

Lesson 1

Pronouncing the Vowels of American English

You have probably discovered that there is a big difference between the way words are spelled in English and the way they are pronounced. English spelling patterns are inconsistent and are not always a reliable guide to pronunciation. For example, in the following words, the letter *a* is used to represent five different sounds.

hate father have any saw

Pretty confusing, right? That's why we need a set of symbols in which *each* sound is represented by a *different* symbol. In this book, you will see symbols used. These are the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which is used all over the world. It consists of a set of symbols in which *one symbol* represents *one sound*.

DON'T PANIC! It is not necessary to learn all the symbols at once. Each sound will be introduced and explained one at a time. You will learn the symbols easily as you progress through the book. A pronunciation key to the different vowels and diphthongs of American English with their IPA symbols is presented below. Refer to it as needed.

To help you understand the exact pronunciation of the phonetic symbols and key words, the Key to Pronouncing the Vowels of American English is included in the audio program. You will hear each phonetic symbol introduced and pronounced once. Each English key word will be said once.

Key to Pronouncing the Vowels of American English

	INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET SYMBOL	ENGLISH KEY WORDS
SECTION 1	[i]	me, tea, bee
	[ɪ]	it, pin
	[eɪ]	ate, game, they
	[ɛ]	egg, head, pet
	[æ]	at, fat, happy
	[a]	hot, father
SECTION 2	[ʊ]	you, too, rule
	[ʊ̇]	put, cook
	[ʌ]	up, but, come
	[oʊ]	boat, no, oh
	[ɔ̇]	all, boss, caught
SECTION 3	[ə]	soda, upon
	[ɔ̄]	urn, first, serve
	[ə̄]	father, after
	[aʊ̄]	out, cow, house
	[aɪ̄]	my, pie, I
	[ɔɪ̄]	oil, boy, noise