

# M

ëm = /ɛm/

# Simple (One-Letter)

# Vowel Sounds

Vowels  
aeiou

In all languages, *vowels* are sounds produced with (partially) open lips—without mouth parts touching. English has at least 16 distinct vowel *sounds* but only seven (7) vowel *letters*—*a, e, i, o, u*, and sometimes *w* or *y*—to spell them. They appear in various combinations, some even with silent consonants, as in *-ai-*, *-ay-*, *-ee-*, *-ie-*, *-oa-*, *-oo-*, *-ow-*, *-ue-*, *-igh-*, *-ough-*, etc. Because vowel-phonics patterns are so diverse, pre-readers and beginners often learn to recognize vowel spellings by *sight*, perhaps by memorizing items in “word families” (rimes).

In an analysis of vowel phonics, the “simple” (“lax” or “short”) vowels come first because they’re most often spelled by *one* vowel letter each—before one or more final consonants in one-syllable words. In the following gray boxes are the five *main* vowel letters. Dictionary (= IPA) symbols for the sounds they usually produce, numbered 1-5 for consistent reference, follow in black boxes. Then come word examples:

-a-		-e-		-i-		-o-		-u-	
1. ä = /æ/		2. ě = /ɛ/		3. ĩ = /ɪ/		4. ǒ = /ɑ/		5. ũ = /ʌ/	
bag	catch	bell	help	sink	miss	mop	chop	junk	rub
man	bad	men	wet	kid	thick	fox	fond	judge	dull

Simple vowels produce *single* sounds. Two other *single* vowel sounds are (6.) ǒ = /ʊ/ as in *good* or *put*, and (7.) ô = /ɔ/, as in *salt*, *golf*, *haul*, \**raw*\*. The two simple vowels before *-r* are (7r.) a: = /ä/, usually spelled *a* as in *star*; and (8r.) û = /ɜ/, spelled in many ways, as in *verb*, *bird*, *work*, *learn*, *fur*. Here are suggested activities to begin focusing on vowels:

- Review simple-vowel word families.** To practice vowel sounds through *letters*, use *word-family spelling-pattern cards* that display one-letter vowels (like some from pages 45 and 47). The most common one-syllable *rimes* with single vowels followed by consonants are: *-ab-*, *-ack-*, *-ad-*, *ag-*, *-all-*, *-an-*, *-ank-*, *-ap-*, *-ash-*, *-at-*, *-ed-*, *-ell-*, *-en-*, *-end-*, *-ent-*, *-est-*, *-et-*, *-ill-*, *-in-*, *-ing-*, *-ink-*, *-ip-*, *-it-*, *-ock-*, *-og-*, *-op-*, *-ot-*, *-ub-*, *-uck-*, *-ug-*, *-ump-*, *-unk-*, *up-*, *-ut-*.

Some rimes with simple vowels before *-r* are *-ar-*; *-erk-*, *-irt-*, *-ur-*.

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



When *starting* the “study” of phonics, lowest-level “at-risk” learners may benefit from materials designed for the young, like “talking” games at websites—or basic *phonemic awareness* worksheets that present the so-called “short” vowels ä ě ĩ ũ one at a time. Less common sounds like ǒ, ô, or ǒǒ may come later. Elementary curricula might then jump to the “long-vowel spellings” of ā, ē, ĩ, ō, ū.



However, second-language learners will soon have questions about *sound contrasts*. To help answer them, phonics lessons can include basic instruction in *pronunciation*. One possible way to reduce confusion in the identification of vowel *sounds* is to *number* them. With their most common *spellings underlined*, their dictionary and IPA symbols, and diagrams of their lip positions from the front, here is a numbered list of seven (7)

- a = ä = /æ/
- e = ě = /ɛ/
- i = ĩ = /ɪ/
- o = ǒ = /ɑ/
- u = ũ = /ʌ/
- u, oo = ǒǒ = /ʊ/
- a, o, au\*, aw\*  
= ô = /ɔ/

Some speakers pronounce Sounds 4 /ɑ/ and 7 /ɔ/ alike.

As the cards are shown, learners can *repeat, omit and supply, identify, and/or compare* the simple vowel sounds produced by single vowel letters.

1. ä = æ	2. ě = ɛ	3. ĭ = ɪ	4. ȝ = ɑ	5. ũ = ʌ
-ack	-ell	-ill	-og	-ub
-ad	-en	-in	-ock	-uck
-am	-ent	-ing	-op	-ug
-ap	-est	-it	-ot	-ut

Those progressing faster can make (large) *simple-vowel-sound cards* (labeled 1 through 8r), with the symbols 1. ä = /æ/, 2. ě = /ɛ/, 3. ĭ = /ɪ/, 4. ȝ = /ɑ/, 5. ũ = /ʌ/, and perhaps also 6. ȝȝ = /ʊ/, 7. ô = /ɔ/ 7r. a:(r) = /ä(r)/, 8r. û = /ɜ(r)/. They can place *word-family spelling-pattern cards* on matching *sound-symbols*, pronouncing the vowels while memorizing their spelling.

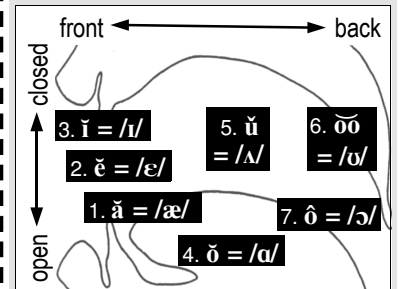
2. **Make and use sets of phonicspelling *Simple-Vowel Word Cards*.** Pages 66 and 67 offer 9 sets of 4 items that match in their vowel sounds and spellings. Follow instructions to make a 36-card deck of *four-of-a-kind cards*, create your own (smaller or larger) deck of similar design—with at least four sets of 4 items each (16 cards)—and/or make productive use of *Authors & Editors' phonicspelling Vowel-Sound Cards Decks, ISBN 978-1-934637-21-0, -22-7, -23-4*. To benefit pedagogically, participants can first use the pictures and/or words as *Flash Cards*. They can name the items; identify and compare the simple vowel sounds and spellings; spell words aloud; say other one-syllable words with each vowel, etc. To "explain meaning," they can classify items in sentences like "(A/An) . . . is a (kind of) . . . (*thing, person, animal, action, describing word, etc.*)" Based on *simple-vowel sounds*, the "Game of Categories" described on page 24 will also work. So will *four-of-a-kind card games*, like those in *Activity Ideas W* on pages 193 to 194.
3. **Play *Simple-Vowel* phonicspelling *Bingo*.** On page 69 are four sample nine-box *Phonics-Bingo Grids* offering effective, motivating ways of practicing contrasts among simple vowel sounds and spellings. For more suggestions regarding phonicspelling *Grid & Board Games*, see *Activity Ideas X* on pages 207-208. Also, available from *Authors & Editors* is a set of 80 phonicspelling *Bingo* boards, caller cards, and game instructions designed for basic to advanced learning levels (*ISBN 978-0-9627878-5-0, -6-7, -7-4, and -8-1*).  
  
Would you like to make—or have learners make—*other* nine-box *Phonics-Bingo Grids* that contrast (mostly) simple-vowel sounds? Here are some lists of 8 or 9 one-syllable words likely to work:
  - *cap, kept, kip, cop, cup, cost, carb, curb*—and perhaps *cook*
  - *pal, bell, bill, doll, dull, pull, pall, purl* (or *pearl*)—and perhaps *Karl*
  - *rack, (w)reck, Rick, rock, truck, rook, bark, work*—perhaps *walk*
4. **Use *Simple-Vowel (Paired) Spelling Lists*.** Page 70 offers another kind of activity—with instructions—to contrast simple vowel sounds and spellings. Participants practice *hearing, writing* the vowels for, and *pronouncing* the single, (one-letter) simple-vowel sounds.

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



"What's the difference between consonants and vowels?" aware language students are likely to ask. In *pronunciation*, the 22 to 24 *consonant sounds* are made with two parts of the mouth—such as the *tongue, lips, teeth, tooth ridge, palate, velum*—(almost) touching before or while air is pushed out through the mouth and/or nose.

In contrast, it's the position of the tongue in an *open mouth* that differentiates the 15 or more possible *vowel sounds*. The "simple vowels" may be called "lax" because the mouth muscles *relax* (don't tense) to say them. (They may not be "short" in the length of time it takes to produce them.) Here's a mouth diagram to compare where these single sounds are pronounced in the mouth—how far to the *front* or *back* and with *open* or *closed*, (*spread* or *rounded*) lips:



Though easier to *spell* than the *complex* ("tense," "long," or "two-letter") vowel sounds, these *simple vowels* are more difficult to distinguish in pronunciation. One method of "teaching" the contrasts is to pronounce them in random order—first as isolated sounds and then in familiar one-syllable words; listeners identify each sound by its number in a diagram or list. Later, *learners* can say the sounds and words; listeners identify their vowel sounds.

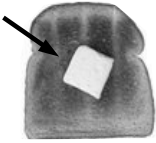

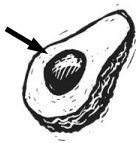





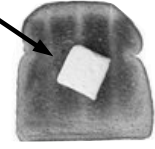
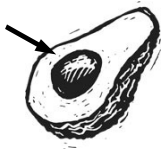











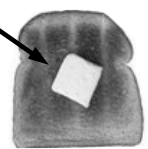

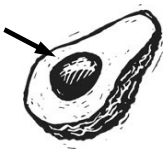


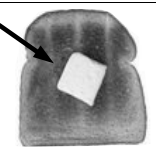




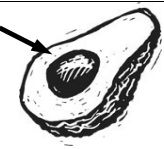
# Instructions for *Simple (One-Letter) Vowel Sounds*

Give out (copies of) these 4 phonicspelling *Simple Vowel-Sound Bingo Grids* to 4 players. If available, distribute *Bingo* counters or chips. Each person marks with an *X* or places a counter on the middle box of his/her grid, which serves as a “free space” for the game.

Pronouncing its vowel sound distinctly, a “caller” reads aloud any one of the 8 words. Everyone marks (a corner of) its box or covers it. The caller continues to say different words; players mark or cover them until someone has “Bingo”—3 boxes in a row, column, or diagonal. After telling the 3 words in his/her *Bingo* line, the winner becomes the caller for the next game.



At other times, follow instructions from *Activity Ideas X* on pages 205 to 208 to play *Bingo/Lotto* or to use these phonicspelling *Simple Vowel-Sound Bingo Grids* in other ways. You can also create and play with *Grids* showing *other* simple-vowel contrasting words.

 <b>pat</b>	 <b>pet</b>	 <b>pit</b>	 <b>part</b>	 <b>pert</b>	 <b>pot</b>
 <b>pot</b>	<i>phonicspelling Simple Vowel-Sound Bingo Grid 1</i>	 <b>putt</b>	 <b>pat</b>	<i>phonicspelling Simple Vowel-Sound Bingo Grid 2</i>	 <b>pit</b>
 <b>put</b>	 <b>part</b>	 <b>pert</b>	 <b>put</b>	 <b>putt</b>	 <b>pet</b>
 <b>pot</b>	 <b>part</b>	 <b>pert</b>	 <b>put</b>	 <b>pot</b>	 <b>pat</b>
 <b>putt</b>	<i>phonicspelling Simple Vowel-Sound Bingo Grid 3</i>	 <b>pit</b>	 <b>part</b>	<i>phonicspelling Simple Vowel-Sound Bingo Grid 4</i>	 <b>putt</b>
 <b>pat</b>	 <b>pet</b>	 <b>put</b>	 <b>pet</b>	 <b>pert</b>	 <b>pit</b>

# Instructions for *Simple (One-Letter) Vowel Sounds*

Give each person (a copy of) the phonics/pelling *Simple-Vowel-Sound Spelling Lists A-D*. Explain that with the addition of *one* vowel letter in the middle, the *same* initial and final consonant(s) can begin and end several *different* words—like *thank* or *think*; *cab*, *cob*, or *cub*.

Choosing from the possibilities (the real words) listed at the bottom of the page, “dictate” 10 words with the given consonants that contain simple vowel sounds spelled by only one letter. According to what they hear, listeners put either a, e, i, o, or u in each blank of *Simple-Vowel Spelling List A*. Check and correct their work.

Working in pairs, each person in turn dictates the same words to a partner, who puts the missing letters in *List B* without looking at the speaker’s *List A*. They read the words aloud.



Working alone, perhaps with a small dictionary, each person prints *one letter* in each blank of *Spelling List C*, forming a real word other than those in *Lists A/B*. S/he then reads *these* words aloud to a partner, who puts letters for the vowel sounds s/he hears in the blanks of *List D*. Both compare their *List D* with their partner’s *List C*, determining what caused the discrepancies or mistakes (pronunciation, spelling, or ?).



Repeat such steps with the same lists and/or lists containing *other* consonants.

Simple-Vowel Spelling List A	Simple-Vowel Spelling List B	Simple-Vowel Spelling List C	Simple-Vowel Spelling List D
1. p___ck	1. p___ck	1. p___ck	1. p___ck
2. b___d	2. b___d	2. b___d	2. b___d
3. f___ll	3. f___ll	3. f___ll	3. f___ll
4. b___g	4. b___g	4. b___g	4. b___g
5. h___m	5. h___m	5. h___m	5. h___m
6. b___n	6. b___n	6. b___n	6. b___n
7. t___p	7. t___p	7. t___p	7. t___p
8. m___sh	8. m___sh	8. m___sh	8. m___sh
9. h___t	9. h___t	9. h___t	9. h___t
10. st___r	10. st___r	10. st___r	10. st___r

With their vowel spellings underlined, here are possible words for the above 10 items with blanks: 1. pack, peck, pick, puck 2. bad, bed, bid, bud, bud 3. fall, fell, fill, fill 4. bag, beg, big, bog, bug 5. ham, hem, him, hum 6. ban, ber, bir, bun 7. tap, tip, top 8. mash, mesh, mish 9. hat, hit, hot, hut 10. sir, sit