

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 ^ˈ (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.

