

American Vowels: An Introduction

The “open-mouth” sounds, which we call *vowels*, can be divided into groups:

Alphabet Vowels

These vowels get their names from the 5 English vowel letters: **a, e, i, o, u**.

❶ a /eɪ/	❷ e /iː/	❸ i /aɪ/	❹ o /oʊ/	❺ u /yuː/ or /uː/
mail	meal	mile	mole	mule
sane	scene	sign	sewn	soon
raid	read	ride	road	rude
save	neat	twice	boat	fume
grapes	heat	dried	pose	dues
place	sleep	kind	throw	clue

Relative Vowels

Sometimes vowel letters aren't pronounced with their alphabet vowel sounds:

❻ /æ/	❼ /ɛ/	❽ /ɪ/	❾ /ɑ/	❿ /ʌ/
pan	pen	pin	pawn	pun
gnat	net	knit	not	nut
half	red	mill	law	cup
lag	leg	sin	mall	sun
bad	bed	hit	bought	love
man	men	slip	hot	hut

/ə/ -Our Favorite Vowel

This next vowel is Americans' favorite. Any vowel can sound this way when it is **unstressed**. The symbol is /ə/, and its name is “schwa”.

/ba/na/na/	/pro/nounce/	/a/ttend/	/A/mer/i/can/
/Ca/na/da/	/Spa/nish/	/ja/cket/	/co/llec/tion/
/ques/tion/	/Ko/re/a/	/a/ppli/ca/tion/	/Ja/pan/