

## Pronunciation Guide (Phonemes of American English)

| CONSONANTS     |                  | SEMI-VOWELS     | VOWELS        |                         |
|----------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| <b>p</b> press | <b>ʃ</b> shine   | <b>r</b> ring   | <b>i</b> bee  | <b>ə</b> unbelievable** |
| <b>b</b> bag   | <b>ʒ</b> measure | <b>ɫ</b> call * | <b>ɪ</b> bit  | <b>ɜr</b> bird          |
| <b>t</b> time  | <b>s</b> sit     | <b>j</b> you    | <b>e</b> bed  | <b>ei</b> bay           |
| <b>d</b> date  | <b>z</b> zebra   | <b>w</b> water  | <b>æ</b> bad  | <b>ai</b> buy           |
| <b>k</b> can   | <b>tʃ</b> chair  | <b>h</b> hot    | <b>ɔ</b> lock | <b>ɔi</b> boy           |
| <b>g</b> good  | <b>dʒ</b> jam    |                 | <b>ʌ</b> luck | <b>ou</b> go            |
| <b>f</b> find  | <b>n</b> never   |                 | <b>ʊ</b> look | <b>au</b> now           |
| <b>v</b> vote  | <b>m</b> more    |                 | <b>u</b> loot |                         |
| <b>θ</b> thin  | <b>ŋ</b> sing    |                 |               |                         |
| <b>ð</b> that  | <b>l</b> lake    |                 |               |                         |

There are 8 consonant pairs in which the two phonemes are different only by being voiced or unvoiced:

voiced:     **b d g v ð z ʒ dʒ**

unvoiced:  **p t k f θ s ʃ tʃ**

\* The /l/ consonant is different when it comes after a vowel, so some dictionaries use the phoneme written as /ɫ/. Other dictionaries don't use /ɫ/.

/r/ /ɫ/ /j/ /w/ and /h/ are usually listed as consonants but they are actually **semi-vowels**. They are in the consonant category, but they are not true consonants. They are close to being vowels because speech articulators are not in close contact when making these sounds.

/ɜr/ is a way of showing /r/ after the /ʊ/ vowel, as in these examples:

*herd* /hɜrd/    *fur* /fɜr/    and    *were* /wɜr/, but after other vowels the phonemic transcription can use /r/ as in these examples: *card* /kɔrd/    *fork* /fɔrk/    *beer* /bi:r/

\*\*/ə/ is a difficult concept to understand. It is the weak, short vowel that appears in unstressed syllables. You can pronounce it with your mouth relaxed and almost closed. Look at these examples. The vowels in **underlined bold** print are /ə/:

ability, inform**ation**, specify, relat**ive**, caus**es**, collis**ion**, un**i**form, elem**ent**, glam**or**ous

Be flexible. Accept ambiguity. The use of phonemic symbols is an attempt to represent an analog system in a digital format. There are many variations in English pronunciation in different regions of the world. Some people say /təme**it**ou/ others say /təmə**æ**tu/.

Don't forget that you can use context to understand when you cannot identify phonemes accurately. Read this sentence in which every vowel letter is replaced with an x:

**Xt mxy bx dxffxcxlt tx lxxrn thx dxffxrxncx bxtwxnx vxwxl sxxnds, bxt xnglxsh cxn xsxllx bx xndxrstxxd bx lxstxnxng tx thx cxmbxnxtxxxn xf cxnsxnxnts xn x sxntxncx.**

(see the answer on page 7)

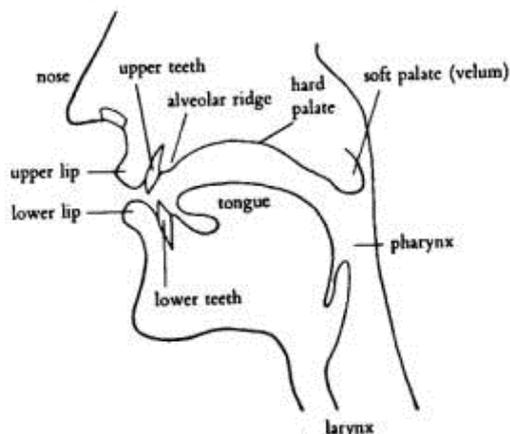
| More difficult to learn for Japanese speakers |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|--|--|
| θ   | ð | ʒ | v | ŋ | ʧ | r | l |   |   |   |   |   |   | ɪ | æ  | ɔ  | ʌ  | ʊ  | u  | ə  | ɜr |  |  |
| Easier to learn for Japanese speakers         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |  |  |
| p   | b | t | d | k | g | f | t | s | ʃ | h | m | n | w | j | dʒ | tʃ |    |    |    |    |    |  |  |
|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | e  | i  | ei | ai | ɔi | ou | au |  |  |

**Special note:** /ə/ is very common. It is the weak vowel sound that appears in unstressed parts of words

examples: information /ɪnfərmeɪʃən/ television /teləvɪʒən/ usual /juːʒuəl/

## The Vocabulary for Talking about Pronunciation

- Phoneme:** The alphabet of sounds used by speakers of a language, usually written between slash marks such as in this example: /æ/
- Consonant:** A speech sound made by contact of the human speech articulators (lips, teeth, roof of the mouth, tongue and so on (see the diagram below)
- Vowel:** A speech sound made without contact of the human speech articulators



- Semi-vowel: A vowel that is a little like a consonant (/j/ /r/ /ɹ/)
- Syllable:** A part of a word that contains a vowel. The number of vowels in a word = the number of syllables in that word. A syllable can be a vowel by itself, one or more consonants followed a vowel, a vowel followed by one or more consonants, or a vowel between one or more consonants. Consonants are indicated by C, and vowels are indicated by V.

### 6. Stressed and unstressed syllables

in the word kitchen, the first syllable is stressed (underlined)

in a sentence, some words and syllables are stressed and others are unstressed

The stove is in the middle of the kitchen.

### 7. Voiced and unvoiced consonants

What is the difference between the th in *this* and the th in *thick*? They are the same except the th in *this* is voiced and the th in *thick* is unvoiced. There are other voiced and unvoiced consonant pairs:

/b/ /p/ /ð/ /θ/

/d/ /t/ /z/ /s/

/g/ /k/ /ʒ/ /ʃ/

/v/ /f/ /dʒ/ /tʃ/

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 /d/    /t/            /z/    /s/  
 /g/    /k/            /ʒ/    /ʃ/  
 /v/    /f/            /dʒ/   /tʃ/

In English, many combinations of C and V are possible:

| SYLLABLE | EXAMPLE                       | PHONEMIC LETTERS |
|----------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| V        | eye                           | ai               |
| CV       | new                           | nu               |
| VC       | it                            | it               |
| CVC      | bit                           | bɪt              |
| CVCC     | little                        | lɪt̩l̩           |
| CCVCC    | stashed                       | stæʃt            |
| CCVCCC   | grasped                       | græsp̩t          |
| CCVCCCC  | twelfths (5/12=five twelfths) | twet̩fθs         |
| CCCVCCC  | strengths                     | streŋθs          |

This possibility for recombination means that there are thousands of syllables in English.

In Japanese the number of possible syllables is much, much lower:

| SYLLABLE | EXAMPLE | ROMAJI |
|----------|---------|--------|
| V        | え (絵)   | e      |
| CV       | け (毛)   | ke     |
| VC       | えん (円)  | en     |
| CVC      | けん (県)  | ken    |
| CVCC     | ???     |        |
| CCVCC    | ???     |        |
| CCVCCC   | ???     |        |
| CCVCCCC  | ???     |        |



## **The North Wind and the Sun**

English Orthography (conventional spelling)

1. The north wind and the sun / were disputing / which was the stronger / when a traveler came along / wrapped in a warm cloak.
2. They agreed / that the one who first succeeded / in making the traveler / take his cloak off / should be considered / stronger than the other.
3. Then the north wind blew / as hard as he could, / but the more he blew / the more closely did the traveler / fold his cloak around him.
4. And at last / the north wind / gave up the attempt.
5. Then the sun shined out warmly / and immediately / the traveler took off his cloak.
6. And so the north wind / was obliged to confess / that the sun / was the stronger of the two.

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*Phonemic representation as read slowly in North American English with slightly idealized pronunciations of individual words.*

|          |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----------|----|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| <b>1</b> |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| ð        | ə  |    | n | ou | r  | θ  |    | w  | ɪ  | n  | d  |    | æ  | n | d  |    | ð  | ə  |    |    |
| s        | ʌ  | n  |   | w  | ɜr |    |    | d  | ɪ  | s  | p  | j  | u  | t | ɪ  | ŋ  |    | w  | ɪ  | tʃ |
| w        | ʌ  | z  |   | ð  | ə  |    | s  | t  | r  | ɔ  | ŋ  | g  | ɜr |   |    | w  | e  | n  |    | ə  |
| t        | r  | æ  | v | ə  | l  | ɜr |    |    | k  | ei | m  |    | ə  | l | ɔ  | ŋ  |    |    |    |    |
| r        | æ  | p  | t |    | ɪ  | n  |    | ə  |    | w  | ou | r  | m  |   | k  | l  | ou | k  |    |    |
| <b>2</b> |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| ð        | ei |    | ə | g  | r  | i  | d  |    | ð  | æ  | t  |    | ð  | ə |    | w  | ʌ  | n  |    |    |
| h        | u  |    | f | ɜr | s  | t  |    |    | s  | ə  | k  | s  | i  | d | ə  | d  |    | ɪ  | n  |    |
| m        | ei | k  | ɪ | ŋ  |    | ð  | ə  |    | t  | r  | æ  | v  | ə  | l | ɜr |    |    | t  | ei | k  |
| h        | ɪ  | z  |   | k  | l  | ou | k  |    | ɔ  | f  |    | ʃ  | u  | d |    | b  | i  |    |    |    |
| k        | ə  | n  | s | ɪ  | d  | ɜr | d  |    |    | s  | t  | r  | ɔ  | ŋ | g  | ɜr |    |    |    |    |
| ð        | æ  | n  |   | ð  | i  |    | ʌ  | ð  | ɜr |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| <b>3</b> |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| ð        | e  | n  |   | ð  | ə  |    | n  | ou | r  | θ  |    | w  | ɪ  | n | d  |    | b  | l  | u  |    |
| æ        | z  |    | h | ɔ  | r  | d  |    | æ  | z  |    | h  | i  |    | k | u  | d  |    | b  | ʌ  | t  |
| ð        | ə  |    | m | ou | r  |    | h  | i  |    | b  | l  | u  |    | ð | ə  |    | m  | ou | r  |    |
| k        | l  | ou | s | l  | i  |    | d  | ɪ  | d  |    | ð  | e  |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| t        | r  | æ  | v | ə  | l  | ɜr |    |    | f  | ou | ɸ  | d  |    | h | ɪ  | z  |    |    |    |    |
| k        | l  | ou | k |    | ə  | r  | au | n  | d  |    | h  | ɪ  | m  |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| <b>4</b> |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| æ        | n  | d  |   | æ  | t  |    | l  | æ  | s  | t  |    | ð  | ə  |   | n  | ou | r  | θ  |    |    |
| w        | ɪ  | n  | d |    | g  | ei | v  |    | ʌ  | p  |    | ð  | i  |   | ə  | t  | e  | m  | p  | t  |
| <b>5</b> |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| ð        | e  | n  |   | ð  | ə  |    | s  | ʌ  | n  |    | ʃ  | ai | n  | d |    | au | t  |    |    |    |
| w        | ou | r  | m | l  | i  |    | æ  | n  | d  |    | ɪ  | m  | i  | d | i  | ə  | t  | l  | i  |    |
| ð        | ə  |    | t | r  | æ  | v  | ə  | l  | ɜr |    |    | t  | u  | k |    | ɔ  | f  |    |    |    |
| h        | ɪ  | z  |   | k  | l  | ou | k  |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| <b>6</b> |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| æ        | n  | d  |   | s  | ou |    | ð  | ə  |    | n  | ou | r  | θ  |   | w  | ɪ  | n  | d  |    |    |
| w        | ʌ  | z  |   | ə  | b  | l  | ai | dʒ |    | t  | u  |    | k  | ə | n  | f  | e  | s  |    |    |
| ð        | æ  | t  |   | ð  | ə  |    | s  | ʌ  | n  |    | w  | ʌ  | z  |   | ð  | ə  |    |    |    |    |
| s        | t  | r  | ɔ | ŋ  | g  | ɜr |    |    | ə  | v  |    | ð  | ə  |   | t  | u  |    |    |    |    |

These phonemic symbols used here are a representation of spoken American English. Other textbooks and dictionaries use variations of these symbols.

**Which phonemes are difficult for Japanese speakers to hear correctly? Pronounce the difference in these minimal pairs.**

**/b/            /v/  
ban            van**

**/r/            /l/  
rock            lock**

**/θ/            /s/  
thick            sick**

**/ð/            /s/  
that            sat**

**/dʒ/            /ʒ/  
legion            lesion**

**/æ/            /ʌ/            /ʊ/  
lack            luck            look**

**/ʊ/            /u/  
full            fool**

**/ɔ/            /ou/  
Auckland            Oakland**

Such sets of words as those above are called minimal pairs. They are pronounced the same way except that one phoneme in the word is different. You can do drills with many minimal pair combinations at

<http://www.manythings.org/pp/>

**The answer to the question posed on page1:**

Xt mxy bx dxffxcxlt tx lxxrn thx dxffrxncx bxtwxxn vxwxl sxxnds, bxt xnglxsh cxn xsxxllx bx xndxrstxxd bx lxstxnxng tx thx cxmbxnxtxxxn xf cxnsxnxnts xn x sxntxncx.

It may be difficult to learn the difference between vowel sounds, but English can usually be understood by listening to the combination of consonants in a sentence.