

Spelling Patterns and the Sounds they Make – 1

Short vowel sounds are written with one vowel letter. These words are often phonetic.

There are 8 short vowel sounds in English. Here are the most common spelling patterns:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
a	a	ba g	_____
e	e	be d	_____
i	i	bi g	_____
o	o	po t	_____
u	u	bu s	_____
uu	u	pu t	_____

The other two short vowel sounds appear in weak syllables; the schwa sound **uh** is the most common vowel sound in English and appears in many weak syllables, e.g. suffixes.

The short **ii** sound also appears in weak syllables, especially in suffixes ending with -y.

Exceptions:

Short vowel sounds are sometimes represented in other ways:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
a	a + e	ha ve	_____
e	a	any	_____
	ae	haemorrhage	_____
	ai	sai d	_____
	ea	de ad	_____
	ei	lei sure	_____
	ie	fr endship	_____
	ue	gu ess	_____

Spelling Patterns and the Sounds they Make – 1

Short vowel sounds are written with one vowel letter. These words are often phonetic.

i

e

sacrilegious

i + e

give

ie

sieve

u

business

ui

building

o

women

y

gym

o

a

watch

au

sausage

eau

bureaucracy

o + e

gone

ou

cough

ow

knowledge

ua

quandary

u

o

won

o + e

come

oe

does

ou

touch

uu

o

woman

oo

book

ou

could

Spelling Patterns and the Sounds they Make – 2

Long vowel sounds are written with an r in the spelling.

There are 5 long vowel sounds in English. Three of them – **ar**, **er**, and **or** – are usually spelled with an r:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
ar	ar	dark	_____
	arre	charred	_____
	ear	heart	_____
	er	sergeant	_____
	uar	guard	_____
er	ear	heard	_____
	er	hers	_____
	erre	deferred	_____
	ir	bird	_____
	or	word	_____
	our	courteous	_____
	ur	church	_____
or	ar	warm	_____
	oar	roars	_____
	oor	doors	_____
	oore	moored	_____
	or	born	_____
	ore	bored	_____
	our	fourth	_____

The other two long vowel sounds **ee** and **oo** are dealt with in Statement 3.

Exceptions:

Long vowel sounds **ar**, **er**, and **or** are sometimes represented in other ways:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
ar	a	bath	_____
	a + e	vase	_____
	al	half	_____
er	olo	colonel	_____
or	a	ball	_____
	al	talk	_____

Spelling Patterns and the Sounds they Make – 3

You can tell a word has a long vowel sound by the presence of two vowel letters which are the same: **ee** or **oo**.

The other two long vowel sounds are often spelled with the distinctive **ee** and **oo** patterns:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
ee	ee	been	_____
oo	oo	cool	_____

Long vowel sounds **ee** and **oo** are sometimes represented in other ways:

Statement 4: two different vowel letters together (digraphs) can represent these sounds
e.g. bean **ee**

Statement 5: vowel-consonant-vowel rule can make the vowel letter e long
e.g. scene **ee**

Statement 8: other consonant letters can be used to represent these sounds, e.g.
e.g. through **oo**

Exceptions:

Here are some common exceptions to this rule:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
ee	e	she	_____
	e + ue	segue	_____
	i	pizza	_____
	i + e	police	_____
	i + ue	technique	_____
oo	o + e	lose	_____

Spelling Patterns and the Sounds they Make – 4

Long vowel sounds are written with two different vowel letters (a vowel digraph).

Sometimes long vowel sounds are written with a vowel digraph. We must learn the possible combinations:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
ee	ae	encyclo ae dia	_____
	ea	be ach	_____
	ei	con cei ve	_____
	ie	pie ce	_____
oo	eu	ne utron	_____
	oe	sho es	_____
	oeu	man oeu vre	_____
	ou	so up	_____
	ueu	q ueu ing	_____
	ueue	q ueue	_____
or	ui	frui t	_____
	au	cau se	_____

Note: the long vowel sounds **ar** and **er** are not represented by any vowel digraphs.

Spelling Patterns and the Sounds they Make – 5

When you see vowel + consonant + e the vowel will say its alphabet name.

The long sound of each vowel letter is caused by the **single consonant + e** spelling:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
ei	a + e	cake	_____
ee	e + e	scene	_____
ai	i + e	bike	_____
eu	o + e	hole	_____
oo	u + e	June	_____

It is important to note that in words of more than one syllable the same rule can apply with other vowel letters too, not only e. The key point to remember is:

when you see **vowel + single consonant + vowel** the first vowel says its alphabet name,
e.g. baking = Bei king

Exceptions:

Sometimes these sounds are represented in other ways:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
ai	y + e	type	_____
eu	o o + ue	both rogue	_____ _____

And sometimes the spelling pattern **vowel + single consonant + e** can result in a short vowel sound, e.g. give (see Statement 1 for more exceptions).

Note: this rule is very consistent with one-syllable words, and is generally true in polysyllabic words as well. However, there are many examples of polysyllabic words where **vowel + single consonant + vowel** occurs but the first vowel is short, e.g. travel, money, lover, and orange.

Spelling Patterns and the Sounds they Make – 6

Diphthongs are written with an **r** in the spelling.

There are 10 diphthongs in English. Like long vowel sounds, they are often written with an **r** in the spelling:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
aiy	iar ire	liars fired	_____ _____
auw	our oure	sours soured	_____ _____
eir	air aire are ear eir	chairs millionaire cared bears theirs	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____
iy	ear eare eer eere eir ere ier ir	beard neared peers cheered weird sincerely piers souvenir	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
Uuw	ure	assure	_____

Exceptions:

Diphthongs can also be represented in other ways:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
ai	i ui + e	bicycle guide	_____ _____
ei	a e + e	waste fete	_____ _____
eir	a	parent	_____
eu	o	both	_____
iy	ee	feel	_____

Spelling Patterns and the Sounds they Make – 7

Diphthongs are written with two different vowel letters (a vowel digraph).

Another common way to spell diphthongs is by using a vowel digraph. We must learn the possible combinations:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
ai	ei	kaleidoscope	_____
	ie	died	_____
	ui	guide	_____
aiy	ia	dial	_____
	iou	pious	_____
au	ou	house	_____
ei	ai	faith	_____
	au	gauge	_____
	ei	beige	_____
eu	au	mauve	_____
	oa	boat	_____
	oe	goes	_____
	ou	shoulder	_____
aiy	ia	dial	_____
	io	lion	_____
	iou	pious	_____
iy	ea	meal	_____
	eo	theories	_____
	oea	diarrhoea	_____
oy	oi	boil	_____
Uuw	ue	suet	_____

Note: **oi** is the only vowel digraph for **oy**, and **ou** is the only vowel digraph for **au**.

Spelling Patterns and the Sounds they Make – 8

Other consonant letters like w, y, and gh count as part of long vowel sounds or diphthongs in spellings, rather than consonant sounds; other consonant letters can occur as silent letters, e.g. b in “debt”.

It can be a surprise that these consonant letters are part of the vowel sound, and therefore not pronounced in their normal way, but we have to accept it and learn the combinations:

Sound:	Spelling Pattern:	Example:	More Examples:
ai	eigh ig igh ye	height sign fight dye	_____ _____ _____ _____
ar	al augh	calm laughter	_____ _____
au	oub ough ow owe	doubt boughs cows bowed	_____ _____ _____ _____
auw	owe ower owere	towel showers powered	_____ _____ _____
ee	ey	keys	_____
ei	ay eig eigh ey	days feign weight they've	_____ _____ _____ _____
eu	ow owe	known owed	_____ _____
oo	ew ewe iew iewe	chew chewed view viewed	_____ _____ _____ _____
or	al augh aw ough	walk caught lawn bought	_____ _____ _____ _____
oy	oy oya uoye	boys royal buoyed	_____ _____ _____
uuw	ewe ewer	jewel sewers	_____ _____