


The IPA

(The International Phonetic Alphabet)

Each symbol in the chart represents a phoneme (sound) in English.

Why is it important? Most dictionaries give the phonetic pronunciation after the spelling of the word. By knowing the symbols, an English student can learn the pronunciation of the word, how it is stressed, and the meaning.

see i:	his i	foot ʊ	you u:	hear iə	name ei	! : 	
ten e	bitter ə	learn ɜ:	morning ɔ:	tour ʊə	boy ɔi	no əʊ	
stamp æ	son ʌ	father a:	hot ɒ	wear ea	my ai	how aʊ	
pen p	big b	tea t	do d	child tʃ	germ dʒ	cat k	go g
four f	very v	thanks θ	the ð	son s	zoo z	she ʃ	vision ʒ
my m	near n	English ŋ	happy h	live l	red r	want w	yes j

The first section (top left:- 4 x 3 squares) represents the **vowel sounds (monophthongs)**.**

Example:- /æ/ as in stamp, /a:/ as in father

** Notice that a colon / : / after a vowel turns it into a long sound, so:-

/u:/ will be the **long u** as in **too, you, shoot**, and so on.

The second section (top right:- 3 x 3 squares) represents the sounds made by **diphthongs**. (Diphthongs are 2 vowel sounds next to each other).

Example:- /ai/ as in my, /ei/ as in name.

The third, and largest section (bottom:- 8 x 3 squares), represents the **consonant sounds**.

Example:- /p/ as in pen, /dʒ/ as in Germany.

The IPA also tells you where the **stress** comes in a word. The words **photograph** and **photography** are stressed like this:-

phoˈ**tograph pho**ˈ**tography**

When written phonetically, the stress is marked like this:-

/ˈfəʊtəgrɑ:f/ /fəˈtɒgrəfi/

The small marks (ˈ) before the /f/ and the /t/ mean the stress is on the next syllable.

Finally, look at the word engineer /endʒəˈniə(r)/. Why is the /r/ in brackets? This is because the /r/ sound is only pronounced if it is followed by a **vowel** sound.

I am an engineer. (The /r/ is **not** pronounced)

I am the engineer in charge. (The /r/ is pronounced).

The IPA is really useful to you. Please learn it!

The IPA

Vowels /ˈvaʊwəlz/

1.	/i:/	see	/si:/
2.	/ɪ/	his	/hɪz/
3.	/ʊ/	football	/ˈfʊtbɔ:l/
4.	/u:/	you	/ju:/
5.	/e/	ten	/ten/
6.	/ə/	litter	/lɪtə/
7.	/ɜ:/	learn	/lɜ:n/
8.	/ɔ:/	corn	/kɔ:n/
9.	/æ/	stamp	/stæmp/
10.	/ʌ/	son	/sʌn/
11.	/ɑ:/	father	/ˈfɑ:ðə/
12.	/ɒ/	hot	/hɒt/

Consonants /ˈkɒnsənənts/

21.	/p/	pen	/pen/
22.	/b/	big	/bɪg/
23.	/t/	tea	/ti:/
24.	/d/	do	/du:/
25.	/tʃ/	child	/tʃaɪld/
26.	/dʒ/	germ	/dʒɜ:m/
27.	/k/	cat	/kæt/
28.	/g/	go	/geʊ/
29.	/f/	four	/fɔ:/
30.	/v/	very	/ˈveri/
31.	/θ/	thanks	/θæŋks/
32.	/ð/	the	/ðə/
33.	/s/	son	/sʌn/
34.	/z/	zoo	/zu:/
35.	/ʃ/	she	/ʃi:/
36.	/ʒ/	vision	/ˈvɪʒn/
37.	/m/	my	/maɪ/
38.	/n/	near	/niə/
39.	/ŋ/	English	/ˈɪŋɡlɪʃ/
40.	/h/	happy	/ˈhæpi/
41.	/l/	live	/lɪv/
42.	/r/	red	/red/
43.	/w/	want	/wɒnt/
44.	/j/	yes	/jes/

Diphthongs /ˈdɪpθɒŋz/

13.	/iə/	hear	/hiə/
14.	/eɪ/	name	/neɪm/
15.	/ʊə/	tour	/tʊə/
16.	/ɔɪ/	boy	/bɔɪ/
17.	/əʊ/	no	/nəʊ/
18.	/eə/	where	/weə/
19.	/aɪ/	my	/maɪ/
20.	/aʊ/	how	/haʊ/

NB - phoneme 6 represents the commonest sound in English. This sound is **always** weak - it can never be stressed! It is called the 'schwa'. The **least** common sound is phoneme 15 /ʊə/. Europe /ˈjʊərəp/.

Voiced and Unvoiced Consonants

Consonants are either **voiced** or **unvoiced**. In the chart below, voiced consonants are underlined.

pen P	big <u>b</u>	tea t	do <u>d</u>	child tʃ	germ <u>dʒ</u>	cat k	go <u>g</u>
four f	very <u>v</u>	thanks θ	the <u>ð</u>	son s	zoo <u>z</u>	she ʃ	vision <u>ʒ</u>
my <u>m</u>	near <u>n</u>	English <u>ŋ</u>	happy h	live <u>l</u>	red <u>r</u>	want <u>w</u>	yes <u>j</u>

Touch your throat with your hand (or cover your ears with your hands). When you say a **voiced consonant**, for example /**dʒ**/, you can feel your vocal chords making the sound, but when you say an **unvoiced consonant**, /**tʃ**/, you cannot feel your vocal chords.

Whether a consonant is voiced or unvoiced sometimes effects the sound of a consonant that follows it.

The IPA in use

Here are the words of a popular song written phonetically.

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,
ju: a: mai `sʌnʃaɪn maɪ `əʊnli `sʌnʃaɪn

You make me happy when skies are grey,
ju: meɪk mi: `hæpi wen skaɪz a: greɪ

You'll never know, dear, how much I love you,
ju:l `nevə nəʊ diə haʊ mʌtʃ aɪ lʌv ju:

Please don't take my sunshine away.
pli:z dəʊnt teɪk maɪ `sʌnʃaɪn ə`wei

Practise. Try writing the following words using the IPA.

teacher	push
Japan	book
Vietnam	violin
singing	rich
song	cheap
mother	think
children	example

These words are written phonetically. What are they?

/fʊ:z/	/dʒu:s/
/li:k/	/laɪk/
/lʌk/	/`ʌndə/
/θɪk/	/pa:st/
/wɜ:d/	/`ju:ʒjʊəli/
/ðəʊz/	/klaʊn/
/`weɪtɪŋ/	/`aktjʊəli/

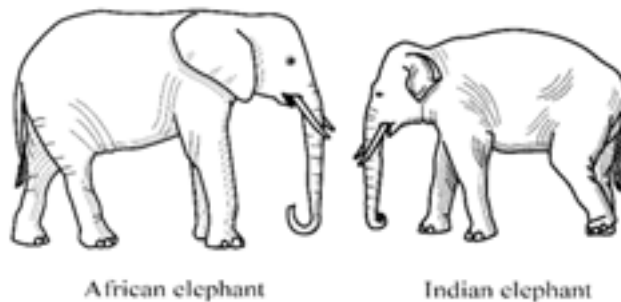
The IPA in use

Below is a dictionary definition of the word 'elephant'. A good dictionary will give the phonetic version also. Notice there are two ways of pronouncing it, and the stress is on the first syllable.

elephant /'eləfənt/ /'elifənt/
noun (pl. same or **-phants** /'eləfənts/)

1 a heavy plant-eating mammal with a prehensile trunk, long curved ivory tusks, and large ears, native to Africa and southern Asia. It is the largest living land animal.

ORIGIN Middle English : from Old French **elefant**, via Latin from Greek **elephas**, **elephant-** 'ivory, elephant.'



The IPA tells the student where the **stress** comes in the word. The small mark like a comma before the first 'e' (/ ' e . . . /) tells you that the stress is on the syllable that follows it.

Finally, sometimes you will see (r) at the end of a word such as 'water' or 'engineer':

/'wɔ:tə(r)/

/endʒɪ'nɪə(r)/

This means that the letter 'r' is only pronounced if that word is followed by another word that begins with a **vowel**. In this case, the '-r' joins up (links) with that vowel. If it is followed by a word that begins with a **consonant**, or if it comes at the end of a sentence, the (r) is **not** pronounced.

The lake was full of water.

The 'r' is **not** pronounced.

The water in the lake . . .

The 'r' **is** pronounced because it joins up with the 'i' of 'in'.
(This is called **linking**)