

SIMPLE LIST

Phonemes are defined as the *sounds* that occur in a language. There are forty-four or forty-five phonemes in English depending on what source is consulted. A phoneme is either written as a letter or, more often, as a phonetic symbol between slash marks: /m/. A *grapheme* is the written symbol for a phoneme or sound. A grapheme can be composed of one or more letters. For example, it takes the two letters *s* and *b* to represent the single phoneme /sb/. There are about 251 graphemes in written English. Thus, English does *not* have a regular phoneme-grapheme relationship.

CONSONANTS

A *consonant* is caused when the outgoing breath stream is blocked by an organ of speech. The organs of speech are the hard palate, the soft palate, the larynx, the tongue, the teeth, the lips, and the vocal cords. When the blockage is complete, the resulting sounds are known as *plosives* or *stops*. Those in which the blockage is partial are called *continuant*s. Continuant>s also are classified as voiced or voiceless depending on whether or not the vocal cords vibrate while producing the sound.

Here are some examples of plosives:

k	kite	g	go
p	pay	b	baby
t	toy	d	did

These nasal sounds are one type of continuant>s:

m	mitten	n	nose
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Fricatives are continuant>s that are made when the outgoing breath escapes with audible friction:

f	for	v	violet
s	sell	z	zebra
h	him		
th	think (voiceless)	them	(voiced)
ch	chain	j	joy
sh	shoe		

The *liquids* are the following:

r	rabbit	l	like
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The *glides* are as follows:

y	yellow	w	wish
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CONSONANT BLENDS

A *consonant blend* (*consonant cluster*) consists of two or three consonant letters that appear together. Each consonant retains some element of its own sound while blending with that of the others. Although most consonant blends occur at the beginning of words, they also can be found at the end.

Here are examples of common consonant blends:

bl	black	br	break	cl	clap
cr	crow	dr	drum	fl	fly
fr	fry	gl	glass	gr	grow
pl	play	pr	price	sc	score
sk	skip	sm	smile	sn	snake
sp	spot	spl	split	spr	spring
st	stay	str	string	sw	swing
tr	tray	tw	twin		

CONSONANT DIGRAPHS

A *consonant digraph* is composed of two consonants that record a single sound that is different from the sound that either one would record separately. Here are examples of consonant digraphs:

ch	chin	sh	ship
th (voiceless)	thin	th (voiced)	these
wh	what	ph	photograph
ng	ring	gh	tough

VOWELS

Vowels result when the organs of speech modify the resonance chamber without stopping the flow of the outgoing breath. All vowels are voiced, and there are no nasal vowels in English. One vowel is distinguished from another by the quality of its sound. Here are examples of the vowels:

a	apron	a	ant	a	air
a	walk	a	far		
a	father				
e	me	e	egg	e	learn
e	her	e	bear	e	sergeant
i	ice	i	igloo	i	skirt

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o rope	o ostrich	o often
o or	o word	
u use	u cube	u umbrella
u burn		
y try	y baby	y hymn
w cow (diphthong—see the explanation in the following discussion)		
y toy (diphthong—see the explanation in the following discussion)		

THE SCHWA SOUND

The *schwa sound* ə is the unstressed vowel sound in a word of more than one syllable. Any one of the five vowel letters can be the schwa sound when it is found in an unaccented syllable. The schwa sound has a sound that is similar to that of the short *u*. Here are some words that contain the schwa sound:

a bedlam	e label	i pencil
o beckon	u minus	

DIPHTHONGS

A *diphthong* is composed of two vowel sounds that together record one sound that is different from the sound that either of them would have recorded separately. Here are several examples of words that contain a diphthong:

ow cow	ou out	oy soy	oi oil
ew new			

VOWEL DIGRAPHS

A *vowel digraph* occurs when two adjacent vowels record one sound. Here are some words that contain a vowel digraph:

ai train	ay pay	
ee beet	ea beat, head, great	
ie pie		
oa boat	oe hoe	ow crow
oo cook	oo noon	oo blood
ui fruit		

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