

Talk a Lot

Learn the Clear Alphabet

Spelling and Sounds – Vowel Clusters

A vowel cluster is a group of two or more vowel letters together in a word that represent a single vowel sound. For example, in the word “**road**”, “**oa**” is a vowel cluster that represents the sound *eu*, whilst in the word “**shoe**”, “**oe**” is a vowel cluster that represents the sound *oo*. In the same way, “**ar**” in the word “**car**”, is a vowel cluster that uses a silent “**r**” to help make the vowel sound *ar*. The reason we have vowel clusters is simple: there are 23 different single vowel sounds (vowel phonemes) in spoken English, but only 5 single vowel letters in written English. We need vowel clusters to represent in spelling all of the different vowel sounds. For example, the letter “**a**” on its own can make the sound *a* when sandwiched between two consonant sounds, for example in the word “**cat**” – *Kat* – but there is no single letter which can make the very common vowel sound *oo*, as in “**true**” *Troo*. We have to use a vowel cluster – in this case “**ue**” – to represent this sound on paper.

Vowel clusters can occur anywhere in a word – at the beginning (initial), as in “**out**”; in the middle (medial), as in “**please**”; and at the end (final), as in “**true**”. Focusing on vowel clusters and consonant clusters (see p.217) is useful if you want to look at some of the differences between spelling and sounds in English words. (See also Rhyming Words, from p.30.)

Vowel clusters can be divided into **eight** categories:

1. Vowel Digraphs
2. Vowel Trigraphs and Quadgraphs
3. Vowel Clusters that End with “-r”
4. Other Vowel Clusters with “r”
5. Vowel Clusters with “w”
6. Vowel Clusters with “y”
7. Vowel Clusters with “gh”
8. Vowel Clusters with Other Consonant Letters

What follows is a comprehensive list of vowel clusters, with the sounds that they represent, grouped by letter in alphabetical order. (*Note: you may wish to add your own examples in the space provided.*)

1. Vowel Digraphs

Vowel digraphs are two vowel letters together in the spelling of a word that represent a single sound (one vowel phoneme). For example, in the word “**meat**”, “**ea**” is a vowel digraph that represents the sound *ee*, whilst in the word “**meet**”, “**ee**” is a vowel digraph that also stands for the same vowel sound: *ee*. This kind of thing can lead to a lot of confusion between spelling and sounds in English!

digraph: *sounds like:* *for example:* *my example(s):*

ai	ei	paid, wait, fail, paint, gain	_____
ai	e	said, again	_____

au	or	fraud, pause, autumn, August	_____
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au	ar	laugh, laughter	_____
ea	ei	break, steak, great	_____
ea	ee	read, appeal, lead, clean, leaf, steal	_____
ea	e	read, bread, dreamt, dead, dread	_____
ee	ee	wheel, peel, kneel, heel	_____
ei	ee	receive, deceive, receipt	_____
ei	ei	rein, vein	_____
eo	e	leopard, Leonard	_____
eu	oy	Freud	_____
ia	aiy	vial	_____
ie	ai	tie, die, lie, pie	_____
ie	iy	field, yield, wield	_____
ie	ee	activities, believe, achieve	_____
ie	aiy	variety	_____
io	uh	station, completion, ration	_____
iu	iy	valium, tedium, radium	_____
oa	eu	oak, foam, loaf, encroach, road	_____
oa	or	broad, abroad	_____
oe	oo	shoe	_____
oe	eu	toe, hoe, woe, foe, goes	_____
oe	u	does, doesn't	_____
oi	oy	avoid, void, coin, toilet	_____
oo	oo	school, tool, fool, choose	_____
oo	uu	good, book, took, rook, hood	_____
oo	u	blood, flood	_____
oo	eu	brooch	_____
ou	au	sound, loud, proud, round, house	_____
ou	oo	route, you, soup, group	_____

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ou	uh	famous, jealous, onerous	_____
ou	o	cough, trough	_____
ou	u	rough, enough, tough	_____

ue	oo	blue, true, sue	_____
ue	e	guess, guest	_____
ue	uuw	fuel, puerile, duel	_____

ui	ai	guide, guidance	_____
ui	oo	juice, bruise	_____
ui	i	build, building, guilt	_____

Most of the vowel sounds of English (18 out of 23) are represented by these 18 different vowel digraphs. The sounds not represented are: a, i, er, eir, auw. The last three of these sounds are represented by vowel clusters that use “r” (see below).

2. Vowel Trigraphs and Quadgraphs

It is possible, though fairly uncommon, to find more than two vowel letters together in an English word. A group of three letters that make a single sound is called a *trigraph*. For example:

trigraph: *sounds like:* *for example:* *my example(s):*

eau	eu	beau, eau de toilette ¹	_____
-----	----	------------------------------------	-------

eou	uh	outrageous, contagious	_____
-----	----	------------------------	-------

iou	iy	industrious, harmonious, tedious	_____
-----	----	----------------------------------	-------

A group of four letters that makes a single sound is called a *quadgraph*. For example:

quadgraph: *sounds like:* *for example:* *my example(s):*

ueue	oo	queue	_____
------	----	-------	-------

3. Vowel Clusters that End with “-r”

The “r” in the spelling helps to make the single vowel sound. Note: the consonant sound r is not pronounced.

¹ in loan words from French

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<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
air	eir	air, fair, hair, chair, stair, pair	_____
ar	ar	car, guitar, star, bar, shark	_____
ar	or	war, wart, warm	_____
ar	uh	popular, singular, regular	_____
ear	ar	heart	_____
ear	iy	ear, beard, dear, appear, fear	_____
ear	er	learn, earn, search, pearl, heard	_____
ear	eir	bear, tear, wear, pear	_____
eer	iy	leer, peer, beer, engineer, steer	_____
er	er	verb, herd, herb, her	_____
er	uh	teacher, cleaner, hotter, mother	_____
iar	aiy	liar	_____
ier	iy	tier, pier	_____
ier	aiy	pliers	_____
ir	er	fir, bird, girl, whirl, twirl	_____
irr	er	whirr	_____
oar	or	oar, boar, hoar, hoard, board	_____
oor	or	door, floor, poor, moor	_____
or	or	form, nor, for, conform, port, sword	_____
or	er	word, worm	_____
or	uh	doctor, tractor, administrator	_____
our	or	pour	_____
our	auw	our, flour, hour, dour, sour	_____
our	uh	harbour, colour, splendour	_____
ur	er	hurl, churl, unfurl, curl	_____

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4. Other Vowel Clusters with “r”

The “r” in the spelling helps to make the single vowel sound. Note: the consonant sound *r* is not pronounced.

v/cluster: *sounds like:* *for example:* *my example(s):*

aire	eir	millionaire, Claire	_____
are	ar	are	_____
are	eir	hare, rare, ware, care	_____
ere	iy	here, mere	_____
ere	er	were	_____
ere	eir	there, where	_____
ire	aiy	wire, fire, mire, tire	_____
oare	or	hoare	_____
ore	or	more, before, core, store, lore	_____
re	uh	centre, metre, litre, acre	_____
ure	uuw	sure	_____
ure	uh	brochure	_____
yre	aiy	tyre, lyre, pyre	_____

5. Vowel Clusters with “w”

The “w” in the spelling helps to make the single vowel sound. Note: the consonant sounds *w* and *r* are not pronounced.

v/cluster: *sounds like:* *for example:* *my example(s):*

aw	or	paw, flaw, lawn, prawn, sawn	_____
ew	oo	grew, brew	_____
ow	eu	know, grow, snow, show, tow, bow, own	_____
ow	au	bow, cow, now, how, brown	_____

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owe	eu	owe	_____
-----	----	-----	-------

ower	auw	flower, power, shower, tower	_____
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6. Vowel Clusters with “y”

The “y” in the spelling helps to make the single vowel sound. Note: the consonant sounds *y* and *r* are not pronounced.

v/cluster: *sounds like:* *for example:* *my example(s):*

ay	ei	pay, say, day, lay, May, play	_____
----	----	-------------------------------	-------

ayer	eir	prayer	_____
------	-----	--------	-------

ey	ei	they, hey, prey	_____
ey	ee	key, monkey, alley	_____

eye	ai	eye	_____
-----	----	-----	-------

oy	oy	toy, joy, annoy, employ, boy	_____
----	----	------------------------------	-------

uay	ee	quay	_____
-----	----	------	-------

ye	ai	bye, rye, dye, tye	_____
----	----	--------------------	-------

7. Vowel Clusters with “gh”

The “gh” in the spelling helps to make the single vowel sound. Note: the consonant sounds *g* and *h* are not pronounced.

v/cluster: *sounds like:* *for example:* *my example(s):*

augh	or	caught, taught	_____
------	----	----------------	-------

eigh	ei	weight, eight, weigh, neigh	_____
eigh	ai	height	_____

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Spelling and Sounds – Vowel Clusters

igh	ai	high, sigh, night, right, flight, might, bright	_____
-----	----	-------------------------------------------------	-------

ough	au	bough, plough, Slough	_____
ough	oo	through, throughout	_____
ough	or	bought, thought, ought, sought, nought	_____
ough	eu	though, although	_____

8. Vowel Clusters with Other Consonant Letters

Sometimes you may find a vowel cluster representing a vowel sound that employs a consonant letter other than “r”, “w”, “y”, or “gh”. Below are a few examples. In each case the consonant in the spelling is not pronounced (it is a *silent letter*).

a) Vowel clusters with “b”:

v/cluster: *sounds like:* *for example:* *my example(s):*

oub	au	doubt	_____
-----	----	-------	-------

b) Vowel clusters with “g”:

v/cluster: *sounds like:* *for example:* *my example(s):*

eig	ei	reign	_____
-----	----	-------	-------

c) Vowel clusters with “l”:

v/cluster: *sounds like:* *for example:* *my example(s):*

al	or	talk, walk, chalk, stalk	_____
al	ar	half, calf, palm, calm, balm	_____

ol	eu	yolk	_____
----	----	------	-------

oul	uu	could, would, should	_____
-----	----	----------------------	-------

d) Vowel clusters with “t”:

v/cluster: *sounds like:* *for example:* *my example(s):*

out	oo	ragout	_____
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Spelling and Sounds – Common Vowel Clusters

A vowel cluster is a group of two or more vowel letters together in a word that represent a single vowel sound. They can be **initial** (at the beginning of a word), **medial** (in the middle of a word), and **final** (at the end of a word). Focusing on vowel clusters and consonant clusters (see p.217) is useful if you want to look at some of the differences between spelling and sounds in English words. Vowel clusters can be divided into eight categories:

1. Vowel Digraphs (two vowel letters together make a single sound)

<i>digraph:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
ai	ei	paid, wait, fail, paint, gain	_____
ea	ee	read, appeal, lead, clean, leaf, steal	_____
ea	e	read, bread, dreamt, dead, dread	_____
ee	ee	wheel, peel, kneel, heel	_____
ei	ee	receive, deceive, receipt	_____
ie	ai	tie, die, lie, pie	_____
oa	eu	oak, foam, loaf, encroach, road	_____
oa	or	broad, abroad	_____
oe	eu	toe, hoe, woe, foe, goes	_____
oe	oo	shoe	_____
oo	oo	school, tool, fool, choose	_____
oo	uu	good, book, took, rook, hood	_____
ou	au	sound, loud, proud, round, house	_____
ui	ai	guide, guidance	_____
ue	oo	blue, true, sue	_____

2. Vowel Trigraphs and Quadgraphs

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
eau	eu	beau, eau de toilette ¹	_____
iou	iy	industrious, harmonious, tedious	_____
ueue	oo	queue	_____

3. Vowel Clusters that End with “-r” (the consonant sound r is not pronounced)

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
air	eir	air, fair, hair, chair, stair, pair	_____
ar	ar	car, guitar, star, bar, shark	_____
ear	iy	ear, beard, dear, appear, fear	_____
ear	er	learn, earn, search, pearl, heard	_____
ear	eir	bear, tear, wear, pear	_____
eer	iy	leer, peer, beer, engineer, steer	_____
er	er	verb, herd, herb, her	_____

¹ in loan words from French

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er	uh	teacher, cleaner, hotter, mother	_____
ier	iy	tier, pier	_____
ir	er	fir, bird, girl, whirl, twirl	_____
oar	or	oar, boar, hoar, hoard, board	_____
oor	or	door, floor, poor, moor	_____
or	or	form, nor, for, conform, port, sword	_____
our	auw	our, flour, hour, dour, sour	_____
ur	er	hurl, churl, unfurl, curl	_____

4. Other Vowel Clusters with “r” (the consonant sound r is not pronounced)

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
are	ar	are	_____
ere	iy	here, mere	_____
ere	eir	there, where	_____
ere	er	were	_____
ore	or	more, before, core, store, lore	_____
re	uh	centre, metre, litre, acre	_____
ure	uh	brochure	_____

5. Vowel Clusters with “w” (the consonant sound w is not pronounced)

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
aw	or	paw, flaw, lawn, prawn, sawn	_____
ew	oo	grew, brew	_____
ow	eu	know, grow, snow, show, tow, bow, own	_____
ow	au	bow, cow, now, how, brown	_____

6. Vowel Clusters with “y” (the consonant sound y is not pronounced)

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
ay	ei	pay, say, day, lay, May, play	_____
ey	ei	they, hey, prey	_____
ey	ee	key, monkey, alley	_____
oy	oy	toy, joy, annoy, employ, boy	_____

7. Vowel Clusters with “gh” (the consonant sounds g and h are not pronounced)

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
augh	or	caught, taught	_____
eigh	ei	weight, eight, weigh, neigh	_____

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igh	ai	high, sigh, night, right, flight, might, bright	_____
ough	or	bought, thought, ought, sought, nought	_____
ough	oo	through, throughout	_____

8. Vowel Clusters with Other Consonant Letters (the consonant sounds are not pronounced)

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
oub	au	doubt	_____
eig	ei	reign	_____
al	or	talk, walk, chalk, stalk	_____
al	ar	half, calf, palm, calm, balm	_____
ol	eu	yolk	_____
oul	uu	could, would, should	_____
out	oo	ragout	_____

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List of Vowel Clusters – In Alphabetical Order

a

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
ai	ei	paid, wait, fail, paint, gain	_____
ai	e	said, again	_____
air	eir	air, fair, hair, chair, stair, pair	_____
aire	eir	millionaire, Claire	_____
al	or	talk, walk, chalk, stalk	_____
al	ar	half, calf, palm, calm, balm	_____
ar	ar	car, guitar, star, bar, shark	_____
ar	or	war, wart, warm	_____
ar	uh	popular, singular, regular	_____
are	ar	are	_____
are	eir	hare, rare, ware, care	_____
au	or	fraud, pause, autumn, August	_____
au	ar	laugh, laughter	_____
ough	or	caught, taught	_____
aw	or	paw, flaw, lawn, prawn, sawn	_____
ay	ei	pay, say, day, lay, May, play	_____
ayer	eir	prayer	_____

Phonemes represented by vowel clusters beginning with the letter "a":

ei e eir ar or uh

e

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
ea	ei	break, steak, great	_____
ea	ee	read, appeal, lead, clean, leaf, steal	_____
ea	e	read, bread, dreamt, dead, dread	_____
ear	ar	heart	_____
ear	iy	ear, beard, dear, appear, fear	_____
ear	er	learn, earn, search, pearl, heard	_____
ear	eir	bear, tear, wear, pear	_____
eau	eu	beau, eau de toilette ¹	_____
ee	ee	wheel, peel, kneel, heel	_____
eer	iy	leer, peer, beer, engineer, steer	_____
ei	ee	receive, deceive, receipt	_____
ei	ei	rein, vein	_____
eig	ei	reign	_____
eigh	ei	weight, eight, weigh, neigh	_____
eigh	ai	height	_____

¹ in loan words from French

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List of Vowel Clusters – In Alphabetical Order

eo	e	leopard, Leonard	_____
eou	uh	outrageous	_____
er	er	verb, herd, herb, her	_____
er	uh	teacher, cleaner, hotter, mother	_____
ere	iy	here, mere	_____
ere	er	were	_____
ere	eir	there, where	_____
eu	oy	Freud	_____
ew	oo	grew, brew	_____
ey	ei	they, hey, prey	_____
ey	ee	key, monkey, alley	_____
eye	ai	eye	_____

Phonemes represented by vowel clusters beginning with the letter “e”:

ei ee e iy ar er eir ai oy oo eu uh

i

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
ia	aiy	bias	_____
iar	aiy	liar	_____
ie	ai	tie, die, lie, pie	_____
ie	iy	field, yield, wield	_____
ie	ee	activities, believe, achieve	_____
ie	aiy	variety	_____
ier	iy	tier, pier	_____
ier	aiy	pliers	_____
igh	ai	high, sigh, night, right, flight, might, bright	_____
io	uh	station, completion, ration	_____
iou	iy	industrious, harmonious, tedious, contagious	_____
ir	er	fir, bird, girl, whirl, twirl	_____
ire	aiy	wire, fire, mire, tire	_____
irr	er	whirr	_____
iu	iy	valium, tedium, radium	_____

Phonemes represented by vowel clusters beginning with the letter “i”:

iy ai ee aiy uh er

O

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
oa	eu	oak, foam, loaf, encroach, road	_____
oa	or	broad, abroad	_____

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List of Vowel Clusters – In Alphabetical Order

oar	or	oar, boar, hoar, hoard, board	_____
oare	or	hoare	_____
oe	oo	shoe	_____
oe	eu	toe, hoe, woe, foe, goes	_____
oe	u	does, doesn't	_____
oi	oy	avoid, void, coin, toilet	_____
ol	eu	yolk	_____
oo	oo	school, tool, fool, choose	_____
oo	uu	good, book, took, rook, hood	_____
oo	u	blood, flood	_____
oo	eu	brooch	_____
oor	or	door, floor, poor, moor	_____
or	or	form, nor, for, conform, port, sword	_____
or	er	word, worm	_____
or	uh	doctor, tractor, administrator	_____
ore	or	more, before, core, store, lore	_____
ou	au	sound, loud, proud, round, house	_____
ou	oo	route, you, soup, group	_____
ou	o	cough, trough	_____
ou	u	rough, enough, tough	_____
ou	uh	famous, jealous, onerous	_____
oub	au	doubt	_____
ough	au	bough, plough, Slough	_____
ough	oo	through, throughout	_____
ough	or	bought, thought, ought, sought, nought	_____
ough	eu	though, although	_____
oul	uu	could, would, should	_____
our	or	pour	_____
our	auw	our, flour, hour, dour, sour	_____
our	uh	harbour, colour, splendour	_____
out	oo	ragout	_____
ow	eu	know, grow, snow, show, tow, bow, own	_____
ow	au	bow, cow, now how, brown	_____
owe	eu	owe	_____
ower	auw	flower, power, shower, tower	_____
oy	oy	toy, joy, annoy, employ, boy	_____

Phonemes represented by vowel clusters beginning with the letter "o":

eu or oo u oy uu uh au o auw er

r

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
re	uh	centre, metre, litre, acre	_____

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List of Vowel Clusters – In Alphabetical Order

u

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
uay	ee	quay	_____
ue	oo	blue, true, sue	_____
ue	e	guess, guest	_____
ue	uuw	fuel, puerile, duel	_____
ueue	oo	queue	_____
ui	ai	guide, guidance	_____
ui	oo	juice, bruise	_____
ui	i	build, building, guilt	_____
ur	er	hurl, churl, unfurl, curl	_____
ure	uuw	sure	_____
ure	uh	brochure	_____

Phonemes represented by vowel clusters beginning with the letter “u”:

ai oo i e uuw uh er ee oo

y

<i>v/cluster:</i>	<i>sounds like:</i>	<i>for example:</i>	<i>my example(s):</i>
ye	ai	bye, rye, dye, tye	_____
yre	aiy	tyre, lyre, pyre	_____

Phonemes represented by vowel clusters beginning with the letter “y”:

ai aiy