

The 44 Phonemes in English – Standard British Pronunciation (RP)

The symbols between forward slashes / / are used in the UK Government's Letters and Sounds phonics programme*. The green symbols in round brackets are used in the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Consonant Phonemes		Vowel Phonemes	
Phoneme symbols and examples of letters used to represent the phoneme (graphemes).	Example words containing the phoneme.	Common phoneme symbol and example of letters used to represent the phoneme (graphemes).	Example words containing the phoneme.
/b/ (b) b, bb, bu	big, crab, gibbon, build	/a/ (æ) a	at, alligator, can, bag
/ch/ (tʃ) ch, tch, t	chick, beach, match, vulture	/ai/ (eɪ) a, ai, ay, a-e, eigh, ey	apron, rain, play, snake, eight, obey
/d/ (d) d, dd, ed	Dad, add, pulled	/air/ (eə) air, are, ar, ear, ere, eir	hair, care, vary, pear, there, their
/f/ (f) f, ff, ph, gh	fox, fluff, dolphin, cough	/ar/ (ɑː) ar, a, al, ear	arm, father, half, heart
/g/ (g) g, gg, gu, gh	goat, egg, guest, ghost	/e/ (e) e, ea, ai, a	peg, feather, again, many
/h/ (h) h, wh	his, hand, happy, who	/ee/ (iː) ee, ea, e, y, e-e, ie, ey	sheep, clean, ego, female, me, very, phoneme, field, money
/j/ (dʒ) j, g, ge, dge	jump, gem, large, fudge	/ear/ (ɪə) ear, eer, ere, ier	hear, beer, here, tier
/k/ (k) c, k, ck, ch, qu	cat, kitten, clock, school, conquer	/i/ (ɪ) i, y, a (next to ge), e, ui	it, pin, gym, system, baggage, England, build
/l/ (l) l, le, ll	log, handle, grill	/igh/ (aɪ) igh, ie, y, i-e, i	sight, pie, my, pipe, l, mind
/m/ (m) m, mm, mb, mn	man, ham, common, bomb, Autumn	/o/ (ɒ) o, a (often after 'w' and 'qu'), au	ostrich, top, was, wasp, squat, fault
/n/ (n) n, nn, gn, kn	nose, pan, funny, gnome, know	/oa/ (əʊ or oʊ) oa, ow, o, oe, o-e, ou, ough	goat, slow, oval, go, toe, bone, soul, dough
/ng/ (ŋ) ng, n (before k, g and sometimes c), ngue	sing, think, jingle, zinc, tongue	/oi/ (ɔɪ) oi, oy	boil, oink, enjoy, royal
/p/ (p) p, pp	pig, nip, apple	/oo/ (uː) oo, ew, ue, u-e, o, ou, ough, o-e, u	zoo, flew, glue, rude, to, you, through, move, flu
/r/ (r) r, rr, rh, wr	red, hurry, rhino, wrap	/oo/ (ʊ) oo, u, oul	foot, full, would
/s/ (s) s, ss, c, ce, se, sc, st	sit, hiss, city, dance, horse, scissors, fasten	/or/ (ɔː) or, aw, au, ore, al, augh, ough, our	horse, claw, August, store, stalk, taught, bought, four
/sh/ (ʃ) sh, s, ss, ti, ci, ch, ce	ship, wash, sugar, tissue, station, initial, racial, chef, ocean	/ow/ (aʊ) ow, ou, ough	how, flower, cloud, drought
/t/ (t) t, tt, ed, th, bt	toy, cat, mitten, dropped, thyme, debt	/u/ (ʌ) u, o, o-e, ou	up, duck, won, monkey, some, cousin, touch
/th/ (θ) th	thank, thin, thick	/ur/ (ɜː Br. or ɜ US) ur, er, ir, or, ear	turn, germ, bird, word, Earth
/th/ (ð) th	this, then, with	/ure/ (ʊə) ure, oor, our	sure, poor, tour
/v/ (v) v, ve, f	vet, give, of	/ə/ (ə) (or ə in some words with US accent). Schwa sound. Similar to 'uh'. The sound can vary with accents. Various letter combinations.	ago, banana, gorilla, effect, the, corner, landed, parrot, collar, tractor ... and others.
/w/ (w) w, wh, u	wet, when, penguin		
/y/ (j) y, i	yak, yoga, year, onion		
/z/ (z) z, zz, s, se, ze, ss, x	zoo, fizz, beans, please, breeze, dessert, xylophone		
/zh/ (ʒ) s, si, ge	pleasure, erosion, massage.		



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*Letters and Sounds: Principles and Practice of High Quality Phonics, Dept. for Education and Skills 2007.

Note: not all of these phonemes are present in everyone's speech due to variations in local accents. You can find a good description of the differences in American and British English pronunciations via this link: <http://www.antimoon.com/how/pronunc-soundsipa.htm>

This video by Jolly phonics gives the pronunciations of common phonemes in a British English accent first, and then in the second half of the video it repeats the same phonemes in an American English accent: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUCUHUDZIY>

You might notice that some familiar letters and letter patterns are missing from the chart. The letter x actually represents 2 sounds /k/ + /s/ and q is normally found in words next to u, where it also represents 2 sounds /k/ + /w/. Long u can also be considered as 2 sounds – /y/ + /oo/.

To listen to the phonemes represented with the International Phonetic Alphabet Chart, you can download a [phonemic chart with audio](#) from the British Council.

You can listen to the phonemes represented by ordinary letters on [Oxford Owls Phonics Audio Guide](#).

You might also find the following video useful:

Phonics: How to pronounce pure sounds | Oxford Owl:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCI2mu7URBc>

