



How to Make the Diphthong Sounds in English: A Comprehensive Guide with Pronunciation Exercises

Diphthongs are combinations of two vowel sounds pronounced within the same syllable like in 'owl' and 'ear'. In English, diphthongs play a crucial role in shaping pronunciation and are found in countless words across various accents and dialects. In some diphthongs the two sounds have blended over time, and you can no longer hear them as distinctly as in the past.

Understanding and mastering these diphthongs is key to achieving clear and authentic English pronunciation. In this guide, we'll explore the different English diphthongs in the way that they are said in Standard Southern British English.

1. /eɪ/ as in "face":

Late, pay, came, mate, same, pain, rain

The tip of the tongue is relaxed and behind the bottom teeth. This diphthong begins with a mid-front, unrounded vowel sound (/e/) and glides into a close-mid, front, unrounded vowel /ɪ/ but there is still backwards glide, through the sound.

Exercise: Repeat the word "day" slowly, paying attention to the transition from the first to the second vowel sound.

Practise sentences :

It doesn't rain much in Spain.

It was a great ride on the train across the plains.



2. /aɪ/ as in "price"

Slide, glide, behind, fight, kite, light, right, mind

This diphthong starts with an open-mid, front, unrounded vowel sound (/a/) and slides into a close front, unrounded vowel (/ɪ/). It travels to the back of the mouth, and ends in a 'y' like sound.

Exercise: Practice saying "time" while focusing on the movement of your tongue from the back to the front of your mouth.

Practise sentences :

I climbed with pride and won the prize.

I lied about the height of the slide.



3. /ɔɪ/ as in "choice":

Toy, coil, boil, boy, coy, oil

This diphthong begins in the lips being rounded and travels into the mouth becoming wider. You can feel the transition quite clearly from the front of the mouth to the mouth widening.

Exercise: Repeat the word "boy" and emphasize the transition from the rounded "ɔ" sound to the front "ɪ" sound.

Practise sentences :

There's a toy on the floor.

The oysters need to be fried in boiling oil.

Coil the foil around the fish before it boils.

4. /aʊ/ as in "mouth":

Round, cow, brown, town, sound, gown, loud, bow

This diphthong starts with an open-mid, back, rounded vowel sound (/a/) and moves into a close-mid, back, rounded vowel (/ʊ/). The mouth starts open and then comes in almost closing.

Exercise: Say "house" slowly, focusing on rounding your lips for the first sound and then relaxing them for the second.

Practise sentences:

'The loud crowd came from the South of the county'.

'I shouted about the brown gown being too loud'

5. /oʊ/ as in "goat":

Goat, throat, though, coat, boat, remote, zone, Rome, moan

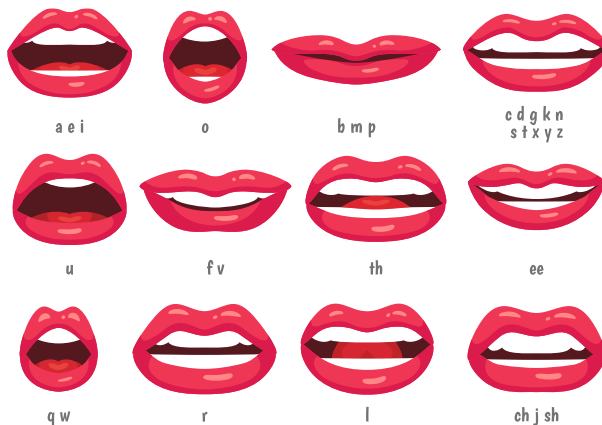
This diphthong begins with a close-mid, back, rounded vowel sound (/o/) and transitions into a close-mid, back, rounded vowel (/ʊ/). The jaw is open and then comes in and there is slight rounding of the lips.

Exercise: Practice saying "go" while paying attention to the rounding of your lips and the movement of your tongue.

Practise sentences

The boat isn't close it is remote.

We are in the phone free zone.





6. /ɪə/ as in "fear"

Fear, beer, clear, ear, near, tear, rear, pier

This diphthong starts with a slight /ɪ/ sound with the mouth slightly wide and then transitions to a schwa sound. It is an unrounded vowel sound (/ɪ/) and glides into a near-close, central, unrounded vowel (/ə/).

Exercise: Repeat the word "fear" and focus on the gradual shift of your tongue position from the front to the centre of your mouth.

Practise sentences:

Let's have a beer on the pier, we can sit here.

It is not clear how near the deer is.

7. /eə/ as in "square":

Bear, pear, care, fair, dare, share, fair, hair

This diphthong begins with a close-mid, front, unrounded vowel sound (/e/) and transitions into a near-close, near-front, unrounded vowel (/ə/). The mouth is quite open and then comes in a little bit more towards the end of the diphthong.

Exercise: Say "care" slowly, paying attention to the movement of your tongue from the front to the centre of your mouth.

Practise sentences :

A bear with brown hair eating a pear.

Share your rare fair with me.

8. /ʊə/ as in "tour"

Cure, pure, during, tour

This diphthong starts with a close, back, rounded vowel sound (/ʊ/) and glides into a near-close, near-back, rounded vowel (/ə/). This diphthong is not in common use as much as it used to be on some words such as 'tour' and 'sure' with many words turning into the /ɔ:/ sound now which is the easier sound to say.

Exercise: Practice saying "cure" while focusing on the rounded position of your lips and the gradual shift of your tongue towards the back of your mouth.

Practise sentences:

'There is no cure for all the tourists in town'

'We will ensure that you will feel secure'

By mastering these diphthongs and practicing their pronunciation exercises, you'll enhance your English-speaking skills and sound more natural and fluent. Remember to pay attention to the movement of your tongue, lips, and vocal cords to achieve accurate pronunciation.



With dedication and practice, you'll be well on your way to mastering the complexities of English diphthongs.