

Name-Shape Translator

To predict glided, unglided, and reduced vowel sounds from spelling, it is necessary to look for clues. One set of clues – the name-shape translator – is presented in this lesson. Using these clues, you will learn the pronunciations associated with each vowel letter.

A. Letter Names for Glided Vowels

The English names for vowel letters provide an important clue to vowel sounds. Do you know the English names for vowel letters? They are transcribed below. If you use the Roman alphabet in your native language, what names do you use for these vowel letters?

If you have a name for each vowel letter in your native language, transcribe it.

	English Name	E.g.	Your Name		English Name	E.g.	Your Name
a, A	/ey/	fade	_____	o, O	/ow/	bone	_____
e, E	/iy/	feed	_____	u, U	/yuw/*	boot	_____
i, I	/ay/	fine	_____	y, Y	/way/*	fine	_____

*In the following exercises, do not include the /y/ of /yuw/ or the /w/ of /way/; use only the /uw/ part of the name for **u** and the /ay/ part of the name for **y**.

It is very important that you know the English names for the vowel letters in order to predict vowel sounds from spelling. *Memorize the names that are unfamiliar to you.*

- Without looking at the letter names above, write out the English names.*
- Say each vowel name aloud.*

E.g. o / ow /	3. y / /	7. u / /	11. a / /
E.g. e / iy /	4. a / /	8. e / /	12. y / /
1. u / /	5. e / /	9. i / /	13. e / /
2. i / /	6. o / /	10. o / /	14. u / /

☛ Notice that the English names of vowel letters are **glided** vowel sounds – those that end in / -y/ and / -w/.

B. Letter Shapes for Unglided Vowels

Another clue to vowel sounds is the shape or form of the vowel letter. Some shapes remind us of, or suggest, vowel symbols. *Study these visual associations, and take the time to learn them well.*

a, A	/æ/	fad	o, O	/ɔ, ɑ/	boss, cot
e, E	/ɛ/	fed	u, U	“flipped over” i.e. /ʌ/	custom
i, I	/ɪ/	fit	y, Y	/ɪ/ same as for i, I	fit

- Without looking at the visual associations above, write out the vowel symbols connected to the shape of each vowel letter.
- Say each vowel symbol aloud.

- | | | | |
|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. e / / | 5. o / / | 9. u / / | 13. i / / |
| 2. a / / | 6. e / / | 10. i / / | 14. a / / |
| 3. u / / | 7. y / / | 11. e / / | 15. y / / |
| 4. i / / | 8. a / / | 12. o / / | 16. u / / |

☛ All vowel-shape clues point us to **unglided** vowel sounds.

Figure out the symbol and sound of each vowel letter using the clue of name or shape.

	Letter	Clue	Sound		Letter	Clue	Sound
E.g.	a, A	name	/ ey /	7.	e, E	name	/ /
E.g.	i, I	shape	/ ɪ /	8.	i, I	name	/ /
1.	y, Y	name	/ /	9.	i, I	shape	/ /
2.	y, Y	shape	/ /	10.	e, E	shape	/ /
3.	o, O	shape	/ /	11.	a, A	name	/ /
4.	u, U	name	/ /	12.	a, A	shape	/ /
5.	u, U	shape	/ /	13.	y, Y	name	/ /
6.	o, O	name	/ /	14.	u, U	shape	/ /

C. Reduced Vowels

If a vowel letter should be pronounced with its “name” or glided vowel quality, you can now identify the exact glided vowel symbol for a particular vowel letter. Similarly, if a vowel letter should be pronounced with its “shape” or unglided

vowel quality, you can write the correct unglided vowel symbol for that vowel letter. But what if a vowel letter should be pronounced with a reduced vowel quality? What symbol do we write?

For all vowel letters, the reduced vowel pronunciation will be schwa, /ə/. However, if the spelling of the vowel letter is e, i, or y, the reduced vowel can be either /ə/ or /ɪ/ in educated English. Here is a summary:

a, A	/ə/	can<u>v</u>as	e, E	/ə or ɪ/	cancel
o, O	/ə/	cann<u>o</u>n	i, I	/ə or ɪ/	cand<u>i</u>d
u, U	/ə/	camp<u>u</u>s	y, Y	/ə or ɪ/	catal<u>y</u>st

Figure out the sound of each vowel letter using the clue of name, shape, or reduced.

	Letter	Clue	Sound		Letter	Clue	Sound
E.g.	a, A	name	/ ey /	9.	e, E	reduced	/ /
E.g.	i, I	reduced	/ ə~ɪ /	10.	i, I	shape	/ /
1.	y, Y	name	/ /	11.	i, I	name	/ /
2.	y, Y	reduced	/ /	12.	e, E	shape	/ /
3.	e, E	name	/ /	13.	o, O	name	/ /
4.	o, O	reduced	/ /	14.	a, A	name	/ /
5.	u, U	shape	/ /	15.	a, A	shape	/ /
6.	u, U	reduced	/ /	16.	y, Y	shape	/ /
7.	a, A	reduced	/ /	17.	i, I	reduced	/ /
8.	o, O	shape	/ /	18.	u, U	name	/ /

The Name-Shape Translator

In summary, the name-shape translator (NST) converts vowel spellings into vowel symbols, given the clue of vowel quality – “name”, “shape”, and “reduced”.

letter + “name” translates into the glided name of the vowel letter.

letter + “shape” translates into the unglided vowel linked to the letter.

letter + “reduced” translates into /ə/, or if the letter is e, i, or y, /ə~ɪ/.

The NST suggests all of the stressed and unstressed vowel sounds in English except /ʊ, ɜr, aw, ɔy, ər/. Other refinements to the translator will be added in later lessons to accommodate these remaining vowels.

In order to do its job, the name-shape translator must have a clue to vowel quality. How do you know which vowel quality clue is required for a particular vowel letter? A **vowel quality pattern** will give you that information.

In upcoming lessons you will learn fourteen basic vowel quality patterns (VQPs) that will give you the power, with the name-shape translator, to predict accurately the sound (actually, the symbol for the sound) of vowels in a huge number of words in English, even those you have never seen before.

Check your answers: p. 1. 1. /uw/; 2. /ay/; 3. /ay/; 4. /ey/; 5. /iy/; 6. /ow/; 7. /uw/; 8. /iy/; 9. /ay/; 10. /ow/; 11. /ey/; 12. /ay/; 13. /iy/; 14. /uw/. p. 2 top. 1. /ɛ/; 2. /æ/; 3. /ʌ/; 4. /ɪ/; 5. /ɔ, ɑ/; 6. /ɛ/; 7. /ɪ/; 8. /æ/; 9. /ʌ/; 10. /ɪ/; 11. /ɛ/; 12. /ɔ, ɑ/; 13. /ɪ/; 14. /æ/; 15. /ɪ/; 16. /ʌ/. p. 2 bot. 1. /ay/; 2. /ɪ/; 3. /ɔ, ɑ/; 4. /uw/; 5. /ʌ/; 6. /ow/; 7. /iy/; 8. /ay/; 9. /ɪ/; 10. /ɛ/; 11. /ey/; 12. /æ/; 13. /ay/; 14. /ʌ/. p. 3. 1. /ay/; 2. /ə, ɪ/; 3. /iy/; 4. /ə/; 5. /ʌ/; 6. /ə/; 7. /ə/; 8. /ɔ, ɑ/; 9. /ə, ɪ/; 10. /ɪ/; 11. /ay/; 12. /ɛ/; 13. /ow/; 14. /ey/; 15. /æ/; 16. /ɪ/; 17. /ə, ɪ/; 18. /uw/.