

# Learning Pronunciation with Dictionary IPA

Learning a foreign language is fun but sometimes speaking the language can be a big challenge, especially for those who do not learn sounds easily by just listening to them. Knowing the pronunciations of the English words is of vital importance in the University in order to follow lectures or even engage in day to day conversations.

The Dictionary International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA) is a set of phonetic transcriptions that transcribe the sounds of individual words in symbols. Learning the skills of using the IPA will enable students to listen and recognize the spoken words as well as to enunciate the pronunciations. With more practice, students will eventually develop more confidence in listening and speaking the language.

## The Basics

Each word is made up of sounds. Here are some of the basics terms you need to know:

### Syllable is ...

a unit of spoken language and consists of one or more vowel sounds alone or of a syllabic consonant alone, e.g. the word *sy/lla/bles/* consists of 3 units of sound.

### Vowel is ...

one of a class of speech sounds in the articulation of which the oral part of the breath channel is not blocked. The vowel is the one most prominent sound in a syllable, usually used in English of *a, e, i, o, u*, and sometimes *y*. *Sometimes vowels are referred as 'voiced' sounds.*

### Consonant is ...

one of a class of speech sounds (as *\p\, \g\, \n\, \l\, \s\, \r\*) characterized by constriction or closure at one or more points in the breath channel. Sometimes consonant is referred as 'unvoiced' sounds.

### Stress...

There are primary and secondary stresses, especially for long words with more than 3 or 4 syllables. Stress is generally to hold the sound louder, longer and done in a higher pitch of voice. For example, *in/ter/ 'na/tion/al*. The primary stress is */na/* and the secondary stress is in */in/*.

## What is the International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA)?

To put it simply, the IPA is a set of symbols used to represent the sounds of the word. In most dictionaries, e.g. Oxford or Cambridge dictionaries (and online dictionaries), the phonetic symbols of each word entry will be given to assist the learners to pronounce the individual word. The symbols that the American dictionaries use will show slight variations from the British in some of the sounds and symbols. For the purpose of discussion here, we will use the IPA of a typical dictionary which uses the British pronunciation. In most dictionaries, you will find a number of Pronunciation Tables:

- The Consonants Table
- The Vowel Tables
- The Diphthong Table

## Consonants

Symbol	Pronunciation
[b]	<u>b</u> oat
[d]	<u>d</u> o
[dʒ]	ju <u>ng</u> le
[ʒ]	treas <u>ur</u> e
[f]	fr <u>ie</u> nd
[g]	<u>g</u> o
[h]	<u>h</u> otel
[j]	y <u>ou</u> ng
[k]	<u>k</u> iss
[l]	l <u>e</u> ft
[m]	<u>m</u> other
[n]	<u>n</u> o
[ŋ]	th <u>ing</u>
[p]	<u>p</u> air
[r]	<u>r</u> un
[s]	l <u>is</u> t
[ʃ]	<u>sh</u> ake
[t]	<u>t</u> ea
[tʃ]	<u>D</u> utch
[θ]	th <u>in</u> k
[ð]	th <u>is</u>
[v]	<u>v</u> ocabulary
[w]	<u>w</u> ork
[x]	Lo <u>ch</u> Ness
[z]	<u>z</u> oo

## short Vowels

Symbol	Pronunciation
[a]	<u>cat</u> (BE)
[æ]	<u>cat</u> (AE)
[ɛ]	<u>bed</u>
[ə]	<u>above</u>
[ɪ]	<u>list</u>
[i]	<u>lovely</u>
[ɒ]	<u>not</u>
[ʌ]	<u>come</u>
[ʊ]	<u>put</u>

## long Vowels

Symbol	Pronunciation
[ɑ:]	<u>arm</u>
[ɛ:]	<u>fair</u>
[ɛə:]	<u>her</u>
[i:]	<u>beast</u>
[ɔ:]	<u>talk</u>
[u:]	<u>too</u>

## Diphthongs

Symbol	Pronunciation
[ʌɪ]	<u>my</u>
[aʊ]	<u>now</u>
[eɪ]	<u>say</u>
[əʊ]	<u>no</u>
[ɪə]	<u>hear</u>
[ɔɪ]	<u>toy</u>
[ʊə]	<u>poor</u>
[ʌɪə]	<u>fire</u>
[aʊə]	<u>sour</u>

## How does IPA work??

The tables below show how each symbol sounds like by giving you an example of a simple word. A useful guide is to listen to the audio files of English IPA Symbols developed by the Department of Linguistics of MQ. [http://clas.mq.edu.au/phonetics/transcription/broad\\_transcription/broad\\_transcription.html](http://clas.mq.edu.au/phonetics/transcription/broad_transcription/broad_transcription.html).

You need to read the sounds aloud to hear yourself and to match the sounds with the symbols. After that, try to put all the individual sounds together to pronounce the word.

IPA Tables abstracted from: <http://www.ego4u.com/en/dictionary/ipa>

## What's Next? Put the sounds together ...

For example, you have the word 'examine'

- First, divide the word up into syllables (single sound), e.g. the word, **e/xa/mine**, (so three syllables). Try to pronounce the word.
- Next, Look up the word in the dictionary and you will find the IPA of the word **/examine/**, the IPA is **/ɪ g'z æ m ɪ n/** (British pronunciation)
- Then, check where the stress is. Is the primary stress in **/e/** or **/xa/** or **/mine/**? It's **'xa/**. So you sound louder, longer and done in a higher pitch of voice on the sound **'z æ/**
- Now try to pronounce the word, if you have no idea of how the word is sound, refer to the IPA Tables for help. Match the sounds and symbols.
- Check against the both the Consonant, Vowel and Diphthongs Tables, try to put the sounds together e.g. **examine**. The IPA symbol is: **/ɪ g'z æ m ɪ n/**
- To pronounce the word, you are combining **vccvcvc** together (a vowel, a consonant, a consonant, a vowel, a consonant, a vowel and a consonant together).
- Now put the sounds together and pronounce the word
- WELL DONE!

## Practise, Practise, Practise!!

Academic	/,ækə demɪk/
Management	/mænɪdʒmənt/
Global	/gləʊbl/
Analysis	/ə nələsɪs/
Critical	/krɪtɪkl/
Plagiarism	/pleɪdʒəriːzəm/

Now check your pronunciation with Merriam Webster Dictionary (Audio) <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> for the pronunciation.

## Important to Note !!

- ▶ There is more than one set of pronunciation symbols. The British and American pronunciations, for example, show some variations in their phonetic transcriptions. The best way is to use the IPA tables provided in the dictionary that you consult.
- ▶ IPA is not the conventional way to learn pronunciation. People normally learn the sounds by listening to produce the sounds, but for students who are learning English as a second language, the IPA guide can be an invaluable tool to recognise and match individual words with their sounds.
- ▶ IPA is for pronouncing individual words. The sound of a word may change slightly in a running speech. For example, *pen* and *penknife*, only one consonant 'n' is needed because the two words are connected with the same consonant.
- ▶ There is no one 'correct' way of pronunciation. People from different countries speak English with an accent. The sounds may vary due to geographical location, intonation, manner of speech and the preceding and following words. There are different regional pronunciations even in countries where English is spoken as the first language. For example, in UK, the Received Pronunciation sounds rather differently from a speaker who speaks with a Scottish accent.
- ▶ Speaking involves more than pronunciation. It involves: stress, intonation, expressiveness, rhythm and many other factors that contribute to a good speech. Pronunciation should not be interpreted as fluency. There are many fluent speakers whose first language is English but speak with an accent typical to their country.
- ▶ Instead of learning to sound like a native speaker, bear in mind that language is for communication and expression of ideas and opinion. Our primary aim is to speak and pronounce with clarity and fluency.

## Are there any Differences between American and British Pronunciation?

**Yes but the differences are slight and very often un-noticeable. The most obvious ones include:**

- Sound of "r" at the end. British pronunciation does not pronounce the 'r' sound if the sound is at the end of a word, e.g. roar, British IPA is /rɔ: r/, American IPA is \ror\
- The IPA Symbols may differ depending on which system the dictionary is using. Some dictionaries provide both British and American IPA transcription  
In American pronunciation, cot /kɒt/ and calm /kɑ:lm/, ɒ and ɑ have the same vowel.

## Last Piece of Advice ...

✓ Sound has a lot to do with ear training, the tongue, the lip, the palate and the air-stream. To do it well, one may need a qualified speech teacher. With this understanding, the IPA can only be used as a self-help guide, a tool for second language learners to have a rough idea of the sound of the word and to pronounce the word with the help of the symbols.

✓ Learning pronunciation with an 'audio' dictionary and the IPA tables in front of you generally produce better effects because you can listen to the sounds and how IPA symbols are put together and read. However, the effectiveness will also depend greatly on the quality of the audio electronic dictionaries, some pronunciations are mechanical and distorted and sound nothing like the natural speech.

✓ The best advice is to produce the sounds aloud so that you could hear yourself over and over again. Checking the pronunciation with a native speaker will also help to know how the word is sound in natural speech.

### Reference:

#### Online Dictionaries

Cambridge Online Dictionary

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

Merriam Webster Dictionary (with pronunciation)

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

Oxford Online Dictionary <http://www.oup.com/elt/catalogue/teachersites/oald7/lookup?cc=global>

A Pronunciation Dictionary (with no IPA)

<http://www.howjsay.com/>

Beare, K. (2003). *English as 2<sup>nd</sup> language*. About.com: Pronunciation. Retrieved from: [http://esl.about.com/od/speakingenglish/Speaking\\_English\\_Pronunciation\\_and\\_Conversation\\_Skills.htm](http://esl.about.com/od/speakingenglish/Speaking_English_Pronunciation_and_Conversation_Skills.htm)

Szynalski, T.P. (2009). *The sounds of English and the international phonetic alphabet*. Retrieved from: <http://www.antimoon.com/how/pronunc-soundsipa.htm>

Wehmeier, S. (6<sup>th</sup> Ed.). (2000). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wells, J.C. & Colson, G. (1971). *Practical Phonetics*. Bath, Great Britain. Pitman Publishing.

The International Phonetic Association

<http://www.langsci.ucl.ac.uk/ipa/sounds.html>

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[http://clas.mq.edu.au/phonetics/transcription/broad\\_transcription/broad\\_transcription.html](http://clas.mq.edu.au/phonetics/transcription/broad_transcription/broad_transcription.html)