



# Passport to English

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## English Pronunciation

### Vowels

The pronunciation of English vowels can be complicated because while there are only five vowels (the letters), there are more than 20 sounds. The pronunciation of a vowel depends on its position in the word and whether it's combined with other vowels. There are some rules, but unfortunately, there are many exceptions to the rules. I think learning the rules is a good place to start, however. After learning the rules, you can gradually learn all the words that are exceptions to the rules.

Vowels in English can have what we call "long" or "short" sounds. When a vowel has a "long" sound, the vowel "says its name" (is pronounced like the letter name).

Long Sound			Short Sound		
Letter	Phonetic Symbol	Example	Letter	Phonetic Symbol	Example
a	/eɪ/	cane	a	/æ/	can
e	/i:/	bead	e	/e/	bed
i	/aɪ/	site	i	/ɪ/	sit
o	/o:/	goat	o	/a/ (USA) /ɒ/ (UK)	got (USA) got (UK)
u	/u:/	tube	u	/^/	tub

### Vowel Pronunciation Rules

These are some rules for vowel pronunciation, but there are many exceptions to the rules.

### Consonant-Vowel-Consonant

When a word (or syllable) ends with a vowel between two consonants (Consonant-Vowel-Consonant), the vowel has a "short" sound (See the short vowel sounds in the table above.).

#### **Examples:**

tap	pot
let	bug
sip	

## The Silent e

When a word ends with a consonant and then a letter **e**, the **e** is not pronounced (hence the term "silent e"), but the **e** makes the pronunciation of the vowel preceding the consonant longer. When children are learning to read, they say the **e** is magical because it changes the pronunciation of the other vowel.

### **Examples:**

cap - cape  
pet - Pete  
pin - pine  
rob - robe  
tub - tube

The Silent e is magical, isn't it?

## Consonant-Vowel

When a word (or a syllable) ends in a consonant and then a vowel, the pronunciation is long.

### **Examples:**

me  
hi  
go

## Combination of Vowels

When two vowels appear together, usually only the first vowel is pronounced, and it is pronounced in with the long vowel sound. Children learn the rhyme "When two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking. It says its name."

### **Examples:**

rain  
meat  
coat

A common exception to this rule is diphthongs (see table below). Diphthongs are vowel combinations that have special pronunciations.

Phonetic Symbol	Diphthong	Example
/aɪ/	ie, uy	die
/aʊ/	ou, ow	house
/eɪ/	ei, ey, ay, ai	eight
/əʊ/	ow, oa	show
/eə/	ai, ea	fair
/ɪə/	ea, ee	hear
/ɔɪ/	oi, oy	point
/ʊə/	oo	poor

## R-Controlled Vowels

When children are learning to read, they are also taught that the letter **r** is very bossy. It changes the pronunciation of the preceding vowel. See the list below for common pronunciations of vowels combined with **r**.

Vowel with <b>r</b>	Phonetic Symbol	Example
ar	/ar/	far
er	/ər/	her
ir	/ər/	stir
or	/ɔr/	for
ur	/er/	fur

There is a big difference in the vowel sound when we add the **r**.

pat - part  
gem- germ  
fist - first  
spot - sport  
bust - burst

## English Consonants

Next we'll explain a few consonants that can be confusing in English.

### The Letter C

We pronounce the letter **c** as **s** when it comes before **e**, **i**, or **y**, but as **k** when it comes before other letters.

**Examples:**

central  
city  
cyst  
car  
code  
cub

### The Letter G

We pronounce the letter **g** as **j** when it comes before **e**, **i**, or **y**, but as **g** when it comes before other letters.

**Examples:**

gem  
gist  
gym  
game  
go  
gum

## Digraphs

When two consonants come together to make a new sound, it is called a digraph. Some digraphs in English are **ch**, **sh**, **th**, **ph** and **wh**.

Digraph	Phonetic Symbol	Example
ch	/tʃ/	chair
sh	/ʃ/	shoe
th	/θ/	thin
	/ð/	than
ph	/f/	telephone
wh	/w/	what