British English Vowels
Fewer than you would think

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### Vowels of Current British English

The table below illustrates the vowels of current British English. Each row represents a different set of vowels, and the columns indicate whether they are present (✓) or not present (✗).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>C</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>V</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>✓</td>
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vowels of current British English (seas3.elte.hu/cube)

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<td>3.</td>
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1. kit, dress, trap, lot, foot
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<tr>
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2. near, square, start/bath/palm, force/north/thought/cure, nurse, strut/comma/letter
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<td>2. i : e : a : o :</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. i j e j a j o j a w e m e w m</td>
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<td>3. ɨ j ɛ j ɒ j ə ʊ m ə w ə w</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
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<td>ow ball</td>
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<td>øw</td>
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epenthesis

- *film film* (Irish E *filəm*)
epenthesis

- *film film* (Irish E *filəm*)
- *known nəwən* (rarely nəwən)
epentheses

- *film* film (Irish E *filəm*)
- *known* nəwn (rarely nəwən)
- *feel* fijəl, *fail* fejəl, *file* fajəl, *foil* fojəl
epenthesis

- *film* (Irish *filəm*)
- *known* (rarely *nown*)
- *feel* (*fiːl*), *fail* (*feɪl*), *file* (*fæl*), *foil* (*foɪl*)
- *fear* (*fiə(r)*), *fire* (*faɪr(r)*), *flour* (*flɔː(r)*)
  
  cf *fearing* (*fiərɪŋ*/ *fɪərɪŋ*), *firing* (*faɪrɪŋ*/ *faɪrɪŋ*), *floury* (*flɔːrɪŋ*/ *flɔːrɪŋ*)
epenthesi**s**

- *film* (Irish E *filəm*)
- *known* (rarely *nəwən*)
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  cf. *fearing* (*fijriŋ*/ˈfiːriŋ/*), *firing* (*fajriŋ*/ˈfaːriŋ/*), *floury* (*flawriŋ*/ˈfləriŋ/*)
- the narrower the sonority gap, the more likely epenthesi**s** is
epenthesis

- *film* film (Irish E *fȇlm*)
- *known* nɜːm (rarely nəwən)
- *feel* fijəl, *fail* fejəl, *file* fajəl, *foil* fojəl
- *fear* fijə(r), *fire* fajə(r), *flour* flawə(r)
  - cf *fearing* fijrɪŋ/fiːrɪŋ, *firing* fajrɪŋ/faːrɪŋ, *floury* flawrɪŋ/flaːrɪŋ
- the narrower the sonority gap, the more likely epenthesis is

**Q:** why should epenthesis occur between a V and a C?
epenthesis

- *film* (Irish E *filəm*)
- *known* (*nəwn*) (rarely *nəwən*)
- *feel* (*fijəl*, *fail* *fejəl*, *file* *fajəl*, *foil* *fojəl*)
- *fear* (*fijə(r)*), *fire* (*fajə(r)*), *flour* (*flawə(r*)
  - cf. *fearing* (*fijriŋ*/*fiːriŋ*), *firing* (*fajriŋ*/*faːriŋ*), *floury* (*flawrij*/*flaːrij*)
- the narrower the sonority gap, the more likely epenthesis is

**Q:** why should epenthesis occur between a V and a C?  
**A:** it does not: *ij* *ej* *aj* *oj* are VC sequences, epenthesis is in CC
**epenthesis**

- *film* /film/ (Irish E *filəm*)
- *known* /nown/ (rarely *nəwən*)
- *feel* /fiːl/, *fail* /feɪl/, *file* /fæl/, *foil* /foʊl/
- *fear* /fɪə(r)/, *fire* /faiə(r)/, *flour* /flɔːə(r/)
  
  \( \text{cf } \) *fearing* /fɪərɪŋ/ /fiərɪŋ/, *firing* /færɪŋ/ /faːrɪŋ/, *floury* /flɔːrɪ/ /flaːrɪ/

- the narrower the sonority gap, the more likely epenthesis is

**Q:** why should epenthesis occur between a V and a C?  
**A:** it does not: *ij* /ɪj/, *ej* /ɛj/, *aj* /æj/, *oj* are VC sequences, epenthesis is in CC

**Q:** why is there no epenthesis in *fool*, *foal*, *foul*?
epenthesis

- film film (Irish E filəm)
- known nəwn (rarely nəwən)
- feel fijəl, fail fejəl, file fajəl, foil fojəl
- fear fijə(r), fire fajə(r), flour flawə(r)
  cf fearing fijriŋ/fiːriŋ, firing fajriŋ/faːriŋ, floury flawrij/flaːrij
- the narrower the sonority gap, the more likely epenthesis is

Q: why should epenthesis occur between a V and a C?
A: it does not: ij ej aj oj are VC sequences, epenthesis is in CC

Q: why is there no epenthesis in fool, foal, foul?
A: no epenthesis in homorganic clusters like wl, cf film, which is homorganic in BrE, not in IrE
a distributional gap

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>glidophilic environments</th>
<th>glidophobicic environments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#__V</td>
<td>V___#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C__V</td>
<td>V___C</td>
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<tr>
<td>V__V</td>
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<tr>
<td>yet, wet</td>
<td>(Dewi, vilayet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cue, quit</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>beyond, away</td>
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**a distributional gap?**

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- Glidophilic environments: yet, wet, cue, quit, beyond, away
- Glidophobic environments: (Dewi, vilayet)

**Q:** why are glides so rare after a stressed V?
a distributional gap?

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</tr>
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<td>lion, doyen, gowan, boa, fuel</td>
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**Q:** why are glides so rare after a stressed V?

**A:** they are not rare: eg *neon níjon, crayon kréjæn, lion lájæn, doyen dójæn, gowan gáwæn, boa bæwæ, fuel fjúwæl*
### a distributional gap

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**Q:** why are glides so rare after a stressed V?

**A:** they are not rare: eg neon níjon, crayon kréjən, lion lájən, doyen dójən, gowan gáwən, boa běwə, fuel fjúwəl

in fact, glides occur word finally and preconsonantally too, eg take tejk, my maj, coat kəwt, too tuw
Representations

V  c  V
|    |
A  I

- English diphthongs pattern with long vowels, hence they are represented similarly (as VV)
representations

V c V
| | | A I

- English diphthongs pattern with long vowels, hence they are represented similarly (as VV)
- but English diphthongs also pattern with VC sequences
representations

English diphthongs pattern with long vowels, hence they are represented similarly (as VV)

but English diphthongs also pattern with VC sequences

a glide is a nonsyllabic vowel (a high vowel is not a syllabic consonant(!), eg *ll, *mm vs ji, wu, ij, uw; l~ə vs i~əj)
English diphthongs pattern with long vowels, hence they are represented similarly (as VV)

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a glide is a nonsyllabic vowel (a high vowel is not a syllabic consonant(!), eg *lǐ, *mēn vs ji, wu, ij, uw; l̃əl vs iəj)

the 2nd half of a diphthong is nonsyllabic, ie it is a glide, C!
representations

V c V V C v
│ │ → │ │
A I A I

- English diphthongs pattern with long vowels, hence they are represented similarly (as VV)
- but English diphthongs also pattern with VC sequences
- a glide is a nonsyllabic vowel (a high vowel is not a syllabic consonant(!), eg *ll, *mm vs ji, wu, ij, uw; ləj vs əj)
- the 2nd half of a diphthong is nonsyllabic, ie it is a glide, C!
- what are the empirical consequences of the above difference?
English stress seems to treat $[\sigma \ VV]$ and $[\sigma \ VC]$ differently
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1. $\_\#$ in verbs: agree ògríː vs habit hábit
English stress seems to treat $[\sigma \ VV]$ and $[\sigma \ VC]$ differently

1. $\_\#$ in verbs: agree $\text{o}gr\text{\'i}j$ vs habit $\text{h\'ab}i\text{t}$
2. $\_C\#$ in nonverbs: arcade $a\text{x}k\text{\'e}j\text{d}$ vs stipend $\text{st\'ajpend}$
English stress seems to treat $[\sigma \text{VV}]$ and $[\sigma \text{VC}]$ differently.

1. __# in verbs: agree əgríj vs habit hábit
2. __C# in nonverbs: arcade aːkéjd vs stipend stájpend
3. __V in nonverbs: European jőːrɛpíjən vs regimen réʤimən
English stress seems to treat $[\sigma VV]$ and $[\sigma VC]$ differently

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2. **C#** in nonverbs: arcade $\text{aɪkéj}$ vs stipend $\text{stájpend}$
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but English stress is lexical
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- but English stress is lexical
  1. carry kárij, omit əwmít
English stress seems to treat \([\sigma \ VV]\) and \([\sigma \ VC]\) differently

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2. ___C# in nonverbs: arcade \(\text{æ}k\text{ɛ}\text{j}d\) vs stipend \(\text{s}t\text{i}\text{p}\text{ɛ}n\text{d}\)
3. ___V in nonverbs: European \(\text{j}\text{ʊ}r\text{ɛ}\text{p}\text{i}\text{ʃ}\text{ɛ}n\) vs regimen \(\text{r}\text{ɛ}\text{j}\text{ɪ}m\text{ə}n\)

but English stress is lexical

1. carry \(\text{k}\text{æ}r\text{j}\), omit \(\text{ɪ}\text{mw}\text{ɪ}t\)
2. decade \(\text{d}\text{ɛ}k\text{ɛ}j\text{d}\), defence \(\text{d}\text{ɛ}f\text{ɛ}\text{n}\)
English stress seems to treat \([\sigma \text{ VV}]\) and \([\sigma \text{ VC}]\) differently

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but English stress is lexical

1. carry \(\text{kárij}\), omit \(\text{əwmít}\)
2. decade \(\text{dékejd}\), defence \(\text{dəféns}\)
3. Cyclopean \(\text{sajkláwpijən}\), dilemma \(\text{dajlémö}\)
English stress seems to treat $[\sigma\ VV]$ and $[\sigma\ VC]$ differently

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but English stress is lexical

1. carry kárij, omit əwmít
2. decade dékejd, defence dəféns
3. Cyclopean sajkláwpjən, dilemma dajlémə

so stress is not a very good argument for $[\sigma\ VV]$ vs $[\sigma\ VC]$
if diphthong = vowel + glide, then

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<thead>
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vowels of current British English

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1. kit/fleece, dress/face, trap/price/mouth, lot/choice, foot/goose
vowels of current British English

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1. kit/fleece, dress/face, trap/price/mouth, lot/choice, foot/goose
2. near, square, start/bath/palm, force/north/thought/cure, nurse, strut/comma/letter/goat
a detail: the FOOT/CURE vowel

a detail: the FOOT/CURE vowel

- $u$ is rare: $uj$, *$up$, *$ub$, *$uv$, *$uθ$, *$uŋ$, *$uŋ$, $ug$ only in *sugar*
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a detail: the FOOT/CURE vowel

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a detail: the FOOT/CURE vowel

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long vowels

- *poor–cure*-split accents may have complete set of short–long vowel pairs \((i–iː \ e–eː \ a–aː \ o–oː \ u–uː \ ə–əː)\), others lack \(uː\)
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long vowels

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- arguments for/against r
  - history: most long Vs come from Vr
  - sandhi
  - VrV is common
- arguments for/against h
  - few long Vs come from Vh (eg *thought*)
  - *r*-ness cannot be detected in long Vs
long vowels

- *poor–cure*-split accents may have complete set of short–long vowel pairs (i–i: e–e: a–a: o–o: u–u: ə–ə:), others lack u:

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arguments for/against r

- history: most long Vs come from Vr

- sandhi

- VrV is common

- r-ness cannot be detected in long Vs

arguments for/against h

- few long Vs come from Vh (eg *thought*)

- no linking with h
long vowels

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    - history: most long Vs come from Vr.
    - sandhi
    - ÍrV is common.
    - r-ness cannot be detected in long Vs.
  - arguments for/against h
    - few long Vs come from Vh (eg thought).
    - no linking with h.
    - *ÍhV (cf *ÍjV, *ÍwV)
long vowels

- *poor–cure*-split accents may have complete set of short–long vowel pairs (ɪ–ɪː ɛ–ɛː ə–əː ʊ–ʊː), others lack uː
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- ie it cannot be a “normal” vowel, which by definition is syllabic
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arguments for/against r

- history: most long Vs come from Vr
- sandhi
- VrV is common
- r-ness cannot be detected in long Vs

arguments for/against h

- few long Vs come from Vh (eg thought)
- no linking with h
- *́VhV* (cf *́VjV, *́VwV)
- h is a V phonetically: ha=[ɑɑ], ah=[aa]
long vowels

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arguments for/against r
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- Vr/V is common
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Arguments for/against r:
- History: most long Vs come from Vr.
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- VrV is common.
- r-ness cannot be detected in long Vs.
- A problem: why is there no epenthesis after “long vowels”?

Arguments for/against h:
- Few long Vs come from Vh (eg thought).
- No linking with h.
- *VhV (cf *VjV, *VwV).
- h is a V phonetically: ha=[_aa], ah=[aa].
long vowels

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- h is a V phonetically: ha=[aa], ah=[aa].

A problem: why is there no epenthesis after “long vowels”? Perhaps the sonority gap between h and l is large enough?
vowels of current British English

if long vowel = vowel + glide, then

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1. kit/fleece(/bill)/near, dress/face(/bell)/square, trap/price/mouth/start/bath/palm, lot/choice(/ball)/force/north/thought/cure, foot/goose(/cure)
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2. strut/comma/letter/goat/nurse(/cure)
The diversity of the vowel system results from the combination of six short monophthongs and three glides.

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<td>put</td>
<td>uw</td>
<td>(uh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>uj</td>
<td>bull</td>
<td>bureau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>but</td>
<td>ew</td>
<td>eah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>ej</td>
<td>dull</td>
<td>bird</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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