Practice. Listen to these nonsense words and circle the syllable that has primary stress.

kinning	desack	kipful	pertrop
anoop	uggles	repalled	untock
gopply	vapy	kuster	fredded
prothorbed	tishken	affrond	norking
fribble	gulpin	imprale	sumpster

Answers on page 102.

Syllable Stress

With some words, moving the primary stress from one syllable to the other can cause a change in the part of speech. A noun can become a verb and vice versa. There may also be a change in meaning.

Listen to these words. If the primary stress is on the first syllable, circle it and say "one." If it is on the second syllable, circle it and say "two."*

object	conduct	address
increase	produce	permit
contract	perfect	project

Which words are verbs?

Can you make a rule?

Answers on page 102.

Say these words as verbs:

subject	reject	record
conflict	address	decrease
convert	present	protest
rebel	contrast	extract
insult	progress	suspect
permit	refuse	desert
annex	conduct	

Now say them as nouns.

Say these sentences:

1. There are conflicting reports that the conflict may be over.
2. He converted to Islam last year. As a convert he now prays every day.
3. We can't permit you to do that. Your permit has expired.
4. She presented him with a beautiful present.
5. The dump refused to take the refuse because it was full.
6. The suspect addressed the jury and protested that he was not guilty.
7. They converted the annex into a shoe store.
8. The rebels rejected the peace plan.
9. Several soldiers deserted in the Western Desert.

* Teacher's note: hear answers for the pronunciation on the CD.