

L  
 ěl = /ɛl/

# Phonetic Symbols for Sounds

ă or /æ/ or ǒ  
 or /ɑ/ or ā or  
 /eɪ/ or ô or /ɔ/  
 or ä or /aː/  
 or ... = AaAa

The “sound building-blocks” of English *printing* or *writing* are represented by *alphabetic characters*—26 letters and certain letter combinations relevant to reading or spelling lessons. In *pronunciation* instruction, in contrast, *phonetic symbols* may stand for the sounds. These 40 to 48 *symbols for sounds* may look similar to or, less frequently, different from the 26 lower-case block-print letters of the roman alphabet.

In *Pronunciation Keys* of American school dictionaries—and in the *International Phonetic Alphabet* used in foreign-language learning, the following sound-symbols have the same shapes as roman letters; in the *IPA*, they appear /between slashes/.

b = /b/	d = /d/	f = /f/	g = /g/	h = /h/	k = /k/	l = /l/	m = /m/	n = /n/
p = /p/	r = /r/	s = /s/	t = /t/	v = /v/	w = /w/	y = /y/	z = /z/	

Some *IPA symbols* look different from the corresponding American-dictionary symbols representing the same sounds.

ɰr = /ð/	th = /θ/	dz = /ʒ/	sh = /ʃ/	j = /dʒ/	ch = /tʃ/	ng = /ŋ/
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The 16 or more *vowel sounds* of American English can be represented by roman-like symbols with *diacritical marks* (added markings like  $\checkmark$   $\hat{\ } \tilde{\ } \text{¨} \text{˘} \text{˙} \text{˚} \text{:}$  ) or other symbol combinations.

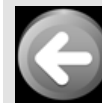
ă = /æ/	ě = /ɛ/	ĩ = /i/	ǒ = /ɑ/	ũ = /ʌ/ or /ə/	ȫ = /o/
ô = /ɔ/ and aː(r) = /ä/(r) or /ɑ/(r)		û(r) = /ɜ/(r) or /ə/(r)		ā = /eɪ/ or /eɪ/	
ē = /iː/ or /i/		ī = /aː/ or /aɪ/		ō = /oʊ/ or /ou/	
ū = /uː/ or u		ou = /aʊ/ or /aʊ/		oi = /ɔɪ/ or /ɔɪ/	

Here are a few ways to begin making use of sound-symbols:

1. **Contrast Phonetic Symbols & Letters.** Print characters on a board. At first, use only upper-case (capital) block alphabet letters, and put sound-symbols between slashes / /. Later, include other letter forms and sound-symbols from various systems. Learners identify each image as “an alphabet letter” or “a phonetic sound-symbol.”
2. **Use Symbol Cards.** Show flash cards of letters and phonetic symbols. (You might want to enlarge, reproduce, and/or cut apart those on pages 16 and 81-82 of this book.) Learners identify the characters as *letters* or *sounds*. Follow up with worksheets containing various kinds of images—like the *Maze* on the next page.

## Slow Down or Speed Up? Multi-Level Pointers

One way to emphasize the contrast between alphabet *letters* used for reading and spelling and the *sounds* they produce in speech is to introduce *phonetic symbols for sounds*—those in dictionary pronunciation keys or guides and/or the *IPA*.



Even so, it may *not* be advisable to challenge struggling

English learners with printed characters other than alphabet letters. Instead, those at low levels could be helped to acquire American English sounds with their “mind’s ears” only. *With or without* visuals (pictures and/or printed words for vocabulary items), careful listening and observation of the use of the speech organs can help beginners to imitate native-speaker modeling accurately—in person, online, with video and/or audio, etc.



On the other hand, more proficient or eager students may greatly *benefit* from contrasting the 26 alphabet letters of English (a language *without* a reliable phonemic orthography) with *phonetic symbols* that represent *sounds* in most languages. Before they attempt sight reading—or spelling items that follow any but the most common English phonics patterns, it may even help their *aural memory* or *pronunciation accuracy* to acquire new vocabulary through *phonetic symbols*.

