

A Practical Course in Standard  
(GB) British English Pronunciation



2021  
Edition

# The Sound of English

by Joseph Hudson



pronunciation  
STUDIO

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey ribbed sweater, is holding a white tablet. To her right is a white cup with gold horizontal stripes. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light grey.

# How to use this ebook.

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This course is designed for self-study and classroom use. Following it from cover to cover, you will learn the sounds and symbols of the standard British English pronunciation found in many dictionaries.

Audio is included throughout the course which you can access on [thesoundofenglish.org](https://thesoundofenglish.org). You can also find many additional materials to accompany the course on this site.

Pronunciation is a skill that requires repetition to build accuracy so you should regularly repeat the parts that are most challenging for you. Use of a voice recorder and mirror are highly recommended to track your progress and develop awareness.

Sections with white letters on a turquoise background are DRILLS with spaces to repeat after the audio.

A little bit of regular practice is normally the most productive approach with pronunciation. And of course, don't forget that learning is most profound when you **enjoy!**



# Interactive Features

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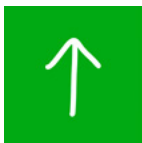
This PDF has the following interactive features which are activated by clicking or tapping on the page:



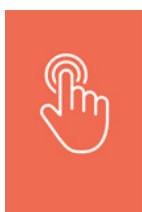
**AUDIO** - takes you to the online audio file.  
For alternative ways to use the audio, visit [thesoundofenglish.org/audio/](https://thesoundofenglish.org/audio/)



**ANSWER KEY** - takes you to the answers at the back of the book.



**RETURN** - takes you back to the course from the answer key.



**NAVIGATION** - all items are clickable on these pages and tapping the icon returns you to the main course menu.



# Course Sections

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The course consists of an Introduction Chapter then 8 Chapters each focusing on a different group of sounds.

- **Part 1:** Vowel Sounds (Chapters 1-4)
- **Part 2:** Consonant Sounds (Chapters 5-8).

Each chapter contains a mixture of the following parts:



## **SOUNDS**

How to physically pronounce sound.



## **SPELLING TO SOUND**

How to decode written English and use IPA.



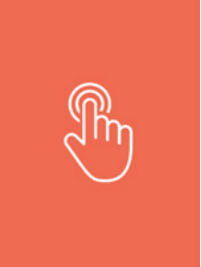
## **LINKING**

How sounds change and join in connected speech.



## **SOUNDS IN ACCENTS**

Common variations heard in regional accents.



# IPA Chart

1) i bean	6) u moon	11) ʊ shook	14) ɪə dear	20) ʊə curious					
2) ɪ tip	7) ə the	8) ɜː sir	12) ɔː shore	19) ɔɪ choice					
3) ɛ met	4) ɛː hair	9) ʌ fun	13) ɒ lock						
5) a pan	10) ɑː card		16) aʊ loud	18) aɪ hide					
21) f first	23) θ thick	25) s saw	27) ʃ she	29) h hard	30) p pick	32) t team	34) k code	45) ʔ witness	36) tʃ choose
22) v van	24) ð these	26) z zen	28) ʒ casual		31) b bed	33) d dine	35) g get		37) dʒ jet
38) w watch	39) r rug	40) j yet	41) l look	46) ɫ tall	42) m mode	43) n neck	44) ŋ song		



# Part 1: Vowel Sounds

	Introduction	1 Weak	2 Short		3 Long		4 Diphthong	
	Sounds 1-20 (2)	<div>/ə/</div>	/ɪ/	/ʊ/	/i:/	/u:/	/ɪə/	/eɪ/
			/ɛ/	/ɒ/	/ə:/	/ɔ:/	/aʊ/	/əʊ/
			/ʌ/	/ɑ/	/ɛ:/	/ɑ:/	/ʌɪ/	/ɔɪ/
							/ʊə/	
	Vowel Spelling (12)	/ə/ (19)	Sound Selection (36)  Word Construction (37)  Unusual Spellings (38)  QUIZ (40)		Sound Selection (50)  Common Words (51)		Sound Selection (64)  Word Construction (65)  Expressions (66)	
		Function Words (21)  Weak vs Strong (24)			Reduced Vowels (52)			
	'Standard' English (16)	<er> in Standard American (28)	/ʌ/ in Northern English (42)		TRAP/BATH Split (56)		/ʊə/ (68)	




## Part 2: Consonant Sounds


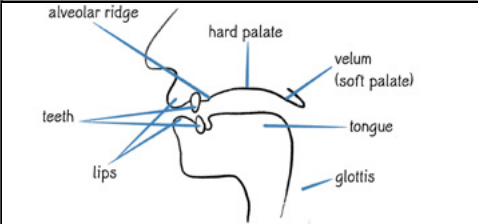

	Introduction	5 Fricatives	6 Plosives	7 Approximants	8 Nasals
	- Sounds 21-46 (4)	/f,v/	/p,b/	/w/	/m/
	- Consonant Articulation (6)	/θ,ð/	/t,d/	/r/	/n/
		/s,z/	/k,g/	/j/	/ŋ/
		/ʃ,ʒ/	/tʃ,dʒ/	/l/	Clusters - Initial (118) - Final (122)
	- Voicing (9)	/h/	[ʔ]	[ɾ]	
	- IPA (14)	- Silent < h > (75) - < th > Voicing (76) - Homophones (86) - < s > Endings (79)	- Silent Letters (89) - < ed > Endings (92)	- Silent < r > (101) - Silent < l > (106) - Clear vs Dark /l/ (108)	- Syllabic Consonants (115)
			- /t/ vs [ʔ] (90)	- Linking /r/ (104)	- QUIZ (124)
	37. 'Standard' English (16)	- < th > Fronting (82)	- Glottal Stops (94)	- Rhoticity (110)	- G Droppin' (126)



# Introduction

## The Sounds of English

	Vowels (1~20)	Consonants (21~46)
	/i:/	/ŋ/

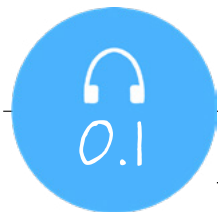
	Consonant Articulation	Voicing
		

	Vowel Spelling	IPA
		

	'Standard' English
	



# Vowel Sounds



0

Vowel sounds are made by **shaping air** as it leaves the body.

Each vowel sound is a **different position** of the mouth (tongue, jaw and lips):

1) <b>/i:/</b> be <u>a</u> n	6) <b>/u:/</b> mo <u>o</u> n	11) <b>/ʊ/</b> sh <u>o</u> ok
2) <b>/ɪ/</b> t <u>i</u> p	7) <b>/ə/</b> th <u>e</u>	8) <b>/ə:/</b> s <u>i</u> r
12) <b>/ɔ:/</b> sh <u>o</u> re		
3) <b>/ɛ/</b> m <u>e</u> t	4) <b>/ɛ:/</b> h <u>a</u> ir	9) <b>/ʌ/</b> f <u>u</u> n
13) <b>/ɒ/</b> l <u>o</u> ck		
5) <b>/a/</b> p <u>a</u> n	10) <b>/ɑ:/</b> c <u>a</u> rd	

14)  /ɪə/ de <u>ar</u>		19)  /ʊə/ cu <u>ri</u> ous
15)  /eɪ/ sa <u>m</u> e	17)  /əʊ/ g <u>o</u>	20)  /ɔɪ/ cho <u>i</u> ce
16)  /aʊ/ lo <u>u</u> d	18)  /aɪ/ h <u>i</u> d	

**Monophthong vowel sounds** (1-13)  
are made with one position of the mouth.

**Diphthong vowel sounds** (14-20)  
move from one mouth position to another.

Each different sound is a **phoneme**.

Most English vowel phonemes have **several different spellings** in written English.

# Consonant Sounds



Consonant sounds are made by **blocking air** as it leaves the body:

**Fricatives (21-30)** squeeze air through a small gap:

21) /f/ f <u>irst</u>	23) /θ/ th <u>ick</u>	25) /s/ s <u>aw</u>	27) /ʃ/ sh <u>e</u>	29) /h/ h <u>ard</u>
22) /v/ v <u>an</u>	24) /ð/ th <u>ese</u>	26) /z/ z <u>en</u>	28) /ʒ/ cas <u>ual</u>	

**Plosives (32-38)** fully stop then release air:

30) /p/ p <u>ick</u>	32) /t/ t <u>eam</u>	34) /k/ c <u>ode</u>	45) /?/ wit <u>ness</u>
31) /b/ b <u>ed</u>	33) /d/ d <u>ine</u>	35) /g/ g <u>et</u>	

**Affricates** / plosive directly followed by fricative

36) tʃ ch <u>oo</u> se	37) dʒ j <u>e</u> t
------------------------------	---------------------------

**Approximants** / vowel-like sound without full block

38) w w <u>a</u> ch	39) r r <u>u</u> g	40) j y <u>e</u> t
---------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

**Lateral Approximants** / sides of tongue release air

41) l l <u>oo</u> k	46) ɫ t <u>a</u> ll
---------------------------	---------------------------

**Nasals** / nose releases air

42) m m <u>o</u> de	43) n n <u>e</u> ck	44) ŋ s <u>o</u> ng
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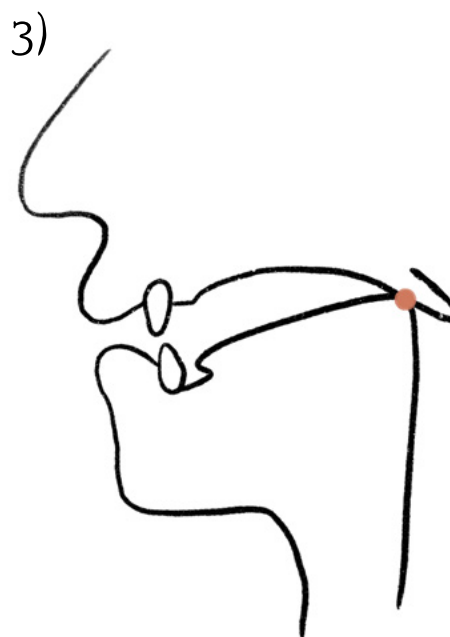
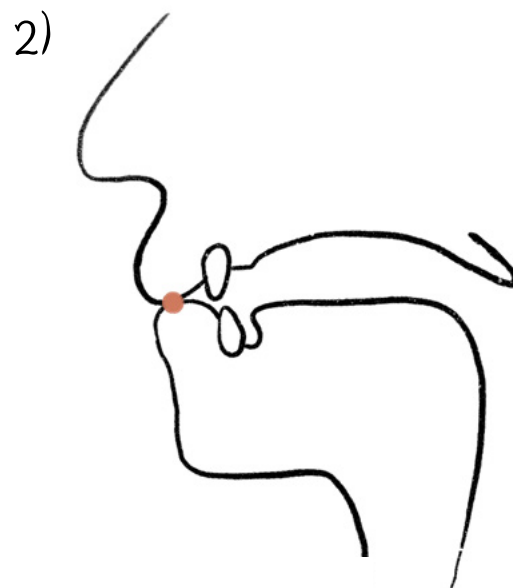
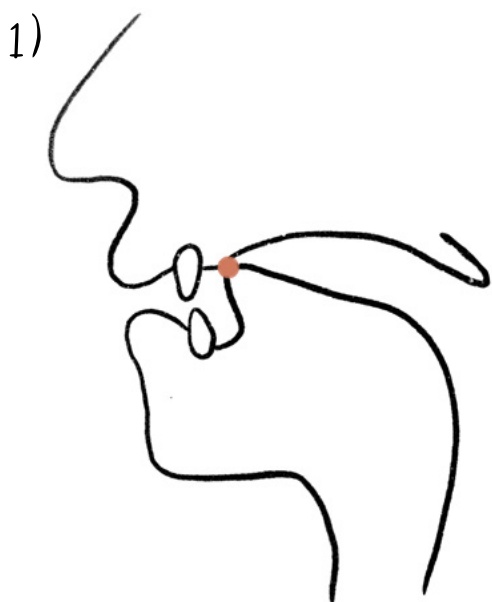
# Consonant Articulation



- What is the difference in the pronunciation of:

/p/ /t/ /k/

- Which mouth picture below matches each sound?

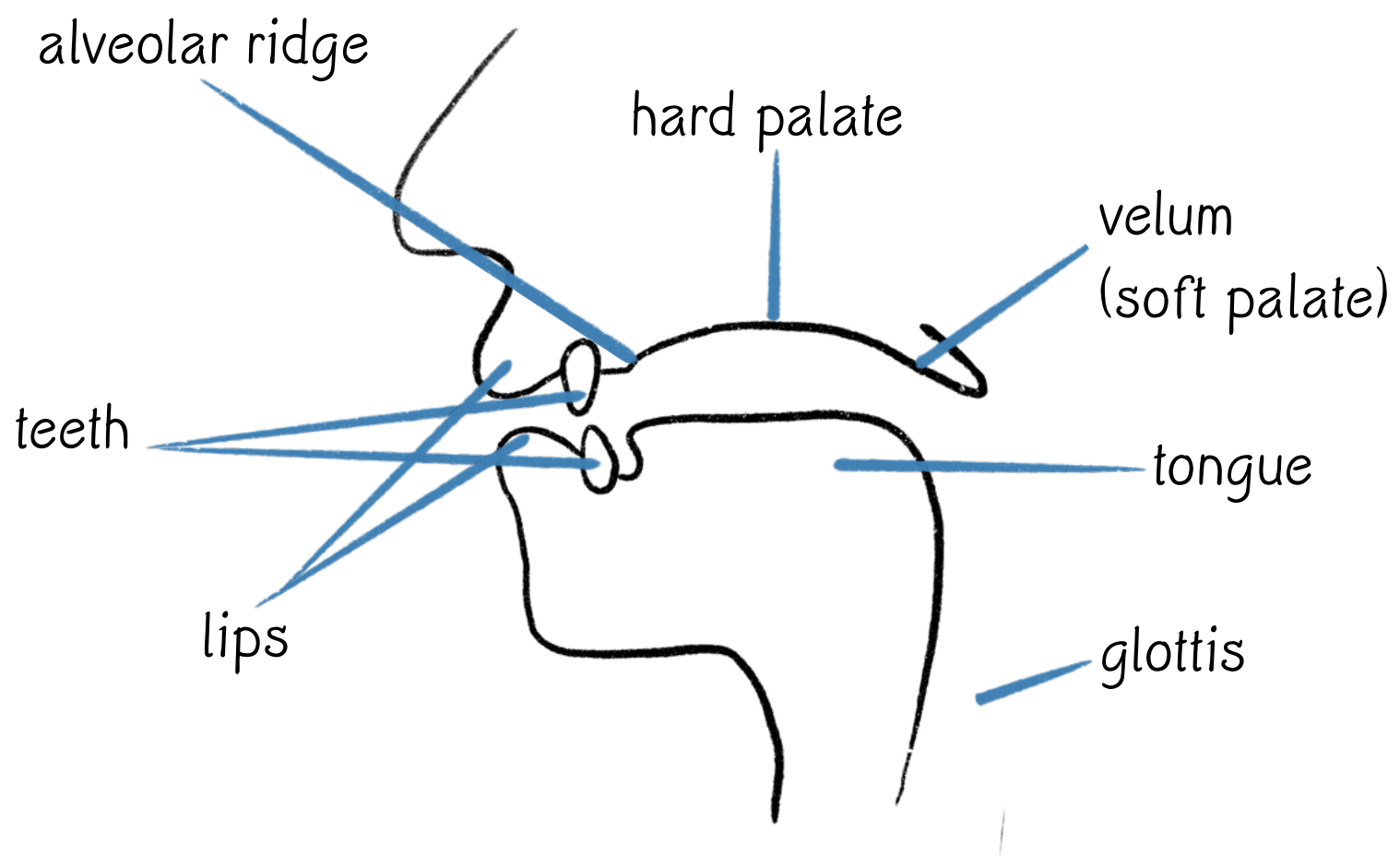






We use a range of places in the mouth and throat to block air to make consonant sounds.

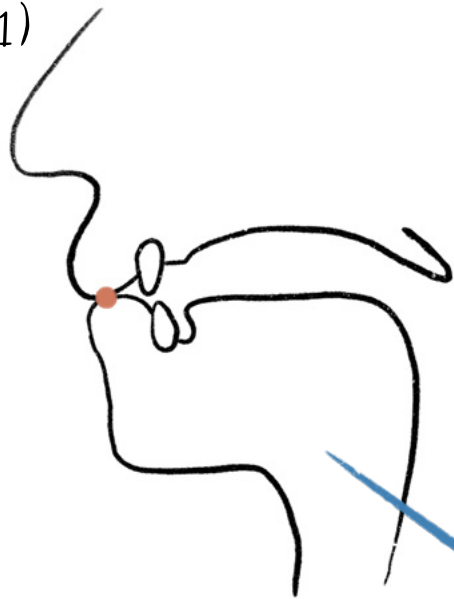
These are the **places of articulation**:





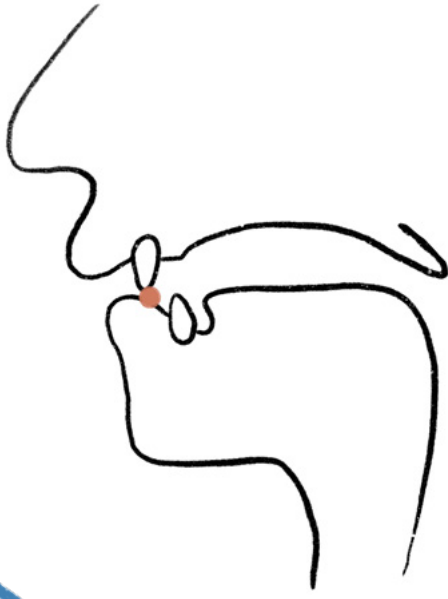
- Listen and match the places of articulation to their sounds:

1)



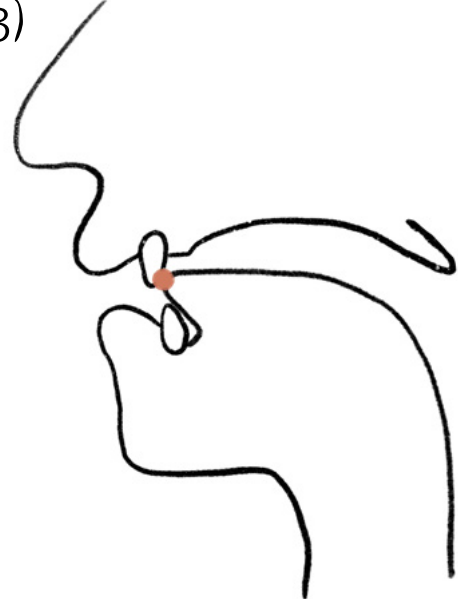
velar  
/k,g,ŋ/

2)



bilabial  
/p,b,m/

3)



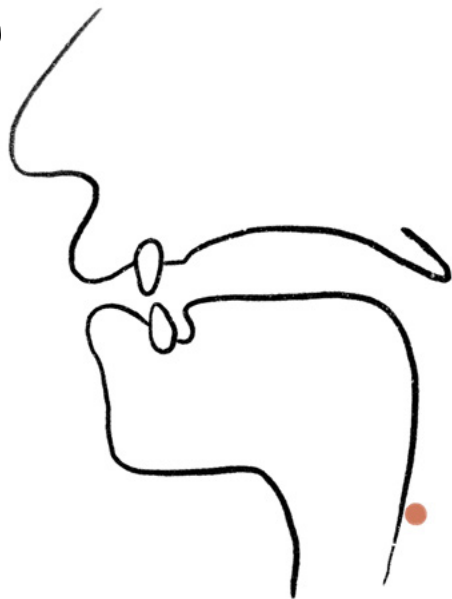
labio-dental  
/f,v/

dental  
/θ,ð/

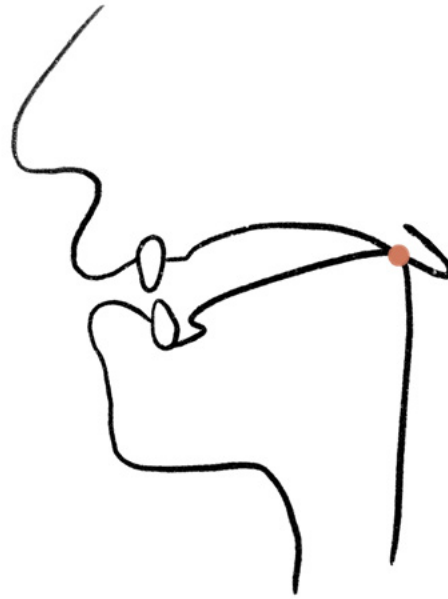
alveolar  
/t,d,l,n/

glottal  
/h/

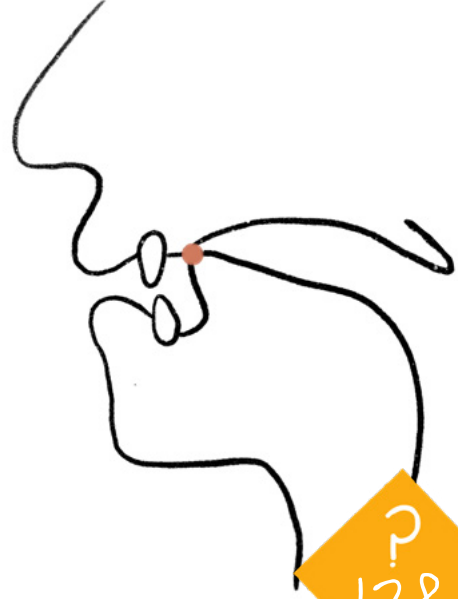
4)



5)



6)



2  
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# Voicing



- Cover your ears with your hands and pronounce the following sounds:

1. /s/
2. /z/

- What is the difference?



Some consonant sounds do not use the voice when they are pronounced - they are **voiceless**.

Voiceless consonant sounds are:

/f,θ,s,ʃ,h,p,t,k,tʃ/ & [ʔ].

**All other consonant sounds and all vowel sounds are voiced** - the vocal cords vibrate during pronunciation.

- Which of the following two words contains the voiced sound /z/?



cheese



mouse



---

Many sounds are in pairs - there is a voiceless and a voiced sound **made in the same place**:

/f,v/ /θ,ð/ /s,z/ /ʃ,ʒ/ /p,b/ /t,d/ /k,g/ /tʃ,dʒ/

It is not always possible to tell whether a sound is voiced or voiceless from its spelling.

---

- Listen and match the sounds to the underlined letters:



	voiced	voiceless	
1	/d/	/t/	play <u>e</u> d    plac <u>e</u> d
2	/v/	/f/	off <u>e</u> r    of
3	/ð/	/θ/	auth <u>o</u> r    fath <u>o</u> r
4	/ʒ/	/ʃ/	miss <u>i</u> on    vis <u>i</u> on
5	/b/	/p/	ba <u>t</u> h    pa <u>t</u> h
6	/dʒ/	/tʃ/	rich    ridg <u>e</u>
7	/z/	/s/	bus <u>i</u> ness    bisc <u>i</u> uit
8	/g/	/k/	ang <u>e</u> r    anch <u>o</u> r





# Vowel Spelling

- Match the transcriptions with the pictures:



/kat/   /wɒsp/   /bɔ:l/   /'kɒtɪdʒ/   /kɑ:/



- Which vowel spelling is found in each word: **a**, **e**, **i**, **o** or **u**?



English has **5 vowel letters** <a,e,i,o,u>  
to spell its **20 vowel sounds**.

Most vowel sounds can be **predicted from spelling**,  
though there are many exceptions.

- Listen and decide which word has a different vowel sound in each line:



1. wool shook cool pull

2. put hut love flood

3. work north shirt burn



/wʊl/

/pɛː/



4. boat both broker bother

5. pair where earn pear

6. brown grow slow no

7. ear bare swear air

8. include wanted college taken

9. polite protect promise parade

10. calm aren't war heart

11. not watch cough tough



/wptʃ/





- Read the dictionary entry below:

doorknob

/'dɔːnbɒb/

**noun**

*a handle that is turned to open  
a door*



Most dictionaries include IPA (**International Phonetic Alphabet**) transcriptions between slashes / /.

IPA symbols can vary slightly in different dictionaries - these variations are included on the sound pages of the course.

- Match the words with their IPA transcriptions.

0.14

1)	foreign	/'kʌbəd/
2)	climb	/'fɒrɪn/
3)	wrist	/hɑːf/
4)	knot	/'ɔːtəm/
5)	half	/rɪst/
6)	autumn	/klʌɪm/
7)	listen	/θɔːt/
8)	thought	/nɒt/
9)	march	/'lɪs(ə)n/
10)	cupboard	/mɑːtʃ/

?

130

- Which silent consonant(s) does each word contain?





# 'Standard' English

In this course we use a 'standard' British English pronunciation called **General British** or **GB English**. This is the model found in British dictionaries, though it is mainly spoken in the South of England.



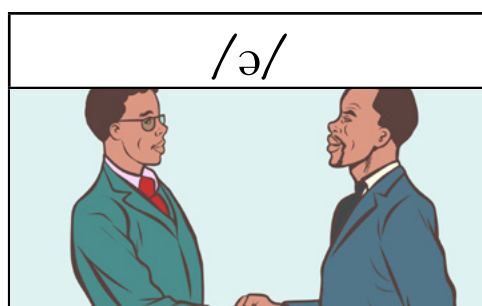
If you travel 50 miles in any direction in the British Isles you will hear clear differences in the local accents. The '**Sounds in Accents**' section at the end of each chapter provides a taster of some of the most commonly heard variations in Britain and beyond.



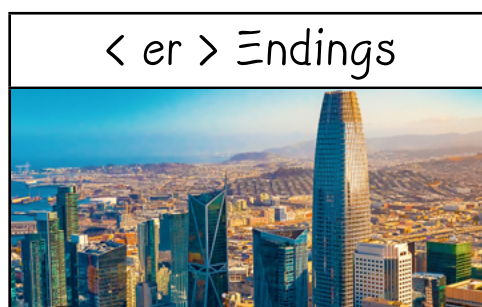


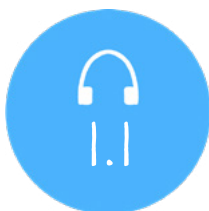
# 1

## /ə/ - the Schwa



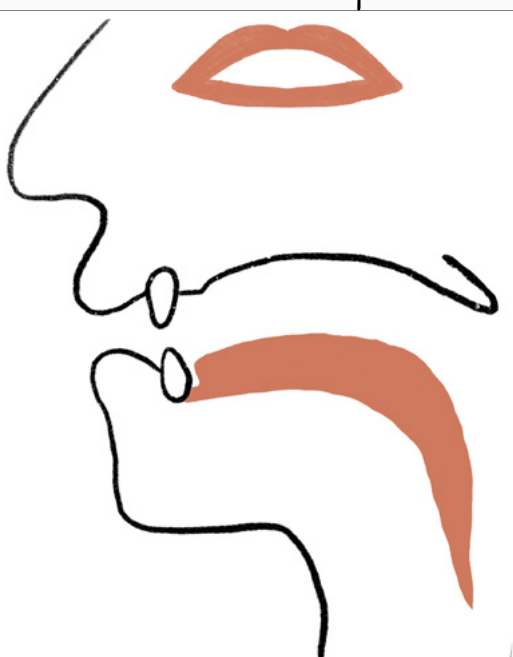
Function Words	Weak vs Strong





/ə/

0

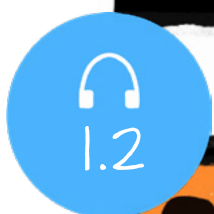
Spellings	Examples	Position
a	again	
	sofa	
e	persuade	
	corner	
o	obey	
	onion	
u	success	
	maximum	

The German actor's second performance was sublime.  
Listen to the thunder, the weather's horrendous tonight.

/ə/

- Match the words with their pictures and IPA transcriptions:

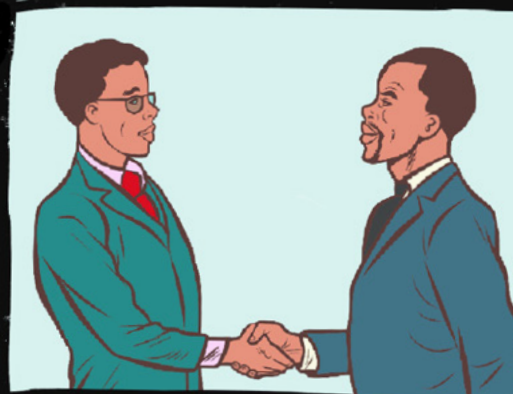
applause    laughter    connect    surprise



/ə'plɔːz/



/kə'nekt/



/sə'praɪz/



/'lɑːftə/



2  
131

- Which letter is pronounced /ə/ in each word?

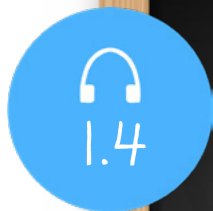


⦿

The schwa sound /ə/ is **commonly spelt in written English with any of < a, e, o, u >.**  
It only appears on **unstressed syllables.**

⦿

- Find a schwa sound in each word:



surround perhaps  
apron assist  
extra obtain  
dancer collect  
pursuit applaud  
forum woman  
anthem suspend  
lawyer terror  
collar spectrum  
button problem





# Function Words

- How many schwa sounds /ə/ can you hear in the sentence?

1.5



2  
132





Many small grammatical words like ‘for’, ‘of’ & ‘the’ are **normally pronounced with /ə/ in connected speech.**

These words are **function words.**

Function words include **prepositions, auxiliary verbs, pronouns, conjunctions & articles:**

Example	IPA
1. go <u>to</u> work	/tə/
2. pass <u>the</u> biscuits	/ðə/
3. ride <u>a</u> bike	/ə/
4. send <u>some</u> money	/səm/
5. this <u>could</u> happen	/kəd/
6. where <u>was</u> Peter	/wəz/
7. bring <u>them</u> back	/ðəm/
8. more <u>than</u> three	/ðən/
9. what <u>do</u> they want	/də/
10. <u>as</u> good <u>as</u> gold	/əz/

- Complete the sentences with a word from the box below:

her than some ~~can~~ to  
from your should are the

1. /kən/ we go now? *can*
2. It's more /ðən/ 30 degrees outside!
3. Let's go /tə/ Thailand this summer.
4. I met /ðə/ Smiths last night.
5. Why /ə/ you looking at me like that?
6. We /ʃəd/ meet up soon.
7. I'd like /səm/ more coffee please.
8. Is that /jə/ wedding ring?
9. /hə/ first husband is a designer.
10. He's originally /frəm/ Greece.

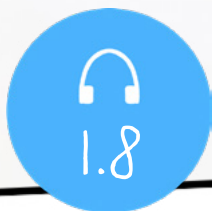


*/grɪs/*



# Weak vs. Strong

- Compare the pronunciations of the word 'from' in this dialogue:



Where are you from?

I'm from London.





Many function words have **2 possible pronunciations**, a **weak pronunciation** and a **strong pronunciation**:

Function Word	Strong Pronunciation	Weak Pronunciation
are	/ɑː/	/ə/
can	/kən/	/kən/
to	/tuː/	/tə/
some	/sʌm/	/səm/
for	/fɔː/	/fə/
from	/frɒm/	/frəm/
and	/ən(d)/	/ən(d)/
them	/ðem/	/ðəm/
your	/jɔː/	/jə/



The **weak pronunciation** is normally used in  
**connected speech:**

"I'm from London." /frəm/  
"We'll manage for now." /fə/

The **strong pronunciation** is normally used for one of  
the following three reasons:

i) the function word is **at the end** of a unit/sentence

"Where are you from?" /frɒm/  
"I don't know what it is for." /fɔː/

ii) the function word is **emphasised**

"It's French in style but it isn't from France." /frɒm/  
"FOR THE LAST TIME!" /fɔː/

iii) the function word is **in isolation**

"From." /frɒm/  
"For." /fɔː/



- Decide if the underlined word is weak or strong:

A) Can we go to the shops now? weak

B) You can. I'm staying in. strong

A) I don't know who these clothes are for.

B) They're not for me.

A) That is some building.

B) It needs some work on the roof though.

A) Your shirt's dirty!

B) Well your trousers are torn.

A) Shall we go to the cinema?

B) I don't really want to.

A) Ask them if they'd like to join us.

B) Them? No way.

A) What are you doing?

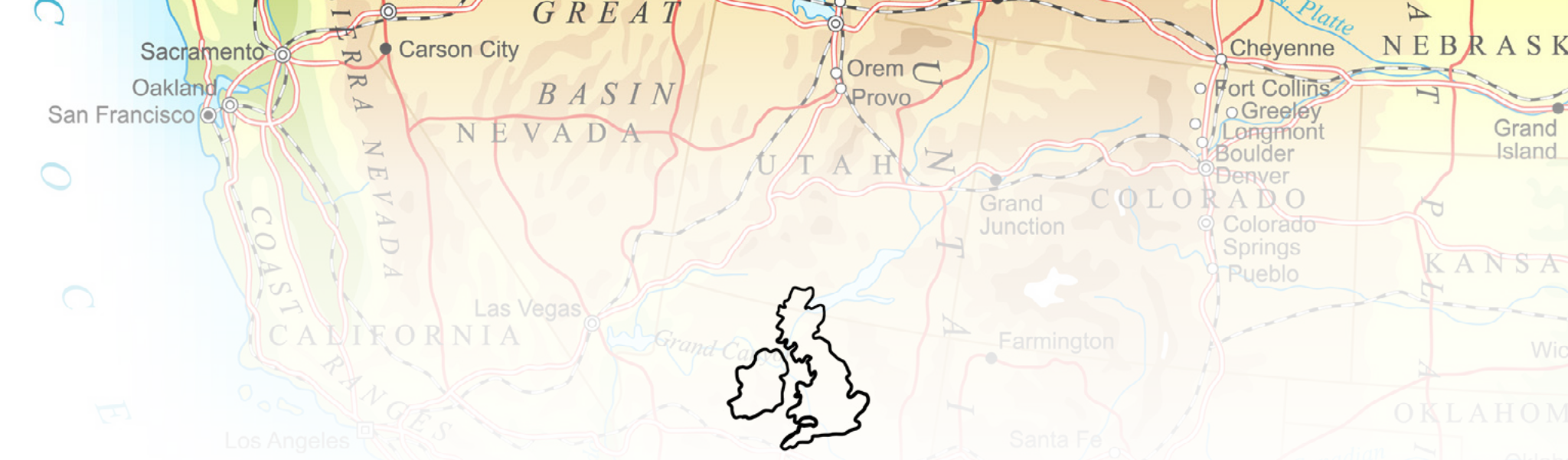
B) Are you sure you want to know?

A) Look, I've got money and nice clothes.

B) And? I'm not going to go out with you.







# < er > Endings

In General American English, the final  
< r > is pronounced, whereas in General  
British, words with < er > endings end  
with schwa:



1.12

American	British
/ər/	/ə/
water <u>er</u>	
further <u>er</u>	
copper <u>er</u>	
sister <u>er</u>	
caper <u>er</u>	
meander <u>er</u>	
greener <u>er</u>	
cylinder <u>er</u>	

San Francisco  
USA