

WHAT ARE PHONEMIC SYMBOLS?

- 1 The twenty six letter (or graphemes) of the English alphabet may be pronounced in a number of different ways. For example <a> is pronounced in six different ways in these six words:

cat *career* *car* *caught* *care* *cake*

The angle brackets or chevrons are used to enclose graphemes: <a> for the letter a. See this site for information on linguistic conventions:

<http://www.languagegeek.com/roman/conventions.html>

- 2 In the words above, the same letter, <a> , occurs six times. It is pronounced in six different ways. Therefore there are six different phonemes to represent the way in which <a> is pronounced in the above words. Two are short vowels, two are long vowels, and two are diphthongs.

short vowels *cat* /kæt/ *career* /kə'riə/

long vowels *car* /kɑː/ *caught* /kɔːt/

diphthongs *care* /keə/ *cake* /keɪk/

The slant brackets are used to show phonemes: one symbol represents one sound, which is not necessarily one letter.

- 3 Each phoneme represents one important sound only. No phonemes are silent – unlike some letters, which not always be pronounced. The words below all contain a silent letter, that is a letter which is written but not pronounced. These are underlined.
doubt *handsome* *gnome* *hour* *walk* *knee* *autumn* *listen* *ballet* *write*

- 4 Long and short vowels and diphthongs are particularly difficult, as Czech lacks some of these sounds. Say these words then note the vowel symbols.

men /e/ *man* /æ/

gun /ʌ/ *gone* /ɒ/

world /ɜː/ *war* /ɔː/

pear /eə/ *pure* /ʊə/ *poor* /ɔː/

blood /ʌ/ *wood* /ʊ/ *loom* /uː/

hire /aɪə/ *hear* /iə/ *heard* /ɜː/

done /ʌ/ *full* /ʊ/ *fool* /uː/

- 5 In RP, <r> is only pronounced when it comes before a vowel phoneme but it is silent when it comes before a consonant. Each <r> in the words in the top row is silent.

<i>bird</i>	<i>clear</i>	<i>dark</i>	<i>farm</i>	<i>lord</i>	<i>normal</i>	<i>morning</i>	<i>piece</i>	<i>order</i>	<i>tire</i>
<i>bread</i>	<i>clarity</i>	<i>dread</i>	<i>frame</i>	<i>lorry</i>	<i>narrative</i>	<i>mooring</i>	<i>price</i>	<i>oral</i>	<i>try</i>