

# IMPROVING YOUR LISTENING

P5

## The aim of this leaflet

This leaflet introduces you to the IPA phonetic symbols commonly used in dictionaries. It also gives suggestions on how you can learn to recognise the symbols so that you are able to pronounce unfamiliar words by consulting the dictionary on your own.

## IPA phonetic symbols

The table below summarises the 19 vowel sounds and 24 consonant sounds in the English language.

Vowel sounds		
No.	Symbol	Examples
1	/i:/	feet /fi:t/ leap /li:p/
2	/ɪ/	fit /fɪt/ lip /lɪp/
3	/e/	men /men/ bed /bed/
4	/æ/	man /mæn/ bad /bæd/
5	/ʌ/	mud /mʌd/ nut /nʌt/
6	/ɑ:/	fast /fɑ:st/ pass /pɑ:s/
7	/ɒ/	top /tɒp/ rock /rɒk/
8	/ɔ:/	fall /fɔ:l/ lord /lɔ:d/
9	/ʊ/	book /bʊk/ foot /fʊt/
10	/u:/	boot /bu:t/ food /fu:d/
11	/ɜ:/	girl /gɜ:l/ bird /bɜ:d/
12	/ə/	a lot /ə'lɒt/

		apart /ə'pɑ:t/
13	/eɪ/	mail /meɪl/ May /meɪ/
14	/aɪ/	fly /flaɪ/ buy /baɪ/
15	/ɔɪ/	boy /bɔɪ/ boil /bɔɪl/
16	/aʊ/	cow /kaʊ/ house /haʊs/
17	/əʊ/	sold /səʊld/ low /ləʊ/
18	/ɪə/	beer /bɪə/ dear /dɪə/
19	/eə/	hair /heə/ rare /reə/

Consonant sounds		
No.	Symbol	Examples
1	/p/	pen /pen/ peep /pi:p/
2	/b/	big /bɪg/ babe /beɪb/
3	/t/	ten /ten/ let /let/
4	/d/	den /den/ red /red/
5	/k/	key /ki:/ cake /keɪk/
6	/g/	get /get/ leg /leg/
7	/s/	see /si:/ guess /ges/
8	/z/	zoo /zu:/ buzz /bʌz/
9	/ʃ/	shoe /ʃu:/ wish /wɪʃ/
10	/ʒ/	measure /'meɪʒə/ treasure /'treɪʒə/
11	/tʃ/	check /tʃek/ watch /wɒtʃ/
12	/dʒ/	jet /dʒet/ judge /dʒʌdʒ/
13	/f/	fan /fæn/ laugh /lɑ:f/
14	/v/	van /væn/ wave /weɪv/

15	/w/	wet /wet/ wait /weɪt/
16	/j/	yes /jes/ you /ju:/
17	/h/	hen /hen/ hat /hæt/
18	/θ/	thin /θɪn/ thought /θɔ:t/
19	/ð/	then /ðen/ that /ðæt/
20	/m/	men /men/ name /neɪm/
21	/n/	no /nəʊ/ phone /fəʊn/
22	/ŋ/	ring /rɪŋ/ sang /sæŋ/
23	/l/	let /let/ tell /tel/
24	/r/	rat /ræt/ read /ri:d/

## Learning activities

Below are some ways to familiarise yourself with the phonetic symbols.

A. Use a dictionary (for example: the English Pronouncing Dictionary, or the Oxford Wordpower Dictionary etc.) to find example words. Suppose you want to practise the vowel sound /i:/.

- Step 1

Take the word *sheep* /ʃi:p/.

Change the first letter. Find as many examples as you can.

E.g. *sheep* /ʃi:p/ --> *beep* /bi:p/ --> *deep* /di:p/ --> *jeep* /dʒi:p/ --> etc

- Step 2

Take the newly-formed word *beep* /bi:p/.

Change the last letter. Find as many examples as you can.

E.g. *beep* /bi:p/ --> *beef* /bi:f/ --> *been* /bi:n/ --> etc

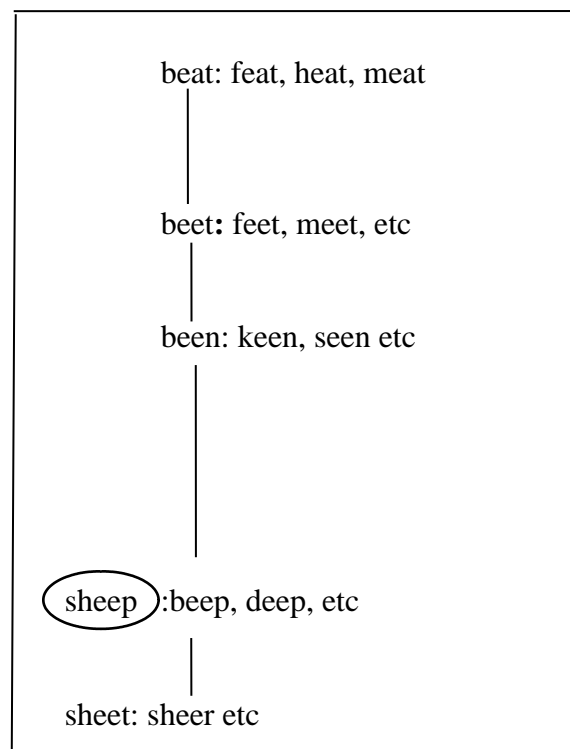
- Step 3

Take the newly-formed word *beet* /bi:t/.

Change the middle letters and repeat Step 1 or Step 2. Find as many examples as you can.

E.g. *beet* /bi:t/ --> *beat* /bi:t/ --> *feat* /fi:t/ --> *heat* /hi:t/ --> etc

B. If you find the above practice simple, instead of following step by step, you can think of as many words as possible and write them out in a web. E.g. start with the word *sheep*.



C. Again using a dictionary, find as many words as you can with the sound that you want to practice. Use the words to make up a poem. Ask someone, an Adviser for example, to record your poem for you

and then use this as practice material. You could listen to your tape and practice saying the poem as much as possible. Once you feel confident about your pronunciation, you could make a tape of yourself saying the poem and then compare it to the original. This could be a good way of testing your progress.

## Learning tips

- Do not be misled by spelling. English spelling can be misleading e.g. the words '**tough**' and '**cough**' are spelt the same except for the first letter. However the 'ou' parts are pronounced with totally different vowel sounds. '**tough**' is: /tʌf/ whereas '**cough**' is: /kɒf/. It is therefore always a good idea to check in a dictionary to find out how words are pronounced rather than relying on spelling.
- If you are unsure about how to pronounce new words, you should check with an Adviser by going to <https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/language-adviser-timetable/>

## And now...

After reading this Advice Sheet, you should have an idea of what to do and how to do it. Improving pronunciation is a long-term process and requires constant practice. Sometimes you may feel bored or frustrated

or think that you are not progressing at all. If you would like any help or advice, or just a chat about your progress, please get in touch - **we are here to support your independent learning!** To contact us:

- Make an appointment to see an adviser. For details of advisers and their availability, please go to <https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/language-adviser-timetable/>.
- E-mail your questions to **iLANG** ([lcilang@ust.hk](mailto:lcilang@ust.hk)).
- Ask at the reception counter of the Language Commons — if the receptionist cannot help you directly, s/he will pass your query on to one of the advisers.

### **What else can you do?**

- Browse the many physical (<https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/language-commons/#resources>) and online materials (<https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/resources-speaking/>) for Pronunciation.
- Join a Pronunciation activity or short course (<http://ilang.cle.ust.hk/speaking/>).

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