

SOUND SPELLING

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Some years ago now, I was interested to realise that there seemed to be many different spellings in English words of the sound 'SH.' I began collecting these and soon branched into other sound spellings as well. The linguistic term for a sound unit is the *phoneme*. Now though I dabble in language curiosities I am no linguist, so I realise that I am entering 'tiger country' by presenting this list! Its purpose is more to celebrate the amazing range of phonemic spellings in English – many being obvious borrowings from our parent languages – than to provide any definitive corpus (à la Rex Gooch or Susan Thorpe!).

Any such listing is of course dependent on local pronunciations – which vary widely across the spectrum of world English. It will quickly be evident that the list strongly reflects my antipodean origins. It is offered as a phurther phalanx in the vanguard of Australian logology led in these pages by such as Anil, Joshua Nash and Peter Delin. Accordingly reference was made in the first instance to the Macquarie Dictionary (second and third editions).

Many from both sides of the pale (Atlantic) will doubtless decry particular examples, especially those which are distinctively foreign or which suggest a somewhat 'less than adequate' enunciation. Notable of course is the almost total absence in the North American phonulary/phonory of the short O sound, present elsewhere in such words as *was*, *cot* and *knowledge* [see list]. A selection of capitalised words is also included, and while many of these form terms in common usage, some are only used as geographical or personal names. Those readers who would prefer that these not be included in such a presentation may freely expunge them from their collective [un]conscious.

For simplicity, sounds have not been represented by phonetic symbols with the exception of the following:

- The indeterminate vowel called the *schwa* (from the Hebrew for 'a sound like a soft vowel'). As can be seen from the list this is the sound with the most spellings (107). It is represented here by the symbol <>.
- <*> represents an 'intrusive' sound – for which there is no corresponding letter within the word; the antithesis of a silent letter.

a Add IsAAc drACHm mADEmoiselle FAHrenheit plAIIt sALmon fAUXbourden
CheyEnne revEille merIngue accIAccatura gUARantee

- ay** Ape grAAI sundAE champAGne dAHlia AId campAIGN strAIGHt bordelAIS
bordelAISE trAIT RALph hALFpenny gAOI gAUge sAY bAYEd clAYEY
suEde yEA CrEAGH LEAHEy passpiED purEE thEGn EH vEIl rEIGN sleIGH
wEIGHEd PompEII bris-soleIL metiER demESne berET vaLETED entremETS
ricochETTED thEY obEYEd EYOt rendeZvous pince-nEZEd [feng] shuI
lingerIE, mouILLE fOEHn epopOEIa communiqUE bouQUET croQUETEd
grYsbok
- ah** spA bAA bAAEd [ooh &] AAH [oohed &] AAHEd AARdvARK bazAAREd
usquebAE intAGlio OmAGH AH hurRAHEd SAHib tAHRs cALm lARK ARE
pARR bizARRE catARRH [objet] d'ART fracAS nougAT AUnt faiENCE hEART
orgEAT sERgeant soIree sangfroID foIE gras memoIRS repertoIRE bourgeois
mirepoIX [je ne sais] quOI gUARD qUInte UrqUHART vo*yeur
- b** BiB eBB loBE BHang elaBORately laBYrinthis gbeJna cuPBoard rasPBerry
- ch** Cello capriCCio caCCIatore CHild mleCHCHHa niCHE [cartes] blanCHES
stanCHion anCIent CSabai CZech conSCIOus riTual iTCH haTCHED
righTEOUS posTHumous quesTION kiTSCH deuTSCHEmark sanctUary
NieTZSCHeism
- d** BDellium DiD quandAry aDD BuDDHist oDE DHow meDICine conDUit filled
couLD Tao
- e** Any AEstival sAId sAYs lEt hEAd kEElson hEIfEr LEICEster lEOpard objET
& objETS [d'art] rEYnard friEND foETid bUry gUEss *nth
- e'** wAry AAron AErate fAIry pAIRs AIREd [chargé] d'affAIRES cAREs prAYERS
mAYOress mAYORs AYRshire [cattle] AYREs bolERo bEARer yEAH pEARs
bEAREd E'ER thEIRs beche-de-mER ERE partERRE EYra EYRES HEIr-
apparent HEIRs HEIREd wHERE
- ee** karAoke cAEsar shilleLAGH tAOIseach bE sEA ocrEAE BEAUchamp bEE
sEEing vEHicle sEize LEIGH receIPT pEOple mESne diocESEs gEWgaw KEY
honEYEd kiwI minutIAE chIEf mIHrab torII komIJne [kaas] coutIL canaILLE
grenouILLES debrIS bruIT [grand] priX dahabIYeh fJord kopJE foETus
onomatopOEIa chamOIs (*pl.*) chamOIS (*sing.*) chamOISEd qUAY qUAYEd
dengUE parqUET croQUETEd begUine grUYere citY gramarYE
- er** EARn [cordon] bleAU bERth wERE ERRs ERREd miliEU massEURs
chauffEUREd messiEURS [pas de] dEUX whIRled whIRRs whIRREd whORls
tIERce FIRs stIRREd mObius OEil-de-boEUf fOEHn OERsted [cri de] cOEUR
cOLOnel wORD scOURge fUrry gUERdon de rigUEUR liqUEUREd sURf
BURRs fURREd mYrrhy mYRtle mYRRnong mYRRH

- f** Fat liFE oFF gaFFE comFORtable oFTen awFULLy touGH couGHED caLF
PFennig PHlox ouPHE staPHYlococcal saPPHire lieUtenant Vorspiel
- g** blaCKGUard Go reneGE eGG poGGE boGGHi GHost cateGORy GUide
vaGUE
- gz** eXist
- h** He JoJoba WHO QuiXote thresh*old
- i** imAge prEtty brEAm brEEches lEHr counterfEIt EYrie exHIBit Ill carrIAge
sIEve vICtuals wOMen bUSy bUIlt NorWIch mYth
- ie** nAive mAestro tAIpan shanghAIEd HawAIIan canAILLE AISle AY AYE
EItHer hEIGHt gEYser EYE rHYme I dIAL indICT lIE sIGN hIGH sIGHEd
nIHilism de stIJl IRon ISle gUIde bUY gUYEd fIY dYE
- j** sandwiCH sandwiCHED graDUate granDEur fidGGet eDGE soldIER adJoin
proceDURE Gem aGE suGGest leGION religIOus Jay haJJ
- k** Cat practiCAlly oCCur siCCED zuCCHini saCCHARine CHyle aCHE baCK
liCKED choCOLate aCQuit laCQUer saCQUE sGraffito louGH houGHED
maHzor Kin eKE ginKGo KHaKi jinriKishaw puKKA treKKEd Quit QUay
piQUE liQUOrice eXcept XHosa
- ks** oX aXE eXCel eXSanguine eXSCind coXSWain EXXon
- ksh** luXury fleXIon seXUally
- l** offAL basicALLY labEL satELLite travELLED seraGLio fossIL LuLL feLDspar
axLE soLELY tuLLE beLLES symBOL victUALS consUL beautifULLy
gunWALE methYL
- m** draCHM phleGM psaLM caLMEd MaMMal priMArY liMB boMBE gaME
mesdaMES famIly progrAMME femMES [fatale] hyMN meMORable
madeMOIselle daMNEdest promPt TMesis
- n** CNemis WeDNesday suddENNESS coGnac GNU coloGNE KNee MNemonic
coMPtroller NoNE ordiNArY haNDsome viNGt-et-un piraNHa iNN cayENNE
dishoNOUrably avaNT-garde cottON PNematic
- ng** iNk puNcture haNDkerchief loNG baNGEd mah-joNGG giNGHAM haraNGUing
toNGUE Pa*go Pa*go

- o** wAs yACHt blancmANge pharAOnic lAUrel EnSEmble taoisEACH burEAUcracy
chEOnsam HONest lIngerie Ox [chou] mOEllier JOHn cOUGh knOWledge
- oh** curacAO pharAOH cAOUTchouc mAUve chAUD-froid [comme il] fAUT fAUX
bEAU platEAUED gatEAUX yEOman sEW sEWEd HAuteur HAUTboy mHO
wHOA gO OAK halloAEd bOATswain tOE colOGne OH fOLk brOOch de
trOP fOREcastle aproPOS depOT depOTEd escargOTS sOUL dOUGH
furlOUGHEd lOW OWE
- aw** All tALK extraORDinary wARM wARREd ArkansAS tAUt AUGHT cAULk
centAURs lAW withdrAWAl AWE drAWERs SEAn GEORge exHAUst
exHORT HORS [d'oeuvre] stOry brOAd OARs rOAREd BOERs O'ER pOOrer
dOORs mOOREd pORT cOREs cORPs [pl.] cORPS [sing.] tORR mORTgage
pOUring OUGHT fOURth pOURED tOWARds sUrer bURghul sUREly
- oi** lAWYer bourgEOIs [type size] FrEUD tOEa Oil cOIGN travOIS jOY tOYEd
bUOY bUOYEd
- ow** MAO miAOU miAOUEd miAOW gAUss HOUr cIAO OUt dOUBt BOUGH
plOUGHEd vrOUW hOW bOWEd
- p** suBPoena hiccouGH hiccouGHED PoPE sePARatist halfPENny shePHERd
corPORate contemPORary temPORARY aPPle stePPE bankruPTcy
- r** dietARY Red arbitRARY foREarm [belles] lettRES RHyme aRRow pyRRHic
waRWicks crocheTing EdinBURgh draWing WRy
- s** forecASTle Cell flaCCid aCE whenCESoever PSalm See sarSaparilla SCent
dehiSCE SCHism baSE uSED to... danseuSES diSHabille aSKEd perSONalized
leSS neceSSary mouSSE chausSES liSTen iSTHmus SWord anSWERable ziziTH
KiribaTI anTS boATSWain Xi waltZ ecZEma
- sh** offiCiate breCCia oCEan herbaCEOus apprentiCEShip CHef caCHE [nouveaux]
riCHES marCHioness daCHSHund fuCHSia soCial speCially graCIOUS PSHaw
Sure faSCist SCHottISCHE meerSCHAum conSCIENCE conSCIOUS nauSEOUS
SHy caSHEd cuSHion faSHIONable fiSH-SHOP tenSIon iSSue paSSION
profeSSIONalism immenSURable raTio raTion cauTIOUS anXIOUS
- t** deBT indiCT viCTUALs viCTUALler apartheiD velDT axED eiGHT PHTHIsis
receiPT peremPTOrily ToT miliTARY aTE THyme au graTIn histOry
postPHTHIsic puTT maTTE ziTTERN TWo piZZa scher*zo
- th** CHTHonian eightH apoPHTHegm THin absinTHE caTHolic
- TH** eDH THE baTHE

- u** hAllo hEllo thrEEpence coIffure wOn dOEs fLOOD tOUch Us UGH hUH
tWOpence
- oo** wOlF gOOD wORsted WORCEstershire cOURier wOULD pUt cWm
- uu** slEUth drEW brEWEd rHEUm silHOUette lIEU SIOUX (*pl.*) SIOUX (*sing.*)
jIUjitsu tO shOE manOEUVre tOO wOOEd pOOH OOHEd [and aahed] sOUp
mOUE thrOUGH brOUGHAm cOUP trou-de-LOUPS rendezvOUs
rendezvOUSEd ragOUT rOUX tUtU blUE glUHwein sUIt flUOride debUT
debUTEd mUUmUU crWth tWO
- v** oF haLVE StePHen qUass Vat eVE goVERNor priVIleged faVOURite [hors]
d'oeVRE naVVy edelWeiss
- w** *one chiHUaHUa mariJUana chOir OUabain sUite We hoWE WHAT poWWow
- y** onIon bouILLon halleluJah carilLon tortiLLa cogNac mañana tenUre Yes intagl*i
- yuu** bEAUty fEUD EUGH fEW EWE adIEU vIEW vIEWEd ampOUle emU dUAl
cUE qUEUE impUGn HUGH FUHrer pursUIt pUISne vacUUm YEW YOU
YUle
- z** CZar DZus aS diSCern uSE uSED to... buSIness raSPberry sciSSorS TSar Xerox
Zest gaZE buZZ whiZZEd
- zh** Genre GBejna beiGE biJou meaSure viSIon pleaSURably equaTION aZure braZier
- '** About CanAAn currACH AEsthetic shilleLAGH loofAH verandaHEd mountAIn
blANCmange liARs reAREd restaURant exCELLent itEm pagEAnt burEAUcrat
bEEEn sakiEH forEHEAD forfEIt forEIGN halfpENNYWORTH pigeON
embracEORs gorgEOUs briERs gruyERE vetERInary oeuvrES crochET
crochETEd pastEURize grandEUR chauffeURED forEWARD cocknEYfy burGH
roxburGHE exHALation philHARmonic veHEment shepHERd veHicle silHOuette
ChisHOLm yogHOURt kieselguHR dachsHUND yogHURT livId parLIament
mischIEf papIER-maché soldIEREd chIHuahua marIJuana wILl fashION
spacIOUs elixIRs AyrshIRE [cattle] BelgIUm oeiL-, oeiLS-de-boeuf purpOse
O'clock cupbOARD OEdeMa bolOGnaise porpOise NorfOLk [pine] COLQUhoun
mONsieur actORs mirROred joyOUs thorOUGH wOULD labOURs honOURED
lacQUERs lacQUEREd houRly acREs [chargés] d'affaiRES iRON coxSWAIN
circUs sanctUary actUAlly blackGUARD gUERilla conqUERs cheqUEREd
biscUIT liqUOrice langUORs liqUOREd sURprise pictURED knoWn gunWale
boatsWAIN ansWERS ansWEREd syzYgy eYAs satYRs martyRED och*ry

Notes:

- bur**E**AU (= oh) bur**E**AUcrat ('), and bur**E**AUcracy (o)
- **ee** and **u** sounds are made by all of the vowels (and **ee** by y too):
im**A**ge pr**E**tty bl**I**t w**O**men b**U**sy h**Y**mn
h**A**llo h**E**llo co**I**ffure t**O**n c**U**p
- The most letters 'contained' in a sound is seven: **ENNYWOR** = ', in half**pENNYWORTH**
brOUGHAm, m**leCHCHHa**, pl**OUGHED**, pos**TPHThisic**, fur**lOUGHED** and w**EIGHED**
(with 71% of its letters in one sound) have five each
- The sound with the most spellings is also the commonest sound in English. The *schwa*
comprises 10.8% of all conversation – way ahead of the next most common sounds: **ee**
(8.3%), **n** (7.6%), **t** (6.4%) and **d** (5%)

SOUNDS REPRESENTED BY VOWELS AND VOWEL COMBINATIONS:

A	c A t: a	A t e: ay	d A re: e'	A s k: ah
	Any: e	kar A oke: ee	im A ge: i	n A ive: ie
	w A s: o	b A ll: aw	h A llo: u	A A bove: '
	de A f: (silent)			
E	Che yE ne: a	su E de: ay	bol E ro: e'	fai E nce: ah
	l E t: e	E rr ing: er	w E : ee	pr E tty: i
	E y e: ie	E nc ore: o	s E w: oh	h E llo: u
	thr E w: uu	f E w: yuu	it E m: '	si E ve: (silent)
I	mer I ngue: a	sol I ree: ah	[feng] shu I : ay	s I r: er
	sk I : ee	bl I t: i	I c e: ie	l I ngerie: o
	co I ffure: u	on I on: y	penc I l: '	pl A it: (silent)
O	m O bius: er	w O men: i	h O t: o	O pe n: oh
	p O rous: aw	t O n: u	w O lf: oo	d O : uu
	ch O ir: w	O ne : wu	purp O se: '	le O pard: (silent)
U	b U ry: e	f U rry: er	lie U tenant: f	b U sy: i
	b U y: ie	s U rer: aw	c U p: u	p U t: oo
	r U le: uu	q U ass: v	q U ick: w	ten U re: y
	Use: yuu	circ U s: '	b U ild: (silent)	

Y	gr Y sbok: ay sk Y : ie	m Y rrhy: er Y es: y	cit Y : ee zeph Y r: '	h Y mn: i pra Y er: (silent)
AA	gr AA l: ay	b AA : ah	AA ron: e'	Can AA n: '
AE	sund AE : ay c AE sar: ee	usqueb AE : ah m AE stro: ie	AE rate: e' AE sthetic: '	AE stival: e
AI	pl AI t: a t AI pan: ie	AI d: ay fount AI n: '	f AI ry: e'	s AI d: e
AO	g AO l: ay extr AO rdinary: aw	curac AO : oh	phar AO nic: o	ci AO : ow
AU	g AU ge: ay g AU ss: ow	l AU gh: ah m AU ve: oh	l AU rel: o rest AU rant: '	t AU t: aw
AY	s AY : ay	s AY s: e	qu AY : ee	AY : ie
EA	y EA : ay t EA m: ee pag EA nt: '	b EA rer: e' br EA m: i	h EA rt: ah taois EA ch: o	h EA d: e SE EA n: aw
EE	pur EE : ay thr EE pence: u	k EE lson: e	b EE : ee	br EE ches: i
EI	rev EI lle: a s EI ze: ee	r EI gn: ay count EI t: i	th EI r: e' EI ther: ie	h EI fer: e for EI t: '
EO	l EO pard: e pig EO n: '	p EO ple: ee	ch EO ngsam: o	y EO man: oh
EU	mili EU : er past EU rize:'	s EU th: uu	f EU d: yuu	Fr EU d: oi
EY	th EY : ay E Y rie: i	r EY nard: e g EY ser: ie	E Y ra: e' cockn EY fy:'	k EY : ee
IA	acc IA ccatura: a	marr IA ge: i	d IA l: ie	parl IA ment: '
IE	linger IE : ay s IE ve: i	fo IE [gras]: ah l IE : ie	fr IE nd: e misch IE f: '	bel IE ve: ee
II	tor II : ee			

IO	flex IO n: '				
IU	j IU jitsu: uu	Belg IU m: '			
IY	dahab IY eh: ee				
OA	O Ak: oh	br O Ad: aw			
OE	f O Etid: e sh O E: uu O Edema: '	ph O Enix: ee m O Ellier: o	O Eil-de-boeuf: er t O E: oh	d O Es: u t O Ea: oi	
OI	[je ne sais] qu O Is: ah porp O ise: '	cham O Is [p/]:ee	f O il: oi	ch O Ir: wie	
OO	f l OOd: u p OO rer: aw	g OO d: oo	f OO d: uu	br OO ch: oh	
OU	y OU ng: u amp OU le: yuu OU abain: w	c OU gh: o s OU l: oh joy OU s: '	c OU rier: oo p OU ring: aw	cr OU p: uu l OU d: ow	
OY	j OY : oi				
UA	g U Arantee: a vict U Al: '	g U Ard: a	d U Al: yuu	s U Ave: wa	
UE	malag U Ena: ay c U E: yuu	g U Ess: e s U Ede: way	deng U E: ee g U Erilla: '	bl U E: uu mering U E: (silent)	
UI	q U Inte: a s U It: uu	beg U Ine: ee purs U It: yuu	b U ild: i s U It: wee	g U ide: ie bisc U It: '	
UO	f l U O ride: uu	liq U O r ice: ' or silent			
UU	m UU m UU : uu	vac UU m: yuu			
UY	gr UY ere: ee	b UY : ie			
YE	gramar YE : ee	d YE : ie			
YU	YU le: yuu				