

PHONETIC PALINDROMES

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Words which are palindromes may, or may not, sound like palindromes. NOON (**n u: n**), PEEP (**p i: p**) and KINNIKINNIK (**k i n i k i n i k**) sound like palindromes. However, most palindromes with more than 4 letters do not sound like palindromes, an exception being the 5-letter MINIM (**m i n i m**). The palindromically-inconsistent sounds, sometimes subtle, are, nevertheless, real: MADAM (**m æ d ə m**), LEVEL (**l ε v ə l**), TENET (**t ε n i t**), CIVIC (**s i v i k**), SOLOS (**s əʊ l əʊ z**), DEIFIED (**d i: i f aɪ d**) and ROTATOR (**r əʊ t eɪ t ə r**).

On the other hand, there exist **words which are not palindromes but which sound like palindromes**.

These are *phonetic palindromes*. MAIM (**m eɪ m**) is a phonetic palindrome.

Most of the phonetic palindromes considered here consist of 3 phonetic symbols of which the 1st and 3rd are identical. The 1st and 3rd phonetic symbols may represent:

1. (a) the **same 2 single letters** in the word. In this case, the middle phonetic symbol must represent at least 2 letters, and these must not be the same letter otherwise the word itself would be a palindrome.
(b) the **same 2 groups of letters** in the word. In this case, the middle phonetic symbol may represent either a single letter or more than one letter. tʃ ɜ: tʃ (church)
2. **different letters/letter groups** in the word. Again, the middle phonetic symbol may represent either a single letter or more than one letter.

The same phonetic structure may represent more than one word, in which case the words are homophones.

Phonetic symbols used:

Long vowels: i: (as in bean) a: (as in barn) ɔ: (as in born) u: (as in boon) ɜ: (as in burn)
e: (as in schnee) ju: (as in use)

Short vowels: ɪ (as in pit) ε (as in pet) æ (as in pat) ʌ (as in cull) ɒ (as in pot) ʊ (as in put)...

Nasal vowel: ɑ̃ (as in franc) ɔ̃ (as in bɔ̃n Fr.) \ ...e (as in bébé) a (as in mari – Fr.)

Diphthongs: eɪ (as in ate) aɪ (as in bite) aʊ (as in now) ɔə (as in boar) əʊ (as in so)
ɔɪ (as in boy) iə (as in peer)

Triphthongs: aɪə (as in fire) ɔɪə (as in royal) əʊə (as in lower)

Consonants: many are the same as the letters they represent.

Others: ʃ (as in shoe) tʃ (as in chop) ʒ (as in vision) dʒ (as in jive and edge)
θ (as in thin)

1. FIRST AND THIRD PHONETIC SYMBOLS REPRESENT THE SAME LETTER(S)

LONG VOWEL CENTRAL SYMBOL

f	i: f (fief –land held in return for feudal service)	b	a: b (barb)
l	i: l (leal –loyal)	d	a: d (dard – in Botany, a fruit spur)
t	i: t (teat)	m	a: m (marm)
		p	a: p (parp –a honking noise, esp. a car horn)
		t	a: t (tart)

dʒ ɔ: dʒ (George)
 t ɔ: t (tort) (taut) (taught)
 n ɔ: n (nawn – the beard of barley) (norn – a Norwegian dialect)
 k e: k (keak – to cackle)
 n e: n (nain – one's own)
 p e: p (paip – the stone of a cherry)

p ɜ: p (perp – abbrev. 'perpendicular')
 k ɜ: k (kirk – a church)
 tʃ ɜ: tʃ (church)

t ju: t (Teut – coll. abbrev. 'teuton')

SHORT VOWEL CENTRAL SYMBOL

tʃ ɪ tʃ (chich – an old name for chick-pea) d ɛ d (dead)
 k æ k (cack – to void excrement) ʃ ʌ ʃ (shush); also ʃ ʊ ʃ (shush)
 ʃ æ ʃ (shash – sash window frame) ʃ ɪ ʃ (shish – a prolonged hissing sound)
 d a d (daud – to knock, beat) θ ɒ θ (Thoth – an Egyptian God)

DIPHTHONG CENTRAL SYMBOL

d eɪ d (daid – dead) d aɪ d (died)
 m eɪ m (maim) s aɪ s (sais – a horse groom)
 t eɪ t (tait – the honey possum) t aɪ t (tight)
 d aʊ d (dowd – a dowdy woman) d ɔə d (doored)
 n aʊ n (noun)
 t aʊ t (tout – the racing term)

TRIPHTHONG CENTRAL SYMBOL

l ɔɪə l (loyal) r əʊə r (rower) s aɪə s (scious - having knowledge)

CONSONANTAL CENTRAL SYMBOL

ɛks l ɛks (exlex - beyond the law)

2. FIRST AND THIRD PHONETIC SYMBOLS REPRESENT DIFFERENT LETTERS/LETTER COMBINATIONS

LONG VOWEL CENTRAL SYMBOL

l i: l (Lille) k ɑ: k (cark – distress, anxiety)
 s i: s (cease) v ɑ: v (varve – layers of clay and silt)
 z i: z (Zees – letters Z in US)

k ɔ: k (cork) (calk – to rough-shoe) (cauk – chalk) (cawk – a bird cry) (caulk - Nautical: a
 s ɔ: s (sauce) \ drop of liquor)

p e: p (pape – the stone of a cherry) s ɜ: s (searce – a sieve or strainer)
 v ɜ: v (veuve – a widow) (verve – energy)

s u: s (Suess – surname of Hans E. Suess, an Austrian chemist associated with radio-carbon dating)
 t u: t (tote – a look-out hill)
 z u: z (zoos) d ju: d (dude)
 t ju: t (tute – colloquial abbrev. for tutor)

SHORT VOWEL CENTRAL SYMBOL

b ɪ b (bibb – Nautical: a bracket under the trestle-tree of a mast, resembling in position a child's bib)
k ɪ k (kick)
l ɪ l (lill – a very small pin)
s ɪ s (siss—to hiss)
z ɪ z (zizz – whizzing noises) ʒ y ʒ (juge)

f ɛ f (feoff, feff – to grant possession of a property in land)
g ɛ g (gegg – a hoax) (Gheg – a people of Northern Albania)
k ɛ k (keck)
s ɛ s (cess – amount of tax) (sess – a section of a soap-cooling frame)
t ɛ t (tête)

dʒ ʌ dʒ (judge)	k ɒ k (cock)(Koch – a German bacteriologist)
f ʌ f (fuff – a puff of wind)	(coque– type of ribbon for hat trimming)
l ʌ l (lull)	l ɒ l (loll)
n ʌ n (none – nothing)	m ɒ m (momme – mom)
s ʌ s (suss – a slattern, a slut)	s ɒ s (sooss – a heavy, awkward fall)
f æ f (faff – to fuss)	k u k (cook) (cuck – to utter the note of a
l æ l (lall – to speak childishly)	\cuckoo)
s æ s (sass – sauce)	t e t (tate – handful of fibres eg. hair)

NASAL VOWEL CENTRAL SYMBOL

t ɑ̃ t (tante – an aunt) b ɔ̃ b (bombe -a cup-shaped confection, often frozen)

DIPHTHONG CENTRAL SYMBOL

b eɪ b (babe)	f aɪ f (fife – a small flute-type instrument)
d eɪ d (dade – to move with uncertain steps)	l aɪ l (lile – little) (Lisle – type of thread)
k eɪ k (cake)	m aɪ m (mime) \Lyll – a surname)
p eɪ p (Pape – Pope)	n aɪ n (nine)
t eɪ t (Tate – a surname)	p aɪ p (pipe)
	s aɪ s (sice – the no. 6 mark on a dice)
	\ (syce – a horse groom)
k əʊ k (coke)	s aʊ s (souse)
n əʊ n (none – the third quarter of the day beginning at noon and lasting till the sun is half way set)	
p əʊ p (Pope)	
t əʊ t (tote – the total amount)	t uə t (Tourte – a French violin-bow maker)

So far, the 1st and 3rd phonetic symbols have represented **consonantal sounds**. Examples in which the 1st and 3rd symbols represent **vocalic sounds** are a lot less common:

The word uh-huh is unusual in having the 1st and 3rd phonetic symbols representing the **same letter combination**: ʌ h ʌ. The 1st and 3rd symbols below represent **different letters/letter combinations**:

LONG VOWEL 1st and 3rd SYMBOLS

ɑ: f ɑ: (Afar – a member of a Cushitic-speaking people of Jibuti and NE Ethiopia)
ɑ: v ɑ: (Avar – a member of a Turkic people prominent in SE Europe from the 6th to the 9th c. A.D.)
e: p e: (épée)

SHORT VOWELS 1st and 3rd SYMBOLS

ɪ f ɪ (iffy – doubtful)
ɪ k ɪ (icky, ikky – sentimental)
ɪ ll ɪ (illy – in an ill manner) e n e (aîné – the elder)
ɪ m ɪ (immy – a type of marble used by children)
ɪ t ɪ (itty – little)

NASAL VOWELS 1st and 3rd SYMBOLS

ɑ̃ f ɑ̃ (enfant – child)

DIPHTHONGS 1st and 3rd SYMBOLS

aɪ t aɪ (Eyetic) ɪə r ɪə (eria – a type of silkworm)
əʊ b əʊ (oboe)
əʊ f əʊ (oaf – slang for a lout or hooligan)
əʊ s əʊ (oh-so – extremely)

3. PHONETIC PALINDROMES WITH 5 PHONETIC SYMBOLS

In these examples, it is either the middle phonetic symbol, or the 2nd and 4th symbols, which represent the vowel sounds.

LONG VOWEL MIDDLE SYMBOL

s t ɑ: t s (starts) s t ɜ: t s (sturts – startles)

DIPHTHONG MIDDLE SYMBOL

s t eɪ t s (states) s t aʊ t s (stouts)
s t əʊ t s (stoats) s t ɔɪ t s (stoits – rebounds, bounces)

SHORT VOWEL 2nd and 4th SYMBOLS

s ɪ l ɪ s (cilice – hair cloth)
k ɪ l ɪ k (kellick – a heavy stone used as a substitute anchor on small vessels)
k ɪ n ɪ k (quinic – a vegetable acid found in chinchona barks)
m ɪ d ɪ m (medimn – an ancient Greek measure of capacity, approx. 12 gallons)
k a z a k (casaque – a woman's jumper) ʃ a b a ʃ (shabash)

In this example, the 1st and 5th phonetic symbols represent the same short vowel sound; the 3rd (middle) symbol represents a different short vowel sound.

ə s ɛ s ə (assessor)