

Common English Mispronounced Words



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Many English words are pronounced differently from how they are spelled. This is one of the most frustrating aspects of English for learners — and even native speakers get some of these wrong. The key is recognizing the patterns: silent letters, surprising vowel sounds, stress on unexpected syllables, and words borrowed from other languages that kept their original pronunciation. Learning these patterns helps you apply the rules to new words you encounter, not just memorize individual cases.

Silent Letters	Word	Correct Pronunciation
Silent K	knife, know, knock, kneel, knight	nife, noh, nok, neel, nite
Silent B	climb, bomb, comb, debt, doubt, subtle	klime, bom, kohm, det, dowt, suttel
Silent G	sign, design, foreign, gnome, campaign	sine, deh-ZINE, FOR-in, nome, cam-PANE
Silent W	write, wrong, wrap, wrist, answer	rite, rong, rap, rist, AN-ser
Silent H	honest, hour, heir, vehicle, ghost	ON-ist, OW-er, air, VEE-uh-kul, gohst
Silent L	calm, palm, salmon, talk, walk, half	kahm, pahm, SAM-un, tok, wok, haf
Silent T	listen, fasten, castle, whistle, often	LIS-en, FAS-en, KAS-ul, WIS-ul, OF-en
Silent P	psychology, pneumonia, receipt, cupboard	sy-KOL-uh-jee, nyoo-MOH-nyuh, reh-SEET, KUB-erd

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Surprising Vowel Sounds	Word	Correct Pronunciation
-ough (multiple sounds)	though / through / thought / tough / cough	thoh / throo / thawt / tuf / kof
Women	not WO-men	WIM-in
Busy	not BYOO-zee	BIZ-ee
Blood / flood	not blOOd / flOOd	blud / flud
Island	not IZ-land	EYE-land (the S is silent)
Iron	not EYE-ron	EYE-ern
Leopard	not lee-OH-pard	LEP-erd
Sword	not SWOR-d	sord (W is silent)
Colonel	not KOL-oh-nel	KER-nel

Stress on Wrong Syllable	Word	Correct Stress
Photograph / Photography	These are different — stress shifts	PHO-to-graph / pho-TOG-ra-phy
Present (noun/adj) vs Present (verb)	Stress changes the meaning	PRE-sent (noun) / pre-SENT (verb)
Record (noun) vs Record (verb)	Stress changes the meaning	REC-ord (noun) / re-CORD (verb)
Comfortable	4 syllables becomes 3 in speech	COMF-ter-bul (not COM-for-ta-bul)
Temperature	4 syllables becomes 3 in speech	TEM-pra-chur (not TEM-per-a-chur)
Vegetable	4 syllables becomes 3 in speech	VEJ-tuh-bul (not VEJ-eh-ta-bul)
February	4 syllables — first R often dropped	FEB-yoo-air-ee (not FEB-roo-air-ee)
Particularly	6 syllables — often reduced	par-TIK-yuh-lee (not par-TIK-yoo-lar-lee)
Deteriorate	5 syllables — stress on second	deh-TEER-ee-uh-rayt

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Borrowed Words — Keep Original Sound	Word	Correct Pronunciation
Espresso (Italian)	not EX-presso	es-PRES-oh (no X)
Bruschetta (Italian)	not broo-SHET-ah	broo-SKET-ah (CH = K in Italian)
Quinoa (Quechua)	not KWIN-oh-ah	KEEN-wah
Croissant (French)	not KRWA-sant	kruh-SAHN (T is silent)
Naan (Hindi)	not NAY-an	nahn (one syllable)
Chipotle (Nahuatl)	not chi-POT-ul	chi-POHT-lay (the E is pronounced)
Choir (Greek origin)	not CHOY-er	KWY-er (CH = K)
Yacht (Dutch origin)	not YATCH-t	yot (CH is silent)
Queue (French origin)	not KYOO-way	kyoo (only the first letter is sounded)

Common Mistakes — Right vs Wrong	Correct	Incorrect
Ask	ahsk (standard) / ask (American)	ax (non-standard)
Height	hyte (rhymes with kite)	hyth (rhymes with width) ✗
Clothes	kloh-z (one syllable)	KLOH-theez (two syllables) ✗
Wednesday	WENZ-day	WED-nes-day (spelling pronunciation) ✗
Library	LY-brair-ee	LY-bare-ee (dropping the first R) ✗
Nuclear	NYOO-kee-er	NYOO-kyuh-ler ✗
Especially	eh-SPEESH-uh-lee	ex-SPEESH-uh-lee (no X) ✗
Epitome	eh-PIT-uh-mee	EP-ih-tohm (the E is pronounced) ✗
Mischievous	MIS-chuh-vus (3 syllables)	mis-CHEEV-ee-us (4 syllables) ✗
Sherbet	SHER-bet	SHER-bert (no R at the end) ✗

EXAMPLES

- SILENT LETTER: You write "knife" but say "nife" — the K has been silent in English since the 17th century.
- VOWEL SURPRISE: "Women" looks like it should rhyme with "omen" but it rhymes with "swimmin."

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EXAMPLES

- STRESS SHIFT: "I want to present you with a present." — same word, different stress, different role.
- REDUCED SYLLABLES: "Comfortable" in fast natural speech is COMF-ter-bul — not four full syllables.
- BORROWED WORD: "Bruschetta" keeps its Italian CH sound — say broo-SKET-ah, not broo-SHET-ah.
- SILENT T: "Listen" and "fasten" — the T disappeared from pronunciation centuries ago but stayed in spelling.
- -OUGH CHAOS: "Though" / "through" / "thought" / "tough" / "cough" — five different sounds, same letter pattern.
- Colonel: Spelled like "kernel" sounds — because English borrowed the spelling from French and the pronunciation from Italian.