

Introduction to the International Phonetic Alphabet

All spoken languages are made up of sounds. Most languages have unphonetic characteristics, that is, the words are not pronounced the way they are spelled. This is especially true of English. For example, the words, “rough,” “dough,” and “through” are all spelled with the same vowel combination but are pronounced with three different vowel sounds.

This poem sums up just how difficult English can be to learn and pronounce!

When the English tongue we speak,
 Why is *break* not rhymed with *freak*?
 Will you tell me why it's true
 We say *sew* but likewise *few*;
 And the maker of a verse
 Cannot cap his *horse* with *worse*?
Beard sounds not the same as *heard*;
Cord is different from *word*.
 Cow is *cow* but low is *low*;
Shoe is never rhymed with *foe*.
 Think of *hose* and *dose* and *lose*;
 And think of *goose* and yet of *choose*.
 Think of *comb* and *tomb* and *bomb*;
Doll and *roll* and *home* and *some*;
 And since *pay* is rhymed with *say*,
 Why not *paid* with *said*, I pray?
 We have *blood* and *food* and *good*;
Mould is not pronounced like *could*.
 Wherefore *done* but *gone* and *lone*?
 Is there any reason known?
 And, in short, it seems to me
 Sounds and letters disagree.

(Anonymous, “Our Queer Language”)

The International Phonetic Alphabet, known as the IPA, is a pronouncing alphabet that indicates the *exact* sounds of *all* languages regardless of their spelling. It was devised in 1888 by a group of European scientists and linguists.

1. It is made up of conventional letters from the Roman alphabet plus some new symbols.
2. Each letter of the alphabet equals *one* sound and always the *same* sound.
3. All letters are enclosed in brackets [] to distinguish them from normal language spellings.
4. The IPA, or the International Phonetic Alphabet, is a key to all languages and is therefore a perfect tool for singers who must be able to switch easily back and forth between the pronunciations of several languages. For example, the same [u] “oo” vowel sound in the words “food,” “jewel,” and “wound” is the same sound as in the words “ruhe” in German, “luce” in Italian, and “douce” in French.
5. Here is a vowel comparison for English, German, Italian, and French. All four languages use the Roman alphabet and have the same five vowel letters: “a,” “e,” “i,” “o,” “u.” However, the same five vowel letters represent a different number of vowel sounds in each language:
 - Italian has 7 vowels using these letters.
 - German has 14 vowels, including unlaufs and open and closed vowels.
 - French has 14 vowels, including nasals and mixed vowels.
 - English has 16 vowels, including diphthongs.

How to Use This Book

This book focuses on three different dialects: American Standard (AS), Received Pronunciation (RP), and Mid-Atlantic (MA) pronunciation. You may choose to work with AS at the beginning of the book and continue straight on through, or start directly with RP or MA found at the end of the book. For the purpose of clarity, these three dialects have been dealt with separately throughout the book. Although the book begins with American Standard pronunciation, it is not necessary to focus on this pronunciation first. The chapters in the middle of this text, chapters 2 through 13, focus on the production of consonants and vowels and are applicable to all three dialects. The treatment of the text within the context of the musical setting for expression and musicality again applies to all three pronunciations. The specifics of British Received Pronunciation and Mid-Atlantic pronunciation are found in chapters 14 and 15 at the end of the book.

If you are a British or British Commonwealth speaker, you may want to familiarize yourself first with the International Phonetic Alphabet as it applies to the British Received Pronunciation. It is found in chapter 14 on page 208. Once you have gone through chap-

ter 14, continue on with chapter 2. Chapters 2 through 13 will contain applications and texts for both American and British English. Throughout all the chapters, American texts are treated in American Standard and the British texts are treated in Received Pronunciation and Mid-Atlantic pronunciation.

If you are a North American English speaker, just continue on in chapter 1 to learn the IPA as it applies to American English speech sounds. Chapters 2–13 will contain applications and texts for both American and British English. The American texts are treated in American Standard pronunciation and the British texts are treated in Received Pronunciation and Mid-Atlantic pronunciation.

An *Exercise Guide* with phonetic transcriptions and applications for all the exercises and drills can be found on the companion website.

IT'S DECISION TIME!!

FOR

IPA for American English

IPA for British English

Continue below

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On to the IPA . . . !!

The International Phonetic Alphabet for American English



Consonants

The following symbols are identical to the letters of our English (Roman) alphabet:

[b], [d], [f], [g], [h], [k], [l], [m], [n], [p], [s], [t], [v], [w], [z]

The symbols below are new symbols added because no corresponding symbols exist in the Roman alphabet:

<i>Symbol</i>		<i>Key Words</i>
[ŋ]	(ng)	in <u>si</u> ng, thi <u>n</u> k
[θ]	(th)	in <u>th</u> in, <u>th</u> irst

<i>Symbol</i>		<i>Key Words</i>
[ð]	(th)	in <u>th</u> ine, <u>th</u> is
[ʍ]	(hw)	in <u>wh</u> isper, <u>wh</u> en
[j]		in <u>y</u> ou, <u>y</u> es
[ʃ]	(sh)	in <u>sh</u> e, <u>sh</u> ure
[tʃ]	(ch)	in <u>ch</u> oose, <u>ch</u> urch
[ʒ]		in <u>v</u> ision, 'a <u>z</u> ure*
[dʒ]		in <u>G</u> eorge, <u>j</u> oy
[ɹ]**		in <u>r</u> ed, <u>r</u> emember, every (the burred r)

Vowels

<i>Symbol</i>		<i>Key Words</i>
[ɑ]	(ah)	in <u>f</u> ather, <u>h</u> ot
[ɛ]	(eh)	in <u>w</u> ed, <u>m</u> any, <u>b</u> ury
[ɪ]	(ih)	in <u>h</u> it, <u>b</u> een, <u>b</u> usy
[i]	(ee)	in <u>m</u> e, <u>ch</u> ief, <u>f</u> eat, <u>r</u> ec <u>e</u> ive
[i]	(ee)	in <u>p</u> retty, <u>l</u> ovely
[æ]		in <u>c</u> at, <u>m</u> arry, <u>a</u> sk, <u>ch</u> arity
[u]	(oo)	in <u>t</u> oo, <u>w</u> ound, <u>b</u> lue, <u>j</u> uice
[ju]		in <u>v</u> iew, <u>b</u> eautiful, <u>u</u> sual, <u>t</u> une
[ʊ]		in <u>b</u> ook, <u>b</u> osom, <u>c</u> ushion, <u>f</u> ull
[o]	(oh)	in <u>o</u> bey, <u>d</u> esolate, <u>m</u> elody (unstressed syllables only)
[ɔ]	(aw)	in <u>a</u> wful, <u>c</u> all, <u>d</u> aughter, <u>s</u> ought
[ɚ]†	(er)	in <u>l</u> earn, <u>b</u> urn, <u>r</u> ehearse, <u>j</u> ourney (stressed syllables only)
[ə]†	(er)	in <u>f</u> ather, <u>d</u> octor, <u>v</u> ulgar, <u>e</u> lixir (unstressed syllables only)
[ʌ]	(uh)	in <u>h</u> um, <u>b</u> lood, <u>t</u> rouble, <u>j</u> udge (stressed syllables)
[ə]	(uh)	in <u>s</u> ofa, <u>h</u> eaven, <u>n</u> ation, <u>j</u> oyous (unstressed syllables)

* See alternate pronunciation and stress pattern in RP.

** The use of rolled [R] and flipped R's [r] is found in the British RP and Mid-Atlantic dialects. They should not be used in American Standard pronunciation.

† [ɚ] and [ə] are the r-colored vowels characteristic of American Standard pronunciation, AS.

Diphthongs

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Key Words</i>
[aɪ]	in <u>n</u> ight, <u>b</u> uy, <u>s</u> ky
[eɪ]	in <u>d</u> ay, <u>b</u> reak, <u>r</u> eign
[ɔɪ]	in <u>b</u> oy, <u>v</u> oice, <u>t</u> oil
[oʊ]	in <u>n</u> o, <u>s</u> low, <u>r</u> epro <u>a</u> ch
[aʊ]	in <u>n</u> ow, <u>a</u> bout, <u>d</u> oubt
[ɛə]	in <u>a</u> ir, <u>c</u> are, <u>t</u> here
[ɪə]	in <u>e</u> ar, <u>d</u> ear, <u>h</u> ere, <u>t</u> ier
[ɔə]	in <u>p</u> our, <u>f</u> our, <u>s</u> oar, <u>o</u> 'er
[ʊə]	in <u>s</u> ure, <u>t</u> our, <u>p</u> oor
[ɑə]	in <u>a</u> re, <u>h</u> ear <u>t</u> , <u>g</u> ard <u>e</u> n

Triphthongs

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Key Words</i>
[aɪə]	in <u>f</u> ire, <u>ch</u> oir, <u>a</u> d <u>m</u> ire
[aʊə]	in <u>o</u> ur, <u>f</u> low <u>e</u> r, <u>t</u> ow <u>e</u> r

Listed below are some frequently used words that are transcribed into the International Phonetic Alphabet; American Standard pronunciations are listed.

sing [sɪŋ]	song [sɔŋ]	singer [sɪŋə]
word [wɜd]	would [wʊd]	wonder [wʌndə]
walk [wɔk]	war [wɔə]	whisper [wɪspə]
jaw [dʒɔ]	judge [dʒʌdʒ]	joyous [dʒɔɪəs]
church [tʃɜtʃ]	choose [tʃuz]	children [tʃɪldrən]
this [ðɪs]	thou [ðəʊ]	thine [ðaɪn]
bear [bɛə]	beard [bɪəd]	burden [bɜdən]
dawn [dɔn]	double [dʌbəl]	darkness [dɑək-nəs]
new [nju]	nuisance [nju:səns]	numerous [nju:mərəs]

Now give these exercises a try. (Note that the phonetic characters in exercises and text throughout the book are in different fonts and some appear slightly different from each other in the two fonts.)



EXERCISES

IPA Drill

1. Change the following words in IPA symbols into English spellings:

[lʊk] _____ [beɪʒ] _____

[lɒəd] _____ [mɪljən] _____

[pɪpəl] _____ [θæŋk] _____

[ɛksələnt] _____ [mjuːzɪk] _____

[lʌntʃ] _____ [jaɪm] _____

[dʒɛləs] _____ [neɪtʃə] _____

[gɒədʒəs] _____ [bɪð] _____

[æŋɡɪ] _____ [ɪhɜːs] _____

[mɛʒə] _____ [dʒɜːnɪ] _____

[gɜːl] _____ [dɑːrəfjæm] _____

[tʌŋ] _____ [læɪŋks] _____

[ɑnə] _____ [vɜːtʃu] _____

2. Change the following English words into corresponding IPA symbols:

charm _____ zephyr _____

pensive _____ earth _____

flood _____ anoint _____

bought	_____	vision	_____
winter	_____	once	_____
hatch	_____	giant	_____
absurd	_____	year	_____
passion	_____	enough	_____
usage	_____	difficult	_____
younger	_____	languish	_____
beautiful	_____	pronounce	_____
worthy	_____	technical	_____

- Write your name in IPA symbols _____
- Find a short paragraph from a newspaper or magazine and transcribe it into phonetics.
- Change the following texts in IPA into English spellings:

American Standard pronunciation:

1. [juθ ləʔdʒ lɪstɪ lɪvɪŋ]

[juθ fʊl əv ɡreɪs fəʔs fæʃɪneɪʃən]

[du ju nou ðæt ould eɪdʒ meɪ klɪm æftə ju]

[wɪð ɪkwəl ɡreɪs fəʔs fæʃɪneɪʃən]



[ðeɪ fʊl bləʊn ænd splendɪd]

[ðeɪ əv ɪmɛns sʌn]

[ækʃən æmbɪʃən læftə]

[ðə naɪt fəloʊz kləʊz wɪð mɪljənz əv sʌnz]

[ænd slɪp ænd ɪstɔːrɪ dæknəs]

[juθ ðeɪ ould eɪdʒ ænd naɪt] [wɔlt mɪtmən]

2. [hɪə ðə meɪləs beɪz]

[gəʊldən beɪz]

[wɪt ə wɜːld əv hæpɪnəs ðeə hæmənɪ fɔːtɪz]

[θɪz ðə bɑːmɪ ɛə əv ðə naɪt]

[həʊ ðeɪ ɪŋ aʊt ðeə dɪlɪt]

[fɪlm beɪz] [ɛdʒə ælən pɒs]