

# How many letters, how many sounds?

## Spelling and pronunciation

## A

All sections with this symbol  are on the recording. Listen to them while you read this page.

A2a There are 26 **letters** in the English alphabet.  
**A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z**

A2b There are five **vowel** letters. **A E I O U**

A2c And there are 21 **consonant** letters. **B C D F G H J K L M N P Q R S T V W X Y Z**

A2d But there are more than 40 vowel and consonant **sounds** in English.  
In some words, the number of letters is the same as the number of sounds.

**best** 4 letters, 4 sounds

b	e	s	t
1	2	3	4

**dentist** 7 letters, 7 sounds

d	e	n	t	i	s	t
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## B

But sometimes the number of sounds is different from the number of letters.

A3a In **green**, ee is one sound, and in **happy**, pp is one sound.  
**green** 5 letters, 4 sounds

g	r	e	e	n
1	2	3	4	

h	a	p	p	y
1	2	3	4	

A3b In **bread**, ea is one sound.  
**bread** 5 letters, 4 sounds

b	r	e	a	d
1	2	3	4	

A3c In some words there are silent letters (letters with no sound). In **listen**, t is silent.  
**listen** 6 letters, 5 sounds.

l	i	s	t	e	n
1	2	3	-	4	5

A3d In some words, one letter is two sounds. The **x** in **six** is two sounds like **k + s**.  
**six** 3 letters, 4 sounds

s	i	x	
1	2	3	4

## C

We sometimes write the same sound differently in different words. For example, the **e** in **red** sounds like the **ea** in **bread**.

A4a Sometimes two words have the same pronunciation but different spellings. (See Section E8 *Homophones*.)

**know – no**

A: **Do you know?** B: **No, I don't.**

A4b And sometimes two words have the same spelling but different pronunciations.

**read** (infinitive and present tense) – **read** (past tense)

A: **Do you want to read the newspaper?**

B: **No, thanks, I read it this morning.**

A4c Because there are more sounds than letters, we use symbols for pronunciation.

/best/ best /'dentist/ dentist /gri:n/ green /'hæpi/ happy /'kɒfi/ coffee /'lɪsən/ listen  
/θri:/ three /sɪks/ six /sɒks/ socks /bred/ bread /nəʊ/ no /nəʊ/ know /red/ red  
/red/ read (past tense) /ri:d/ read (infinitive and present tense)

The symbol <sup>ˈ</sup> (look at the beginning of the symbols for *dentist*, *happy*, *coffee*, *listen*) comes before stressed syllables (see Section B *Syllables and words*).



## Exercises

**1.1** Write the number of letters and the number of sounds in these words.

	letters	sounds
green	5	4
1 all	3	2
2 back	4	3
3 could	5	3
4 knee	4	2
5 sixty	5	6
6 thing	5	3
7 who	3	2
8 address	7	5

**A5** Check with the Key (on page 138). Then listen and repeat.

**1.2** Some pronunciation symbols are easy. Write these words in their normal spelling.

EXAMPLE /best/ ..... best

1 /bɪg/ ..... 2 /dres/ ..... 3 /frend/ ..... 4 /gɪv/ .....  
5 /help/ ..... 6 /nekst/ ..... 7 /'veri/ ..... 8 /wel/ .....

**A6** Check with the Key. Then listen and repeat.

**1.3** All five words in each group have the same vowel letter – a, e, i, o or u – but one has a different vowel sound. Circle the word with the different vowel sound in each group.

EXAMPLE

on	top	stop	<u>one</u>	gone
1 give	time	sit	think	rich
2 apple	bad	wash	catch	bank
3 much	bus	sun	push	up
4 many	maths	man	hat	flat

**A7** Check with the Key. Then listen and repeat.

**1.4** Write words that rhyme (the end part of the word sounds the same).

EXAMPLE

red	be <u>d</u>
1 key	tr__
2 blue	sh__
3 not	w__
4 one	r__
5 date	w__
6 lie	w__
7 so	sh__
8 beer	n__

**A8** Check with the Key. Then listen and repeat.

