

Guide to the Pronunciation of French Using the IPA Phonetic Symbols

| Phonetic Symbols of Oral Vowels | Some Spelling Examples in French Words | Approximate Sounds in English Words | Comments, Hints, Observations |
|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| [a] | patte, papa, collage, Paris | something like the vowel sound in Tom | a antérieur (front of mouth) |
| [ɑ] | pâte, pas, âge, vase | ah! art, alms | a postérieur (back of mouth, drop jaw) |

Note: Some dictionaries and reference books that give phonetic symbols for French sounds do not use this [ɑ] symbol to distinguish the sound from the [a] sound listed above it. We agree with those reference books that retain the distinction in pronunciation between words such as *tache* [taʃ] and *tâche* [taʃ]. In this book we use both different sounds in order to show the difference in both pronunciation and meaning.

| | | | |
|-------|--|--|---|
| [e] | jouer, j'ai, gai, café, thé | gay, say, ate | e fermé (closed e) |
| [ɛ] | elle, jouet, valet, tête, poète, mais, j'aime, merci | egg, met | e ouvert (open e) |
| [i] | ici, il, lire, lyre, île, Paris | see | |
| [ɔ] | donne, Paul, or, mort, mode | up, mud, done | o ouvert (open o); drop your jaw a bit |
| [o] | pôle, mot, eau, gauche, chevaux, repos | oh! open | o fermé (closed o) |
| [u] | fou, vous, roue, août, loup | to, too, food | keep your lips apart, thrust forward a bit |
| [y] | tu, rue, mur, eu, elle eut, du, su, sur, sûr | (not an English sound, but close to the sound of few without pronouncing the y sound that comes before the u sound or the w that comes after it) | see page 9 |
| [ø] | feu, noeud, ceux, queue, peu | (not an English sound, but close to pudding) | thrust your lips forward a bit |
| [œ] | jeune, neuf, boeuf, peuple, peur | (not an English sound, but close to purr) | drop your jaw a bit |
| [ə] | je, me, premier, de | again | this phonetic [ə] symbol is called e muet (mute e). |

Phonetic Symbols of Nasal Vowels

| | | |
|--------|------------|---|
| [ɛ̃] | un, parfum | (not an English sound, but close to sung) |
| [ɔ̃] | bon | (not an English sound, but close to song) |
| [ɛ̃] | vin | (not an English sound, but close to sang) |
| [ɑ̃] | blanc | (not an English sound, but close to throng) |

Phonetic Symbols of Consonant Sounds

| | | | |
|-------|---------------------------|-------------------|---|
| [b] | bon, bébé | be, baby | |
| [d] | donne | done | |
| [f] | femme | fun | |
| [g] | gare, gai | gay, gum | |
| [k] | cou, café, cinq, quarante | can, kangaroo | avoid making an explosive aspirate h sound as in the English word <i>key</i> |
| [l] | bal, ballet | blame, long, tell | |
| [m] | madame | me, him | |
| [n] | banane | banana | |
| [ɲ] | signer, agneau | canyon, onion | |
| [ɲ] | le camping | camping, sleeping | |
| [p] | papa | pal | avoid making an explosive aspirate h sound as we do in the English word <i>puff</i> |
| [r] | Paris, rue | air, rude | |

Some books that use phonetic symbols for French sounds sometimes use uppercase R instead of lowercase r. Remember that there is no equivalent in English. The French sound is pronounced farther back in the throat, at the uvula, the fleshy lobe you see hanging when you look in the mirror, open your mouth, and say aah.

| | | |
|-------|---------------|-------------------|
| [s] | silence | silence, pass |
| [t] | tutu | table |
| [v] | vent | village, live |
| [z] | zéro | zero, easy, shows |
| [ʃ] | chaise, chose | shows |

Note that *la chose* means *the thing*; *chose* sounds very much like the English word *shows* without that *w* sound. To express a *ch* sound, as in *church*, *itch*, the phonetic symbol [tʃ] is used, as if spelled *tch*.

| | | |
|-------|------------|-------------------|
| [ʒ] | je, garage | leisure, pleasure |
|-------|------------|-------------------|

Note: If you study, practice, memorize, write, and pronounce aloud the IPA phonetic symbols, you will be an expert in reading French without even looking at the French words. When French words are transcribed into these phonetic symbols, they reproduce the French sounds—if pronounced properly—even if you cannot read the words written in French! Isn't that remarkable?