

Welsh Pronunciation

1 Stress

The stress in Welsh falls on the second-to-last syllable, pretty much always. So you say “Aberystwyth” and not “Aberystwyth” for example.

However, if a word is a compound word, like “Aberystwyth” (from *aber ystwyth*, “Estuary of the Supple¹ (river)”) the stresses from the individual words remain. So really, it’s “Aberystwyth”. And you’ll note from below that the “ystwyth” is pronounced “ust-with”. Most people get this wrong.

2 Consonants

Consonants in Welsh are mostly like those in English, with a few missing and a few extras. Remember that the letters *w* and *y* are actually vowels in Welsh.

Another slightly odd thing is that certain pairs of letters are thought of as single letters in Welsh, and are included as such in the Welsh alphabet. These are also shown in the list below. Any letters which aren’t like English are **shown in bold**. One last point — I’m writing from the point of view of an English speaker from the South of England.

Letter	Sound
B	as in English “boat”
C	as in English “cat”, not as in “ceiling”
CH	as in Scottish “Loch” or German “Büch”
D	in English “dog”
DD	as in English “this”
F	as “v” in English “van”
FF	as “f” in English “fire”
G	as in English “gun”, not as in “gin”
H	as in English “hat”
J	as in English “j” (only seen in borrowed English words)
L	as in English “lamb”
LL	the famous Welsh double-L. See below. It’s easy.
M	as in English “man”
N	as in English “nut”
NG	as in English “ring”, not as in “finger”. In Welsh, this can start a word: (<i>fy</i>) <i>ngardd</i> is “my garden”
P	as in English “pin”
PH	as in English “phone”
R	as in English “rose” but trilled. See below.
RH	as R but with a silent puff of air afterwards — think of it as “R-H”
S	as in English “soup”, not as in “cousin”. One exception – SI is pronounced like SH in “shop”
T	as it English “tin”
TH	as in English “thin” not as in “this” (we have DD for that sound)

2.1 LL and R

These are sounds which don’t appear in English, so I’ll describe them in a bit more detail.

To make the **LL** sound, simply say the letter L, but as you do so, breathe out around the sides of your tongue, so you get

a sort of hissing sound as the air escapes through the gaps between your tongue and your teeth.

The **R** sound is much like that in English, in areas where we still bother pronouncing that letter (like in the North) and you can get away with that. To pronounce it correctly, it needs to be trilled or rolled, like someone saying “Rrrrowr! I am a tiger!”. Remember — R is always pronounced. Never drop it, like (some) English accents do in words like “barn”.

The **RH** sound is similar, but is ‘aspirated’; it’s like saying “r” and “h” at the same time with more puff.

3 Vowels

Many of these are quite different from English, particularly Y and U, but they’re quite simple once you realize this. What’s most important is that you pronounce the vowels clearly and distinctly, and **don’t let them all smoosh into each other**, which we tend to do in English.

Letter	Sound
A	as in English “cat”
E	as in English “ten”
I	as in English “pin” (but before another vowel, it’s a sort of consonant like English “y”)
O	as in English “cot”
U	as “ee” in English “keep”
W	as in English “book”
Y	like the “u” in “fun” (the so-called “schwa” or “obscure” vowel), except in the last syllable of a word, where’s it’s like “i” in “pin” (except for the very common words <i>y</i>, <i>yr</i> and <i>yn</i>, in which it is the schwa again.)

3.1 Diphthongs — pairs of vowels

These can get a bit complicated, but the basic rule is that you smoothly go from one vowel sound to the next one. For example, “aw” (as in *cawl*, a kind of Welsh soup) is pronounced “a” as in “cat” followed by “oo” as in “book”. This gives something roughly the same as the “ow” in English “cow”. Here are some more concrete descriptions:

Diphthong	Sound
AE, AI and AU	all (more or less) like English “eye”
OE, OI and OU	like “oy” in “boy”
EI, EU and EY	to a Welsh speaker these all sound quite different but you can get away with English “ay” as in “bay”
EW	As in the name “Dewi”. Try saying “Derry”, but say “w” instead of ‘r’, like a little kid might. “Dewwy.”
WY	Sort of like the “ui” in “quiz”.
IW and YW	i-w, very quickly (think “iwwitating”).

Finally, circumflexes indicate a long vowel, so *tân* (fire) rhymes with “Khan” while *tan* (until) rhymes with “can”. A diaeresis (two dots) indicates a vowel to be pronounced separately in a diphthong — so *copïo* is “copee-oh” and not “cop-yo”. And please remember, this is a basic introduction. I’ve missed out a few subtleties.

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¹or Agile, or Flexible... funny word, *ystwyth*.