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English Pronunciation | The Letter “A” | 13 Ways to Pronounce A

#1 /æ/ “AA”

Anatomy: For the /æ/ sound- the jaw is open, back and middle of tongue are down- feeling the back of your oral cavity widening as you spread your lips into a smile.

Words:

Had
At
Have
That
Has
Last
Fast

Weird Spellings for /æ/

Plaid *
Daiquiri
Laugh *

Phrases:

That map
At last
Had my back
Has a bat
Fast track
Plaid hat
Laugh at that

Sentences:

The **cat sat** on the **black mat**.
Don't **laugh** at my **plaid** skirt.
He **had** to **grab** a **glass** of milk.
The **actor's last** show was **captivating**.
Jack packed his **backpack** and **ran** to **catch** the bus.

SECRET #1: [æ̃]

When the /æ/ sound is followed by a nasal sound like n, m, or ŋ there is an anticipatory effect. This means that since we expect to pull our velum down during the vowel, so the vowel receives a slight nasal effect.

If you're practicing /æ/ just pronounce it as normal, and any nasality will occur naturally...just know it's something that naturally occurs.

Nasalized [æ̃]

Man
Dance
Advance
Example
Hand
Land
Plan
Can't
And
Animal
Answer

With nasalized /æ̃/ "an, ank, ang"

Thank

Sang
Rang
Slang
Bank
Mango

Sentences:

Sandy bought a **fancy handbag**.
The teacher **handed back** the **exams**.
The **man planned** to go to the **Grand Canyon**.
She **planted** flowers and **expanded** her garden.
The **bank manager demanded** an **answer**.
Thank you for the **mangos**!

#2: /eɪ/ “EH EE”

Anatomy: This is a diphthong sound, meaning there are two vowels to pronounce.
Start with an “EH” – slightly open jaw, tongue in a forward middle position and a slight smile with the lips.

Then transition to the “EE” sound moving the middle of the tongue up towards the palate.

Words:

Take
Make
Shape
Place
Cake
Bake
Age
Page

This is also common in (able) words when in the stressed syllable:

Able
Cable
Table
Enable

The /eɪ/ is also common in “AY” spelled words

Pay
Way
Stay
Day
Say

Other exception spelling with the “a” are spelled with “EA”

Great

Steak

Break

Here are some other A words pronounced as /eɪ/:

Radio

Favourite

April

Agent

Angel

Basil * 2 pronunciations

Phrases:

Make a cake

Stable table

Able agent

Favourite page

A great day in April

Sentences:

She wants to **make** a special **cake** for her friend’s birthday.

Can you **shape** the **clay** today?

The **baker** decided to **bake** in a new **place**.

As we **age**, our **tastes** often **change**.

The **radio station** **played** her **favorite** song.

❓ #3 /ɑ/ “AH”

Anatomy: The /ɑ/ sound is produced with an open jaw, The middle and back of the tongue are in a low back position in the oral cavity, and the lips are in a relaxed open position (not smiling, but not tensely rounded in any way)

These /ɑ/ words are spelled with “A”

All

Awesome

Father

Calm

Saw

Want

Wash

Watch

Yacht

There are also /a/ words spelled with “AU”

Auto
Audio
Autumn
Author
August
Launch
Nauseous
Caught
Taught
Pause
Fault
Cause
Sauce
Haul
Haunt

An exception word spelled with “OA”
Broad /a/

Phrases:

That’s awesome sauce
Auto launch
Father saw it all
Calmly wash the dog
Watch the yacht
Want to pause
Launch in August

Find the /a/ sound in these Sentences:

Father saw the awesome sunset.
She wants to wash her car.
He enjoys watching the autumn leaves in the fall.
The auto launch event was successful.
He paused to appreciate the calm yacht on the dock.

#4 /ʌ/ “UH”

- **Anatomy:** The “UH” sound is represented with this IPA symbol.
To make this sound, relax your jaw, tongue and lips-with your teeth slightly apart, vocalize a sound “UH”

Here are a few rare A words that are pronounced as “UH”

What

Was
Because

Sentences

What's the answer?

Was it really that long ago?

Because I said so.

Was it **because** of the thunderstorm?

☞ #5 /ə/ "UH" (schwa)

Anatomy: This sound is produced quite similarly to the previous sound, but produced in a much quicker, unstressed way, since it only occurs in unstressed syllables and unstressed words

Let's look at A pronounced as "uh" the schwa sound

A (when not stressed)

An (when not stressed)

Amazing (notice, they occur in the unstressed syllables)

America

Canada

About

Along

Around

Another

Again

Away

Across

Ahead

Sofa

Banana

Phrases:

America's amazing

America and Canada

Another amazing day

About a new project

Away from the sofa

A long time ago

Again and again

Sentences:

In America and Canada, amazing parks stretch across the landscapes

It's about time, we found an amazing sofa

She walked along the beach, around the bend, and across the sand.

☐ #6 /ɛ/ “EH”

Anatomy: For this sound, the jaw is slightly open, the middle and back of the tongue is in the neutral forward position, and your lips are only slightly spread.

Let’s practice a few A words that are pronounced as “EH”

Many

Any

Said

Says

Again *also /eɪ/

There are also a few “EA” spelled word exceptions (usually pronounced as “EE” but not in these words!)

Head

Heavy

Heaven

Breath

Sweat

Spread

Dread

Dead

Deaf

Realm

Health

Wealth

Thread

Phrases:

It says so

Any ideas?

She said yes

Heavy breath

Sentences:

I don’t have just any idea, I have many ideas!

Any idea why she said that with a heavy breath?

The paper says there aren’t any heavy metals in the water.

#7 /I/ "IH"

- **Anatomy:** this sound is produced with the jaw almost closed completely. The tongue is lowered from the /i/ position- if you let your tongue drop to a more relaxed version of "EE" that's a great tongue position.
- The lips are also very neutral
- A note about this pronunciation of A words: each of these /I/ pronunciations could also be reduced further to the schwa "uh" sound. So you may hear a combination of /I/ or UH used for any of them. Choose the version you like!

We can organize the /I/ pronunciation in a few different word endings.

Many AGE suffix words are pronounced with /I/

Let's practice:

Manage

Damage

Mileage

Image

Sausage

Some ATE suffix words are pronounced with /I/ although these are exceptions, that are otherwise usually pronounced "ATE"

Climate

Private

Legitimate

Chocolate

Delicate

Desperate

Immediate

Certificate

Lastly, AIN suffix words are pronounced as /I/. let's practice:

Captain

Villain

Bargain

Certain

Curtain

Fountain

Mountain

Britain

A few OTHER notable /I/ pronunciations:

*portrait

*ocean

Phrases

Manage damage
Private certificate
Captain's bargain
Immediate image
Chocolate and sausages

Sentences

He needed to **manage** the **damage** caused by the **ocean**.
The car's high **mileage** suggests it has been driven a lot.
She captured the perfect **image** of the **mountain**.
She took an **immediate** liking to the **delicate** artwork.
The **captain** admired the **portrait** of the famous **villain**.
The **fountain** in the park is a popular spot for visitors.

🔊 #8 /aɪ/ "AH EE"

Anatomy: This is a diphthong sound, so there are two vowels to pronounce.
Start with an "AH" –open jaw, tongue low position and a relaxed open lips.

Then transition to the "EE" sound moving the middle of the tongue up towards the palate with a spreading of the lips to a near-smile.

You will really only see this pronunciation with the spelling "AI"

Words:

Aisle
Chai
Naïve
Samurai
Shanghai

Phrases:

Wide aisle
Chai latte
So naïve
Samurai sword
Moving to Shanghai

Sentences:

He ordered a **chai** latte to drink in the **aisle** of the coffee shop
She was **so naïve**, she didn't notice it was an ancient **samurai** sword
They are moving to **Shanghai** next month for a new job opportunity.

#9 /O/ "OH"

- This pronunciation of A is not as widely discussed. It occurs as another exception of the "AU" spelling.

Let's take a look at some words where the A is pronounced as "OH"

The typical situation is in "AU" Spelling- again, these are more the exception, than they are the rule. They occur in many French origin words as well. Let's take a look:

"AU"

Aura

Dinosaur

Stegosaurus

Thesaurus

Chauffeur

Beau

Faux

Plateau

Bureaucrat

Chauvinism

A is also pronounced as /o/ in "OA" combinations

Soap

Road

Coat

Goal

Toast

Sentences:

The stegosaurus is a dinosaur

I'll use a thesaurus for the word aura

That's a faux leather mauve couch

That's a really broad road (remember "broad" Earlier? /a/ But you're too smart, I'm sure I didn't trick you!)

#10 /U/ "OO"

- **Anatomy:** This sound is pronounced with a neutral jaw opening, the back of the tongue is raised high close to the palate on the roof of the mouth, and the lips are fully rounded.

"OO" The A is pronounced as /u/ "OO" in one instance- and other uses of the base word

Beauty

Beautiful

Beautician

Let's practice:

She's a beautiful beautician

#11 /aʊ/ "AA OO"

- **Anatomy:** This is a diphthong vowel. The first vowel sound is similar to /æ/ with jaw open, tongue low, lips retracted in an open smile.
The sound then transitions to a closed jaw, high back tongue position with tightly rounded lips.

Words:

Flautist

Schnauzer

Sauerkraut

Let's try a sentence.

The schnauzer ran after the flautist with the sauerkraut in his hand.

#12 /i/ "EE"

Anatomy: For /i/ the jaw is closed, the middle of the tongue is high close to the palate of the roof of the mouth and the lips are spread into a smile position.

Let's look at a few examples: This is the typical pronunciation of "EA" as /i/, the other pronunciations have been discussed under "EH" and "EH EE" so go back if you need a refresher!

Tea

Eat

Ear

Pea

Year

Each

Team

Near

Let's practice:

Each year, the team eats pizza after their games

Lifting these heavy weights is making me sweat /ɛ/ "EH"

You did a great job; you deserve a break! /eɪ/ "EH EE"

The bear was heavy after eating pears. (mixed!)

- **#13 DROPPED A:**

- In English, the A is dropped entirely in a few circumstances. Let's look at a few.

UALLY suffix word endings: Drop the "a"

Usually
Actually
Eventually
Gradually
Individually
Manually
Virtually

CALLY: suffix word endings: Drop the "a"

Automatically
Basically
Typically
Logically
Ethically
Vertically
Alphabetically

Other Dropped "A"'s – these are exception words

Separately
Comfortable

Sentences:

She usually completes all of her meetings virtually
I prefer when it's done automatically rather than manually
Actually, his process was completed logically and ethically

BONUS SECRET

A few words to know that you can pronounce in a few different ways- just choose which one you like best 😊

- Data /el/ /æ/ /'dætə/ /'deɪtə/ (first syllable like "day")
- Basil /el/ /æ/ /'bæzəl/ (rhymes with "dazzle") /'beɪzəl/ (rhymes with "nasal")
- Apricot /el/ /æ/ (first syllable like "apple") (first syllable like "ape")
- Mauve /o/ /a/ /moʊv/ (rhymes with vowel in "no") /mav/ (rhymes with vowel in "on")
- Caramel /'kærəmə/ ("kaa ruh mell") /'kɑ:rməl/ (two syllables, "car mull")

SUPER PRACTICE!

Now let's try all of the A pronunciations together. Write down the words you struggle with, and focus on those pronunciations when you practice this video each day for the rest of the week.

1. **Take that plaid hat to my favourite yacht in the ocean**

/teɪk ðæt plæd hæʔ tu: maɪ 'feɪvərɪt jɑt ɪn ði 'oʊʃən/

2. **What was it that your father said about his health again?**

/wɒt wɒz ɪt ðæt jər 'fɑðər sed ə'baʊt hɪz helθ ə'geɪn/

3. **The villain managed to steal the flautist's chai latte**

/ðə 'vɪlən 'mænɪdʒd tu: stɪl ðə 'flaʊtɪsts tʃaɪ 'ləteɪ/

4. **Basically, she feels most beautiful when she's comfortable**

/'beɪsɪkli ʃi fiلز moʊst 'bjʊtɪfəl wɛn ʃɪz 'kʌmfɪtərbəl