ONE HUNDRED

MOST COMMONLY MISPRONOUNCED

ENGLISH WORDS

Jakub Marian
www.jakubmarian.com

M

One Hundred Most Commonly Mispronounced English Words

by

Jakub Marian

Second Edition, March 2015

BEFORE YOU START READING

If you have found this book freely available on the Internet (from an illegal source), please consider obtaining a legal version at

http://jakubmarian.com/hundred-words/

You can get the most up-to-date legal version of the book either in the author's English Bundle or for free with subscription to his educational mailing list.

*If you find any **error** in the book, be it a factual or grammatical error, a typo, or a formatting issue, please send me an email to*

errors@jakubmarian.com

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS BOOK

This little booklet is based on my much larger book called *Improve your English pronunciation and learn over 500 commonly mispronounced words* which, apart from hundreds of additional words, describes also typical error patterns in English and contains an introduction to English phonology (which will help you read English words correctly in general).

I have selected **100 words** from the original book that I consider to be the most important ones and compiled them here in alphabetical order so that my readers can easily review them. This book also utilizes a smaller page size and is better suited for reading on e-book reading devices.

Pronunciation is denoted using a simplified version of IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet; the notation used in the aforementioned book is a bit more sophisticated). If you can't read IPA yet, don't worry; pronunciation is written also in a pseudo-English notation which will be explained before you start reading the list. If you want to learn more about the IPA, there is an *appendix explaining all IPA symbols* at the very end of the book.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE NOTATION

In order to be able to read the pseudo-English notation used here, you will have to remember just three IPA characters; the rest should be pronounced as you would intuitively pronounce it as an English word. The characters you have to remember are:

[ə] is pronounced as "a" in "a book" (i.e. as the indefinite article). It is a neutral sound, as if you were just releasing air through your vocal chords. If you sometimes think that there's an "ə" used in a place where you would expect "i" as in "pit" (or conversely), don't worry; these two sounds are often interchangeable.

[æ] is a sound approximately between "a" in "father" and "e" in "bed". The symbol is used to remind you that English "a" (as in "cat" = "kæt", "bad" = "bæd", "sad" = "sæd" etc.) is pronounced somewhat differently than you are used from your mother tongue.

[ʌ] is the sound of "u" in "but" (bʌt) and "o" in "come" (kʌm).

There are also a few groups of letters used consistently in the pseudo-English notation, but don't worry about them too much; you will remember them naturally as you start reading the list and *if*

you skip to the right now, you will probably do just fine.

In case you are interested: "*aw*" is pronounced as in "l<u>aw</u>", "*oo*" as in "c<u>oo</u>l", "*oo*" (italicised) as in "g<u>oo</u>d" (the same as "u" in "put"), "*ee*" (italicised) is used to denote the same sound as in "s<u>ee</u>" but short, and "*oh*" is used to denote [oʊ] which is how Americans pronounce "oh"; in British English, "oh" is pronounced as "əu".

The pseudo-English notation uses dashes to divide each word into simpler parts, for example "police" = "pə-**lees**". The stressed part is bold. These parts often correspond to the syllables of the word, but they do not if this could lead to a wrong pronunciation, so don't pronounce the dashes as any kind of pause. For example "recipe" is denoted as "**res**-ip-*ee*", although the syllables are in fact "res-i-pee", but this would mislead some people to pronounce the "i" as "aay".

If the American pronunciation differs from the British one, the one just explained is marked by the symbol ᴜᴋ or ᴜs after the given pronunciation.

THE LIST

There is not much more to say; I hope you will enjoy the process of reading and learning something new.

ability [əˈbɪləti] (ə-**bil**-ə-t*ee*); even though an ability is something you are **able** [ˈeɪbl] (**ey**-bl) to do, there's no "ey" at the beginning of "ability".

albeit [ɔːlˈbiːɪt] (*aw'l*-bee-it); this fairly formal word, meaning "although", is not used much in speech, but is still quite common in literature. Once you remember that it is actually a combination of three words "all be it", you will no longer have any problem with its correct pronunciation.

alien [ˈeɪliən] (**ei**-li-ən); a lion would certainly be an unwelcome alien at your home, but don't pronounce them the same. Just remember that an alien is not your **ally** [ˈælaɪ] (**æ**-laay).

angel [ˈeɪndʒəl] (**eyn**-dzhəl); unlike many other words beginning with "ang-", "angel" is pronounced with [eɪndʒ] (eyndzh) at the beginning. Nevertheless, a derived word **angelic** [æn

ˈdʒelɪk] (æn-**dzhe**-lik) is stressed on the second syllable and the vowels are pronounced differently.

Arkansas [ˈɑːkənˌsɔː] (**aak**-ən-s*aw*) UK, [ˈɑːrkənˌsɔː] (**aark**-ən-s*aw*) US; the name of one of the US states sounds like a symbol for a new religious movement: "ark and saw". However, this is how it is really pronounced.

ballet [ˈbæleɪ] (**bæ**-lei) UK, [bæˈleɪ] (bæ-**lei**) US; somewhat surprisingly, the final "t" remains silent in English.

beige [beɪʒ] (**beyzh**); this word is of French origin and inherits its French pronunciation. The "g" is pronounced the same as in "massage".

bomb [bom] (**bom**) UK, [bɑːm] (**baam**) US; the "b" in "mb" in English is usually silent. This word is perhaps even more confusing than the others in that it also exists in most other languages in the same written form but with the "b" pronounced. The same pronunciation is used also for **bombing** [ˈbomɪŋ] (**bom**-ing) UK, [ˈbɑːmɪŋ] (**baam**-ing) US.

bull [bʊl] (**bool**, with short "u"); some people pronounce the "u" wrongly as [ʌ], as in "cut", but it is the same "u" as in "put".

bullet [ˈbʊlɪt] (**boo**-lit, with short "u"); as in the previous case, "u" is pronounced as [ʊ] (**oo**).

bury [ˈberi] (**ber**-ri); a **burial** [ˈberiəl] (**ber**-ri-əl) is a sad and important event. Don't spoil it by pronouncing it wrong. It is pronounced exactly the same as "berry" (i.e. there is no "uh" or "ʌ" sound).

caffeine [ˈkæfiːn] (**kæ**-feen) is, after all, in coffee, so it would be more logical to call it "coffeen", wouldn't it? As a compromise between the two, at least "ei" is pronounced as "ee".

calm [kɑːm] (**kaam**); English doesn't seem to like the combination "alm", so the "l" remains silent in most dialects (however, there are some American ones in which it is pronounced).

change [tʃeɪndʒ] (**tcheyndzh**); the word is pronounced with "ey", not with "æ" or "e".

chaos [ˈkeɪɒs] (**kei**-oss) UK, [ˈkheɪɑːs] (**kei**-aas) US;
the pronunciation of this word is actually quite
regular, but people tend to pronounce it as the
same word in their own language, which usually
differs from its English pronunciation.

chic [ʃiːk] (**sheek**); what is chic is fashionable or el-
egant. The word is borrowed from French and
retains the original pronunciation.

climb [klaɪm] (**klaaym**); as in "bomb", the "b" in
"mb" is silent. This is true also for "climbing"
[ˈklaɪmɪŋ] (**klaay**-ming), "climbed" [ˈklaɪmd]
(klaaymd), and "climber" [ˈklaɪmə] (**klaay**-mə) UK,
[ˈklaɪmər] (**klaay**-mr) US.

colonel [ˈkəːnl] (**kə'ə**-nl) UK, [ˈkərnl] (**kər**-nl) US; is
there a kernel inside a colonel (a military of-
ficer)? Well, at least in pronunciation, there is
(they are pronounced the same).

column [ˈkoləm] (**koll**-əm) UK, [ˈkɑːləm] (**kaal**-əm)
US; whether it is a column of text or a column in
architecture, the pronunciation still retains some
influence of its French origin. It is **not** [ʌ] as in
"**colour**", and there is also no [juː] (**yoo**) as in
volume.

comb [kəʊm] (**kəum**) UK, [koʊm] (**koh'm**) US; the toothed device used for styling hair is pronounced without the "b" at the end. Remember: the "m" already looks like a comb, so no "b" is needed.

comfortable [ˈkʌmfətəbl] (**kʌm**-fə-tə-bl) UK, in the US also [ˈkʌmftəbl] (**kʌm**-ftə-bl); if you "come for a table" to a furniture shop, it will hopefully be comfortable, although it doesn't rhyme with it.

company [ˈkʌmpəni] (**kʌm**-pə-n*ee*); a company is a group of people who in a sense "come" together, and the "com" in "company" is pronounced exactly the same as in "come". The same is true for **accompany** [əˈkʌmpəni] (ə-**kʌm**-pə-n*ee*).

(of) course [kɔːs] (**kaw's**) UK, [kɔːrs] (**kaw'rs**) or [koʊrs] (**koh'rs**) US; although the word is of French origin, the "ou" is not pronounced as [uː] (oo) as is common in French words.

court [kɔːt] (**kaw't**) [kɔːrt] (**kaw'rt**); hopefully you will never have to deal with a court, but if you do, remember to pronounce it with "aw", not with "oo".

cupboard [ˈkʌbəd] (**kʌ**-bəd) UK, [ˈkʌbərd] (**kʌ**-brd) US is indeed derived from the words "cup" and "board"; nonetheless, the "board" in it is pronounced with [ə] and "p" is not pronounced at all.

debris [ˈdebriː] (**deb**-ree) UK, [dəˈbriː] (də-**bree**) US; this word retained its original French pronunciation, so the final "s" is silent.

debt [det] (**det**); a word that has become abundant in media after the recent financial **crisis** [ˈkraɪsɪs] (**kraay**-sis). If you pronounce the "b", people will likely understand it as "dipped".

despicable [dɪˈspɪkəbl] (dis-**pik**-ə-bl), rarely also [ˈdespɪkəbl] (**des**-pik-ə-bl); when you despise [dɪˈspaɪz] (dis-**paayz**) something, you find it "despicable", which is pronounced with [k] for some reason. The word "despisable" [dɪˈspaɪzəbl] (dis-**paay**-zə-bl) (spelled with an "s") theoretically exists in some dictionaries, but no-one really uses it in practice.

dessert [dɪˈzəːt] (di-**zə'ət**), [dɪˈzərt] (di-**zərt**) is a sweet course that concludes the meal. Don't con-

fuse it with **desert** [ˈdezət] (**de**-zət) UK, [ˈdezərt] (**de**-zrt) US which is a large area of dry land.

dove [dʌv] (**dʌv**); the bird of the pigeon family is often used as a symbol of love, perhaps because the words are so similar. However, the word "dove" is becoming increasingly widespread as the past tense of "dive" (whose standard form is "dived"), and in this sense it is pronounced [dəʊv] (**dəuv**) UK, [doʊv] (**doh'v**) US.

Edinburgh [ˈedɪnbərə] (**ed**-in-bə-rə) or [ˈedɪnbrə] (**ed**-in-brə) UK, [ˈedənbʌrə] (**ed**-ən-bʌ-rə) or [ˈedənbərə] (**ed**-ən-bə-rə) US; the name of the capital of Scotland is known well enough to slip into many other languages in an almost unchanged written form, but its correct counter-intuitive pronunciation is usually known only to native speakers.

elite [ɪˈliːt] (ih-**leet**), sometimes also [eɪˈliːt] (ey-**leet**); elite people are certainly not a "lite version" of the population. Don't rhyme them with it.

epitome [ɪˈpɪtəmi] (ih-**pit**-ə-m*ee*); this somewhat less common word means "someone who is a prototypical example of a class of people". Al-

though you could fill a tome with a list of epitomes, you cannot rhyme it with them.

exercise [ˈeksəsaɪz] (**ek**-sə-saayz) UK, [ˈeksərsaɪz] (**ek**-sr-saayz) US; many doctors will discourage you from eating too many eggs if you want to lead a healthy lifestyle. Whether they are right or not is a matter of discussion, but one thing is for sure: don't mix eggs and (the word) "exercise"; after all, it's "exercise" not "eggsercise".

finale [fɪˈnɑːli] (fin-**aa**-lee) UK, [fɪˈnæli] (fin-**æ**-lee) US is the last part of a show or a piece of music. And the only English word in which "ale" at the end is pronounced with "lee".

front [frʌnt] (**frʌnt**); is pronounced with [ʌ], i.e. "ron" in it **doesn't** sound like the name "Ron". The same is true for "confront" [kənˈfrʌnt] (kən-**frʌnt**).

fruit [fruːt] (**froot**); simply ignore the "i". The word is pronounced exactly as if it were written "froot".

fuchsia [ˈfjuːʃə] (**fyoo**-shə) is a small bush with flowers of a characteristic colour which is also referred to as "fuchsia".

garage is pronounced in the UK either as [ˈgærɑːʒ] (**gæ**-raazh) or [ˈgærɪdʒ] (**gæ**-ridzh), in the US it is usually [gəˈrɑːʒ] (gə-**raazh**).

gauge [geɪdʒ] (**geydzh**); this word is especially useful to guitarists who speak about string gauges (i.e. how thick they are). It is pronounced as if the "u" were not there.

genre [ˈʒonrə] (**zhon**-rə) UK, [ˈʒɑːnər] (**zhaa**-nr) US; a very French word indeed. It is even pronounced with a nasal vowel in some variations of British English, i.e. with squeezing of the back of one's throat instead of saying [n].

Greenwich [ˈgrenɪtʃ] (**gren**-itch) or [ˈgrɪnɪdʒ] (**grin**-idzh); you probably know this word from the Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) standard. Just remember that there is no green witch in Greenwich.

grind [graɪnd] (**graaynd**); there are only 4 English words that end with "rind": rind, grind, regrind,

and tamarind. Tamarind is a tree, and it is the only one of those in which "rind" is pronounced as one would expect: [rɪnd]. In the other three, it is pronounced as [raɪnd] (**raaynd**). ("Rind" is the outer skin of some types of fruit, for example "lemon rind".)

height [haɪt] (**haayt**); the pronunciation is as if it were written "hight". The "e" is there just to confuse foreigners.

heir [eə] (**eə**) ᴜᴋ, [er] (**er**) ᴜꜱ; a person who inherits something from someone else. It comes from Old French, so the "h" remains silent; it sounds exactly the same as "air" and "ere" (meaning "before long").

hotel [həʊˈtel] (həu-**tel**) ᴜᴋ, [hoʊˈtel] (h*oh*-**tel**) ᴜꜱ; "ho ho *ho, tell* me why you are not at home" is something Santa Claus could ask you if you stayed in a hotel over Christmas. It is most certainly not the reason why it is called "hotel", but it will hopefully help you remember that the stress is actually on the second syllable (there is not [tl] at the end).

hour [ˈaʊə] (*aa*u-ə) UK, [ˈaʊər] (*aa*u-rr) US (both the same as "our"); the "h" at the beginning is silent, as it should be also in the name of the letter **H** [eɪdʒ] (**eydzh**). Some native speakers started to pronounce H as "heydzh" lately, but such pronunciation is regarded as uneducated by many.

houses [ˈhaʊzɪz] (**h*aa*uziz**); the singular form, house, is pronounced with [s] at the end: [haʊs] (h*aa*us). The plural of it, however, is pronounced with [z].

hyperbole [haɪˈpəːbəli] (haay-**pə'ə**-bə-l*ee*) UK, [haɪˈpərbəli] US (haay-**pər**-bə-l*ee*); don't confuse this word with a hyperbola, a geometric shape. Hyperbole is a form of exaggeration, and it doesn't rhyme with a bowl.

infamous [ˈɪnfəməs] (**in**-fə-məs); although the word is just "famous" with the prefix "in-" stuck in the front, it is not pronounced so.

Ireland [ˈaɪələnd] (**aay**-ə-lənd) UK, [ˈaɪərlənd] (**aay**-r-lənd) US; ironically, "**ire**", pronounced [ˈaɪə] (**aay**-ə) UK, [ˈaɪər] (**aay**-r) US, is a word meaning "anger" or "wrath". However, the "Ire" in "Ire-

land" comes from "Ériu", a mythological Irish being.

iron [ˈaɪən] (**aay**-ən) UK, [ˈaɪərn] (**aay**-rn) US; this word is mispronounced by almost 100% of beginning English learners who pronounce it as **aay**-rən or **aay**-ron, but none of these pronunciations is correct. The same is true also for "ironed" [ˈaɪənd] (**aay**-ənd) UK, [ˈaɪərnd] (**aay**-rn'd) US and "ironing" [ˈaɪənɪŋ] (**aay**-ə-ning) UK, [ˈaɪərnɪŋ] (**aay**-ər-ning) US.

island [ˈaɪlənd] (**aay**-lənd) was written "iland" before the 16th century. Although island indeed is land surrounded by water, the word is not written so because it "is land", but because there is an etymologically unrelated word **isle** [aɪl] (pronounced the same as "I'll") which also means "island", and so people during the 16th century thought it would be fun to insert "s" into the spelling of "iland" as well.

laugh [lɑːf] (**laaf**) UK, [læf] (**læf**) US; the letter combination "augh" is usually pronounced [ɔː] (aw), as in "taught", "caught", "naught", but not here.

launch [lɔːntʃ] (**law'ntch**); as in most English words, "au" here is pronounced as [ɔː] (**aw**). Don't confuse the word with **lunch** [lʌntʃ] (**lʌntch**); you can launch a **rocket** [ˈrokɪt] (**rokk**-it) UK, [ˈrɑːkɪt] (**raa**-kit) US and you can have a lunch with your friends, but hopefully not otherwise.

lettuce [ˈletɪs] (**let**-is) UK, [ˈleɾɪs] (**led**-is) US; remember that lettuce doesn't grow on a spruce; and it also doesn't rhyme with it.

lieutenant [lefˈtenənt] UK (lef-**te**-nənt), [luːˈtenənt] US (loo-**te**-nənt); the American pronunciation poses no problem here; just notice the British one.

lingerie [ˈlænʒəri] (**læn**-zhə-ree) UK, [ˌlɑːn(d)ʒəˈreɪ] (laan-(d)zhə-**rei**) or [ˈlɑn(d)ʒəri] (**laan**-(d)zhə-ree) US; in British English, pronunciation of this word remains close to the original French one; there are several other options in American English.

lozenge [ˈlozɪndʒ] (**lozz**-indzh) UK, [ˈlɑːzɪndʒ] (**laa**-zindzh) US; a diamond-like figure: ◊. The last "e" is silent and there is no "oh" in it.

maple [ˈmeɪpl] (**mei**-pl); you can make a map (mæp) out of its wood, you can eat an apple (æ-pl) with

its syrup, but don't pronounce it with [æ]. By the way, the word "**syrup**" is pronounced [ˈsɪrəp] (**si**-rəp), not "saay-rəp".

margarine [ˌmɑːdʒəˈriːn] (maa-dzhə-**reen**) UK, [ˈmɑːrdʒərɪn] (**maar**-dzhə-rin) US; in most dialects, the "g" is pronounced as [dʒ] (dzh) (perhaps it will help you to remember that margarine is also colloquially called "marge" [mɑːdʒ] (maadzh) in the UK). Also notice the difference in stress position between American and British English.

miscellaneous [ˌmɪsəˈleɪniəs] (mis-ə-**lei**-nee-əs); learners make miscellaneous mistakes; even the word "miscellaneous" is often one of them.

mischief [ˈmɪstʃɪf] (**mis**-tchif); mischief is a bad behaviour which does not cause serious harm. Don't pronounce it with "k". The adjective derived from it is **mischievous** [ˈmɪstʃɪvəs] (**mis**-tchiv-əs);

mishap [ˈmɪshæp] (**mis**-hæp); the word is mis-hap, meaning mis-happiness, i.e. misfortune or bad luck.

mortgage [ˈmɔːgɪdʒ] (**maw**-gidzh) UK, [ˈmɔːrgɪdʒ] (**maw'r**-gidzh) US; the "t" is silent, as it should be in the name of Lord Volde*mort* according to J.K.Rowling (although most Muggles who dare say the name pronounce the final t).

niche [niːʃ] (**neesh**) UK, [nɪtʃ] (**nitch**) US; this word, originally meaning a shallow recess or simply a nice place or position, is also often used to mean a particular narrow field of interest (especially in business). Its pronunciation can be somewhat unexpected.

oasis [əʊˈeɪsɪs] (əu-**ey**-sis) UK, [oʊˈeɪsɪs] (*oh*-**ey**-sis) US; imagine you are on a desert with a friend named Asis and you are almost dying of thirst. When you cannot go any further, you say "oh, Asis…" after which your friend starts running forward in a burst of happiness. To solve the puzzle, find out why. The plural of "oasis" is "oases" [əʊˈeɪsiːz] (əu-**ey**-seez) UK, [oʊˈeɪsiːz] (*oh*-**ey**-seez) US.

onion [ˈʌnjən] (**ʌn**-yən); one of a couple of words in which "o" is pronounced as [ʌ] (as in "come").

owe [əʊ] (**əu**) UK, [oʊ] (*oh*) US; if you remember that the phrase "I owe you" is often abbreviated IOU, it will help you remember that this word is pronounced just as the letter "o". The abbreviation has even become a noun meaning "a written promise to pay a debt" (you can give someone "an IOU").

owl [aʊl] (*aaul*); it may be a silly way, but if you remember that an owl looks like ʌ(OO)ʌ, it will perhaps help you remember that it is pronounced with something close to "ʌoo".

photograph [ˈfəʊtəgrɑːf] (**fəu**-tə-graaf) UK, [ˈfoʊtə-græf] (**foh**-tə-græf) US; the word is synonymous to a photo; it is not the person who takes the photo as in many other languages. The person is a **photographer** [fəˈtogrəfə] (fə-**togg**-rə-fə) UK, [fəˈtɑːgrəfər] (fə-**taag**-rə-fr) US; notice that the stress is now on the second syllable, whereas it was on the first syllable in "photograph". To make the confusion complete, the stress in the word **photographic** [ˌfəʊtəˈgræfɪk] (fəu-tə-**græf**-ik) UK, [ˌfoʊtəˈgræfɪk] (foh-tə-**græf**-ik) US is on the third syllable.

pour [pɔ:] (**p**aw) UK, [pɔ:r] (**p**aw'r) or [poʊr] (**p**oh'r) US; although the word looks like having a French origin and "ou" in French words is usually pronounced [u:], e.g. route [ru:t] (root), in this case the origin is not French, and so is not the pronunciation. On the other hand, the word "poor" can be pronounced either with [ʊ] (oo) or with [ɔ:] (aw) (both are equally valid). If you use the former, you can remember not to use the "poor" pronunciation for "pour".

pudding [ˈpʊdɪŋ] (**p**oo-ding, with short "u"); if you drop a bowl of pudding, it forms a puddle [pʌdl], but when it is still in the bowl, it is, well, with "p**oo**".

purchase [ˈpə:tʃəs] (**p**ə'ə-tchəs) UK, [ˈpərtʃəs] (**p**ər-tchəs) US; it is true that many people literally "chase discounts" when purchasing goods, but there is no "chase" in the pronunciation of "purchase".

pyramid [ˈpɪrəmɪd] (**p**ir-ə-mid); the "pyr" in the word "pyramid" has nothing to do with the prefix "pyro-" which comes from Greek and is used in the word **pyromania** [ˌpaɪrəʊˈmeɪniə] (paay-

rəu-**mei**-n*ee*-ə) UK, [ˌpaɪroʊˈmeɪniə] (paay-r*oh*-**mei**-n*ee*-ə) US.

queue [kjuː] (**kyoo**); if you want to pronounce this word correctly, just think of the Q at the beginning; "ueue" is not pronounced at all.

recipe [ˈresɪpi] (**res**-ip-*ee*); "cipe" in this case doesn't rhyme with "ripe"; it consists of two separate syllables.

salmon [ˈsæmən] (**sæ**-mən); there's something fishy about this word. Perhaps the pronunciation.

sandwich [ˈsænwɪtʃ] (**sæn**-witch) or [ˈsænwɪdʒ] (**sæn**-widzh); would you like to eat a sandwich with sand? If you wouldn't, don't pronounce the "d".

schedule [ˈʃedjuːl] (**shed**-yool) UK, [ˈskedʒuːl] (**skedzh**-ool) US; I am not sure which of the two variants is more confusing. Anyway, if you learn a certain dialect, you should stick to the pronunciation used in that dialect.

schizophrenia [ˌskɪtsəˈfriːniə] (skits-ə-**free**-ni-ə); a German heart will skip a beat when seeing this word; not just because schizophrenia was originally described and researched by German scientists, but also because its pronunciation resembles to a certain degree the original German one. It is one of very few English words containing the "ts" sound where "t" and "s" are pronounced almost simultaneously.

since [sɪns] (**sins**); some people, misled by the "e" at the end, pronounce this word as "**saayns**".

subtle [ˈsʌtl] (**sʌ**-tl) UK, [ˈsʌɾl] (**sʌ**-dl) US; "btle" simply doesn't sound good. Don't pronounce the "b".

suit [suːt] (**soot**), in the UK also [sjuːt] (**syoot**); as in the case of "fruit", the "i" is silent.

suite [swiːt] (**sweet**); meaning a set of rooms (in a hotel), a set of matching pieces of furniture, a certain type of musical composition, or a set of related computer programs, this word is pronounced exactly the same as "sweet".

surface [ˈsəːfɪs] (**səˈə**-fis) [ˈsərfɪs] (**sər**-fis); you can wipe your face using the surface of your towel, but you cannot rhyme it with it.

sweat [swet] (**swet**); have you ever tasted sweat? It's not exactly sweet. Don't pronounce it this way.

sword [sɔːd] (**saw'd**) UK, [sɔːrd] (**saw'rd**) US; the "w" is silent, and the word is pronounced as if it were written "sord". However, it is not true that in "sw" the "w" would always be silent; for example "**swan**" is pronounced [swon] (**swonn**) UK, [swɑːn] (**swaan**) US.

target [ˈtɑːgɪt] (**taag**-it) UK, [ˈtɑːrgɪt] (**taarg**-it) US; it would certainly be possible to "get some tar" in order to mark a target. Although "target" is etymologically related neither to "tar" nor to "get", it is a way to remember that the "g" is as in "get", not as "j" in "jet".

tear; this word may cause some confusion, because it has two completely unrelated meanings. When it denotes a water drop coming out of someone's eye, it's pronounced [tɪə] (**ti'ə**) UK or [tɪr] US (**tir**). When it denotes the process of "ripping" some-

thing, it is pronounced [teə] (**teə**) ᴜᴋ or [ter] (**ter**) ᴜꜱ.

ton [tʌn] (tʌn); don't let your mother tongue mislead you; there is really an [ʌ], and so is in "**son**" and "**won**". What may be even more confusing than the pronunciation is the fact that "ton" refers to the unit used in the US that is defined as 1 ton = 2,000 pounds = 907 kg. It can also refer to the ton used in the UK where 1 ton = 2,240 pounds = 1,016 kg, but which is no longer officially used (since 1985). If you want to refer to the so called "**metric ton**", the word you are looking for is pronounced the same but is spelled "tonne", i.e. 1 tonne = 1000 kg.

vegan [ˈviːgən] (**vee**-gən); the city of **Las Vegas** [ˈlɑːs ˈveɪgəs] (**laas vei**-gəs) is considered to be a place of indulgence—a quality despised by vegans. Don't pronounce the "veg" in the two words the same.

village [ˈvɪlɪdʒ] (**vil**-idzh); it is not called so because its inhabitants are of higher age on average; in fact, there is no connection between the words "village" and "age" whatsoever, and there is also none in the pronunciation. The same applies to a

villager [ˈvɪlɪdʒə] (**vil**-idzh-ə) UK, [ˈvɪlɪdʒər] (**vil**-idzh-rr) US.

vinegar [ˈvɪnɪgə] (**vin**-ig-ə) UK, [ˈvɪnɪgər] (**vin**-ig-rr) US is used to make food more **sour** [ˈsaʊə] (**saau**-ə) UK, [ˈsaʊər] (**saau**-rr) US. Although the word is related to **vine** [vaɪn] (vaayn), it is not pronounced so. And when we are at it, don't confuse pronunciation of "vine" and "wine"; a "vine" is a plant on which grapes grow and is pronounced with "v" at the beginning (as in "very"), and "wine" is the liquid you can make out of the grapes and is pronounced with "w" at the beginning (as in "wow").

pear [peə] (**peə**) UK, [per] (**per**) US; the fruit, as well as **bear**, the animal, and **wear**—all of them are pronounced with the [e] sound. In other words, if you've heard a story about someone's grandpa being attacked by a beer while eating his peer, you can be pretty sure the storyteller hadn't read this book.

wolf [wʊlf] (**woolf**); this is one of a few words in which a single "o" is pronounced as [ʊ] (as "oo" in "good"). Other examples include **woman** [ˈwʊmən] (**woo**-mən), and similar words **womb**

[wu:m] (**woom**), the organ in which a child before birth is, and **tomb** [tu:m] (**toom**), a place in which remains of dead people are stored. "**Tombstone**" is pronounced "**toom**-stone".

womb [wu:m] (**woom**), **tomb** [tu:m] (**toom**); people tend to pronounce "o" as in "lot". Think about "tomb" as about "to"+"mb". "Mb" may sound nice in Swahili, but not so much in English, so the "b" is silent. The same applies to all other words in which "m" and "b" belong to the same syllable, such as **numb** [nʌm] (**nʌm**) and **plumb** [plʌm] (**plʌm**). The "b" is silent even in "number" when it means "more numb" and in "plumber".

Xerox [ˈzɪəroks] (**zi**-ə-roks) UK, [ˈzɪrɑːks] (**zi**-raaks) US; perhaps as a great disappointment to all fans of a dubbed version of Xena: Warrior Princess comes the fact that "x" at the beginning of any word is not pronounced as [ks] but as [z].

Yosemite [joʊˈsemɪtiː] (yəu-**sem**-it-ee) UK, [joʊ ˈsemɪriː] (y*oh*-**sem**-id-ee) US; Yosemite National Park is well known around the Globe. Although there certainly is at least one mite somewhere in the park, there is none in the name.

zealot [ˈzelət] (**zel**-ət) is a person who is very enthusiastic about something, i.e. a person having a great amount of **zeal** (a great energy or enthusiasm) which is, surprisingly, pronounced [ziːl] (zeel).

You have finished reading the whole list! I hope you enjoyed it. You will find several hundred more words and many other tips in my book entitled *Improve your English pronunciation and learn over 500 commonly mispronounced words* (which is available as a paperback, for Kindle, or as a PDF file). A lot of freely available articles can be found on my website:

www.jakubmarian.com

You can also follow me on

Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/JakubMarianOfficial

Google+: http://google.com/+JakubMarian

Mailing list: http://jakubmarian.com/mailing-list/

Should you find any error in the book, or if you have any question, please, send me an email to

errors@jakubmarian.com

Appendix: IPA

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) has become standard when denoting English pronunciation, and proper knowledge of it is essential for any learner who wants to further improve his or her pronunciation. It is based on the Latin alphabet (the standard English alphabet); each letter of the alphabet is assigned a particular sound, and many other characters (e.g. ʃ, ʒ, ɔ) are added to the alphabet in order to be able to, theoretically, denote any sound that occurs in any language in the world to quite a high degree of precision.

Unlike some other phonetic alphabets, there is no way to recognize what exact sound an IPA symbol represents just from its symbol. On the other hand, the symbols are usually chosen so that similar symbols denote similar sounds, so, for example, [ɔ] sounds similar to "o", which helps you associate the symbol with the correct pronunciation. We shall take a look only at the symbols used to denote English pronunciation.

Remark: When I write "most languages", I mean "most languages that use the Latin alphabet".

VOWELS

We will take a look at the symbols for vowels first because they usually cause more problems:

[X:] long vowel

When the symbol ":" follows a vowel symbol, it means that the vowel is pronounced longer.

[ˈXY] stressed syllable

This symbol, which looks similar to an apostrophe, means that the following syllable is stressed (it is pronounced louder).

[ˌXY] secondary stress

This symbol, which looks similar to a comma, is basically the same as the above, only the stress is weaker.

[æ] cat, bad, sad, sand, land, hand

Among all the English vowels, the greatest problem for most learners poses "æ". It is somewhere in between of "a" in "father" and "e" in "bed". It is usually pronounced slightly longer and closer to "e" in "bed" in American English, whereas it is of-

ten shorter and closer to "a" in "father" in British English.

[ɑ:] bra, calm, palm, f<u>a</u>ther, start, dark

This vowel is the closest one to the sound of the letter "a" in many other languages and as such is also denoted [a] in some dictionaries. There is no reliable general rule which would tell you when the letter "a" is pronounced as [ɑ:] instead of [æ].

[ɒ] (o) god, pot, top, spot (British English only)

This vowel is quite similar to the sound of "o" many other languages (and we also denote it as [o] in this book). Americans don't use this vowel and say [ɑ:] instead.

[ʌ] but, cut, gun, come, some, glove

This vowel very similar to [ɑ:], but it's never pronounced long in English.

[ɛ] (e) get, bed, set, sell, fell, men

This vowel is the closest one to the sound of the letter "e" in most other languages and is sometimes denoted by [e] in dictionaries (and in this book) for simplicity.

[ɪ] pit, bin, fill, will, vill<u>a</u>ge, bull<u>e</u>t

If you find [ə] (see below) in a dictionary in a word for which you are almost sure that [ɪ] is correct (or conversely), don't worry; in most cases the two possibilities are interchangeable and usage can vary even among different occurrences of the same word pronounced by the same speaker.

[i], [iː] he, she, see, keep, famil<u>y</u>, hyperbol<u>e</u>

This is just a softer [ɪ]. It is usually long when it is in a stressed syllable and short when it is not, but not necessarily.

[ɔː] saw, straw, dawn, fall, call, wall

A similar sound to the British [ɒ], but somewhat "darker".

[ʊ] put, full, good, wood, could, would

The sound most similar to the sound of "u" in most other languages.

[uː] you, who, chew, shoe, cool, tool

[ʊ] would sound strange if it were long, so when there is a long "u" sound in English, it is pronounced somewhat "darker" than [ʊ].

[ə] a, syll<u>a</u>ble, mom<u>e</u>nt, terr<u>i</u>ble, fel<u>o</u>ny, papyr<u>u</u>s

Most learners of English learn very fast how to pronounce "a" when it means an indefinite article (such as in "a book"), and this is exactly the pronunciation of [ə].

Many dictionaries (and this book) use the notation [ᵊ] (i.e. "ə" in the superscript) or [(ə)] to denote [ə] that may be pronounced but doesn't have to be. For example "visible" is pronounced [ˈvɪzɪbᵊl] which means that some speakers would pronounce it as [ˈvɪzɪbəl] and others as [ˈvɪzɪbl]. The two pronunciations are equally acceptable, and even one speaker could use either of them in different situations.

[ɚ], [ər] mist<u>er</u>, stand<u>ard</u>, edit<u>or</u> (American English only)

This vowel is formed by saying [ə] and at the same time putting your tongue to the position as if you were saying the English "r" (listen to the recordings). It is denoted [ər] in some dictionaries (and in this book), which is not entirely precise; it is more like a long "r". In all cases where it is used (most notably "-er" at the end of a word), a Brit would say just [ə].

[ɜː] (əː), [ɝ:] (əːr) curve, purge, herd, serve, bird

Don't confuse the symbol with [ɛ]. [ɜː] is pronounced the same as [əː] in some dialects while it is slightly "darker" in others, and some dictionaries don't use it at all and write simply [əː] (and we do to in this book). The difference between [ɜː] and [ɝ:] is the same as between [ə] and [ɚ]. The former is used chiefly in British English, the latter chiefly in American English (listen to the recordings). Dictionaries which denote [ɜː] as [əː] would denote [ɝ:] as [əːr], [ər] or [ɚ:].

CONSONANTS

A few technical terms: **voiced consonants** are those in which the vocal chords are active while pronouncing them (e.g. b, v, z, d, g), and **unvoiced consonants** are the others (e.g. p, s, t, k, sh).

[b] buy, bet, big, hub, knob, superb

This sound exists in most languages and is also usually denoted by the letter "b". One thing to pay attention to is that it doesn't become "p" when it is at the end of a word (unless it follows an unvoiced consonant).

[d] do, deal, dust, odd, prod, cod

Also a common sound, denoted by "d" in most languages, including English. Again, it doesn't become "t" when it is at the end of a word (unless it follows an unvoiced consonant).

[ð] that, though, there, father, breathe

A common source of problems for English learners. It is pronounced as if you wanted to say "d" but only slightly touched the back of your teeth by your tongue instead. In particular, it is not pronounced as [d] or [dz].

[dʒ] jet, joke, giant, purge, huge, banjo

A sound approximately like [d] and [ʒ] (see below) pronounced at the same time.

[f] fast, fat, philosophy, off, stuff, cough

Again, a sound that usually causes little trouble, since it is present in most languages.

[g] go, get, grass, big, dog, fig

The sound similar to "k" but voiced, i.e. with an almost uninterrupted stream of sound coming out of your vocal chords.

[h] high, how, hot, somehow, ahead

Native speakers of French and Russian beware! This sound may require some practice. Try to make a neutral sound just by letting air flow through your vocal chords, and then try to "squeeze' the stream of air at the very bottom of your throat.

[j] you, yet, yawn, pure, cure, few

The symbol can be slightly confusing, especially for speakers of French and Spanish. In the IPA it represents what is usually written as "y" in English at the beginning of a syllable. Notice: in words like buy [baɪ] and hey [heɪ], the sound at the end is in fact not [j], but the vowel [ɪ] as a part of a diphthong.

[kʰ], [k] keep, cat, character, sock, bloc

When [k] is at the beginning of a stressed syllable, it is always aspirated (there is always a short "h" after it which is sometimes denoted by a superscript "h"). In many dialects, especially in British English, this aspiration can be heard almost for all occurrences of [k] (it doesn't matter by what letter it is represented (such as "k", "c", "ch"), only that there is [k] in pronunciation). If you say [k] in place where [kʰ] is expected, it can lead to a misunder-

standing; for example if you pronounce "call" just [kɔ:l] instead of [kʰɔ:l], some people will think that you said "gall" [gɔ:l]. It is, however, never aspirated after "s", e.g. in skin [skin], sky [skaɪ], skate [skeɪt].

Nevertheless, for simplicity, virtually all dictionaries write just [k] and suppose that the reader implicitly understands that it is in fact [kʰ].

[l], [ɫ] low, let, like, owl, cool, well

The sound [ɫ] is called "the dark l". Some dictionaries use [l] to denote pronunciation of the letter "l" that precedes a vowel and [ɫ] otherwise. However, there are some dialects in which an "l" is always dark while in others it is never dark, irrespective of its position. The difference is minor, and it is pointless to worry about it much.

[m] man, my, more, some, doom, seem

This sound is present in almost every language in the world and shouldn't pose any problem.

[n] no, new, nose, ban, soon, keen

Again, no problem here.

[ŋ] thing, long, sang, singer, longing

This sound is produced as if you wanted to say "n" but with the back of your tongue (the part with which you say [g]).

[pʰ], [p] pit, pale, poke, top, hip, cap

The very same same rules (in terms of aspiration) that hold for "k" hold also for "p". It is always aspirated when it is at the beginning of a stressed syllable and in many dialects also almost everywhere else, except after "s", e.g. spit [spɪt], speak [spiːk].

[r], [ɹ] red, rich, rake, boar, care, tour

The correct IPA symbol for the typical English "r" is [ɹ], unless you mean the rolled Scottish [r]. However, the vast majority of English dictionaries denote the sound by [r] (and this book follows this convention).

[s] sit, soap, same, boss, kiss, house

Most people have no problem with the sound (but don't confuse it with [θ]).

[ʃ] shy, shot, chef, posh, bush, douche

This sound is created by saying [s] but bending your tongue further to the upper palate.

[tʰ], [t] two, tall, tea, hot, bat, put

The very same rules about aspiration that hold for "k" and "p" hold also for "t", i.e. it is always aspirated when it is at the beginning of a stressed syllable (two, tall, tea) and in many dialects also almost everywhere else, except after "s" (e.g. step, still).

[θ] think, thigh, thesis, both, math, froth

[θ] is to [t] as [ð] is to [d]. It is pronounced like "t", but instead of putting your tongue on your upper palate, use it to gently touch your upper teeth.

[ɾ] letter, better, written (Am. En. only)

Where a Brit would say [tʰ], an American often says something that sounds like a fast touch of [d]. It is called "alveolar flap" and is usually represented by a double "t". However, many dictionaries ignore the distinction and denote it also by [t].

[tʃ] chat, China, choose, rich, catch, much

This sound sounds approximately like [t] and [ʃ] pronounced together.

[V] van, very, vile, stove, leave, save

This sound is the "v" sound of most languages (also represented by "w" in some, e.g. German and Polish).

[W] we, wow, wax, dwell, swine, twain

This sound must be distinguished from [v]; "wary" and "vary" don't sound the same.

[Z] zoo, xenon, zoom, is, has, booze

This sound usually causes few pronunciation problems.

[ʒ] genre, version, measure, massage

This sound is a softer version of [z]. Its relation to [z] is the same as that of [ʃ] to [s].

Now you have finished reading even the appendix! If you would like to learn more about the IPA and English pronunciation in general, see my book "Improve your English pronunciation and learn over 500 commonly mispronounced words".

Alphabetical Index