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The **Podcast** That Will Help You **Speak** English Fluently.  
With No Grammar and No Textbooks!

## **Episode #156**

Vowel Pronunciation in American English

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Hi, everybody! I am Georgiana, your English teacher and founder of [SpeakEnglishPodcast.com](http://SpeakEnglishPodcast.com). My mission is to help you speak English fluently.

Today we will talk about how to pronounce vowels in English. And with a fun point of view story you will improve your grammar.

The truth is that vowels in English always represent a particular difficulty for many students.

But don't worry because there is a self-evident reason why this happens.

It turns out that in English, we have **six vowel letters** represented by the letters **a, e, i, o, and u** and **fifteen vowel sounds**.

### **Fifteen vowel sounds?**

Yes. You see that's the real problem.

In English, **we don't read vowels as they are written**, simply because **the same vowel letter can be pronounced in different ways**.

For example, we can pronounce vowel A in seven different ways.

Amazing, right?

We divide vowel sounds into three different categories:

**Long vowels** (we pronounce the long vowels the same as the letter.)

These are the long vowel sounds in American English:

**A** /eɪ/, **E** /i/, **I** /aɪ/, **O** /oʊ/, **U** /yu/.

### **Examples:**

**Steak** / steɪk /

**Sleep** / slɪp /

**Bike** / baɪk /

**Home** / hoʊm /

**Cute** / kyut /

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**Short vowels** (have the most common sound for a single vowel spelling.)

**Examples:**

cat /kæt/  
bed /bɛd/  
sit /sɪt/  
top /tɒp/  
sun /sʌn/

**Other vowels** (the remaining vowel sounds)

other <b>u</b> /ʊ/	Put /pʊt/
<b>oo</b> sound /u/	soon /su:n/
<b>aw</b> sound /ɔ/	dog /dɒg/
<b>oi</b> sound /ɔɪ/	join /dʒɔɪn/
<b>ow</b> sound /aʊ/	down /daʊn/

Ok, let's continue.

I want to talk about the **schwa (ə)** sound.

What is Schwa?

The **Schwa sound** - is the most common **vowel** in English.

We find this sound in almost all words with more than a syllable.

**Examples:**

Doct**o**r, ab**o**ut, th**e**, cent**e**r.

**Schwa (ə)** replaces any vowel in English if the vowel is unstressed.

It also appears in words consisting of only one syllable: **a**, **the**, **of**.

### Examples with Schwa:

For this episode, you will need to **read the transcript simultaneously as you listen to it**, so go to **SpeakEnglishPodcast.com** to get the transcript.

Here I will give several examples where you can see how schwa replaces the other vowels in English.

Ok, let's start!

Vowels a, e, i, o, u.	IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)	PHONETIC RESPELLING
Banana	/ bə'næn ə /	[ buh-nan-uh ]
Summer	/ 'sʌm ə /	[ suhm-er ]
Animal	/ 'æŋ ə məl /	[ an-uh-muhl ]
Pronunciation	/ prə'nu:nsi'eɪʃən /	[ pruh-nuhn-see-ey-shuhn ]
Support	/ sə'pɔ:t /	[ suh-pawrt ]

Let's continue.

I will start by giving you 7 examples of different ways to pronounce **vowel A**.

This exercise will help you **understand the different ways you can pronounce vowels in English**. But don't get intimidated. I will give you further instructions, but for now, make sure you have the **transcript** and that you listen carefully to the different examples.

Vowel A	Sounds like...	IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)	PHONETIC RESPELLING
Father	<b>a</b>	/ 'fɑ ðər /	[ fah-ther ]
And	<b>æ</b>	/ ænd /	[ and ]
Air	<b>ɛ</b>	/ ɛər /	[ air ]
Amazing	<b>eɪ</b>	/ ə'meɪ zɪŋ /	[ uh-mey-zing ]
Tall	<b>ɔ</b>	/ tɔl /	[ tawl ]
Private	<b>ɪ</b>	/ 'praɪ vɪt /	[ prahy-vit ]
Again	<b>ə</b> Schwa	/ ə'geɪn /	[ uh-gen ]

Let's continue with vowel **E**.

Vowel E	Sounds like...	IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)	PHONETIC RESPELLING
Red	<b>ɛ</b>	/ rɛd /	[ red ]
Evening	<b>i:</b>	/ 'i:v nɪŋ /	[ eev-ning ]
Résumé	<b>ei</b>	/ 'rez ʊ'meɪ /	[ rez-oo-mey ]
Eleven	<b>ə</b> Schwa	/ ɪ'lev ən /	[ ih-lev-uhn ]

Let's see some different ways you can pronounce the vowel **I** in English:

Vowel I	Sounds like...	IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)	PHONETIC RESPELLING
Idol	<b>ai</b>	/ 'aɪd l /	[ ahyd-l ]
Sister	<b>ɪ</b>	/ 'sɪs tər /	[ sis-ter ]
Kiwi	<b>i</b>	/ 'ki wi /	[ kee-wee ]
Cousin	<b>ə</b> Schwa	/ 'kʌz ən /	[ kuhz-uhn ]

Let's see how many ways we can pronounce the vowel **O** in English:

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Vowel O	Sounds like...	IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)	PHONETIC RESPELLING
Hot	ɒ	/ hɒt /	[ hot ]
Hello	oʊ	/ he'lou /	[ he-loh ]
Too	u	/ tu /	[ too ]
Opposite	ə Schwa	/ 'ɒp ə zɪt, -sɪt /	[ ɒp-uh-zit ]

Now you will learn how to pronounce the vowel **U** seven different ways:

Vowel U	Sounds like...	IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)	PHONETIC RESPELLING
Sun	ʌ	/ sʌn /	[ suhn ]
Cute	yʊ	/ kyut /	[ kyoot ]
Tuesday	u	/ 'tuz deɪ /	[ tooz-dey ]
Build	ɪ	/ bɪld /	[ bild ]
Bury	ɛ	/ 'ber i /	[ ber-ee ]
Church	ɜ	/ tʃɜrtʃ /	[ church ]
Focus	ə Schwa	/ 'fɔs kəs /	[ foh-kuhs ]

As you can see, there are multiple ways to pronounce vowels in English.

But don't worry. You don't have to memorize anything.

The reason I created this lesson, was to make you realize how important it is to listen, listen, and listen to obtain **English fluency**.

However, I do have some tips that will help you improve your pronunciation:

### Helpful Tips:

- **Read the transcript** as you listen to my [podcast](#) or my [premium courses](#).

Get more lessons at: [SpeakEnglishPodcast.com](http://SpeakEnglishPodcast.com)

- Try the **shadowing** technique. While you listen to the audio, imitate the narrator. Listen to the material and try your best to **talk at the same time as the narrator**. It may be challenging, but it's fun! This technique requires a lot of concentration. So, leave this part for when you have listened to the content several times.
- Practice vowels with **tongue twisters**. I have an episode dedicated to tongue twisters for vowels. Go to [SpeakEnglishPodcast.com/podcast](https://speakenglishpodcast.com/podcast) and look for **episode #087**.

Let's move on to the next section.

## Point of View Story

### (Improve your Grammar)

I'll tell you a short story more than one time. Every time, I'll change a grammar point. For example, I can change the tense or the person. This way, you'll intuitively notice the changes.

Let's start!

#### **The Past Tense, in the first person:**

Last summer, I went to visit the United States to practice my English pronunciation. I made a lot of friends. However, I wasn't entirely comfortable. I was afraid of making a terrible mistake when speaking. I definitely didn't want to get in trouble or offend anyone. So I didn't talk much. But one day, someone asked me what I did for a living back home. I said I was a lawyer. All the people around me started smiling a lot, and I couldn't understand why. Later, they explained to me that I pronounced the word lawyer as "liar."

## The Past Tense, the third person:

Last summer, Lisa went to visit the United States to practice her English pronunciation. She made a lot of friends. However, Lisa wasn't really comfortable. She was afraid of making a terrible mistake when speaking. Lisa didn't want to get in trouble or offend anyone. So Lisa didn't talk much. But one day, someone asked her what she did for a living back home. Lisa said she was a lawyer. All the people around her started smiling a lot, and she couldn't understand why. Later, they explained to her that she pronounced the word lawyer as "liar."

Ok, it's the end of this short lesson. As you can see, just by changing a point of view of the story, you can learn grammar intuitively.

This is one of the techniques that I use in my [premium courses](#). I recommend you to take a look at:

[SpeakEnglishPodcast.com/courses](https://speakenglishpodcast.com/courses)

Ok, this is the end of this episode. Remember to listen to it several times. It will help with your English.

See you soon!  
Bye! Bye!



*Georgiana*

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