

# THROUGH TOUGH THOROUGH THOUGHT

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A most common complaint against the English language is the unpredictability of its pronunciation. A single sound may be represented by a slew of spellings. Likewise, a single spelling may conceal a plethora of pronunciations. As Ralph Beaman noted in the February 1975 Kickshaws, Webster's Third sanctions 60 variant pronunciations for TEMPERATURE. He also argued that W3 implicitly recognizes 70 ways to pronounce YES! However, the sequence OUGH is remarkable in that its nearly 30 pronunciations show the greatest diversity of sound.

In earlier Kickshaws notes, Darryl Francis and Philip Cohen enumerated some 19 pronunciations of OUGH, with examples. From six standard dictionaries, I increased this count to 28. I ignored obsolete words, for which no pronunciation was listed. Numbers after the examples indicate some primary and secondary pronunciations.

Sound	As in	OUGH examples
AHCH	LOCH (Scot. CH)	brough(1), dought(2), hough(1), houghmagandy W2, lough(1), loughen, ought W3:Scot., oughtlins, turlough W3
AHF	MAFIA	chincough(2), hough OED, trough(2), loughlinite W3
AHFT	HAH + FFT	trough W3:dialect
AHK	ROCK	hough, hougher, lough(2)
AHTH	AH THING	trough dialect
AH/TH	AH THIS	troughs W3:dialect
AHV	RAH V	troughs W3:dialect
AW	AWE	bought, brought, drought(2), fought, nought, ought, rought, sought, thought, Troughton level, wough(2), wrought
AWCH	AWE + Scot. CH	rought
AWF	OFF	chincough(1), cough, hiccough W3, loughlinite W3, pentrough, trough
AWFT	SOFT	trough W3:dialect
AWTH	MOTH	trough dialect
AW/TH	MOTHS	troughs W3:dialect
AWV	MAUVE	troughs W3:dialect
OH	OWE	although, borough(1), brougham(2), dough, dought(2), frough, froughy, furlough, Houghton W2, though, trough W3:by bakers, wough(1), Yarborough

OHCH	OH + Scot. CH	hough(2), houghmagandy W3, jough, turlough OED, wough =harm
OHG	ROGUE	skeough
OOH	OOH	brougham(1), slough =prairie depression, through
OOHCH	BOO + Scot. CH	ough, shough
OOHF	BOO FAST	south W2: =to ditch
OW	HOW	bough, clough(2), dought, doughty, drought, frough, hough OED, plough, slough =despair, sough(2), tought, trough W3: by British bakers, Troughton level
UH	THE =schwa	borough(2), Yarborough(2) British
UHCH	HUH + Scot. CH	brough(2), sough OED:Scot., turlough W2
UHF	MUFF	brough(2), chough, clough(1), enough, grough, hiccough W3, hough OED, houghite, rough, slough =to shed skin, sough(1), tough
UHP	UP	hiccough(1)
UHW	HUH WHY	borough W3
UWCH	BOOK, but with Scot. CH	ough
UWF	HOOFER	sough W2: =to ditch, wough =woof

This list is probably not complete. I have not included skeough (pronounced like jog), turlough (like rack), or troughs (like mothers and loves). These were all listed by Francis or Cohen in their Kickshaws notes, but I have not found dictionary references. Enumeration is complicated by the different pronunciation symbols used by dictionaries. Some less-common definitions follow:

- BROUGH (Scot. variant of broch): (a) a luminous ring, as around the moon; a halo (b) a round tower
- CHINCOUGH (British dialect): whooping cough
- CHOUGH: a crowlike old-world bird
- CLOUGH: a gorge or ravine
- DOUGHT: (a) Scot. past tense of dow (=be able, prosper) (b) doughtiness, power (obsolete, exc. dialect)
- FROUGH: liable to break, fragile (obsolete, exc. dialect)
- GROUGH: (a) impure commercial potassium nitrate (W2) (b) obsolete form of grow, variant form of gruff (OED)
- HOUGH: a joint in the hind leg of a quadruped; the hock; hollow part behind the knee-joint in man; joint of beef, venison, etc.; to hamstring
- HOUGHITE: a mineral, a variety of hydrotalcite (OED, W2)
- HOUGHMAGANDY: Scot. word for fornication (W2, W3)
- HOUGHTON: an American variety of gooseberry (W2)
- JOUGH: an ale drink made in Manx (OED, W2)
- LOUGH: (a) Anglo-Irish word for a lake (b) past tense of laugh (OED, W2, obsolete, exc. dialect)
- LOUGHEEN: Anglo-Irish word for a little lough (OED, W2)
- LOUGHLINITE: a mineral resembling asbestos (W3)
- OUGH: interjection of pain or surprise (OED, W2)

- OUGHT: should; Scot. variant form of aught =nothing, zero (W3);  
 owed or possessed (pronounced ahCHt)  
 OUGHTLIN(G)S: Scot. word meaning in the least  
 PENTROUGH: a trough for conveying water from a head to a windmill  
 ROUGHT: British dialect variant of raught =reached  
 SHOUGH: (a) to sheugh =make drains in a ditch (W2, W3) (b) a  
 kind of lap dog originally from Iceland (obsolete) (c) obsolete  
 form of interjection shoo  
 SKEOUGH: a wicker potato-basket in the shape of a shield (W2)  
 SOUGH: (a) to make a sighing sound like the wind (b) an adit  
 of a mine; drain, trench; to drain by a ditch  
 TOUGHT: a length of angler's hair line (OED, W2); an obsolete  
 form of the word taut  
 TROUGHTON LEVEL: a surveyor's dumpy level (W2)  
 TURLOUGH: in Ireland, a brook, or ground covered with water  
 in the winter but dry in the summer  
 WOUGH: (a) wall of a house (obsolete, exc. dialect); side of a  
 vein, in mining (b) obsolete form of wrong, harm (pronounced  
 woe + CH) (c) bark of an animal (pronounced woof) (OED)

## REFERENCES

- AH The American Heritage Dictionary, New College Edition, 1969  
 F&W Funk and Wagnalls Standard Comprehensive Dictionary,  
 1971  
 OED Oxford English Dictionary, 1933  
 RH Random House Dictionary, Second Edition, Unabridged, 1987  
 W2 Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition,  
 1954  
 W3 Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1966