

Introduction to IPA Vowels

Why this topic is useful

The International Phonetic Alphabet is sort of like the Periodic Table of the Elements for linguistics, or at least for phonetics — when we're talking about different sounds, it's useful to be able to convey precisely and unambiguously in writing exactly which one we're talking about, even when people may have different accents, dialects, or pet spelling conventions. Vowels in particular require particular attention because they are more of gradient than categorical phenomena.

Most intro classes we've encountered will include suprasegmentals and other phonetic features in the same week as vowels, but this worksheet is focused on vowels. Next Friday's Resource Guide will be about introducing morphemes. This guide is a companion to [Introduction to IPA Consonants](#) (Resource Guide 1).

Resources

IPA Charts

- [Interactive IPA Chart](#) - A free, web-based IPA chart. Each symbol is clickable and plays the corresponding phoneme. Good for an introduction to IPA or phonetics in general.
- [UBC Enunciate: Vowels](#) - On the IPA vowel chart, clicking on each symbol leads to its identification (height, backness, roundness), a list of some languages in which it occurs, and an animated video of its production alongside another video of a human speaker pronouncing it with the corresponding MRI footage superimposed over the speaker.
- [OSU Interactive IPA Chart](#) - 6 separate interactive IPA charts for specific phonemes found in these major world languages: Chinese, English, Indian, Korean, Spanish, Turkish.
- [IPA Lab Audio Illustrations](#) - A highly detailed and complete IPA chart showing more phonemes and diacritics with detailed descriptions at the bottom of the screen for each symbol you click on. This would be good for a more complete and technical look at the IPA.

Videos & Podcasts

Explanations & Demonstrations

- [Essential of Linguistics: 2.7 Classifying Vowels](#)
A short technical, lecture-style video about vowels with mini-quiz below; dry but informative. Length: 4m39s. Captions: human-edited.

- [NativLang: IPA for Language Learning - Vowels](#)
A short animated video with a simple and fun but accurate description of IPA vowels. Good for an introduction to IPA consonants. Length: 2m46s. Captions: automatically generated.
- [LanguageStory: Sound Check: Phonetics Part 2](#)
A detailed and engaging breakdown of IPA vowel symbols and characteristics [starting at 1m34s](#), followed by a similar explanation of consonants. Check out [Phonetics Part 1](#) for a short but informative introduction to the subject. Length: 9m23s. Captions: automatically generated.
- [The Ling Space: Vowels and the IPA](#)
A mid-length video with charts and an on-screen demonstration. Good for introduction to phonology. Length: 8m48s. Captions: human-edited.
- [TheTrevTutor: Vowels: Production and Transcription](#)
A detailed and structured video about the phonology of vowels that's heavy on terminology and diagrams. Good for a more in-depth look at phonology terms and concepts. Length: 17m35s. Captions: automatically generated.
- [Lingthusiasm Podcast Episode 17: Vowel Gymnastics](#)
Section (3:35-5:42): Vowel sounds on a continuum with examples, describing how the IPA vowel chart "fits" in the mouth. Transcript for [the whole episode](#) available.
- [Pronunciation Tutorial 3: English Vowels and the International Phonetic Alphabet](#)
A video describing each vowel in the English language and classifying them according to the IPA vowel chart. Informative but geared towards teaching English pronunciation. Length: 14m28s. Captions: human-edited.

Related Subjects & Interesting Facts

- [ArticulatoryIPA YouTube Playlist](#)
A collection of animations and ultrasounds that depict people pronouncing various phonemes. Captions: we're not exactly sure how one would caption this.
- [Essential of Linguistics: 2.8 Diphthongs](#)
A short technical video about diphthongs with mini-quiz below; dry but informative. Length: 3m00s. Captions: human-edited.
- [Aaron Alon: What If English Were Phonetically Consistent?](#)
A fun look at the relationship of English spelling to its phonology, mostly focused on the (in)consistency of our vowels. Breaks each vowel grapheme down into the different IPA symbols it's likely to represent in English. Length: 4m05s. Captions: auto.
- [NativLang: Intro to Phonology: Consonants & Vowels](#)
A short animated explanation of phonology in general. Length: 3m30s. Captions: human-edited.

Tech Tips

- [Typelt: IPA Phonetic Symbols](#)
An easy-to-use website that lets you easily type IPA symbols (either full IPA or language-specific subsets) into a text box, which you can then copy-paste elsewhere as needed.
- [How to Type the IPA on your phone \(iOS or Android\)](#)
Several good free IPA phone keyboard options, reviewed.

Activities

- [Introducing the IPA: quizzes](#)
Third batch of quizzes: Phonetic Symbols & Mnemonic Words (#1,4,5) - good review of vowel phonemes where you match the IPA symbol to the right word. Phonetic Symbols & Their Names (#2,3) could be helpful if identifying the symbols by name is part of the curriculum. (Sound Recognition (#6) has technical issues.)
- [IPA Vowel Identification Quiz](#) & [IPA Vowel Identification II](#) (Sporcle)
In the first quiz, you are given words with capitalized vowel sounds and asked to identify the correct IPA symbol. In the second quiz, you are given words and asked to identify the correct IPA symbol for each word's nucleus. Good for a basic review of IPA vowels in English.
- [IPA Vowel Chart Quiz](#) (PurposeGames)
Given a blank IPA vowel chart, place each IPA symbol on the correct spot based on its articulatory features.
- [Pink Trombone](#) - An interactive diagram of the oral and nasal cavities that lets you drag the tongue around to simulate how people pronounce different vowel sounds.
- Two blog posts on teaching IPA transcription in the digital age from Angus Grieve-Smith, who addresses the problem of not being able to have students repeat back their transcriptions to check if they're accurately representing their own dialects (as many profs do in a face-to-face class) by instead [having students transcribe based on other linkable audio clips, such as the YouTube Accent Tag challenge](#) and [asking students to record audio files of themselves reading IPA transcriptions](#).

Something fun

The Journal of the IPA accepted articles written in IPA from the late 1800s all the way up until 1971.



May Helena Plumb
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TODAY I LEARNED

that the Journal of the IPA was, for a while, læ mɛ:trə
fonetik (Le Maître Phonétique) and the articles were
written ENTIRELY IN THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC
ALPHABET

This situation went on from the late 1800s until *1971*

I'M DYING

38
Le Maître Phonétique, Vol. 48 (85), No. 134 (1970), pp. 38-39

uggljf : kɔkni

after ðə transkriptsjən əv *ben, *nan, and *stivɪ un pri
əv ðis dʒɜːnəl, hɪr ɔːr spɛtəmən əv ðə spɪtʃ əv ðɛr rɛlətɪv
*ɛɪdə. *fɪl ɪz *bɛnz sən, mərɪd tu *ɛɪdə. *ɛɪdə ɪz *nanz
*stɪvɪz sɪstər. sən ɔːnʒʊəl sɪmbəlz ɔːr ɛkspləɪnd bɪləs.

ð—dɛntəl vɔʊt frɪkʃənəlz kɔntɪnjuːnt.
ʒ—pɹæst-alvɪəlɔːr vɔʊt frɪkʃənəlz kɔntɪnjuːnt.
ʔ—vɪdɪərəʊz glɔtəl stɒp.
ɱ—nɛzələʊz bɔʊləbɪəl vɔʊt frɪkʃənəlz kɔntɪnjuːnt.
ʔ—slɔʊt ɔːspɛrʃən.

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un mɔɪ ɔːrtɪkəl, “The Range of Contoid Articulations in a
Orbis, xvii, 2, dɪsɛmbər, 1968. ɔːr hɔv dɪskraɪbɪd ðə mɛðəd
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Language and Speech, 12, 4, dɪsɛmbər, 1969, and ɔ tʃɔːrt
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grɔmɪtɪkəl pɛtɜːn. ɔpɪsɪz hɔv bɪn lɛft ɔt, ɔ ɔ ɛ kɪəs ɔz f
wɔrd bɔʊndɪz, bɛt ðɪz hɔv nɔ fɔnɛtɪk vɔljʊ.

Le Maître Phonétique, Vol. 48 (85), No. 134 (1970), pp. 49-50
G. SEYMOUR, *Practical English Phonetics* (pp. x + 84, Leonard Hill,
London, 1969, 15s.).

ðis *Leisure Learning Book* pɹɔpɔːts to kɔntɛɪn ðə mɪnɪmə
ðɪrɛktɪkəl ɔn pɹæktɪkəl nɔɪtɪz ɔ stɪfɪdʒt mɔst hɛv ɪn ɪnɪŋ ðə
pɹɔnʌnsɪʃjən əv ɪŋɡljf tɔdɛɪ. ðə ðɪrɛktɪkəl sɛkʃjə ɔ fɔləʊb bɔt tɛksts ɪn
fɔnɛtɪk transkriptsjən ɔnd ɔndɪrɪ ɔndɪgrɔfi, ɔn mæpɔ ɔd lɪsts əv plɛɪnɛtɪz
ɪn transkriptsjən.

ɪn ðə fɔrwɔrd ðɪ ɔðər ɔnʒɔʃjəl klɛɪmz ðɪt “the first and most
important aim of ‘Practical English Phonetics’ is to be useful. It
should prove useful to lecturers, teachers, students and schoolchildren
alike, whether teaching or learning English as a foreign language. . . .
It is intended to be a helpful, practical tool for constant use . . . can
be used by anyone who is interested in the English language.”

nɔʊ ðɪt wɪz əv dɪsɔʊndɪd to pɪnt ɔː nʒuː *Journal* ɪn ɔndɪgrɔfi, fɔ ðə
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fɔrm mɛmbɔz hɜːz sɔkɪkrɪps ɔ nɔt rɪnʒɪd.

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kɔntɪbɪʃjən gɪv ɔn mɔkɪtʃjən əv ðə rɪkɔmɛndɛmɛnts əv pɹɛntɛʃjən fɔ ðə
Journal; ðɪt wɪl ɪn fɪʃtʃɔ bɛ pɹɛntɪd ɔn ðə *Journal* kɔvɜ.

4:28 AM · Feb 12, 2020 · Twitter Web App

Via [May Helena Plumb](#)

About Mutual Intelligibility

This Resource Guide is also available on mutualintelligibility.substack.com (where you can subscribe for email updates to future issues), and as a [google doc](#) or [pdf](#).

Mutual Intelligibility is a project to connect linguistics instructors with online resources, especially as so much teaching is shifting quickly online due to current events. It's produced by [Lauren Gawne](#) and [Gretchen McCulloch](#), with the support of our patrons on Lingthusiasm. Our 3 Links editor is [Liz McCullough](#), and our Resource Guide contributor is Kate Whitcomb ([Layman's Linguist](#)).

The newsletter consists of 3 Links on a topic on Mondays and Wednesdays and longer Resource Guides on Fridays, both of which are free and will always remain free, but if you have a stable income and find that they're reducing your stress and saving you time, we're able to

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