Pronunciation Guide for English

In the English writing system, many of the graphemes (letters and letter groups) have m[ore] than one possible pronunciation.

Sometimes, specific sequences of letters can alert the reader to the possible pronunciati[on] required; for example, note the letter sequences shown as 'hollow letters' in this guide as ['watch', 'salt' and 'city' – indicating that, in these words with these letter patterns, letter [a] is usually code for the /o/ sound and letter c is always code for the /s/ sound. Slash mar[ks] around a letter or letters – for example, /o/, /s/ or /sh/ – indicate a sound – usually at t[he] level of the phoneme – the smallest unit of sound identifiable in speech.

This Pronunciation Guide is not comprehensive as it does not include all the graphemes an[d] sounds in the English language. The guide is based on letters, groups of letters, and comm[on] spelling patterns, which generally have more than one pronunciation dependent on the word[s] themselves. This is NOT the same as an Alphabetic Code Chart based on ALL the phonemes.

Some of the word examples in the Pronunciation Guide below are words used commonly bu[t] they have very unusual spellings, for example: 'any', 'said', 'pretty', 'women' and 'choir'.

The guide below cannot be definitive about how to pronounce each word becaus[e] pronunciations vary according to regional or national accents in the English language. Th[e] complexity of the Pronunciation Guide demonstrates the advisability of teaching the Englis[h] alphabetic code (the grapheme-phoneme correspondences) for reading, and for spelling systematically and thoroughly. Some learners are able to deduce the alphabetic code for themselves through lots of book experience and writing experience as they mature (although they may not fully appreciate that they are 'picking up' what is known as the alphabetic code – or alphabetic principle). Other learners, however, only manage to 'pick up' some alphabetic code without explicit teaching – or they may fail to deduce the alphabetic principle at all – regardless of their book experience at home or in school.

Years of research and leading-edge practice has shown that the best way to teach reading and spelling in the English language is to teach the English alphabetic code and the core phonics skills of decoding for reading and encoding for spelling very explicitly, systematically and comprehensively – providing reading, spelling and writing activities which match the code that has been taught to date. This approach serves all learners of all ages and is essential for many learners whatever their age.

The Phonics International programme is designed and organised around the free Alphabetic Code Charts at www.alphabeticcodecharts.com . The notion of the Alphabetic Code Chart is based on the 'units of sound mainly at phoneme level' of the English language and the graphemes which are code for the sounds. This Pronunciation Guide, in contrast, is based on some spelling patterns shown in the left column and provides examples of different pronunciation. See www.phonicsinternational.com to learn more about the rationale of the Phonics International programme and the importance of the Alphabetic Code Charts.

Pronunciation Guide for English

graphemes and spelling patterns	example words including common and rare spellings	sounds phonemes and multiple phonemes
a	apple 🍎	/a/ grey background = common pronunciation
	table 🔤 apricot	/ai/
	watch ⌚ qualify 📜 salt 🧂	/o/
	father drama	/ar/
	any many	/e/
	water 🍸 also always	/or/
	banana 🍌	schwa /u/
	village 🫐 manage	/i/
ai	first aid	/ai/
	said again 🚶 against	/e/
	bargain 🍇 mountain	schwa /u/
al	palace	/a/ + /l/
	hospital capital	/ul/
	salt 🧂 alternative	/o/ + /l/
	chalk walk talk	/or/
	palm 🌴 half 🎩 calves 🐄	/ar/
	also almost altogether	/or/ + /l/
ar	artist 🎨 start	/ar/
	wardrobe 🚪 quarter 🍽	/or/
	collar 🐱 ⬅ sugar 🍬	schwa /er/ or /u/
are	hare 🐇 care dare	/air/
	You are funny. 👦	/ar/
aw	awkward 🏃 awful	/or/
	aware	/a/ + /w/

ay	tray	/ai/
	She says that I am funny.	/e/
e	egg	/e/
	emu me he she we be	/ee/
	pretty	/i/
	acne	between /i/ and /ee/
ea	eat reach each	/ee/
	head breakfast	/e/
	break great	/ai/
ear	ears nearby	/eer/
	bear wear	/air/
	earth search	/er/
	heart hearth	/ar/
-eau	plateau	/oa/
	beautiful butterfly	/y+oo/
-ed	It rained.	/d/
	She skipped.	/t/
	He acted.	/u/+/d/
ei	either neither	/igh/
-ei	deceive receive receipt	/ee/
-eo	people	/ee/
	leopard	/e/
er	mermaid	/er/
	mixer	schwa /er/ or /u/
-ere	adhere here	/eer/
	where there	/air/
	you were	/er/

-ew	new news	/y+oo/
	crew	long /oo/
-ey	key	/ee/
	monkey	between /i/ and /ee/
	bird of prey they	/ai/
i	insect	/i/
	I am behind the tree.	/igh/
	piano radio	/ee/
-ie	chief brief believe	/ee/
	movie	between /i/ and /ee/
	tie He cried.	/igh/
	friends	/e/
	fiesta	/ee/+/e/
o	octopus	/o/
	yo-yo no go so	/oa/
	son mother	/u/
	move to do who	long /oo/
	women	/i/
	wolf wolves	short /oo/
oi	ointment	/oi/
	coincidence	/oa/+/i/
	choir	/w/+/igh/
on	on board	/o/+/n/
	Once upon a time..... one	/w+o/+/n/
oo	good book look	short /oo/
	moon balloon	long /oo/
	flood blood	/u/

-oor	door floorboards	/or/
	poorly	/long oo+er/or/or/
or	fork	/or/
	world	/er/
	sailor	schwa /er/ or /u/
	historic building	/o/+/r/
ou	"ouch" shout out loud	/ou/
	soup you	long /oo/
	touch	/u/
ough	dough though although	/oa/
	plough	/ou/
	through	long /oo/
	thought bought ought	/or/
	no thoroughfare	schwa /er/ or /u/
our	our house flour	/ou/+ schwa /u/
	your house four	/or/
	savour the flavour	schwa /er/ or /u/
ow	bow tomorrow	/oa/
	owl down town	/ou/
u	umbrella	/u/
	unicorn united	/y+ oo/
	push pull	short /oo/
	penguin	/w/
	superman	long /oo/
-ue	barbecue	/y+oo/
	blue true clue glue	long /oo/
u-e	tube cute cube	/y+oo/

	flute	rule	long /oo/
-ui	fruit		long /oo/
	building		(bu=/b/)+/i/
	guitar		(gu=/g/)+/i/
	intuition		/y+oo/+/i/
-ure	pure	cure obscure	/y+oor/
	sure		/or/
	treasure		schwa /er/ or /u/
be	beg		/b/+/e/
	behind		/b/+/i/
bt	debt	doubt subtle	/t/
	subtract	subterranean	/b/+/t/
c	cat		/k/
	bicycle		/s/ soft c: ce ci cy
-cc	succumb		/k/
	accent	succeed	/k/+/s/ soft c
ch	chairs		/ch/
	chameleon	school	/k/
	chef		/sh/
ci	city		/s/+/i/ soft c
-ci	magician		/sh/
	pronunciation		/s/+/ee/ soft c
de	desk		/d/+/e/
	demand		/d/+/i/
	detour		/d/+/ee/
f	feathers		/f/
	of		/v/

g	girl	/g/
	giraffe	/j/ soft g: ge gi gy
	courgette	/zh/
ge	I get it!	/g/+/e/
	gentle touch	/j/+/e/ soft g
-ge	cabbage	/j/
	collage	/zh/
gh	ghost	/g/
-gh	laugh	/f/
gn	gnome	/n/
	signal	/g/+/n/
gu	guitar	/g/
	gust of wind	/g/+/u/
le	leg	/l/+/e/
-le	kettle	/ul/
-mb	thumb comb	/m/
	number 3 remember	/m/+/b/
n	net	/n/
-n	jungle	/ng/
-ng	gong	/ng/
	bangles	/ng/+/g/
	danger	/n/+/j/ soft g
pn	pneumatic drill	/n/
	hypnotic	/p/+/n/
pt	pterodactyl	/t/
	helicopter deceptive	/p/+/t/
	reception deception	/p/+(ti=/sh/)

g	girl	/g/
	giraffe	/j/ soft g: ge gi gy
	courgette	/zh/
ge	I get it!	/g/+/e/
	gentle touch	/j/+/e/ soft g
-ge	cabbage	/j/
	collage	/zh/
gh	ghost	/g/
-gh	laugh	/f/
gn	gnome	/n/
	signal	/g/+/n/
gu	guitar	/g/
	gust of wind	/g/+/u/
le	leg	/l/+/e/
-le	kettle	/ul/
-mb	thumb comb	/m/
	number 3 remember	/m/+/b/
n	net	/n/
-n	jungle	/ng/
-ng	gong	/ng/
	bangles	/ng/+/g/
	danger	/n/+/j/ soft g
pn	pneumatic drill	/n/
	hypnotic	/p/+/n/
pt	pterodactyl	/t/
	helicopter deceptive	/p/+/t/
	reception deception	/p/+(ti=/sh/)

tw	twice twins	/t/ + /w/
	two 2	/t/
ve	vest ➡	/v/ + /e/
-ve	dove love have	/v/
wa	watch was swap	/w/ + /o/
	wag	/w/ + /a/
wh	wheel when what why	/w/ can be +'breath
	who is it? whole one	/h/
wor	worm work worth	/w/ + /er/
	worn	/w/ + /or/
x	fox	/k+s/
	exam	/g+z/
	xylophone	/z/
	excellent	/k/
y	yawn yesterday	/y/
	sunny happy	between /i/ and /ee/
	fly by my why try	/igh/
	cymbals symbols 1 2 3	/i/

The complexities of the English Alphabetic Code include:

1) one sound (phoneme) can be represented by one, two, three or four letters:
    e.g. /k/ c, /f/ ph, /igh/ igh, /ai/ eigh
2) one sound can be represented by different spellings (graphemes):
    e.g. /oa/ is represented by: o, oa, ow, oe, o-e, eau, ough
3) one spelling (grapheme) can represent multiple sounds:
    e.g. 'ough': /oa/ though, /or/ thought, /oo/ through, /ou/ plough, /u/ thorough

This Pronunciation Guide demonstrates that learning to read the English language is not straightforward. It is easier to teach and learn reading and spelling in English, however, when beginners are not expected to read and write independently with words that have complex and unusual code. The Synthetic Phonics Teaching Principles are based, therefore, on introducing the alphabetic code systematically and providing words, sentences, texts and reading books which match, more or less, the incremental introduction of the alphabetic code in the synthetic phonics programme.