

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/	time	knife	right	eye	write	wine
/aʊ/	ground	cow	house	mouse	mouth	down
/eɪ/	lake	Spain	play	late	cake	day
/eə/	bear	share	air	wear	fair	hair
/iə/	idea	theatre	dear	career	ear	weird
/ɔɪ/	boy	toy	choice	voice	noise	point
/ʊə/	tour	endure	sewer	sure	puritan	cure
/əʊ/	clothes	home	road	old	go	stone

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).

- /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, apply, 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

- /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 /wɑː/: abattoir, noir.

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

memoir heroism spoilt annoyed mooring 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.
aʊ ɔʊ ɒ aʊ ɒ

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.
aʊ ʌ ɒ ɒ

c) Write the word in which the underlined letters are pronounced /aʊ/ the same as "ou" in "loud":
Mother- culture- powerful- lower.
ʌ ʌ aʊ

d) Write the word whose underlined letters are pronounced differently: prey - available - giant - weigh
eɪ eɪ ɪə eɪ

e) Write the word whose underlined letters are pronounced differently: outfitted - thousands - through - hours
aʊ aʊ aʊ aʊ

f) Which one of these words contains the sound /aɪ/ as in "my": remains, highly, away, machine?
eɪ eɪ eɪ eɪ

g) In which word is the underlined letter ("a") pronounced differently: mayor, age, nature, danger?
eɪ eɪ eɪ eɪ

h) In which word is the vowel sound pronounced differently: silk, mild, wild, blind?
ɪ aɪ aɪ aɪ