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Vorlesungsskript zum Deutschkurs  
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*Fantasie ist wichtiger als Wissen, denn Wissen ist begrenzt.*  
Albert Einstein

# Preface

*Gewisse Bücher scheinen geschrieben zu sein, nicht  
damit man daraus lerne, sondern damit man wisse,  
daß der Verfasser etwas gewußt hat.*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Every journey into a new language is an adventure—at once exhilarating and daunting. German, or **Deutsch**, with its precise grammar, rich vocabulary, and complex case system, presents a unique and formidable challenge. This book is the codified result of one such journey.

It did not begin as a traditional textbook, but as a systematic, version-controlled log—a digital notebook hosted in a GitHub repository. This unconventional origin underscores the book’s core philosophy: that mastering German requires not just immersion, but rigorous organization and clarity. The structure you now hold is designed to serve as a quick reference and summary, a map drawn by a learner, for a learner.

## A Systematic Guide to German

This resource is built to cut through the complexity of the language by dividing the study into essential, reviewable components. Inside, you will find:

- **Grammar Rules:** Clear, concise summaries of the most challenging structures, from the intricacies of cases and prepositions to the nuances of verb conjugations and adjective endings.
- **Curated Vocabulary:** Thematic and frequency-based word lists designed for efficient acquisition, ensuring you are building a practical foundation.
- **Phonetics and Pronunciation:** Dedicated notes on tackling challenging German sounds and minimizing common pronunciation pitfalls.
- **Cultural Notes:** Brief but crucial insights into the cultural context that informs the language, aiding comprehension far beyond simple translation.

This book is intended to evolve alongside my own learning trajectory. It is the repository of hard-won knowledge—the distilled essence of countless hours of self-study, courses, and practice.

## To the Fellow Learner

Take this material as a learner’s notebook. You may find some mistakes or areas that require more clarification; this is part of the learning process.

The evolution and revision of this book is an open project available on <https://github.com/fernandomartinscardoso/deutsch>.

Feedback, corrections, and contributions are welcome. Together, we can refine this resource into a more effective tool for mastering the German language.

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# Aussprachekurs

*Der Alte verliert eines der größten Menschenrechte:  
er wird nicht mehr von seines Gleichen beurteilt.*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

This chapter is dedicated to study the German language pronunciation. The content is based on the first chapter of the Berlitz book [1], on the Aussprachekurs from Professor Raville [7], and on the pronunciation indicated in Langenscheidt Dictionary [5] and Wiktionary [13] using International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

## Accent and pronunciation

According to Professor Raville [7], accent is a particular way of pronouncing certain phonemes, which can change the “melody” and “rhythm” of a particular word or phrase. While pronunciation has a more rigid structure which, even with the variation in accents, must be preserved so as not to compromise the communication process. Therefore, this material focus on German standard pronunciation (*Standardaussprache*) to keep the speech clear during verbal communication.

To check the stressed syllable<sup>1</sup> of German words, the website of the famous German dictionary Duden can be consulted at the following link <https://www.duden.de/>. To check phonetic transcription and etymology, Wiktionary, the free dictionary available in <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/> has an excellent database. Finally, to check pronunciation with audio recordings of native speakers, the website <https://www.forvo.com/> is a great option.

The main topics of phonetics and phonology are summarized in Appendix A to make the pronunciation explanation that follows clearer.

## How to improve the pronunciation in German

Here are recommended tasks for pronunciation improvement [7]:

- Always read aloud, and use a voice recorder frequently.
- Check your pronunciation on Google Translate or similar online translators. Do they “understand” you?
- Identify what is most challenging for you to pronounce and practice a lot until you master it.

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<sup>1</sup>Properties of syllables in Appendix A.1.1.

- When speaking German, articulate a lot and exaggerate. This is normal in the beginning.
- Sing in German.

## Das Deutsche Alphabet (The German Alphabet)

Before diving into vocabulary and grammar, establishing a solid foundation in pronunciation is crucial. The sounds of a language are its DNA, and mastering them early will significantly accelerate your progress and confidence.

The German alphabet is, thankfully, very similar to the English (Latin) alphabet, sharing the same 26 letters. However, the German language incorporates four additional characters that are essential for accurate reading and speaking: the three mutated vowels (Umlauts) and the sharp S (*Eszett* or *scharfes S*).

This section will provide a comprehensive overview of the following components:

1. The 26 standard letters and how their names and associated sounds differ from their English counterparts.
2. The four special characters (Ä, Ö, Ü, and ß) and their distinct phonetic values.
3. Common diphthongs and letter combinations (like ei, eu, ie, ch, and sch) that follow predictable rules and are key to proper German articulation.

Knowing how to correctly name and sound out each letter will unlock the ability to spell German words clearly and, most importantly, pronounce them correctly.

### A

Letter name [a]. This letter sounds like a as in **alga**e.

Examples:

1. **aus:** [aus]
2. **auf:** [auf]
3. **an:** [an]
4. **aktuell:** [aktu'el]

### Ä

Letter name [a] Umlaut, pronounced [ɛ]. This letter may sound long (i.e., stressed), or short (i.e., unstressed) [8].

Examples of long ä:

1. **Hähnchen:** ['hɛ:nçən]
2. **Käse:** ['kɛ:zə]

3. **schläfst:** [ʃlɛ:fst]

4. **Verspätung:** [fer'spɛ:tʊŋ]

Examples of short ä:

1. **ändern:** ['endərn]

2. **Gäste:** ['gɛstə]

3. **Männer:** ['mɛnər]

4. **März:** [merts]

5. **wäscht:** [vɛʃt]

Depending on the area of Germany, ä may sound short in words where it is usually long, e.g., **schläfst** being pronounced as ['ʃlɛfst], and **später** being pronounced ['ʃpɛ:tər].

## B

Letter name [be:']. This letter sounds like b in open syllables, as in **bow**. And it sounds like silent p at the end of words or in closed syllables, as in **map**.

Examples:

1. **Ab:** [ap]

2. **bald:** [balt]

3. **bekommen:** [be'kɔmən]

4. **Bier:** [bi:r]

5. **Bus:** [bus]

6. **gelb:** [gɛlp]

7. **gibt:** [gɪpt]

8. **habt:** [hapt]

9. **halb:** [halp]

10. **Obst:** [o:pst]

11. **siebzehn:** ['zi:pse:n]

## C

Letter name [tse:]. This letter sounds like ts before e and i, and sounds like k before a, o and u. It is not a common letter in German language, mostly used in foreign words incorporated into German.

Examples:

1. **Café:** [ka'fe:]
2. **campen:** ['kempən]
3. **Celsius:** ['tselziʊs]
4. **Chaos:** ['ka:os]
5. **Curry:** ['kœri]

## D

Letter name [de:]. This letter sounds like d in open syllables, as in **dog**. And it sounds like silent t at the end of words or in closed syllables, as in **cat**.

Examples:

1. **Bild:** [bilt]
2. **Dame:** ['da:mə]
3. **dämpfen:** ['dæmpfən]
4. **davor:** ['da:fɔr,da'fɔ:r]
5. **Freund:** [frɔ:ynt]
6. **Hand:** [hant]
7. **Kind:** [kint]
8. **Land:** [lant]
9. **Stadt:** [ʃtat]
10. **Versand:** [fer'zant]

## E

Letter name [e:]. This letter sounds like Spanish **e**, as in **abuelo**. But it sounds more subtle at the end of words, as in **moment**.

Examples:

1. **eine:** ['aɪmə]
2. **esse:** ['ɛsə]

3. **Frage:** ['fra:gə]
4. **heute:** ['hɔytə]
5. **lese:** ['le:sə]
6. **Sprache:** ['ʃpra:xə]
7. **Wange:** ['vangə]

## F

Letter name [ɛf]. In words, this letter sounds like f as in **fate** or **friend**.

Examples:

1. **Fach:** [fax]
2. **fegen:** ['fe:gən]
3. **Feier:** ['faɪər]
4. **Flug:** [flu:k]
5. **freundlich:** ['frɔyntlɪç]
6. **Frucht:** [frʊxt]
7. **Fußball:** ['fu:sbal]

## G

Letter name [ge:]. This letter sounds like g in open syllables, as in **gate**. And it sounds like silent k at the end of words or closed syllables, as in **dark**.

Examples:

1. **Flugzeug:** ['flu:ktsɔyk]
2. **Gesicht:** [gə'ziçt]
3. **lägt:** [ly:kt]
4. **mag:** [ma:k]
5. **sagt:** [za:kt]
6. **Sonntag:** ['zɔnta:k]
7. **Weg:** [ve:k]

As per article in [3], there are two exceptions for the general rule of g pronunciation: the g is not pronounced after n, and it is pronounced as ch in the German word **ich** when it comes after i.

Examples:

1. **Hunger:** ['hʊŋər]
2. **lang:** [laŋ]
3. **länger:** ['leŋər]
4. **Zeitung:** ['tsaɪtʊŋ]
5. **vergänglich:** [fər'gɛŋliç]
6. **ewig:** ['e:viç]
7. **fähig:** ['fɛ:iç]
8. **fertig:** ['fertiç]
9. **richtig:** ['riçtiç]
10. **ständig:** ['ʃtəndiç]
11. **vierzig:** ['fi:rtsiç]

## H

Letter name [ha:i]. It sounds like h as in **have** at the beginning of words, it is not pronounced between vowels, and it prolongs the duration of the preceding vowel.

Examples of h at the beginning of words:

1. **haben:** ['ha:bən]
2. **Hello:** [ha'lo:]
3. **Haus:** [haʊs]
4. **heißen:** ['haɪsən]
5. **Humor:** [hu'mɔ:r]

Examples of h between vowels and prolonging vowels:

1. **früher:** ['fry:ər]
2. **gehen:** ['ge:ən]
3. **Höhe:** ['hø:ə]
4. **ihr:** [i:r]
5. **Uhr:** [ʊr]

Exceptions: compound words, e.g., **woher**, and foreign words adapted to German, e.g., **Alkohol**.

## I

Letter name [i:]. It sounds like i in **illness**.

## J

Letter name [jɔt]. It sounds like i as in mania.

Examples:

1. **ja:** [ja:]
2. **Jahr:** [ja:r]
3. **jetzt:** [jetst]
4. **jedoch:** [je:'dɔx]
5. **jemand:** ['je:mant]
6. **jetzt:** [jetst]
7. **Junge:** ['junʒə]

In words of English origin, the original pronunciation of j is kept as in job. Examples: **joggen** ([ˈdɔgən]), and **Pyjama** ([py'ʃa:ma]).

## K

Letter name [ka:']. It sounds like k as in kid, with a plosive intonation [2].

## L

Letter name [ɛl]. In closed syllables, this letter sounds like the Spanish l as in miel.

Examples:

1. **Alkohol:** ['alkoho:l]
2. **helfen:** ['hɛlfən]
3. **Himmel:** ['himəl]
4. **Hotel:** [ho'tel]
5. **Milch:** [milç]
6. **schnell:** [ʃnɛl]

## M

Letter name [ɛm]. At the end of words, it sounds like the letter m as in room.

Examples:

1. **Baum:** [baʊm]
2. **einem:** ['aməm]

3. **im:** [im]
4. **komm:** [kɔm]
5. **Raum:** [raʊm]
6. **wem:** [ve:m]

## N

Letter name [ɛn]. At the end of words, this letter sounds like n as in Heaven.

Examples:

1. **Bösen:** ['bø:zən]
2. **Mädchen:** ['mɛ:tçən]
3. **mein:** [mam]

## O

Letter name [o:]. This letter sounds like a long o as in Spanish word **pollo**, or short o as in **hot**.

Examples:

1. **rot:** [ro:t]
2. **Socke:** ['zɔ:kə]
3. **Soda:** ['zo:da]
4. **Tochter:** ['tɔxtər]

## Ö

Letter name [o] Umlaut, pronounced [ø:]. This letter has no equivalent sound in English. You must pronounce the “e” sound, but with lips in a whistling position.

Examples:

1. **Löffel:** ['løfəl]
2. **nervös:** [ner've:s]
3. **öffnen:** ['øfnən]
4. **Öl:** [ø:l]

## P

Letter name [pe:]. This letter sounds like p as in **people**, often with plosive intonation.

Examples:

1. **Palast**: [pa'last]
2. **Pferd**: [pfe:rt]
3. **plus**: [plus]
4. **Prinz**: [prɪnts]

## Q

Letter name [ku:]. This letter sounds like k as in **kite**, and it is always followed by the letter u, forming the sound [kv].

Examples:

1. **Qual**: [kva:l]
2. **Qualität**: [kvali'te:t]
3. **Quelle**: ['kvɛlə]
4. **Quiz**: [kvɪz]

## R

Letter name [ɛr]. This letter sounds like a guttural r, pronounced at the back of the throat (*Reibe-R*). At the end of words or in closed syllables, it sounds like a schwa [ə]<sup>2</sup>.

Examples:

1. **der**: [dɛr]
2. **Erde**: ['ɛ:rðə]
3. **erledigen**: [ɛr'le:dɪgən]
4. **Humor**: [hu'mo:r]
5. **Kraut**: [kraʊt]
6. **leer**: [leɪr]
7. **lernen**: ['lɛ:rнən]
8. **rotieren**: [ro'ti:rən]
9. **Rabatt**: [ra'batt]

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<sup>2</sup>The "lazy" or "reduced" sound that appears in unstressed syllables, like a as in **wanna**.

10. **sehr:** [ze:r]
11. **warm:** [varm]
12. **wer:** [ve:r]
13. **wir:** [vir]

## S

Letter name [ɛs]. This letter sounds like English z in open syllables as in **zebra**. Before p and t, usually at the beginning of words, it sounds like sh as in **fish**. For further cases in closed syllables, it sounds like s as in **fast**.

Examples:

1. **sagen:** ['zagən]
2. **sie:** [zi:]
3. **Sache:** ['zaxə]
4. **Suppe:** ['zupə]
5. **Sport:** ['spo:rt]
6. **Spanisch:** ['spa:nisʃ]
7. **Stunde:** ['ʃtundə]
8. **Stadt:** [ʃtat]
9. **Lust:** [lust]
10. **Ost:** [ɔst]

## T

Letter name [te:]. This letter sounds like t as in **top**, with a plosive intonation.

## U

Letter name [u:]. This letter sounds similar to English oo as in **trooper**.

Examples:

1. **Kultur:** [ku:l'tur:]
2. **Mund:** [mʊnt]
3. **unter:** ['ʊntər]

## Ü

Letter name [u] Umlaut, pronounced [y:]. This letter has no equivalent sound in English. You must pronounce the “i” sound, but with lips in a whistling position.

Examples:

1. **Brücke:** ['brykə]
2. **Früh:** [fry:]
3. **über:** ['y:bər]

## V

Letter name [faʊ]. This letter sounds like f as in **fade**.

Examples:

1. **Vater:** ['fa:tər]
2. **vier:** ['fi:ər]
3. **Volk:** [fɔlk]

## W

Letter name [ve:]. This letter sounds like v as in **vase**.

Examples:

1. **Wasser:** ['vasər]
2. **wegen:** ['ve:gən]
3. **weiß:** [vais]

## X

Letter name [iks]. This letter sounds like x as in **box**.

Examples:

1. **extrem:** [eks'tre:m]
2. **Praxis:** ['praksɪs]
3. **Text:** [tekst]

## Y

Letter name ['ypsilon]. This letter sounds like ü as in **übrig**.

Examples:

1. **analysieren**: [analy'zi:rən]
2. **sympathisch**: [zym'patɪʃ]
3. **System**: [zys'te:m]

## Z

Letter name [tset]. This letter sounds like z as in **Pizza** (always ts sound for German words).

Examples:

1. **jetzt**: [jɛtst]
2. **spazieren**: [ʃpa'tsi:rən]
3. **Zimmer**: ['tsimər]

## ß

Letter name *eszett* or *scharfes S*. In words, this letter sounds like the ss in *passing* and comes after a long vowel or diphthong (blend of two vowel sounds in a single syllable).

According to [10], as the ß derives from a ligature of lower-case letters, it is itself exclusively lower-case. The proper transcription when it cannot be used, or when writing a word in all capital letters, is **ss** or **SS**. The ß is not used in Switzerland and Liechtenstein, where it was replaced by **ss**.

Examples:

1. **außen**: ['ausən]
2. **dreißig**: ['draisiç]
3. **Fuß**: [fu:s]
4. **groß**: [gro:s]
5. **Gruß**: [gru:s]
6. **heißen**: ['haɪsən]
7. **schließen**: ['ʃli:sən]
8. **Spaß**: [ʃpa:s]
9. **Straße**: ['ʃtra:sə]
10. **weiß**: [vais]

When the vowel is short, the word is written with **ss**. Examples:

1. **essen:** ['ɛsən]
2. **Fluss:** [flos]
3. **gerissen:** [gə'trisən]
4. **krass:** [kras]
5. **muss:** [mus]

## Plosivkonsonanten (Plosive consonants)

Plosive consonants (also known as occlusive consonants or explosive consonants) are consonants in which the airflow in the vocal tract is briefly blocked completely and then suddenly released again. This results in an audible “explosive sound”. In German, these include sounds such as p, t, k (voiceless plosives) and b, d, g (voiced plosives)<sup>3</sup>.

Examples in German:

- p and b: the block is created by the lips.
- t and d: the block is formed by the contact of the tongue with the alveolar ridge.
- k and g: the block is formed by the contact of the back of the tongue with the palate.
- Voiceless plosives (p, t, k): The audible effect is often stronger because the trapped air is released as a more forceful burst of air.
- Voiced plosives (b, d, g): The audible effect is more subtle because the vocal cords vibrate from the beginning of the syllable.

## Short and Long Vowels<sup>4</sup>

Vowels preceding double consonants are typically *short*:

- [a] - Kaffee, Tasse, Terrasse
- [ɛ] - essen, prinzipiell, stellen, Teppich, Toilette
- [ɪ] - Himmel, Lippe, umstritten
- [ɔ] - geschlossen, hoffe, Karotte, Kontrolle
- [u] - Kutte, Kuss

The vowel is also typically short when precedes “ck” and “tz”:

- **backen:** ['bakən]
- **Dreck:** [drɛk]

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<sup>3</sup>Check Appendix A.2

<sup>4</sup>Check Appendix A.3.

- **Ecke:** ['ɛkə]
- **Jacke:** ['jakə]
- **kotzen:** ['kɔtsən]
- **motzen:** ['mɔtsən]
- **Schatz:** [ʃats]
- **trotz:** [trɔts]

The double vowels and vowels preceding “h” or “ß” are typically long:

- [a:] - **Haar, Maß, Paar, Spaß, Staat, wahr**
- [e:] - **Armee, fehlen, Idee, Meer, nehmen, Tee**
- [i:] - **ihr**
- [o:] - **Bohne, Boot, ohne, Ohr, Stoß**
- [u:] - **Fuß, Gruß Uhr**

The vowel is also long in monosyllable words ending with one consonant, as in: dem, Brot, mal, rot, Tod, tut, etc.

## Digraphs and Diphthongs

Some letter combinations create specific pronunciation cases, such as:

### äu

Pronunciation: [ɔʏ]. Examples:

- **äußern:** ['ɔysərn]
- **äugen:** ['ɔygən]
- **Bäume:** ['bɔymə]
- **Bräu:** [brɔʏ]
- **träumen:** ['trɔymən]
- **Verkäufer:** [ver'kɔyfər]

## ch ach-Laut

The “ach” sound or “hard ch” appears when **ch** is written after the vowels [a, o, u], including the diphthong “au”. It is similar to the throaty sound in Scottish “loch” [4]. Examples:

- **acht**: [axt]
- **Bach**: [bax]
- **Mittwoch**: ['mitvox]
- **rauchen**: ['rauxən]
- **Sucht**: [zuxt]
- **Tuch**: [tux]

## ch ich-Laut

The “ich” sound or “soft ch” appears when **ch** is written after the letters [e, i, ä, ö, ü, y, r, l, n], the diphthongs [ei, eu, äu] and termination “-chen”. It is similar to a soft version of an “angry cat hissing” [4]. Examples:

- **ich**: [iç]
- **rechts**: [rεçts]
- **nächste**: ['ne:çstə]
- **Bücher**: ['byçər]
- **möchten**: ['møçtən]
- **Kirche**: ['kirçə]
- **Milch**: ['milç]
- **Sträucher**: ['strɔ:yçər]
- **leicht**: [laιçt]
- **leuchten**: ['lɔ:yçtən]
- **Mädchen**: ['me:itçən]
- **München**: ['mynçən]



# Appendix A

## Basics of Phonetics and Phonology

### A.1 Syllables

A syllable is a unit of pronunciation voiced without interruption, close to a single sound. All words are made from at least one syllable [12].

According to Ramoo [6], while phonemes are the smallest units of sound, we don't actually speak in phonemes. If you say the word "cat" [kæt] and record it, you won't be able to break it into three units of [k], [æ] and [t].

Therefore, the smallest unit of articulation is not the phoneme but rather the *syllable*. Most native speakers of a language will know how many syllables are in a word in their language. You can try this in English by saying a word slowly. For example, the word "elephant" has three syllables: ['el.i.fənt]. As seen in Figure A.1, all syllables must have a mandatory *nucleus* or peak. This is usually a vowel. Some languages can also have a syllabic consonant as a nucleus of a syllable as in the English word "button" [bʌt.n] where there are two syllables [bʌt] and [n]. You can see that the second syllable has no vowels but a syllabic [n] as the nucleus.

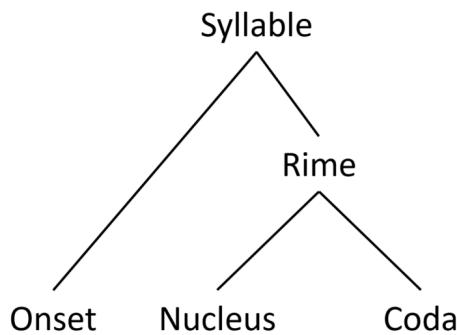


Figure A.1: Syllable structure [6].

Consonants that come before the nucleus of a syllable are known as *onsets* and those that come after it are called *codas*. The nucleus and coda of a syllable form a group called a *rime*. These onsets and codas can be complicated or simple depending on what is allowed in a language. English allows up to three consonants in the onset and at least as much in the coda. Consider the word "twelfths" [twelfθs]. It has two consonants in the onset and four consonants in the coda. Generally, the onset is more restricted in what consonants are allowed [6].

### A.1.1 Properties of Syllables

If a syllable ends with a consonant, it is called a *closed syllable*. If a syllable ends with a vowel, it is called an *open syllable* [12]. In summary, closed syllables have coda consonants.

The *stress* or *accent* is the relative emphasis or prominence given to a certain syllable in a word or to a certain word in a phrase or sentence [11]. But this accent must not be confused with the sociolinguistic meaning of accent, which is a way of pronouncing a language that is distinctive to a country, area, social class, or individual [9].

## A.2 Voiced and Voiceless Sounds

Our vocal cords, or vocal folds, are two muscular bands inside our voice box that produce the sound of our voice. The way we use them to pronounce certain sounds defines if the sound is *voiced* or *voiceless*.

The difference is whether the vocal cords vibrate: voiced sounds are produced with vibrating vocal cords, while voiceless sounds are produced without vibration. You can feel this difference by placing your hand on your throat; a "buzzing" sensation indicates a voiced sound, whereas a lack of vibration indicates a voiceless sound. All vowels are voiced, and some consonants are voiced, while others are voiceless.

Elements	Voiced Sounds	Voiceless Sounds
Vocal Cords	Vibrate	Do not vibrate
Sensation	Buzzing or humming in the throat	No vibration in the throat
Mechanism	Air from the lungs closes the vocal cords and causes them to vibrate	Air flows freely through the mouth without the vocal cords vibrating
Example	[b] in "bat"	[p] in "pat"
Other Cases	[z], [v], [m]	[k], [s], [t]

Table A.1: Voiced and voiceless sounds.

## A.3 Short and Long Vowels

Short and long vowels differ in the length and quality of their sound: short vowels are quick sounds like [a] in "cat", while long vowels are drawn out and sound like the letter's name, such as [a] in "cake". In English, long vowels are often created by a "silent e" at the end of a word or by having two vowels together, and their sounds are held for a longer duration than short vowels.

Short Vowel	Long Vowel
[æ] as in <b>apple</b> , <b>cat</b>	[eɪ] as in <b>acorn</b> , <b>cake</b>
[ɛ] as in <b>egg</b> , <b>bed</b>	[ɪ:] as in <b>eve</b> , <b>scene</b>
[ɪ] as in <b>ink</b> , <b>sit</b>	[aɪ] as in <b>ice</b> , <b>bike</b>
[ə] as in <b>octopus</b> , <b>mop</b>	[ɔʊ] as in <b>open</b> , <b>note</b>
[ʌ] as in <b>umbrella</b> , <b>cut</b>	[ju:] as in <b>unicorn</b> , <b>cute</b>

Table A.2: Long and short vowels in English.

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