

HARD WORDS

What is English Pronunciation?

- 1.** Pronunciation is how a word is pronounced, using **sounds** that combine to form **words** and **sentences** in order to communicate **meaning**. Incorrect pronunciation – the wrong sound or sounds – can lead to communication being **reduced** or **blocked** – even though the speaker knows the right words.
- 2.** English began with the invasion of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in the 5th Century AD. Anglo-Saxon mixed with Celtic languages, over time taking words and influence from various peoples and places. Norse, Norman French, Latin, Spanish, Greek, the language of trade and colonialism, then later mass immigration from former colonies. English absorbed numerous **loan words** and generally forgot to change the spelling of words as they entered everyday usage. Over time the pronunciation changed with use, but the spelling was unchanged. Unlike other languages, there is no official body taking care of English, so it continues to Hoover up hundreds of new words every year, without matching them to a standard spelling system. [\[LINK\]](#) [\[LINK\]](#) [\[LINK\]](#).
- 3.** English was exported to many parts of the globe, as Britain colonised a quarter of the planet between 17th-20th centuries. UK aside, English is the national language in 50+ countries, including: USA, Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and India. Each country speaks English with a number of different **accents**.
- 4.** In this course we focus on **British English**. Britain is three countries: England, Scotland, and Wales. To get the UK you add Northern Ireland. Each part of the UK speaks English with different accents and **dialects**.
- 5.** In England itself there are at least 40 distinctive accents, based around particular cities or regions. For example: Scouse (Liverpool), Geordie (Newcastle), Brummie (Birmingham), and Estuary English (Essex). [\[LINK\]](#)
- 6.** There is also a **Standard English Pronunciation (SEP)**, which is the accent students use to learn English. In the past this was called Received Pronunciation (RP). SEP is easy to understand, because it is spoken clearly and without any particular regional accent. Some people call it BBC English and it is true that we can often hear it when we switch on BBC Radios 3 or 4, or indeed many other popular radio and TV channels. It is a kind of **default pronunciation** of the language.
- 7.** To be successful in their communication goals, students should try to work towards speaking with SEP. We learn to do this by examining the features of words in terms of **syllables**, **stress**, and **sounds**.
- 8.** On this course we learn how to break a word into syllables with easy connections. We learn how to tell which syllables are **strong** and **weak** and what this means for pronouncing the word.
- 9.** We discover how to find the **stressed syllable** in a word, by using a mixture of rules and clues, while also looking at words which do not fit our patterns and can be labelled **exceptions**, which have to be learned.
- 10.** We also find out about the **48 sounds of English** and how they combine to form words. [\[LINK\]](#)
We discuss **vowel sounds** and **consonant sounds**, and learn how the **26 letters of the English alphabet** are not enough to give each sound one letter, so letters have to combine to represent different sounds. We particularly focus on how to identify the all-important **stressed vowel sound** in each word from its spelling.