

Lesson 1: Vowel Sounds

There are five vowels in English:

a e i o u

Repeat these letters after me: a, e, i, o, u

Note: Some people also consider “y” an “almost” vowel, because it can sometimes make a vowel sound in a word, like the word “way.”

Even though there are just five vowels, these letters can make **15 different sounds!**

This is one reason why English pronunciation can be difficult for learners.

Let’s learn these 15 vowel sounds.

“LONG VOWEL” SOUNDS

The easiest 5 are when the vowel “says its name” in the word.

In American elementary schools, students learn that this is called a **“long vowel sound.”** (But most grammar books for non-native speakers do not use this term.)

For example:

The letter “a” in “cake.” It is a “long ‘a’” meaning that the “a” is pronounced just like the name of the letter, “a.”

Here are some other words that use the “**long vowel**” sound. Read and repeat them.

a	e	i	o	u*
ma <u>a</u> ke	me <u>e</u> t	ic <u>i</u> e	no <u>o</u> se	cu <u>u</u> be
ch <u>a</u> ir	kn <u>e</u> e	wh <u>i</u> te	co <u>o</u> de	bl <u>u</u> e

*The long “u” sound is without the “y” sound at the beginning of the letter, as in “ooo” like “food.”



Many words that end in “e” follow a pronunciation rule in English! Many times, the “e” is silent, and the vowel in the middle of the word “says its name,” like **cake, lake, made.**

“SHORT VOWEL” SOUNDS

There are also “short vowel” sounds. (Some pronunciation textbooks call these “relative” vowel sounds.) Each vowel letter has a separate “**short sound.**” Read and repeat these words.

a	e	i	o	u
h <u>a</u> t	egg	mi <u>i</u> ss	o <u>o</u> dd	u <u>u</u> mbrella
l <u>a</u> p	ye <u>e</u> s	ki <u>i</u> d	sto <u>o</u> p	ug <u>u</u> gly



Many times, when there is just one vowel in the middle of a short word, the short vowel sound is used, like in **cat, with, mop.**

The five other vowel sounds in English are sounds that mix two vowel sounds together, or are just special vowel sounds. Read these words, and then repeat them.

OTHER VOWEL SOUNDS

“ow”	hou <u>se</u>	co <u>w</u>
“aw”	ra <u>w</u>	ta <u>l</u> k
“oi”	bo <u>y</u>	to <u>y</u>
“oo”	bo <u>o</u> k	w <u>o</u> man
“ə”	<u>a</u> gain	<u>o</u> ccur

The last sound - ə - is called a “schwa” sound and is very common in English pronunciation.

It is so common that **every vowel** can be used in words to make the schwa sound! Like these words:

again petition experiment occur support



When there are two vowels together in a short word, many times the first vowel “says its name,” as in **boat, bait, read**. You can remember this rule as **when two vowels go walking, the first does the talking.** 😊

Time for some practice! If you are listening to the audio of this lesson, pause it before you continue.

PRACTICE

Pause the audio now, and practice saying word number one. Then play the audio to see if you are correct. Pause the audio again before going on to number two, and so on.

1. maid

2. spike

3. whisker

4. loud

5. chess

6. soy

7. speed

8. lone

9. alone

10. put