

General /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ Words

In the low sector of the vowel chart, speakers of educated English have some choice in how they pronounce words. In some regions, speakers distinguish words by using /ɑ/ and /ɔ/, e.g. *cot - caught, don - dawn*. In other regions, speakers use only one of these vowel sounds for the same words, making the words indistinguishable except by context. You may choose to preserve a contrast or use only one vowel sound; both are educated English.

Words often having /ɑ/: These are spelled óC# (*hot*), óCC¹ (*pond*), óC not in the last syllable (*topic*).

hot	cop	bond	rocky	comic	model
top	god	collar	holly	profit	closet
rob	pot	clock	nozzle	opera	promise
shop	con	pocket	scotch	body	honest
nod	Tom	bottle	romp	scholar	polish

Words often having /ɔ/: These are spelled aú (*fault*), áw (*law*), álC# (*talk*), oúght (*bought*).

daughter	saw	chalk	nought
nausea	flaw	halt	bought
laundry	brawn	calm	brought
haul	lawn	tall	sought
slaughter	hawk	stalk	wrought

Words having /ɑ/ only: These are spelled ár#, árC.²

car	char	market	tarp
bar	mar	hard	farm
star	jar	arc	lark
far	par	dart	barn
scar	tar	alarm	carve

¹The spelling ólt/d/s/k predicts the tense vowel /ow/: *volt, bold, holster, folk*. A few words with *o* next to *v, w, n,* and *m* are pronounced as /ʌ/: *shovel, won, wonder, son, company, front, tongue, Monday, cover*.

²These spellings preceded by <w>, e.g. wár#, wárC, predict the /ɔ/ sound: *war, warm, wart, ward*.