



English

See also a note on *American English*

Consonants

The standard English consonant system is traditionally considered to comprise 17 obstruents (6 plosives, 2 affricates and 9 fricatives) and 7 sonorants (3 nasals, 2 liquids and 2 semivowel glides).

With the exception of the fricative /h/, the obstruents are usually classified in pairs as "voiceless and "voiced", although the presence or absence of periodicity in the signal resulting from laryngeal vibration is not a reliable feature distinguishing the two classes. They are better considered "fortis" (strong) and "lenis" (weak), with duration of constriction and intensity of the noise component signalling the distinction.

The six plosives are p b t d k g:

Symbol	Word	Transcription
p	pin	pIn
b	bin	bIn
t	tin	tIn
d	din	dIn
k	kin	kIn
g	give	gIv

The "lenis" stops are most reliably voiced intervocalically; aspiration duration following the release in the fortis stops varies considerably with context, being practically absent following /s/, and varying with degree of stress syllable-initially.

The two phonemic affricates are tS and dZ:

tS	chin	tSIn
dZ	gin	dZIn

As with the lenis stop consonants, /dZ/ is most reliably voiced between vowels.

There are nine fricatives, f v T D s z S Z h:

f	fin	fIn
v	vim	vIm
T	thin	TIn
D	this	DIs
s	sin	sIn
z	zing	zIN
S	shin	SIn
Z	measure	"meZ@
h	hit	hIt

Intervocalically the lenis fricatives are usually fully voiced, and they are often weakened to approximants (fricationless continuants) in unstressed position.

The sonorants are three nasals m n N, two liquids r l, and two sonorant glides w j:

m	mock	mQk
n	knock	nQk
N	thing	TIN
r	wrong	rQN
l	long	lQN
w	wasp	wQsp
j	yacht	jQt

Vowels

The English vowels fall into two classes, traditionally known as "short" and "long" but, owing to the contextual effect on duration of following "fortis" and "lenis" consonants (traditional "long" vowels preceding fortis consonants can be shorter than "short" vowels preceding lenis consonants), they are better described as "checked" (not occurring in a stressed syllable without a following consonant) and "free".

The checked vowels are I e { Q V U:

I	pit	pIt
e	pet	pet
{	pat	p{t
Q	pot	pQt
V	cut	kVt
U	put	pUt

There is a short central vowel, normally unstressed:

@	another	@ "nVD@
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The free vowels comprise monophthongs and diphthongs, although no hard and fast line can be drawn between these categories. They can be placed in three groups according to their final quality: i: eI aI OI, u: @U aU, 3: A: O: I@ e@ U@. They are exemplified as follows:

i:	ease	i:z
eI	raise	reIz
aI	rise	raIz
OI	noise	nOIz
u:	lose	lu:z
@U	nose	n@Uz
aU	rouse	raUz
3:	furs	f3:z
A:	stars	stA:z
O:	cause	kO:z
I@	fears	fI@z
e@	stairs	ste@z
U@	cures	kjU@z

The vowels /i:/ and /u:/ in unstressed syllables vary in their pronunciation between a close [i]/[u] and a more open [I]/[U]. Therefore it is suggested that /i/ and /u/ be used as indeterminacy symbols.

i	happy	"h{pi
u	into	"Intu

NOTES.

- 1. Notational variants. Differently from the notation set out above:

(i) It is possible to transcribe English long vowels without using length marks, thus /i u 3 A O/. This is phonemically unambiguous, although it does remove the option of restricting the symbols [i u] to the use just described, for the phonemically indeterminate weak vowels.

(ii) The symbol /E/ is quite widely used in place of /e/ for the vowel of "pet".

(iii) In an older notation, now no longer in general use, paired short and long vowels were transcribed using the same vowel symbol with and without length marks, thus /i/ in "pit", /i:/ in "ease"; /O/ in "pot", /O:/ in "cause".

- 2. Additional symbols. For some purposes and some varieties of English it is useful to give explicit symbolization to the glottal stop and/or the voiceless velar fricative:

ʔ	network	neʔw3:k
x	loch	lQx

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