

Alphabet (ABC), Pronunciation



The alphabet with phonetic transcription

Below is the English Alphabet (the ABC) with phonetic transcription of the names of the letters, using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)¹.

A	[eɪ]	J	[dʒeɪ]	S	[es]
B	[biː]	K	[keɪ]	T	[tiː]
C	[siː]	L	[el]	U	[juː]
D	[diː]	M	[em]	V	[viː]
E	[iː]	N	[en]	W	[dɒbljuː]
F	[ef]	O	[ʊː]	X	[eks]
G	[dʒiː]	P	[piː]	Y	[vaɪ]
H	[eɪtʃ]	Q	[kjuː]	Z	[zed ziː]
I	[aɪ]	R	[ɑ(ɪ)]		

The names of the letters G [dʒiː] and J [dʒeɪ] are easily mixed up. What can help you to remember the correct pronunciation is thinking of DJ [diːdʒeɪ], Disc Jockey and GM [dʒiːem], General Motors.

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¹In this hand-out, the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) from the International Phonetic Association (also IPA) is used. To hear the sounds which are indicated by the characters of the IPA, click on the symbols in one of the following IPA charts.

www.internationalphoneticassociation.org/IPAcharts/inter_chart_2018/IPA_2018.html

or

www.seeingspeech.ac.uk/ click on [IPA charts]

English Sound Spelling Combinations

In this section some sound spelling combinations that are typical of English.

Infos

s	[s]	seep	[si:p]
sh	[ʃ]	sheep	[ʃi:p]
ch	[tʃ]	cheap	[tʃi:p]
tch	[tʃ]	watch	[wɒtʃ]

Pronunciation of *qu* and *gu*

In English a **u** after a **q** is normally pronounced as [w] but a **u** after a **g** is normally not pronounced.

qu	[kw]	question	['kʌɛstʃən]
		quarter	['kvɔ:(ɪ)tə(ɪ)]
gu	[g]	guard	[gɑ:d]

The Suffix *-tion*

Most of the time the suffix **-tion** is pronounced as [-ʃən].

-tion	[-ʃən]	opposition	[,ɒpə'zɪʃən]
		occupation	[,ɒkʊ'peɪʃən]
		illustration	[,ɪlə'stɹɪʃən]

The *th* sound

For non-native speakers, probably the most difficult sound of the English language is the sound of **th**. They actually are two sounds, an unvoiced and a voiced version, [θ] and [ð] respectively. In the English language teaching business, it is not uncommon to suggest sounds to substitute the **th** sounds because many teachers consider it impossible or not worthwhile to try to learn a good pronunciation. It is however very well possible to learn a good pronunciation and incorrect pronunciation of **th** causes communication problems. Independent of which substitute sound is chosen, it will always result in pupils saying other words than they want to say. See examples in the following table.

intended word	pronunciation	substitute sound	pronounced word
[θ] thing thought	[θ] [θɪŋ] [θɔ:t]	[s] [sɪŋ] [sɔ:t]	sing sought
[θ] thought	[θ] [θɔ:t]	[f] [fɔ:t]	fought
[ð] though there, their, they're	[ð] [ðoə ðoʊ] [ðeə(ɪ)]	[d] [doə doʊ] [deə(ɪ)]	dough dare

Enfos

To get a good pronunciation of **th**, stick the tongue out a bit so the tip of the tongue is between the front teeth but leave a bit of space between the tongue and the teeth. When breathing out, the turbulence of the air moving through the space will cause turbulence and that produces the typical **th** sound. With some words the sound is voiced, [ð]; with others not, [θ].

Some Difficult Sounds for Brazilians

This section is about some sounds of English which are difficult to pronounce, especially for Brazilian learners.

Long and Short vowels

One important aspect of English pronunciation which is difficult for speakers of Portuguese to learn is the difference between long and short vowels. Portuguese, does not have long and short vowels. Portuguese vowels are typically pronounced with a duration in between long and short vowels of English. Apart from English having vowel pairs of which one is long and the other is short, most of the time, the long vowel of the pair is pronounced more to the front of the mouth and the short vowel more to the back.

been	[bi:n]	bin	[bɪn]
blue	[blu:]	cup	[cɜ:p]
hope	[ho:p]	hop	[hɒp]

This difference between the languages causes that many Brazilian learners of English pronounce most English vowels in between the normal, long and short but

also in between the normal to the front and to the back of the English vowel pairs. This often makes it difficult for listeners to understand which word is intended.



Pronunciation of letter **L** at end of word

In Brazilian Portuguese the sound of the letter **l** at the end of a word is reduced to a [u] or [v] sound. That is why good pronunciation of [l] at the end of a word is difficult for Brazilians. This often causes communication problems.

Peculiarly, this sound shift has only happened when the **l** is at the end of a word or syllable, not in other positions. The first sound of the word **liberdade** in Brazilian Portuguese is [l], just like in most other languages. For Brazilian learners, realising this can be a first step toward good pronunciation of the [l] sound at the end of words.

Pronunciation of letter **r**

For many non-native speakers of English, it is difficult to learn the English pronunciation of the letter **r**. For Brazilians it can be extra difficult because Portuguese has three different pronunciations for the letter **r**. More peculiar even is that they are not variations but they are different phonemes. In the beginning of a word the **r** is pronounced as [ʁ]. As a result Many Brazilians pronounce **red** [ɹɛd] as **head** [hɛd].

A difficult sound combination for many learners of English is **th** followed by **r** [θɹ] like in **three** [θriː], **thrust** [θɹʌst] and **throb** [θɹɒb]. For Brazilians it is not so very difficult because in Portuguese a single **r** in the middle of the word is pronounced as [r], just like in English **r** after **th**.

For completeness, the third pronunciation of the letter **r** in Portuguese is when double **r**, **-rr-**, is written in the middle of the word. The pronunciation can be [ʁ] or [h] or something in between.

Words ending in **y** or **ee**

For most Brazilians learners of English, it is difficult to pronounce ends of words clear enough to avoid communication problems, especially the [iː] sound. In Brazil the last sound or sounds of words often are pronounced very weak or not at all. Sometimes they are reduced to a level that they are very difficult to

hear. Words ending in **y** or **double e** are especially problematic. In most words, the endings **y** or **double e** should be pronounced as the clear long [i:] sound. Actually, the sound typically starts as a sharp [i:] which dies away. Compare the following pairs. Many Brazilians pronounce the first word of each pair as the second one.

ready	['ɹɛdɪ:]	red	[ɹɛd]
heavy	['hɛvɪ:]	have	[hæv]
coffee	['kɒfi: kɒfi:]	cough	[kɒf kɒf]

The alphabet without phonetic transcription

A	J	S
B	K	T
C	L	U
D	M	V
E	N	W
F	O	X
G	P	Y
H	Q	Z
I	R	

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