# BBN–ANG–141 Foundations of phonology
# 6. Spelling vowels

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this is a spelling rule: it usually does not matter **what** the vowel is pronounced (but see AE above), or whether it is pronounced at all: in *cater*, *cure* there is a front vowel/glide after the C, in *cite* there is a back vowel after it, in *nice* there is no vowel pronounced after it

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but life is more complicated: *gaol* /ʤejl/, *gynecology* /gajnikoləʤij/

# spelling short/checked vowels with single vowel letters

| VOWEL | SPELLING | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|---|
| i | I/Y | kit, myth, mint, crystal |
| e | E | dress, ten, belt, depth |
| a | A | trap, lax, talc, thank |
| o | O | lot, moth, loss, pond |
| ə | U | strut, cup, punk, thumb |

note we're talking only about the spelling of stressed vowels today

# complication 1: the FOOT–STRUT split

| | put | full | cut | dull |
|---|---|---|---|---|
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- but not
  - in some words, like *put* or *full*
  - in the North of England
- this results in U=/ə/, and, in a few words, U=/u/

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- GA had a later /o/ > /a/ change, but *want* and *rant* do not rhyme in GA either

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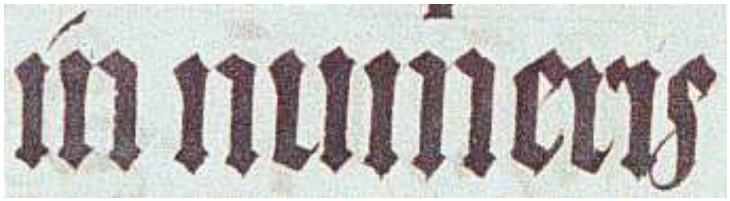
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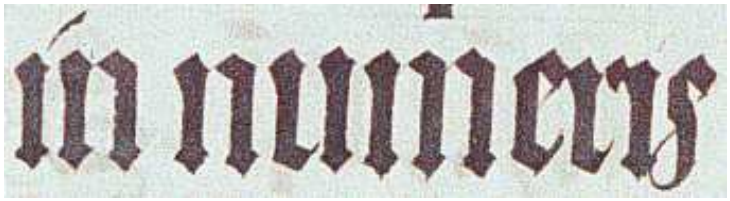
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# summary of the spelling of short vowels with SVLs

| VOWEL | SPELLING | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | REGULAR | RARE | EXCEPTIONAL |
| i | kit, myth | — | English, England, pretty, busy |
| e | dress | — | any, many, Thames, bury |
| a | trap | — | — |
| o | lot | want | — |
| ə | strut | love | — |
| u | — | put | wolf, woman, Boleyn, Wolsey, etc |

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- /u/ has no regular spelling
- /a/ can only be spelled A

# spelling diphthongs/free vowels

## single vowel letters

| VOWEL | SPELLING | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|---|
| ij | E | scene, meme, complete, these |
| ej | A | ace, fate, name, wave |
| aj | I/Y | bite, hi, type, sky |
| uw | U | Jude, use, super, mute |
| əw | O | go, home, dose, post |

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## digraphs

| VOWEL | SPELLING | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|---|
| aw | OU/OW | loud, round, now, vowel |
| oj | OI/OY | voice, join, joy, envoy |

# further digraphs: common equivalences

| VOWEL | SPELLING | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|---|
| ij | EA, EE, IE | sea, meat, see, meet, siege, fiend |
| ej | AI/AY, EI/EY | plain, play, eight, vein, convey |
| aj | — | |
| əw | OA | oak, coal, boat, roam |
| uw | EU/EW, UI, OO | Euston, Newton, bruise, boot, fool |

# further digraphs: less common equivalences

| VOWEL | SPELLING | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|---|
| ij | EI/EY, EO | seize, key, people |
| ej | EA | break, great, steak |
| aj | EI/EY | height, eye |
| əw | OU/OW | soul, shoulder, tow, know |
| uw | OU | group, route, soup |

# summary of the spelling of diphthongs

| VOWEL | SPELLING | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | REGULAR: SVL \| DIGRAPH | OTHER | "FOREIGN" |
| ij | scene \| keen, mean, thief | seize/key, people | chic, quay |
| ej | name \| plain/play, weight/grey | great | fete |
| aj | time/skype \| — | height/eye | aisle |
| uw | rude \| sleuth/new, suit, room | lose, wound | group |
| əw | home \| roam | soul/bowl, sew | chauffeur |
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# digraphs representing short/checked vowels

| VOWEL | SPELLING | |
|---|---|---|
| | COMMON | RARE |
| i | — | sieve |
| e | bread, deaf, head | leisure, Geoff, said/says, friend |
| a | — | plaid, plait |
| o | — | cough, trough, knowledge |
| ə | country, rough, young | blood, flood |
| u | foot, book, look, good | could, would, should, courier |

# rare digraphs

| DIGRAPH | VOWEL |
|---|---|
| AE | /ij/ Caesar, faeces; /ej/ Israel |
| AO | /ej/ gaol |
| EO | /ij/ people, feoff; /e/ leopard, Leonard, jeopardy, Geoff |
| OE | /ij/ foetus, Oedipus, phoenix, Phoebe, subpoena |

# not all vowel letter sequences are digraphs

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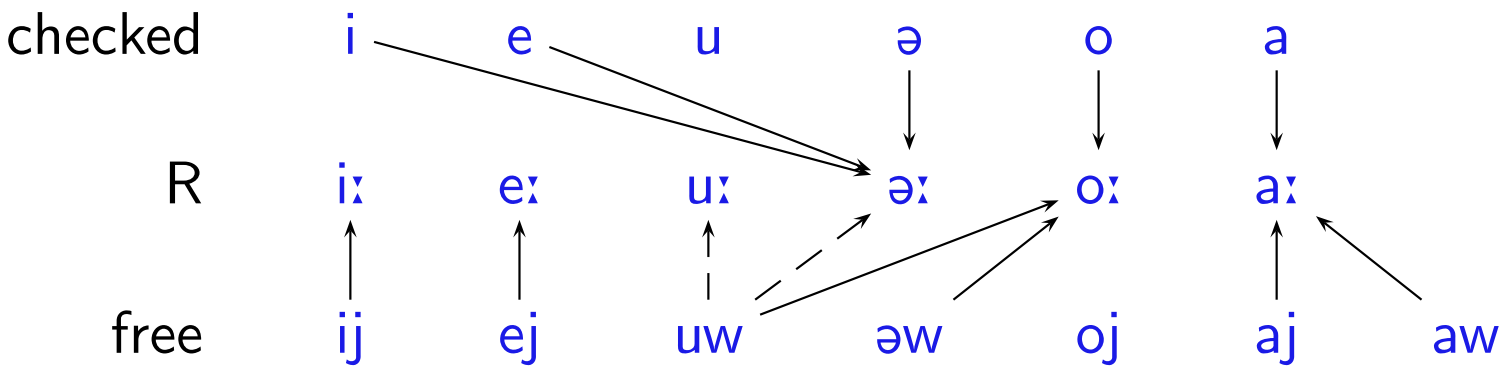
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- a vowel and word-final silent E: die (cf dying), toe, continue

# the relation of checked and R vowels, free and R vowels



# spelling R vowels: iː and eː

## ij ∼ iː

E: meme /mijm/ ∼ mere /miː/
EE: cheek /tʃijk/ ∼ cheer /tʃiː/
EA: ease /ijz/ ∼ ear /iː/
EI/EY: seize /sijz/ ∼ weird /wiːd/
IE: thief /θijf/ ∼ tier /tiː/

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## ej ∼ eː

A: state /stejt/ ∼ stare /steː/
AI/AY: aid /ejd/ ∼ air /eː/
EA: break /brejk/ ∼ bear /beː/
EI/EY: they /ðej/ ∼ their /ðeː/

# spelling R vowels: uː and əː

## uw ∼ uː

U: cute /kjuwt/ ∼ cure /kjuː/
EU/EW: neutral /njuwtrəl/ ∼ neural /njuːrəl/
UI: nuisance /njuwsəns/ ∼ Muir /mjuː/
OU: Louvre /luwv/ ∼ Lourdes /luːd/

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## ə/e/i ∼ əː

U: hut /hət/ ∼ hurt /həːt/
O: won /wən/ ∼ work /wəːk/
OU: couple /kəpəl/ ∼ courtesy /kəːtsij/
E: vest /vest/ ∼ verse /vəːs/
EA: head /hed/ ∼ heard /həːd/
I: bid /bid/ ∼ bird /bəːd/
Y: myth /miθ/ ∼ myrrh /məː/

# spelling R vowels: aː and oː

## a/aj/aw ∼ aː

A: bat /bad/ ∼ bard /baːd/
I: fine /fajn/ ∼ fire /faːr/
Y: type /tajp/ ∼ tyre /taːr/
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## o/əw ∼ oː

O: port /pot/ ∼ port /poːt/
A: swamp /swomp/ ∼ swarm /swoːm/
O: bone /bəwn/ ∼ bore /boː/
OA: roam /rəwm/ ∼ roar /roː/
OU: soul /səwl/ ∼ source /soːs/

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7. "foreign" words: toccata /təkaːtə/, Gestapo /gestaːpəw/

# sample exam question

## which words exemplify the NURSE merger?

1. sure /ʃoː/ or /ʃəː/
2. you /juw/ and your /joː/
3. berth /bəːθ/ and birth /bəːθ/
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