

One Hundred Most Commonly Mispronounced English Words

by

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you skip to the [next section](#) right now, you will probably do just fine.

In case you are interested: “**aw**” is pronounced as in “law”, “**oo**” as in “cool”, “**oo**” (italicised) as in “good” (the same as “u” in “put”), “**ee**” (italicised) is used to denote the same sound as in “see” but short, and “**oh**” is used to denote [oʊ] which is how Americans pronounce “oh”; in British English, “oh” is pronounced as “əu”.

The pseudo-English notation uses dashes to divide each word into simpler parts, for example “police” = “**pə-lees**”. The stressed part is bold. These parts often correspond to the syllables of the word, but they do not if this could lead to a wrong pronunciation, so don’t pronounce the dashes as any kind of pause. For example “recipe” is denoted as “**res-ip-ee**”, although the syllables are in fact “res-i-pee”, but this would mislead some people to pronounce the “i” as “aay”.

If the American pronunciation differs from the British one, the one just explained is marked by the symbol **UK** or **US** after the given pronunciation.

schizophrenia [ˌskɪtsəˈfriːniə] (skits-ə-free-ni-ə); a German heart will skip a beat when seeing this word; not just because schizophrenia was originally described and researched by German scientists, but also because its pronunciation resembles to a certain degree the original German one. It is one of very few English words containing the "ts" sound where "t" and "s" are pronounced almost simultaneously.

since [sɪns] (**sins**); some people, misled by the "e" at the end, pronounce this word as "saayns".

subtle [ˈsʌtl] (**SA**-tl) **UK**, [ˈsʌrl] (**SA**-dl) **US**; "btle" simply doesn't sound good. Don't pronounce the "b".

suit [su:t] (**soot**), in the **UK** also [sju:t] (**syoot**); as in the case of "fruit", the "i" is silent.

suite [swi:t] (**sweet**); meaning a set of rooms (in a hotel), a set of matching pieces of furniture, a certain type of musical composition, or a set of related computer programs, this word is pronounced exactly the same as "sweet".

VOWELS

We will take a look at the symbols for vowels first because they usually cause more problems:

[X:] long vowel

When the symbol “:” follows a vowel symbol, it means that the vowel is pronounced longer.

['XY] stressed syllable

This symbol, which looks similar to an apostrophe, means that the following syllable is stressed (it is pronounced louder).

[,XY] secondary stress

This symbol, which looks similar to a comma, is basically the same as the above, only the stress is weaker.

[æ] cat, bad, sad, sand, land, hand

Among all the English vowels, the greatest problem for most learners poses “æ”. It is somewhere in between of “a” in “father” and “e” in “bed”. It is usually pronounced slightly longer and closer to “e” in “bed” in American English, whereas it is of-

ten shorter and closer to “a” in “father” in British English.

[ɑ:] bra, calm, palm, father, start, dark

This vowel is the closest one to the sound of the letter “a” in many other languages and as such is also denoted [a] in some dictionaries. There is no reliable general rule which would tell you when the letter “a” is pronounced as [ɑ:] instead of [æ].

[ɒ] (O) god, pot, top, spot (British English only)

This vowel is quite similar to the sound of “o” in many other languages (and we also denote it as [o] in this book). Americans don’t use this vowel and say [ɑ:] instead.

[ʌ] but, cut, gun, come, some, glove

This vowel very similar to [ɑ:], but it’s never pronounced long in English.

[ɛ] (e) get, bed, set, sell, fell, men

This vowel is the closest one to the sound of the letter “e” in most other languages and is sometimes denoted by [e] in dictionaries (and in this book) for simplicity.

[ʃ] shy, shot, chef, posh, bush, douche

This sound is created by saying [s] but bending your tongue further to the upper palate.

[tʰ], [t] two, tall, tea, hot, bat, run

The very same rules about aspiration that hold for "k" and "p" hold also for "t", i.e. it is always aspirated when it is at the beginning of a stressed syllable (two, tall, tea) and in many dialects also almost everywhere else, except after "s" (e.g. step, still).

[θ] think, thigh, thesis, both, math, froth

[θ] is to [t] as [ð] is to [d]. It is pronounced like "t", but instead of putting your tongue on your upper palate, use it to gently touch your upper teeth.

[ɾ] letter, better, written (Am. En. only)

Where a Brit would say [tʰ], an American often says something that sounds like a fast touch of [d]. It is called "alveolar flap" and is usually represented by a double "t". However, many dictionaries ignore the distinction and denote it also by [t].