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

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but life is more complicated: gaol/dsejl/, gynecology /gajnikolədij/


## spelling short/checked vowels with single vowel letters

| VOWEL | SPELLING | EXAMPLES |
| :---: | :---: | :--- |
| i | $\mathrm{I} / \mathrm{Y}$ | kit, myth, mint, crystal |
| e | E | dress, ten, belt, depth |
| a | A | trap, lax, talc, thank |
| $\circ$ | O | lot, moth, loss, pond |
| $\partial$ | 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 |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Middle English, North of England | u | u | u | u |
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- but not
- in some words, like put or full
- in the North of England
- this results in $\mathrm{U}=/ \partial /$, and, in a few words, $\mathrm{U}=/ \mathrm{u} /$


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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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## 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 | - |
| $\partial$ | 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 |
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digraphs

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

## 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 | - |  |
| วw | 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 |
| ej | EA | break, great, steak |
| aj | EI/EY | height, eye |
| วw | OU/OW | soul, shoulder, tow, know |
| uw | OU | group, route, soup |

## summary of the spelling of diphthongs

| VOWEL | SPELLING |  |  |
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|  | REGULAR: SVL \| DIGRAPH | OTHER | "FOREIGN" |
|  | 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 | group |
| əw | home \| roam | soul/bowl, sew | chauffeur |
| oj | $-\\|$ voice/joy | - | Freud |
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## digraphs representing short/checked vowels

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|  | COMMON | RARE |
| i | - | sieve |
| e | bread, deaf, head | leisure, Geoff, said/says, friend |
| a | - | plaid, plait |
| $\circ$ | - | cough, trough, knowledge |
| $\partial$ | 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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the second member of a vowel digraph may be Y or W too, typically they vary with I and $U$, respectively: $A I=A Y, E U=E W$, etc

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- the absence of palatalization and a vowel: guess /ges/, guide /gajd/
- a vowel and word-final silent E: die (cf dying), toe, continue
the relation of checked and $R$ vowels, free and $R$ vowels
checked

R
free


## spelling R vowels: i: and e:

```
ij ~ i:
E: meme /mijm/ ~ mere /mi:/
EE: cheek /t tijk/ ~ cheer / t Ji:/
EA: ease /ijz/ ~ ear /i:/
EI/EY: seize /sijz/ ~ weird /wi:d/
IE: thief /⿴囗ijf/ ~ tier /tiz/
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EI/EY: seize /sijz/ ~ weird /wi:d/
IE: thief /Qijif/ ~ tier /tiz/
ej ~ e:

A: state /stejt/ ~ stare /ste:/
AI/AY: aid /ejd/ ~ air /e:/
EA: break /brejk/ ~ bear /be:/
EI/EY: they /ðej/ ~ their /ðe:/

## spelling $R$ vowels: $u:$ and $\partial:$

## UW ~ U:

U: cute /kjuwt/ ~ cure /kju:/
EU/EW: neutral /njuwtral/ ~ neural /nju:ral/
UI: nuisance /njuwsəns/ ~ Muir /mju:/
OU: Louvre /luwv/ ~ Lourdes /lu:d/

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ә/e/i ~ ә:
U: hut /hət/ ~ hurt /həit/
O: won /wən/ ~ work /wərk/
OU: couple /kəpəl/ ~ courtesy /kərtsij/
E: vest /vest/ ~ verse /vəis/
EA: head /hed/ ~ heard /hə:d/
I: bid /bid/ ~ bird /bard/
Y: myth /mi / / ~ myrrh /mə:/

## spelling $R$ vowels: $a$ : and $o$ :

## a/aj/aw ~ a:

A: bat /bad/ ~ bard /ba:d/
I: fine /fajn/ ~ fire /fa:/
Y: type /tajp/ ~ tyre /ta:/
OU: house /haws/ ~ hour /a:/

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o/วw ~ O:
O: port /pot/ ~ port /poit/
A: swamp /swomp/ ~ swarm /swo:m/
O: bone /bəwn/ ~ bore /bo:/
OA: roam /rəwm/ ~ roar /ro:/
OU: soul /səwl/ ~ source /so:s/

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7. "foreign" words: toccata /təka:tə/, Gestapo /gestarpəw/

## sample exam question

which words exemplify the NURSE merger?

1. sure / $\mathrm{fo}: /$ or / f ə:/
2. you /juw/ and your /jo:/
3. berth /bə: $\theta$ / and birth /bə: $\theta /$
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