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## How To Pronounce & Spell Vowel Digraphs

Vowel digraphs are vowels written with two letters. Some are a single sound. Others, like 'au' or 'oi,' are 'diphthongs'. (Diphthongs contain the basic sounds of both vowels, but they glide together.) This page has some suggestions for sounding digraphs out in unfamiliar words.

*For Vowels plus 'R' (in words like  
CAR, CARE, VERY, AWARE, EAR,*

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*BIRD, FUR, BETTER, MORE, etc.), see the 'Other Vowel Sounds' section of English Vowels.*

Learning how to pronounce and spell English vowel digraphs can also improve your reading.

(Note: These are standard American pronunciations. They may have different pronunciations in some areas.)

## Vowel Digraphs Beginning with 'A'

*AI* or *AY* are almost always pronounced as long A -- /eɪ/ in the International Phonetic Alphabet. (For exceptions see AIR below the Es):

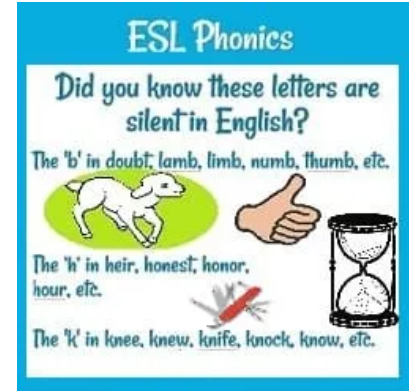
- bait, bay, brain, daily, fail, laid, maid, may, paid, pay, praise, raise, say (but NOT said-- it rhymes with red), wait, way.

*AU* or *AW* are usually pronounced /ɔ:/:

- audio, auditorium, auto, autumn, awful, cause, caught, daughter, raw, saw, taught.

One common exception is 'because.' At least in my California dialect, we pronounce it with a simple short 'u' sound: be-cuz. (It's the same sound as the 'ou' in cousin.)

enough information to decide if you want to read more.



Do you want to know how to pronounce what you read (or to spell what you can say?)

[ESL Phonics](#) gives the basic sounds of each letter. as well as linking to pages with in-depth explanations of vowel sounds and of vowel and consonant digraphs.

[Vocabulary in Minutes a Month](#) Top

## Vowel Digraphs Beginning with 'E'

**EA** is often pronounced /i:/ like long E (as in the long vowel rule on the [English Vowels](#) page):

- bean, cheat, dream, each, heal, lead (the verb), leave, mean, reach, real, speak, team, treat.

However, **EA** is also commonly pronounced like a short E (/ɛ/):

- already, bread, breakfast, dead, head, instead, lead (grey substance used in plumbing), measure, ready, spread, weather.

There is no certain way to predict which pronunciation a word will use.

**EE** is pronounced with a long E (/i:/) :

- bee, deep, feed, feel, free, need, see, seed, steep, tree.

**EI** is usually pronounced with a long A (/eɪ/):

- eight, neighbor, weigh, **OR** with a long E (/i:/) after C: deceive, receive.

**EU and EW** are usually long U (/ju:/):

- eulogy, few

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Top

or /u:/

- grew, new, stew

## AIR, EAR, EER, EIR, and EUR

As pointed out on the English Vowels page with link above, vowels and vowel digraphs followed by 'R' change their sounds. AIR, EAR, EER, and EIR can be pronounced three ways:

- /ɛər/-- air/heir (same pronunciation), bare/bear, fair, hair, pair/pear, stair/stare, their
- /ɪər/-- beer, career, ear, hear/here, near, stear/steer, weary, weird, year
- /ɜr/-- early, earn, earth, heard, learn, neuron

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Top

## Digraphs Beginning with 'I'

*IE* is usually pronounced with a long E sound (/i:/):

- achieve, belief, believe, grieve, piece, relieve. (See EI.)

An old spelling rhyme goes: "I before E except after C, or when pronounced A as in neighbor and weigh.")

## Vowel Combinations Beginning with 'O'

*OA* is pronounced with a long O (/ou/):

- boast, boat, coat, goal, soap, throat.

*OI* and *OY* make the /ɔɪ/ sound:

- boil, boy, point, soil, toy.

*OO* is pronounced /u:/ as in:

- food, room, school, soon, too, tool, zoo

or /ʊ/ as in

- book, good, look, stood, took, understood.

*OU* may be the most difficult digraph to guess.

Its most common sound is /aʊ/:



- about, amount, around, count, doubt,

[Top](#)


# Vowel Digraphs


## Vowel Sounds written with 2 letters (for example: OU)

### Can You Pronounce These Words with OU?


/aʊ/: about, amount, around, count, doubt, ground, house, mountain, mouth, out, rebound, sound, south, thousand, without.  

/ɔ:/: bought, cough, fought, ought, thought

long O (/oʊ/): dough, though, thorough (two syllables) 


short U (/ʌ/): country, cousin, double, enough, rough, trouble, young, 

/u:/: group, through x2:

/ju:/: you 

/ʊ/: could, should, would.

or (followed by an R) /ɔr/: four, fourth 4

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 108

ground, house, mountain, mouth, out, rebound, sound, south, thousand, without.

It can also make the sound of /ɔ:/:

- bought, cough, fought, ought, thought (see AU),

long O (/oʊ/):

- dough, though, thorough (two syllables, meaning complete),

short U (/ʌ/):

Top

- country, cousin, double, enough, rough, trouble, young,

/u:/:

- group, through

/ju:/:

- you

/ʊ/ :

- could, should, would.

or (followed by an R) /ɔr/:

- four, fourth

*OW*

is pronounced /aʊ/:

- brown, cow, down, how, now, town,

or with a long O (/oʊ/):

- blow, grow, know, low, own, show, throw.

## Vowel Digraphs of 'U'

*UE* is pronounced /u:/:

- blue, true

*UI/UY* can be pronounced /u:/:

- fruit, suit

Top

or sometimes /ɪ/:

- build

or /aɪ/:

- buy, guy

A good way to learn how these digraphs sound in spoken English is to listen to a speech or podcast with a transcript you can read while you listen. Check out [English Listening Practice](#).

Try Carol Dweck's short TED talk on that page: "[The Power of Yet](#) (Believing that you can improve)." She talks about the importance of a growth mindset. That means believing that practicing difficult skills can make you smarter, not prove that you are a failure.

I found 22 vowel digraphs in the first two minutes, or nearly 60 in all. They're almost all mentioned in the list above.

For a more detailed explanation of digraphs and other English vowel sounds, (with practice activities), see this course on [English Vowel Sounds and Spellings](#).

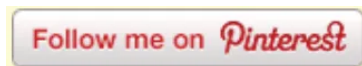
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Top

[Home](#) › [ESL Reading](#) › [Vowel Digraphs](#)





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Top

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**Robert Krasinski**

Why is the a silent when it comes after e or o? Clean, boy etc.? Does any other language have a silent a or use w a much as we do, or wh, th combinations, or oo and ee?

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 17w**Catherine Simonton**

That's a good question! I don't know exactly WHY English spelling rules are so strange (or whether languages have as many silent letters. Clean, boy are part of a pattern. (English-speaking kids sometimes learn it as "when 2 vowels go walking, the first does the talking.") It's one way of showing the first vowel will have a "long" sound ("say its name.") The rule isn't always true, though. See eu, ou, & ui above for some common exceptions. (There are also less common ones, like aisle, where ai is pronounced as a long

\*You can get some ideas for why from the history of English. See [www.englishhints.com/word-origins](http://www.englishhints.com/word-origins), especially the last section "English goes worldwide" which discusses spelling.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 16w**John Harvey**

Thanks for reminding me of the digraph UY ( I was making a list).

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1y**Catherine Simonton**[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 51w**Arq Mauricio S Pinto**

is terrible

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Top