

Let's decipher the IPA!



This quick-and-easy guide will get you started on your IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) journey by showing you how IPA symbols correspond to sounds in American English¹.

Vowels		
[i] as in 'beat'	[ɪ] as in 'bit'	[ɛ] as in 'bet'
[ɑ] as in 'bot'	[ɔ] as in 'bought' ²	[ʌ] as in 'but'
[u] as in 'boot'	[ə] as in 'about'	[ʊ] as in 'book'
[æ] as in 'dad'	[oʊ] as in 'boat'	[aʊ] as in 'house'
[aɪ] as in 'tide'	[eɪ] as in 'cake'	[ɔɪ] as in 'boy'

Consonants		
[p] as in 'purpose'	[t] as in 'team'	[k] as in 'king'
[b] as in 'belong'	[d] as in 'diverse'	[g] as in 'guide'
[m] as in 'magic'	[n] as in 'new'	[l] as in 'learn'
[s] as in 'success'	[z] as in 'zen'	[h] as in 'hint'
[f] as in 'fun'	[v] as in 'voice'	[w] as in 'won'
[ʃ] as in 'shine'	[ʒ] as in 'treasure'	[tʃ] as in 'choose'
[dʒ] as in 'journey'	[j] as in 'yellow'	[ŋ] as in 'being'
[ɹ] as in 'road' ³	[r] as in 'buddy' & 'butter'	[ʔ] as in 'uh-oh' ⁴
[θ] as in 'thing'	[ð] as in 'bathe'	That's it!

- 1. There are many varieties of American English**, so the way you pronounce the words in this chart may differ slightly from how someone else would say it. #LinguisticDiversity
- 2. Do 'bot' and 'bought' sound the same to you?** That's the case for many American English speakers, and it means you have what's called a *merger* between these two vowels. #Accents
- 3. Why is the [ɹ] upside down?** The [ɹ] symbol represents the English 'r' sound (as in 'ready') whereas the upright [r] represents a sound not found in English at all: the trill (as in 'Rrrricardo'), which you might hear in a language like Spanish.
- 4. The [ʔ] symbol is not a question mark.** But it does resemble one! This symbol represents the sound that separates the vowels in 'Uh-oh!' You might also recognize it from speakers of Cockney English (a British dialect) when they pronounce words like 'bottle' or 'butter.'

Your turn! Try writing these words in IPA...



To give you an example, we've done the first one for you!

(Full answer key is down below)

Pro-tips: Phonetic transcriptions get encased in [brackets], and periods mark syllable breaks.

1. **Phonetics:** [fə.nɛ.tɪks]

2. **Speech:** _____

3. **Quest:** _____

4. **Linguistics** _____

5. **[Your Name]** _____

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ANSWER KEY - 2. [spɪtʃ] | 3. [kwɛst] | 4. [lɪŋ.gwɪ.stɪks] | 5. 🙄