

English Phonemic Transcription

It is important to understand the difference between a narrow transcription and a broad one. The term narrow is applied to the transcription which contains a certain amount of phonetic details: the narrower transcription is represented with more phonetic details, it contains more diacritic signs and special symbols to give more details about transcription. This kind of transcription is the **phonetic** transcription and is placed between square brackets ([...]). A broad transcription shows an absence of phonetic details. The broadest transcription contains only phonemes. It is referred to as a **phonemic** transcription and is written between slants (/.../), we can find this type in many dictionaries like Oxford and Cambridge Dictionaries.

In dictionaries (and in dictations) it is common usage to use a phonemic transcription with the added symbols for vowel length (:), primary stress (') and secondary stress (,), and the diacritic for syllabic consonants (as in ŋ and ɫ) as in sudden / 'sʌdn / and able / 'eɪbəl /.

Transcription of consonants:

English has the following consonant phonemes:

	—————Voiceless	—————Voiced
<i>stops:</i>	/p/ as in 'pea'	/b/ as in 'bee'
	/t/ as in 'tea'	/d/ as in 'do'
	/k/ as in 'key'	/g/ as in 'go'
<i>nasals:</i>		/m/ as in 'map'
		/n/ as in 'nap'
		/ŋ/ as in 'hang'
<i>fricatives:</i>	/f/ as in 'fat'	/v/ as in 'vat'
	/θ/ as in 'thin'	/ð/ as in 'that'
	/s/ as in 'sip'	/z/ as in 'zip'
	/ʃ/ as in 'ship'	/ʒ/ as in 'measure'
	/h/ as in 'hat'	
<i>affricates:</i>	/tʃ/ as in 'chin'	/dʒ/ as in 'gym'
<i>approximants:</i>	<i>liquids:</i>	/l/ as in 'led'
		/r/ as in 'red'
	<i>glides:</i>	/j/ as in 'yet'
		/w/ as in 'wet'

Some hints for transcribing consonants:

p, b, t, d¹, k, m, n, l, r, f², v, z, h, w (¹ except certain past and past part.- ending in -ed)
 (² except in <of> / ɒv /)

3. The remaining consonant letters and the vowel letters have no unique sound value:

<i>letters</i>	<i>phonemes</i>	<i>examples</i>
c	/ s, k / , always voiceless	<u>c</u> ellar / s / <u>c</u> lub / k / ac <u>ce</u> ss / ks /
ck	/ k /	<u>pic</u> k / k /
g	/ g, dʒ , ʒ / , always voiced	<u>g</u> et [g] a <u>g</u> e / dʒ / be <u>ig</u> e / ʒ /
qu	/ kw /	<u>que</u> en
s	/ s / or / z / / ʒ / in some words of French origin	<u>si</u> gn, ba <u>si</u> s, / s / plea <u>s</u> e, rea <u>li</u> se / z / mea <u>s</u> ure, vi <u>si</u> on / ʒ / plea <u>s</u> ure, le <u>is</u> ure
th	/ θ / or / ð /; All the function words (articles, prepositions, pronouns, adverbials) except <i>through</i> and <i>thorough</i> have a voiced th-sound / ð /. A lot of content words have a voiceless th-sound / θ /, especially in initial and final position. In median position <th> is often voiced.	<u>wi</u> th, <u>th</u> y, <u>the</u> y, <u>the</u> n / ð / thee, there, though <u>th</u> in, <u>th</u> igh, ba <u>th</u> / θ / / / bath,youth but /ð/ in bathe, youths mo <u>th</u> er, fa <u>th</u> er / ð /
x	/ ks /	bo <u>x</u> / b <u>o</u> ks /

4. Relationship between / ʒ, ʃ, dʒ, tʃ / phonemes and letters:

<i>phoneme</i>	<i>letters</i>	<i>examples</i>
ʒ	g, s	be <u>ig</u> e, mea <u>s</u> ure, vi <u>si</u> on / ʒ /
ʃ	sh, ti, ssi	fi <u>sh</u> , sta <u>ti</u> on, exp <u>ssi</u> on / ʃ /
dʒ	j, g, dg	<u>jud</u> ge, a <u>g</u> e / dʒ /
tʃ	ch, tch, tu	tea <u>ch</u> er, bu <u>tch</u> er, na <u>tu</u> re / tʃ /

5. Plural-, genitive- and 3rd person singular ___s:
 / s / after voiceless sounds cats, tips, kicks
 / z / after voiced sounds pens, cars, songs
 / ɪz / after sibilants /s, z, ʃ,t, ʒ, dj/ kisses, dishes, boxes, searches, judges.
6. past- and past participle of regular verbs ___ed:
 / t / after voiceless sounds sipped, kicked
 / d / after voiced sounds sinned, followed
 / ɪd / after / d / and / t / mended, sorted
7. In British English (RP) an / r / is only transcribed in front of a vowel.
 Real, rear (the first /r/ is transcribed but the second is not)

Transcription of vowels:

English has the following vowel phonemes:

<u>short vowels:</u>	<u>long vowels:</u>	<u>diphthongs:</u>
/ɪ as in 'pit'	/i: as in 'key'	/eɪ as in 'bay'
/e as in 'pet'		/aɪ as in 'buy'
/æ as in 'pat'		/ɔɪ as in 'boy'
/ʌ as in 'cut'	/ɑ: as in 'car'	/əʊ as in 'low' (US: /oʊ)
/ɒ as in 'pot' (US: /ɑ:)	/ɔ: as in 'core'	/aʊ as in 'how'
/ʊ as in 'put'	/u: as in 'coo'	/ɪə as in 'here'
/ə as in 'potato', 'upper'	/ɜ: as in 'cur'	/eə as in 'there'
		/ʊə as in 'moor'

The phoneme / ə / can only occur in unstressed syllables.

ðə spɪtʃ əv pəʊl pəsi

əz mɛmbəz wɪl nəʊ, ðɪs ɪz ðə laɪst nʌmbə əv ðɪə pɪ: ɪn ɪts preznt fɔ:m. ɑ: dʒɜ:nl wəz pʌblɪʃt fə ðə fɜ:st taɪm ɪn 1889, ðəʊ prɪ:vʒəslɪ, frəm 1886, ɪt əd əpɪəd əz "ðə fənetɪk tɪtʃə". ɪn 1889, ɑ: ɜ:səʊstɪɪʃn hæd 321 mɛmbəz ɪn 18 kəntrɪz, ðə mədʒɪrətɪ kʌmɪʃ frəm swɪ:dn, dʒɜ:məni ən frɑ:ns. tædɪ, wɪ: hæv mɔ: ðn 800 mɛmbəz ɪn əʊvə 40 kəntrɪz, ðə greɪt mədʒɪrətɪ kʌmɪʃ frəm ðə ʤənartɪd steɪts ən greɪt brɪtən.

nəʊ ðət wɪ: əv dɪsɑɪdɪd tə prɪnt ɑ: nju: *Journal* ɪn ɔ:θvgræfɪ, fə ðə fɜ:st taɪm ɪn dʒʌm 1971, ɪt ɪz həʊpt ðət ðə rɪ:ðəfɪp wɪl bɪ ɪnlɑ:dʒd ən ðət kəntrɪbju:ʃnz wɪl bɪ rɪsɪ:vɪd frəm ə waɪdə sɜ:kl əv fəʊnɪtɪʃnz ən tɪtʃəz. məʊst əv ɑ: mɛmbəz hu: əv rɪplɑɪd tə ðə sɜ:kjələr ɪn ðə laɪst ɑ:pɪ: ɪ:həv sɪgnɪfɪd ðət ðeɪ wɪʃ tə kən'tɪnju: tə səbskraɪb tə ðə nju: *Journal*. ðəʊz hu: əv nɒt jət ɪnfə:md əs əv ðɜ:əɪntensɪz ər sɜ:dʒd tə du: səʊ wɪðaʊt dɪleɪ, sɪms ɑ: fɑ:nənsɪz wɪl nɒt ələʊ əs tə send ðə *Journal* tə fɔ:mə mɛmbəz hu:z səbskɪpʃnz ə nɒt rɪnju:d.



Paul Passy, founder of the International Phonetic Association

Books with phonetic transcriptions:

The English department has no single book with texts and their transcriptions. Although it is preferable to refer to the book: English Pronunciation in Use. However, it does not provide whole texts for transcription or already transcribed using the latest version of the IPA, the texts are very useful to practise transcribing. It is advised to use internet in order to find the following books:

- 1- Lecumberri, M. Luisa Garcia and John A. Maidment (2000): *English Transcription Course*, London: Arnold. (Available for free on internet in [scribd.com/wanglais/documents](https://www.scribd.com/wanglais/documents))
- 2- Buck, Timothy (1968): *Modern Phonetic Texts for foreign students of English*. München: Hueber.

To practise transcriptions of single words, you can always take a good dictionary like Oxford or Cambridge.

FURTHER RESOURCES FOR TRANSCRIPTION:

- Abercrombie, D. (1964): *English Phonetic Texts*. London: Faber and Faber.
- O'Connor, J.D. (1948): *New Phonetic Readings from Modern English Literature*. Bibliotheca Anglicana, vol. 9. Berne: Franke.
- O'Connor, J.D. (1971): *Advanced Phonetic Reader*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Connor, J.D. (1973): *Phonetic Drill Reader*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tagliavini, Carlo (1968): *Testi in trascrizione fonetica*. Bologna: Riccardo Pàtron.
- Windsor, Lewis J. (1977): *People Speaking: Phonetic Readings in Current English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.