Phonics

Phonics is a method for figuring out how to pronounce a word by using the sounds of its letters and syllables. Using phonics will help you “sound out” and then say words, which will benefit you in the following ways:

- You will learn to improve your pronunciation of English words.
- You will improve your reading comprehension, for you may recognize a word that seems unfamiliar if you hear it pronounced.
- You will improve your ability to spell words when you write.

To understand how phonics works, you will first examine the sounds of the twenty-one consonants and then the sounds of the five vowels. Finally, you will discover how these sounds combine to create the syllables of words.

CONSONANTS

Twenty-six letters form the words of the English language. Twenty-one of these letters, which are spoken by blocking the air that comes from our mouths with our lips, our teeth, or our tongues, are called consonants. The consonants are b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, and z. (The vowels, which are discussed in the next section, are a, e, i, o, and u.)

Most of the consonants have only one sound. Seven of the consonants have more than one sound. And consonants can be combined to create additional sounds.
Consonants with Only One Sound

Fourteen of the twenty-one consonants usually have only one sound, no matter where they occur in a word. As you read the following list of words, say each one aloud and notice how the letter sounds the same, whether it appears at the beginning, middle, or end of the word.

b bone cabin sob
f fox after hoof
h hello behind inhabit
j jay eject injure
k kite unkind look
l love alone sail
m moon home sum
n nest panel raisin
p pork hope leap
r rent arise soar
t tall later forget
v van even drive
w wax away lower
z zebra lazy squeeze
Note that some of these consonants, such as $b$, $h$, $p$, and $w$, can be silent in some words. See the “Silent Consonants” section for more information.

**Consonants with More Than One Sound**

Seven of the consonants ($c$, $g$, $d$, $q$, $s$, $y$, and $x$) have more than one sound.

The letter $c$ sounds like either the $s$ in *soft* or the $k$ in *kind*. Say aloud the words in the lists below and note the difference in the way the $c$ is pronounced.

- **c with s sound**
  - certain
  - race
  - acid
  - fancy

- **c with k sound**
  - call
  - cobra
  - decay
  - picnic

Some words, like *cycle*, contain a $c$ with an $s$ sound and a $c$ with a $k$ sound. Also, note that $c$ can be silent in some words; see the “Silent Consonants” section for more information.

**Exercise 1**

On the blank next to each word, write $s$ if the $c$ in the word has an $s$ sound or $k$ if the $c$ in the word has a $k$ sound.
The letter \(d\) sounds like either the \(d\) in \textit{dog} or the \(j\) in \textit{jump}. Say aloud the words below and note the difference in the way the \(d\) is pronounced.

\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{d} with \textit{d} sound & \textit{d} with \textit{j} sound \\
\textit{edit} & \textit{education} \\
\textit{modern} & \textit{modular} \\
\textit{golden} & \textit{soldier} \\
\end{tabular}

**Exercise 2**

On the blank next to each word, write \(d\) if the \(d\) in the word has a \(d\) sound or \(j\) if the \(d\) in the word has a \(j\) sound.
The letter $g$ sounds like either the $g$ in goat or the $j$ in jump. Say aloud the words below and note the difference in the way the $g$ is pronounced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$g$ with $g$ sound</th>
<th>$g$ with $j$ sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gust</td>
<td>imagine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gold</td>
<td>gel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hug</td>
<td>village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wagon</td>
<td>gentleman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that the $g$ can be silent in some words; see the “Silent Consonants” section for more information.

**Exercise 3**

On the blank next to each word, write $g$ if the $g$ in the word has a $g$ sound or $j$ if the $g$ in the word has a $j$ sound.

1. dragon ______
The letter *q*, which is always followed by the letter *u*, sounds like either *kw* as in *quick* or *k* as in *boutique*. Say aloud the words below and note the difference in the way the *qu* is pronounced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>qu</em> with <em>kw</em> sound</th>
<th><em>qu</em> with <em>k</em> sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>question</em></td>
<td><em>antique</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>quality</em></td>
<td><em>clique</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>inquire</em></td>
<td><em>unique</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>squirt</em></td>
<td><em>mosque</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that the *qu* words with a *k* sound usually come from foreign languages, such as French or Spanish.
Exercise 4

On the blank next to each word, write kw if the qu in the word has a kw sound or k if the qu in the word has a k sound.

1. quiet  ______
2. technique  ______
3. quality  ______
4. critique  ______
5. quirk  ______
6. physique  ______
7. mosquito  ______
8. quaint  ______
9. quench  ______
10. oblique  ______

The letter s sounds like either the s in sock or the z in hose. Say aloud the words below and note the difference in the way the s is pronounced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>s with s sound</th>
<th>s with z sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sea</td>
<td>toes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salsa</td>
<td>eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purse</td>
<td>does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horse</td>
<td>laser</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notice that some words, like season and suppose, contain an s with an s sound and an s with a z sound.

**Exercise 5**

On the blank next to each word, write s if the s in the word has a s sound or z if the s in the word has a z sound.

1. false ______
2. rose ______
3. wise ______
4. morose ______
5. pleasing ______
6. disguise ______
7. disguise ______
8. suspense ______
9. synonym ______
10. hands ______

The letter x sounds like eks as in x-ray, ks as in box, gz as in examine, or (in a very few words that begin with x) z as in xylophone. Say aloud the words below and note the difference in the way the x is pronounced.
Exercise 6

On the blank next to each word, write whether the *x* in the word sounds like *eks*, *ks*, *gz*, or *z*.

1. *x*’s and o’s  
2. exist  
3. perplexing  
4. xenon  
5. maximum  

Exercise 7

On the blank next to each pair of words, write *yes* if the bold letters have the same sound, and *no* if they do not have the same sound.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>x</em> with <em>eks</em> sound</th>
<th><em>x</em> with <em>ks</em> sound</th>
<th><em>x</em> with <em>gz</em> sound</th>
<th><em>x</em> with <em>z</em> sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X-rated</td>
<td>fox</td>
<td>example</td>
<td>xenophobia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>mixer</td>
<td>exit</td>
<td>Xerox</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consonant Combinations

There are many combinations of two or three consonants that either blend their sounds or create an entirely new sound. Many of them can occur at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a word.

The following list contains the two-letter consonant combinations. Say each word aloud and notice how both letters are pronounced but run together.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonant</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Consonant</th>
<th>Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bl</td>
<td>blood</td>
<td>bl</td>
<td>blank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>br</td>
<td>brain</td>
<td>umbrella</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cl</td>
<td>clog</td>
<td>unclear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cr</td>
<td>crawl</td>
<td>decrease</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dr</td>
<td>draw</td>
<td>gumdrop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fl</td>
<td>fly</td>
<td>reflect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fr</td>
<td>freeze</td>
<td>unfriendly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ft</td>
<td>craft</td>
<td>lifted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gl</td>
<td>glow</td>
<td>glad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gr</td>
<td>great</td>
<td>regret</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ld</td>
<td>cold</td>
<td>balding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lt</td>
<td>melt</td>
<td>salted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mp</td>
<td>damp</td>
<td>pumpkin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nd</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>ending</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nk</td>
<td>sank</td>
<td>blanket</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nt</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td>planter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl</td>
<td>please</td>
<td>display</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pr</td>
<td>proud</td>
<td>reproduce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sc</td>
<td>scout</td>
<td>scare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sk</td>
<td>skill</td>
<td>task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sl</td>
<td>slow</td>
<td>slippery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sm</td>
<td>smart</td>
<td>smoke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sn</td>
<td>snail</td>
<td>snuggle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sp</td>
<td>spell</td>
<td>perspire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>st</td>
<td>stop</td>
<td>instant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sw</td>
<td>swear</td>
<td>unsweetened</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr</td>
<td>tray</td>
<td>mistrust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The list below contains the three-letter consonant combinations. Say each word aloud and notice how all three letters are pronounced but run together.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>scr</th>
<th>scr</th>
<th>unscr</th>
<th>ramble</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>spl</td>
<td>spl</td>
<td>splendid</td>
<td>splinter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spr</td>
<td>spr</td>
<td>spring</td>
<td>sprout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>squ</td>
<td>squ</td>
<td>squeeze</td>
<td>squash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>str</td>
<td>str</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>instruct</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exercise 8**

For each combination of consonants, write two words on the blanks that contain this combination. If the blend can appear in different locations in a word, try to think of words that contain the blend in different places.

1. bl
2. br
3. cl
4. cr
5. dr
6. fl
7. fr
8. ft
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>gl</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>gr</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>ld</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>lt</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>mp</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>nk</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>nt</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>pl</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>pr</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>sc</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>sk</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>sl</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>sm</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>sn</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>sp</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>st</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>sw</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>tr</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>scr</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>spl</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>spr</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>squ</td>
<td>_______</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other blends of consonants create entirely new sounds. For example, both the combinations $gh$ and $ph$ sound like the letter $f$. These letter combinations can appear in different locations within words:

- $gh$ with $f$ sound: cough, laughter, rough
- $ph$ with $f$ sound: phonics, alphabet, telephone

Note, however, that the $ough$ combination can, in some words like through and although, sound like the $ew$ in blew or the $o$ in ego.

To say the $sh$ combination, you do not blend the $s$ sound and the $h$ sound. Instead, you create an entirely new sound. Say aloud the words shine, rush, and wishing to hear this sound. Likewise, the $th$ combination creates a new sound, which you can hear when you pronounce the words path, they, and panther.

The $ch$ combination has three different sounds. Say the words in the following lists aloud to hear the difference in these sounds.

- $ch$ with $ch$ sound: 
- $ch$ with $sh$ sound: 
- $ch$ with $k$ sound:
When an s precedes the third ch sound, the new three-letter combination sch sounds like the sk in skin. Say aloud the words school, scholar, and scheme to hear this sound.

The double ss sound can sound like the s in see or the sh in shore. Say aloud the words below and note the difference in the way the ss is pronounced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ss with s sound</th>
<th>ss with sh sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>essay</td>
<td>pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>miss</td>
<td>passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fossil</td>
<td>Russian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exercise 9

For each combination of consonants, write two words on the blanks that contain this combination. If the blend can appear in different locations in a word, try to think of words that contain the blend in different places.

1. gh
   ____________
   ____________

2. ph
   ____________
   ____________

3. sh
   ____________
   ____________
4. th ___________ ___________
5. ch ___________ ___________
6. sch ___________ ___________
7. ss ___________ ___________

**Exercise 10**

On the blank next to each pair of words, write *yes* if the bold consonant combinations have the same sound, and *no* if they do not have the same sound.

1. chair moustache ______
2. fuss messenger ______
3. chapter machine ______
4. messy press ______
5. melancholy machete ______
6. dissuade distress ______
7. amass repercussion ______
8. mechanic chivalry ______
9. amass profess ______
10. chord chagrin ______


Silent Consonants

Sometimes, a consonant is not pronounced at all. For example, when the consonant is doubled, as in happy, call, and better, we pronounce only one of them. Consonants are also silent in the following instances:

1. *b* is sometimes silent after *m*: lamb, crumb, tomb
2. *c* is silent before *k*: sick, back, wreck
3. *c* is sometimes silent after *s*: science, scissors, scintillate
4. *d* is silent before *g*: edge, fudge, knowledge
5. *k* is silent before *n*: knight, knit, knot
6. *g* is sometimes silent before *n*: align, cologne, gnome
7. *gh* is silent after *i*: night, sigh, freight
8. *h* is sometimes silent at the beginning of words: herb, heir, honor
9. *p* is sometimes silent before *s*: psychology, psychic, psalm
10. *h* is often silent after *w*: while, where, whisker
11. *w* is sometimes silent: answer, sword, two
12. *w* is silent in words that begin with *who*: who, whose, whole
13. *w* is silent before *r*: wring, wrist, wrinkle
14. *y* is silent after *a*: play, mayor, layer

Exercise 11

Write the silent consonant or consonant combinations in each word on the blank beside it.

One of these words has more than one silent consonant.
VOWELS

The five vowels in the alphabet are a, e, i, o, and u. In addition, the letter y is sometimes considered a vowel. Unlike consonant sounds, which are made by somehow blocking the air from the mouth, vowel sounds are made with an open mouth that does not block the air. Each vowel has a long sound and a short sound. The long sound of the vowel sounds like the letter itself. This section will cover the different sounds of each of the vowels.

The Sounds of the Letter a

The long a sounds like the letter itself: able, case, say. In the pronunciation guide of the dictionary, the long a sound is represented with a horizontal line above the letter: ā.
When a word ends with a silent *e*, as in *bake*, *fate*, and *escape*, the *a* sound is usually long.

The short *a* sounds like the *a* in *cat*, *black*, and *sap*. In the pronunciation guide of the dictionary, the short *a* sound is represented with a half-moon-shaped curve above the letter: ā. In one-syllable words that contain an *a* followed by one or more consonants, as in *rap*, *tack*, and *flat*, the *a* sound is usually short.

The letter *a* can also sound like *ah*, as in *father* and *dachshund*. This sound is represented in the dictionary with two dots above the letter: ä.

It can sound like *aw*, too, as in *saw*, *call*, and *yawn*. This sound is represented in the dictionary with an inverted v over the letter *o*: ô.

Finally, the letter *a* can sound like *uh*, as in *amaze* and *cobra*. This sound is represented in the dictionary by an upside-down e, which is called a schwa: ð. When a word ends with an *a* (*extra*, *soda*, *pizza*), the *a* usually sounds like *uh*.

**Exercise 12**

On the blank next to each word, write ā if the bold *a* sounds like the *a* in *cake*, ā if the bold *a* sounds like the *a* in *sad*, ā if the bold *a* sounds like the *a* in *father*, ô if the bold *a* sounds like the *a* in *raw*, or ð if the bold *a* sounds like the *a* in *asleep*. 
Exercise 13

On the blank next to each sound, write a word that contains a letter a with that sound.

1. a that sounds like ā  ____________
2. a that sounds like ā  ____________
3. a that sounds like ä  ____________
4. a that sounds like ô  ____________
5. a that sounds like ô  ____________

The Sounds of the Letter e
The long e sounds like the letter itself: *complete, relax, recipe*. Like the long a, it is represented in dictionary pronunciation guides with a horizontal line above the letter: ĕ. Usually, a silent e at the end of the word makes the e sound long, as in *concede, athlete, and these*.

The short e sounds like the e in *let, sell, and bent*. In the pronunciation guide of the dictionary, the short e sound is represented with a half-moon-shaped curve above the letter: ē. In one-syllable words that contain an e followed by one or more consonants, as in *mend, red, and test*, the e sound is usually short.

The letter e can also sound like *uh*, as in *silver, risen, and enemy*. This sound is represented in the dictionary by the schwa: ə.

Remember that the letter e can be silent, too, as it often is when it appears at the end of a word: *role, humble, require*.

**Exercise 14**

On the blank next to each word, write ē if the bold e sounds like the e in *delay*, ĕ if the bold e sounds like the e in *pet*, ə if the bold e sounds like the e in *absent*, or write the word *silent* if the e is silent.

1. regular ———
2. rely ———
Exercise 15

On the blank next to each sound, write a word that contains a letter e with that sound.

1. e that sounds like ē:

2. e that sounds like ē:

3. e that sounds like ì:

4. e that is silent:

The Sounds of the Letter i

The long i sounds like the letter itself: time, slide, fight. Like the long a and e, it is represented in dictionary pronunciation guides with a horizontal line above the letter: ì. Usually, a silent e at the end of the word makes the i sound long, as in ripe, inside, and collide. Words that end in i (hi, rabbi, alibi) sometimes have a long i sound, too.
The short \textit{i} sounds like the \textit{i} in \textit{pig}, \textit{igloo}, and \textit{skin}. In the pronunciation guide of the dictionary, the short \textit{i} sound is represented with a half-moon-shaped curve above the letter: ĭ. In one-syllable words that contain an \textit{i} followed by one or more consonants, as in \textit{fin}, \textit{silly}, and \textit{trick}, the \textit{i} sound is usually short.

The letter \textit{i} can also sound like \textit{uh}, as in \textit{decimal}, \textit{sensible}, and \textit{possible}. This sound is represented in the dictionary by the schwa: \textit{ə}.

When it appears at the end of a word, as in \textit{ski}, \textit{chili}, and \textit{spaghetti}, the \textit{i} usually sounds like a long \textit{e} (ē).

**Exercise 16**

On the blank next to each word, write ĭ if the bold \textit{i} sounds like the \textit{i} in \textit{ride}, ĭ if the bold \textit{i} sounds like the \textit{i} in \textit{sick}, \textit{ə} if the bold \textit{i} sounds like the \textit{i} in \textit{flexible}, or ě if the \textit{i} sounds like the \textit{i} in \textit{taxi}.

1. flight  
2. kite  
3. investigate  
4. indelible  
5. confetti  
6. sticker  
Exercise 17

On the blank next to each sound, write a word that contains a letter i with that sound.

1. i that sounds like ĭ:  ___________
2. i that sounds like ĭ:  ___________
3. i that sounds like ơ:  ___________
4. i that sounds like ē:  ___________

The Sounds of the Letter o

The long o sounds like the letter itself: rope, omit, stereo. Like the long a, e, and i, it is represented in dictionary pronunciation guides with a horizontal line above the letter: ō.

Usually, a silent e at the end of the word makes the o sound long, as in toe, mole, and promote. When o ends the word, the sound is usually long: so, echo, tobacco.

In the dictionary, you will also see the pronunciation ô, an o with an inverted v above it, for words such as for, corn, and storm. This sound is similar to the long o sound, and you might see it represented in some dictionaries as a long o (ō).
The short \( o \) sounds like the \( o \) in \textit{mop, sod}, and \textit{bottle}. In the pronunciation guide of the dictionary, the short \( o \) sound is represented with a half-moon-shaped curve above the letter: \( ō \). In one-syllable words that contain an \( o \) followed by one or more consonants, as in \textit{pop, cost,} and \textit{spot,} the \( o \) sound is usually short.

When it’s followed by the letter \( y \), the letter \( o \) sounds like the \( o \) in \textit{boy, employ,} and \textit{voyage}. In the dictionary, this sound is represented as \( oi \).

The letter \( o \) can also sound like \textit{uh}, as in \textit{bacon, harmony,} and \textit{corral}. This sound is represented in the dictionary by the schwa: \( ġ \).

**Exercise 18**

On the blank next to each word, write \( ō \) if the bold \( o \) sounds like the \( o \) in \textit{rose}, \( ō \) if the bold \( o \) sounds like the \( o \) in \textit{hot, ġ} or \( ō \) if the bold \( o \) sounds like the \( o \) in \textit{fort,} \( oi \) if the bold \( o \) sounds like the \( o \) in \textit{toy,} or \( ġ \) if the bold \( o \) sounds like the \( o \) in \textit{error}.

1. robot ____
2. royal ____
3. operate ____
4. canyon ____
5. portable ____
6. close ____
7. mottled ____
Exercise 19

On the blank next to each sound, write a word that contains a letter o with that sound.

1. o that sounds like ô: __________
2. o that sounds like ô: __________
3. o that sounds like ô: __________
4. o that sounds like oi: __________
5. o that sounds like ð: __________

The Sounds of the Letter u

The long u sounds like the letter itself: use, union, pupil. Like the long a, e, i, and o, it is represented in dictionary pronunciation guides either with a horizontal line above the letter (ü) or with the letters oo or yoo. Usually, a silent e at the end of the word makes the o sound long, as in true, refuse, and continue. When u ends the word, as in menu, the sound is usually long.

The short u sounds like the u in up, under, and puddle. In the pronunciation guide of the dictionary, the short u sound is represented with a half-moon-shaped curve above the
letter: ŭ. In one-syllable words that contain a u followed by one or more consonants, as in *cut*, *sun*, and *trust*, the u sound is usually short.

You will also see the pronunciation û, a u with an inverted v above it, for words such as *fur*, *urge*, and *purple*.

The letter u can also sound like yuh, as in *medium* and *regular*. This sound is represented in the dictionary by the schwa: ḥ.

**Exercise 20**

On the blank next to each word, write ŭ if the bold u sounds like the u in *future*, ū if the bold u sounds like the u in *gum*, ŭ if the bold u sounds like the u in *purse*, or ḥ if the bold u sounds like the u in *figure*.

1. humid  ______
2. mug  ______
3. curse  ______
4. culture  ______
5. mature  ______
6. pressure  ______
7. failure  ______
8. pun  ______
9. punctual  ______
Exercise 21

On the blank next to each sound, write a word that contains a letter u with that sound.

1. u that sounds like ū: __________
2. u that sounds like ŭ: __________
3. u that sounds like û: __________
4. u that sounds like ð: __________

The Vowel Sounds of the Letter y

In the previous section about consonants, you learned that the letter y is a consonant when it begins words, as in yam, yolk, and yes. However, when the letter y appears elsewhere in a word, it usually functions as a vowel, and it has different vowel sounds. Y can sound like a short i (ɪ), as in bicycle, oxygen, and system. It can also sound like a long i, (ĩ) as in fly, eye, and style. It can sound like a long e (ē), as in jury, kitty, and slowly. Finally, it can sound like uh, as in syringe and martyr, which is represented with the schwa (ð).

Note that the y is silent when it’s next to an a or an e, as in spray, obey, and they.

Exercise 22
On the blank next to each word, write ĭ if the bold y sounds like the y in gym, ĭ if the bold y sounds like the y in type, ē if the bold y sounds like the y in ready, ð if the bold y sounds like the y in syringe, or write the word silent if the y is silent.

1. python   _____
2. myth     _____
3. gypsy    _____
4. delay    _____
5. satyr    _____
6. cyclops  _____
7. symbolic _____
8. analyze  _____
9. grisly   _____
10. convey  _____

**Exercise 23**

On the blank next to each sound, write a word that contains a letter y with that sound.

1. y that sounds like ĭ:  _________
2. y that sounds like ĭ:  _________
3. y that sounds like ē:  _________
4. y that sounds like ð:  _________
The Sounds of Vowel Combinations

The following chart lists the sounds of the vowel combinations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel Combination</th>
<th>Sounds like</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ae</td>
<td>long a (ā)</td>
<td>aerosol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>short e (ē)</td>
<td>aesthetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ai</td>
<td>long a (ā)</td>
<td>pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au</td>
<td><em>aw</em> (o)</td>
<td>August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>long a (ā)</td>
<td>gauge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>short a (ā)</td>
<td>laugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ay</td>
<td>long a (ā)</td>
<td>day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ea</td>
<td>long a (ā or a)</td>
<td>great, pear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>long e (ē)</td>
<td>east</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ee</td>
<td>long e (ē)</td>
<td>feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ei</td>
<td>long a (ā or a)</td>
<td>weigh, their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>long e (ē)</td>
<td>receive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>short i (ī)</td>
<td>forfeit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>long i (ī)</td>
<td>height</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eo</td>
<td><em>uh</em> (ō)</td>
<td>pigeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eu</td>
<td><em>yoo</em> (yoo or ū)</td>
<td>feud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>uh, oo, or yoo</em></td>
<td>amateur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(ō, ū, oo, or yoo)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ey</td>
<td>long a (ā)</td>
<td>obey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>long e (ē)</td>
<td>chimney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ia</td>
<td>uh (Ə)</td>
<td>militia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ie</td>
<td>long e (e)</td>
<td>piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>long i (ī)</td>
<td>pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yuh (Ə)</td>
<td>spaniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>io</td>
<td>yuh (Ə)</td>
<td>action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oa</td>
<td>long o (ō)</td>
<td>road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oe</td>
<td>long o (ō)</td>
<td>toe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>oo (oo)</td>
<td>canoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oi</td>
<td>oy (oi)</td>
<td>soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oo</td>
<td>oo (ōō or ōō)</td>
<td>fool, good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>long o (ō or ə́)</td>
<td>door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ou</td>
<td>long u (ū or yoo)</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ow (ou)</td>
<td>cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>short u (ū)</td>
<td>touch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>long o (ō)</td>
<td>though</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aw (ō)</td>
<td>cough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oy</td>
<td>oy (oi)</td>
<td>boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ua</td>
<td>ah (â)</td>
<td>guard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wah (wo)</td>
<td>squad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>short i (ī)</td>
<td>language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>long a (ā)</td>
<td>persuade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ue</td>
<td>oo (ōō)</td>
<td>clue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ui</td>
<td>oo (ōō)</td>
<td>juice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: Some vowels appear next to each other in a word but are in different syllables. Therefore, both vowels are pronounced individually (*rodeo, museum, phobia*). These combinations are not included in the chart above.

**Exercise 24**

On the blank next to each pair of words, write *yes* if the bold vowel combinations have the same sound, and *no* if they do not have the same sound.

1. beast threat ______
2. shoe cruise ______
3. aloud double ______
4. deuce loose ______
5. fried friend ______
6. brood glued ______
7. hue view ______
8. spear bear ______
9. trough plough ______
10. leaf chief ______
11. heat tear ______
Exercise 25

On the blanks next to each vowel combination, write two words containing that combination. If the combination has more than one sound, think of words that include two different sounds.

1. ae  __________  __________
2. ai  __________  __________
3. au  __________  __________
4. ay  __________  __________
5. ea  __________  __________
6. ee  __________  __________
7. ei  __________  __________
8. eo  __________  __________
9. eu  __________  __________
SYLLABLES

To pronounce words correctly, we must know how to divide them into syllables.

Syllables are the groups of letters in a word that are spoken together. For example, the word *fish* has just one syllable because we say all four letters together, but the word *water* has two syllables because we pronounce the first two letters, *wa*, as one part and the last three letters, *ter*, as another part.
Every syllable contains just one vowel sound, and it may or may not include consonants. In the dictionary, you will see each word divided into syllables with black dots. The word stereo, for example, has three syllables \((ster • e • o)\) because the last two letters are not a vowel combination, as they are in the word surgeon \((sur • geon)\). Thus, it’s important to understand how words are divided and then apply what you’ve learned in the last two sections about the pronunciation of vowels and consonants. Then, you won’t end up pronouncing that word \(sur • gee•on\), which is incorrect.

Learning to divide words into syllables can also help you know which of a letter’s different sounds is the correct one. For example, if a syllable contains one vowel, ends in a consonant, and is stressed (emphasized) more than the other syllables, the vowel sound is usually short. In \(pic • ture\), for example, the sound of the \(i\) is short. If a syllable ends in a vowel and is stressed, its vowel sound is usually long. In \(com • pu • ter\), for example, the sound of the \(u\) is long.

**One-Syllable Words**

A word with only one vowel sound has only one syllable. Therefore, the word \(scream\), which has only one vowel sound (long \(e\)), has only one syllable. Words that end with a silent \(e\) and have only one vowel sound, such as \(else\), \(name\), and \(white\), consist of only one syllable.

Also, words that contain a combination of vowels that together form only one vowel sound, as in \(tie\), \(moist\), and \(hour\), have only one syllable.
Exercise 26

Circle all of the one-syllable words in the following list.

roast  scratch  straight  away  ocean
porch  glass  waltz  being  bronze
area  quote  fairy  rage  friend

Five Guidelines for Dividing Words with More Than One Syllable

If you are unsure about how to divide a word into its syllables, it’s best to consult a dictionary. However, five guidelines will help you determine the syllables of an unfamiliar word.

Guideline #1: Divide between two consonants that are between two vowels.

When two consonants come between two vowels, divide between those two consonants:

din • ner
suc • ceed
an • gel
hos • tile
If there are three consonants in a row between two vowels, divide between the first and second consonant because the final two consonants are spoken as a blend:

- con • stant
- sur • prise
- mon • ster

The exceptions to this rule are those consonant combinations that are never divided, such as ch, ph, sh, tch, th, and wh. Therefore, the word bishop is divided bish • op (not bis • hop).

**Exercise 27**

On the blank beside each word, write the word with black dots dividing its syllables.

1. quarter
2. address
3. trumpet
4. perceive
5. mentor
6. certain
7. bistro
8. impasse
9. dollar
Guideline #2: Divide before a single consonant that is between two vowels.

When a consonant is between two vowels (or vowel combinations that form only one sound), that consonant usually begins a new syllable:

- o • pen
- e • ven
- gui • tar
- mi • nor

There are exceptions to this rule. Words like car • ol and cab • in, for example, are divided as indicated.

Exercise 28

On the blank beside each word, write the word with black dots dividing its syllables.

1. baby  ______
2. lazy  ______
3. onus  ______
4. placate  ______
5. idol  ______
6. eager  ______
Guideline #3: Divide before a consonant + le.

In words that end with one or more consonants plus le, the last consonant + le form the final syllable:

- a • ble
- cy • cle
- tri • ple
- cra • dle
- an • gle
- twin • kle
- pur • ple

The exception is the ckle ending. A word like pickle is divided pick • le.

For words that have a double consonant, divide between them as you learned to do in Guideline #1. The second consonant plus the le will form the last syllable:

- waf • fle
Guideline #4: Divide after a prefix and before a suffix.

Prefixes are word parts that are added to the beginnings of words. Some common prefixes include the following:

- **ad-**
- **non-**
- **com-**
- **ob-**
Notice how the prefix forms a separate syllable in the following words:

un • kind

dis • use

re • run

trans • port

Suffixes are word parts that are added to the ends of words. They include the following:

-able -less
-en -ly
-er -ment
-ful -ness
-ible -sion
-ing -tion
Notice how the suffix is divided as a separate syllable in the following words:

ship • ment
ring • ing
cor • rec • tion
rare • ly

But remember the rules for one-syllable words. In the words swing and twist, for example, the ing and ist are not suffixes. There is only one vowel sound in both of these words, so there is only one syllable.

Note that two of these suffixes consist of more than one syllable and conform to Guideline #3:

vis • i • ble
lov • a • ble

One suffix, –ed, may or may not be divided as a separate syllable. If it follows a d or a t, it forms the last syllable of the word:
blend • ed

rent • ed

However, if the –ed suffix follows any other letter, it is usually blended with the rest of the final syllable. Notice how you say the bold part of each of the following words as one sound:

en • tered

length • ened

con • demned

And some words that end in –ed have only one syllable total. Say each of the following words aloud to notice how they are spoken as one sound:

perched

fanned

stretched

Exercise 30

On the blank beside each word, write the word with black dots dividing its syllables.

1. refund  ___________
2. happiness  ___________
3. departed
4. mended
5. audible
6. defraud
7. reenter
8. inflection
9. nonchalant
10. sadly

Guideline #5: Divide compound words between the two separate words that form the word.

If two words are combined to form a compound word, then divide them between the two words that create the compound:

- push • up
- bird • house
- flash • back
- park • way

Note, though, that a compound word may have more than two syllables. For example, the word grandmother is a compound of the words grand and mother, but mother has two syllables, so the whole word has three syllables total (grand • mother). If one of the
words in the compound has more than one syllable, use the four previous guidelines to figure out how to divide that word.

**Exercise 31**

On the blank beside each word, write the word with black dots dividing its syllables.

1. shipload __________
2. lifestyle __________
3. applesauce __________
4. houseboat __________
5. driveway __________
6. highway __________
7. automobile __________
8. pocketbook __________
9. backyard __________
10. motorcycle __________

**Exercise 32**

On the blank beside each word, write the word with black dots dividing its syllables.

1. principle __________
2. syllable __________
3. piano __________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Word</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>indecency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>redemption</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>indenture</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>sightseeing</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>manipulate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>incorrigible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>