

ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION – DIPHTHONGS

In English, there are two groups of vocalic sounds: the **single vowel sounds**, which we saw in the last document, and the **diphthong vowel sounds**, which we are going to see in this document. Remember that diphthongs are a combination of two vowel sounds that go together in one single syllable.

These are the diphthong vowel sounds in English:

/aɪ/	t <u>i</u> me	kn <u>i</u> fe	r <u>i</u> ght	<u>e</u> ye	w <u>r</u> ite	w <u>i</u> ne
/aʊ/	gr <u>ou</u> nd	cow	h <u>ou</u> se	m <u>ou</u> se	m <u>ou</u> th	d <u>ow</u> n
/eɪ/	l <u>a</u> ke	Sp <u>a</u> in	pl <u>a</u> y	l <u>a</u> te	c <u>a</u> ke	d <u>a</u> y
/eə/	b <u>ea</u> r	sh <u>a</u> re	<u>a</u> ir	w <u>ea</u> r	f <u>a</u> ir	h <u>a</u> ir
/ɪə/	id <u>ea</u>	the <u>a</u> tre	de <u>a</u> r	care <u>er</u>	<u>ea</u> r	we <u>ir</u> d
/ɔɪ/	b <u>oy</u>	t <u>oy</u>	ch <u>oi</u> ce	v <u>oi</u> ce	n <u>oi</u> se	p <u>oi</u> nt
/ʊə/	t <u>ou</u> r	end <u>u</u> re	sew <u>er</u>	s <u>u</u> re	pur <u>i</u> tan	c <u>u</u> re
/əʊ/	cl <u>o</u> thes	h <u>o</u> me	r <u>oa</u> d	<u>o</u> ld	g <u>o</u>	st <u>o</u> ne

What rules or patterns do they follow? Or in other words, how do we know that a written word is pronounced with these diphthongs? Let's summarize the most common spellings:

(Remember to use the dictionary www.wordreference.com as a help to this document, and remember to check the YouTube video on diphthongs every time you have problems with a sound in particular).

1. /aɪ/ In words such as eye, right, time. It's pronounced as the Spanish "ai". Common spellings:

- Some words containing 'i': hi, identity, child, behind, bicycle.
- Most words containing 'i' + consonant + 'e': ice, arrive, side, smile.
- Most words written with 'ie': die, lie, pie.
- Words with the letter 'y': cry, why, appy, psychology.
- Words with 'ig / igh': sign, high, bright, resign.
- Others: buy, guy, eye.

Practice 1. In which of the following words are the underlined letters pronounced /aɪ/?

live (adj) · live (v) · bit · bite · buys · piercing · dye · describe · sideburns · signature · wing · hygiene · biography

· hidden · river · bible · bicycle · isle · item · ignorant · children · analyse · private · thigh · achieve · hire · virus

2. /aʊ/ In words such as ground, mouth, cow. It's pronounced as the Spanish "au". Common spellings:

- Most words with the letters 'ou': about, mouse, mountain.
- Most words with 'ow': now, towel, clown.

Practice 2. In which of the following words are the underlined letters pronounced /aʊ/?

know · law · south · how · low · announce · hour · honour · town · lawn · ouch · flower · flow · wow · pour

3. /eɪ/ In words like *state*, *Spain*, *day*, *cake*. It's pronounced as the Spanish "ei". Common spellings:

- Most words containing 'a' + consonant + 'e': *bake*, *sane*, *paper*.
- Common in words containing 'a' + 2 consonants + 'e': *strange*, *able*, *chamber*.
- Some words with 'a' followed by one consonant, but very uncommon in monosyllabic words: *information*, *nature*, *creative*.
- Common in words with 'ai / ay': *lay*, *explain*, *always*, *wait*.
- In some words with 'ei / ey': *eight*, *neighbour*, *grey*, *survey*.
- In some words with 'ea': *break*, *great*, *steak*.

Practice 3. In which of the following words are the underlined letters pronounced /eɪ/?

seat · classmate · height · ankle · stay · catering · exchange · acted · bass · basic · key · May · unbreakable ·

handle · application · obey · April · baby · rapper · create · misbehave · ladder · crazy · antisocial · air

4. /eə/ In words like *bear*, *hair*, *share*, *there*. It's pronounced as the Spanish "ea", but with a very closed 'a' sound. Common spellings:

- Common with 'are': *care*, *aware*, *prepared*.
- Common with 'air / aer': *air*, *unfair*, *millionaire*, *aeroplane*.
- Some words with 'ear': *pear*, *swear*.
- Some words with 'ar': *area*, *various*, *Mary*.
- Others: *there*, *where*, *scarce*, *prayer*.

Practice 4. In which of the following words are the underlined letters pronounced /eə/?

are · dare · hear · here · anywhere · ear · footwear · dairy · aerobics · beard · pair · fear · scare · rarely · dear

5. /ɪə/ In words like *idea*, *weird*, *career*. It's pronounced as the Spanish "ie", but with a very closed 'e' sound. It appears in:

- Some words with 'ea': *clear*, *appear*, *fear*, *beard*.
- Some words with 'ee': *beer*, *career*, *volunteer*.
- Some words with 'ere': *here*, *atmosphere*.
- In a few cases, 'e': *experience*, *material*, *serious*.
- Some words with 'ie': *cashier*, *piercing*, *frontier*.
- Others: *weird*.

Practice 5. In which of the following words are the underlined letters pronounced /ɪə/?

ideal · fierce · piece · peace · deer · seem · steel · severe · material · bear · beard · tired · year · engineer

6. /ɔɪ/ In words like *boy*, *choice*, *point*. It's pronounced as the Spanish "oi". It appears in:

- Words with 'oi': *noise*, *oil*, *poison*.
- Words with 'oy': *destroy*, *employ*, *royal*, *voyage*.
- Exceptions! *going*, *coincide*, *heroic* (they spell like /əʊɪ/), *doing*, *booing*.

- In words finishing in ‘-oir’, which come from French, this is pronounced as /waɪə/: *choir*, or /war/: *abattoir*, *noir*.

Practice 6. In which of the following words are the underlined letters pronounced /ɔɪ/?

memoir · heroism · spoilt · annoyed · mooing · coin · coincidence · owing · toy · unemployment

7. /ʊə/ In words like *tour*, *sure*, *cure*. It’s pronounced as the Spanish “ue”, but with a very closed ‘e’ sound.

- Common in words that have a written ‘ur’ followed by a vowel: *pure*, *fury*, *puritan*, *you’re*, *tour*.
- Exceptions: *poor* (in the UK), *jewelry* (in the US).

Practice 7. In which of the following words are the underlined letters pronounced /ʊə/?

turn · secure · Turkish · rural · poorly (UK) · mature · touring · burning · furry · curve · tourist

8. /əʊ/ In words like *clothes*, *road*, *go*. It’s pronounced as the Spanish “ou”, but the ‘o’ sounds a bit like an ‘e’.

- Common in words with ‘o’ + consonant + ‘e’: *stone*, *code*, *home*.
- In some words, with ‘o’ alone: *almost*, *both*, *social*.
- Many times, final ‘o’: *no*, *go*.
- Common with ‘ol’: *control*, *old*, *colt*.
- Common with ‘oa’: *load*, *coast*, *goal*.
- Common with ‘oe’: *goes*, *potatoes*.
- Common with ‘ow’: *owe*, *tomorrow*, *low*.
- In some words with ‘ou’: *although*, *shoulder*, *soul*.

Practice 8. In which of the following words are the underlined letters pronounced /əʊ/?

so · role · love · potter · ghost · toast · soldier · politician · only · open · mountain · powerless · robot ·

thought · though · enough · hardcore · cow · votation · oak · okay · mock · smoke · through

MORE PRACTICE

1. In each line there are three words that have these diphthong sounds. Which ones?

/eɪ/ height – steak – leak – friend – capable – lake

/aɪ/ said – virus – high – fake – kind – says

/ɔɪ/ doing – oyster – noir – annoyed – blood – loyal

/əʊ/ through – owe – here – though – thought – oven

/aʊ/ now – hair – face – law – lower – sound

/ɪə/ there – seed – bear – peer – here – beard

/eə/ there – beer – say – pear – shoulder – careful

/ʊə/ tourism – tooth – hurt – endure – pure – zoo

2. ABAU questions about diphthongs:

- a) In which one of the following words do the underlined letters have the same sound as the letter underlined in the word “promote”: *foundation, discover, growth, models.*
- b) In which one of the following words do the underlined letters have the same sound as the “o” in the word “over”: *cover, brother, strong, only.*
- c) Write the word in which the underlined letters are pronounced /aʊ/ the same as “ou” in “loud”:
Mother- culture- powerful - lower.
- d) Write the word whose underlined letters are pronounced differently: *prey – available – giant – weigh*
- e) Write the word whose underlined letters are pronounced differently: *outfitted – thousands – through – hours*
- f) Which one of these words contains the sound /aɪ/ as in “my”: *remains, highly, away, machine?*
- g) In which word is the underlined letter (“a”) pronounced differently: *mayor, age, nature, danger?*
- h) In which word is the vowel sound pronounced differently: *silk, mild, wild, blind?*