

Usual pronunciation of vowel digraphs and the most common exceptions

You can check the pronunciation of the examples in a dictionary, for example www.ldoceonline.com

ai, ay /eɪ/ Spain, play, May, always, (again), (against), pain...

Exceptions: /e/ said, says, again(!), against(!)

/æ/ plaid, plait

ea /i:/ clean, bean, please, leave, meat...

Exceptions: /e/ bread, read(!), tread, breakfast, dead, lead(!), death, deaf, breast, dread, steady, head, ahead, health, heavy, instead, leather, weather, weapon, pleasure, thread, sweat, sweater, measure, feather, breath wealth, pleasant, heaven, jealous, stealth, treasure, spread, threat, ready, already, meant, dreamt... /ɛ:/ earl, early, earn, earnest, earth, heard, learn, learnt, pearl, search, research, rehearse, (year)...

/eɪ/ steak, break, great... /eə/ bear, pear, tear(!), wear, swear

/ɑ:/ heart, hearth

ee /i:/ bleed, fleet, feed, meet, breed...

ei, ey /eɪ/ hey, they, neighbour, sleigh, veil, reign...

Exceptions: /aɪ/ either(!), neither(!), kaleidoscope, eye, height, seismic, Frankenstein, Einstein, Eileen, Eiffel, Fahrenheit

/i:/ receive, receipt, Keith, Sheila, sheik, Seymour, ceiling, key, seize, conceive, conceit, deceive, deceit, perceive, protein... /ɪə/ weird

/e/ leisure, heifer, Leicester

eu, ew /ju:/ new, Europe, few, neurotic, stew...

/u:/ blew, flew, brewery, shrewd...

Exception: /əʊ/ sew

ie /i:/ piece, niece, belief, believe, field, thief... Exception: /e/ friend

oi, oy /ɔɪ/ boy, employ, toy, toilet...

oo /u:/ boot, food, mood, moon, roof, drool...

Exceptions: /ʊ/ ! ! crook, book, took, cook, look, brook, good, stood, foot shook, soot, hook, hood, wool, wood, gooseberry, rook (rookie etc.)

/ʌ/ blood, flood

/ɔ:/ floor, door, poor(!)

oa /əʊ/ ! ! ! coat, float, boat, load, road...

Exceptions: /ɔ:/ ! ! ! broad, abroad

au, aw /ɔ:/ ! ! ! draw, Paul, law, caught, August...

Exceptions: /əʊ/ ! ! ! mauve, chauvinism, chauffeur

/v/ because!, knowledge, acknowledge, Lawrence, sausage, cauliflower, Gloucester, Austria, Australia...

/ɑ:/ laugh, aunt, laughter, draught

/eɪ/ gauge

ou, ow /aʊ/ house, now, about, down, row(!), bow(!), wound(!)...

ou, ow /əʊ/ ! ! ! blow, grow, mow, slow, row(!), bow(!), window...

Exceptions: /u:/ soup, group, you, youth, route, routine, souvenir, through, roulette, wound(!), coupon, Vancouver, goulash, rouble, ghoul, boulevard, bijou /'bi:zʊ:/... /ʊə/ tour(ist), contour, bourgeois, troubadour...

/ʊ/ could, would, should, courier

/ʌ/ trouble, country, touch, courage, young, southern, couple, nourish, rough, tough, cousin, double, Douglas, enough, flourish, hiccough /ɜ:/ journal, adjourn, Luxembourg, journey, courteous (courtesy)...

/v/ cough, trough

/ɔ:/ ! ! ! (ou+ght) thought, bought, brought, fought, ought, nought

Exception: drought /draʊt/

ui /ju:/ nuisance...

/u:/ juice, sluice, bruise, cruise, fruit...

Before a letter 'r', the following changes take place automatically:

/eɪ/ → /eə/ way – hair, retain – repair

/i:/ → /ɪə/ beet – beer, steed – steer

/əʊ/ → /ɔ:/ oat – oar, boat – board

/u:/ → /ʊə/, sometimes /ɔ:/ moo – moor, poo – poor

/ju:/ → /jʊə/ few – Europe

/aʊ/ → /aʊə/ (→/a:ə/→/a:/) out – our, about – devour, flout – flour