

100 MOST MISPRONOUNCED WORDS IN ENGLISH

Don't say	Do Say	Comment
A		
acrossed	across	It is easy to confuse "across" with "crossed" but better to keep them separate.
affidavid	affidavit	Even if your lawyer's name is "David," he issues affidavits.
Old-timer's disease	Alzheimer's disease	While it is a disease of old-timers, it is named for the German neurologist, Dr. Alois Alzheimer.
Antartic	Antarctic	Just think of an arc of ants (an ant arc) and that should help you keep the [c] in the pronunciation of this word.
Artic	Arctic	Another hard-to-see [c]—but it is there.
aks	ask	This mispronunciation has been around for so long (over 1,000 years) that linguist Mark Aronoff thinks we should cherish it as a part of our linguistic heritage. Most of us would give the axe to "aks."
athelete, atheletic	athlete , athletic	Two syllables are enough for "athlete."
B		
barbituate	barbiturate	Don't forget this word contains three others: bar+bit+u+rate.
bob wire	barbed wire	No, this word wasn't named for anyone named "Bob;" it should be "barbed wire," although the suffix -ed, meaning "having," is fading away in the U.S.
bidness	business	The change of [s] to [d] before [n] is spreading

throughout the US and when the unaccented [I] drops from this word the [s] finds itself in the same environment as in "[isn't](#)" and "[wasn't](#)."

a blessing in the skies a [blessing](#) in [disguise](#) This phrase is no blessing if it comes from the skies. (Pronounce it correctly and help maintain the disguise.)

C

Calvary [cavalry](#) It isn't clear why we say, "Mind your Ps and Qs" when we have more difficulty keeping up with our Ls and Rs. Had there been a cavalry in Jesus' time, perhaps Calvary would not have been so tragic.

cannidate [candidate](#) You aren't being canny to drop the [d] in this word. Remember, it is the same as "candy date." (This should help guys remember how to prepare for dates, too.)

card shark [cardsharp](#) Cardsharps probably won't eat you alive, though they are adept at cutting your purse strings.

Carpool tunnel syndrome [Carpal tunnel syndrome](#) This one is mispronounced (and misspelled) several different ways; we just picked the funniest. Carpal means "pertaining to the wrist."

caucaphony [cacophony](#) There is no greater cacophony [kæ'kafêni] to the ears than to hear the vowels switched in the pronunciation of this word.

The Caucasus The [Caucasus](#) Although there are more than one mountain in this chain, their name is not a plural noun.

chester drawers [chest of drawers](#) The drawers of Chester is a typical way of looking at these chests down South but it misses the point.

chomp at the bit [champ](#) at the [bit](#) "Chomp" has probably replaced "champ" in the U.S. but we thought you might like to be reminded that the vowel should be [æ] not [o].

close [clothes](#) The [th] is a very soft sound likely to be overlooked. Show your linguistic sensitivity and always pronounce it.

coronet [cornet](#) Playing a crown (coronet) will make you about as popular as wearing a trumpet (cornet) on your head—reason enough to keep these two words straight.

D

dialate [dilate](#) The [i] in this word is so long there is time for another vowel but don't succumb to the temptation.

diphtheria [diphtheria](#) The "ph" in this word is pronounced [f], not [p].

doggy dog world [dog-eat-dog world](#) The world is even worse than you think if you think it merely a "doggy-dog world." Sorry to be the bearer of such bad news.

drownd [drown](#) You add the [d] only to the past tense and past participle.

E

elec'toral [e'lectoral](#) The accent is on the second, not the third, syllable and there is no [i] in it—**not** "electorial." (By the way, the same applies to "mayoral" and "pastoral.")

excaped [escape](#) The good news is, if you say "excaped," you've mastered the prefix ex- because its meaning does fit this word. The bad news is, you don't use this prefix on "escape."

expresso [espresso](#) While I can't express my love for espresso enough, this word was borrowed from Italian well after the Latin prefix ex- had developed into es-.

excetera [et cetera](#) Latin for "and" (et) "the rest" (cetera) are actually two words that probably should be written separately.

expecially [especially](#) Things especial are usually not expected, so don't confuse these words.

F

Febuary [February](#) We don't like two syllables in succession with an [r] so some of us dump the first one in this word. Most dictionaries now accept the single [r] pronunciation but, if you have an agile tongue, you may want to shoot for the original.

fedral [federal](#) Syncopation of an unaccented vowel is fairly common in rapid speech but in careful speech it should be avoided. See also "[plute](#)" and read more about the problem [here](#).

fillum	film	We also do not like the combination [l] + [m]. One solution is to pronounce the [l] as [w] ("film" [fiwm}, "palm" [pawm]) but some prefer adding a vowel in this word.
fiscal	fiscal	In fact, we don't seem to like any consonants together. Here is another word, like athlete and film that is often forced to swallow an unwanted vowel.
flounder	founder	Since it is unlikely that a boat would founder on a flounder, we should distinguish the verb from the fish as spelling suggests.
foilage	foliage	Here is another case of metathesis, place-switching of sounds. Remember, the [i] comes after the [l], as in related "folio."
For all intensive purposes	For all intents and purposes	The younger generation is mispronouncing this phrase so intensively that it has become popular both as a mispronunciation and misspelling.
forte	fort	The word is spelled "forte" but the [e] is pronounced only when speaking of music, as a "forte passage." The words for a strong point and a stronghold are pronounced the same: [fort].

H

Heineken remover	Heimlich maneuver (or manoeuvre, Br.)	This term is mispronounced many different ways. This is just the funniest one we have heard. This maneuver (manoeuvre) was named for US surgeon Henry Jay Heimlich (1920-).
heighth	height	The analogy with "width" misleads many of us in the pronunciation of this word.
'erb	herb	Does, "My friend Herb grows 'erbs," sound right to you? This is a US oddity generated by the melting pot (mixed dialects). Initial [h] is always pronounced outside America and should be in all dialects of English.
hi-archy	hierarchy	Remember, hierarchies go higher than you might

think. This one is pronounced "higher archy" and not "high archy."

I

in parenthesis	in parentheses	No one can enclose an expression in one parenthesis; at least two parentheses are required.
interpretate	interpret	This error results from the back-formation of "interpretate" from "interpretation." But back formation isn't needed; we already have "interpret." (See also ' orientate ')
irregardless	regardless	"-Less" already says "without" so there is no need to repeat the same sentiment with "ir-."
idn't	isn't	Again, the struggle of [s] before [n]. (See also " bidness " and " wadn't ")

J

jewlery	jewelry	The root of this word is "jewel" and that doesn't change for either "jeweler" or "jewelry." The British add a syllable: "jewellery" (See also its spelling.)
jist nor dis	just	As opposed to the adjective "just," this word is always unaccented, which encourages vowel reduction. However, it sounds better to reduce the [ê] rather than replace it with [i].

K

Klu Klux Klan	Ku Klux Klan	Well, there is an [l] in the other two, why not the first? Well, that is just the way it is; don't expect rationality from this organization.
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L

lambast	lambaste	Better to lambaste the lamb than to baste him—remember, the words rhyme. "Bast" has nothing to do with it.
larynx	larynx	More metathesis. Here the [n] and [y] switch places. Mind your [n]s and [y]s as you mind your [p]s and [q]s.
Laura Norder	law and order	The sound [aw] picks up an [r] in some dialects (also "sawr" and "gnawr"). Avoid it and keep Laura Norder in her place.
leash	lease	Southern Americans are particularly liable to confuse these two distinct words but the confusion occurs elsewhere. Look out for it.
libel	liable	You are liable for the damages if you are successfully sued for libel. But don't confuse these discrete words.
library	library	As mentioned before , English speakers dislike two [r]s in the same word. However, we have to buck up and pronounce them all.
long-lived	long-lived	This compound is not derived from "to live longly" (you can't say that) but from "having a long life" and should be pronounced accordingly. The plural stem, live(s), is always used: "short-lived," "many-lived," "triple-lived."

M

masonry	masonry	We have been told that masons are most likely to insert a spare vowel into this word describing their occupation but we know others do, too. Don't you.
mawv	mauve	This word has not moved far enough away from French to assume an English pronunciation, [mawv], and should still be pronounced [mowv].
mannaise	mayonnaise	Ever wonder why the short form of a word pronounced "mannaise" is "mayo"? Well, it is because the original should be pronounced "mayonnaise." Just remember: what would mayonnaise be without "mayo"?

miniture	<u>miniature</u>	Here is another word frequently syncopated. Don't leave out the third syllable, [a].
mute	<u>moot</u>	The definition of "moot" is moot (open to debate) but not the pronunciation: [mut] and not [myut].
mis'chievous	<u>'mischievous</u>	It would be mischievous of me not to point out the frequent misplacement of the accent on this word. Remember, it is accented the same as mischief. Look out for the order of the [i] and [e] in the spelling, too—and don't add another [i] in the ending (not mischievious).

N

nother	<u>other</u>	Misanalysis is a common type of speech error based on the misperception of where to draw the line between components of a word or phrase. "A whole nother" comes from misanalyzing "an other" as "a nother." Not good. Not good.
nucular	<u>nuclear</u>	The British and Australians find the American repetition of the [u] between the [k] and [l] quaintly amusing. Good reason to get it right.
nuptual	<u>nuptial</u>	Many speakers in the US add a spurious [u] to this word, too. It should be pronounced [nêpchêl], not or [nêpchuêl].

O

often	<u>ofen</u>	We have mastered the spelling of this word so well, its spelling influences the pronunciation: DON'T pronounce the [t]! This is an exception to the rule that spelling helps pronunciation.
ordinance	<u>ordnance</u>	You may have to use ordnance to enforce an ordinance but you should not pronounce the words the same.
orientate	<u>orient</u>	Another pointless back-formation. We don't need this mispronunciation from "orientation" when we already

have "orient." (See also "[interpretate](#)")

ostensively [ostensibly](#) Be sure to keep your suffixes straight on this one.

Ostraya [Australia](#) This pronunciation particularly bothers Australians themselves, most of whom can manage the [l] quite easily, thank you.

P

parlament [parliament](#) Although some dictionaries have given up on it, there should be a [y] after [l]: [pahr-lyê-mênt]

perculate [percolate](#) Pronouncing this word as "perculate" is quite peculiar. (Also, remember that it means "drip down" not "up.")

pottable [potable](#) The adjective meaning "drinkable" rhymes with "floatable" and is not to be confused with the one that means "capable of being potted."

perogative [prerogative](#) Even in dialects where [r] does not always trade places with the preceding vowel (as the Texan pronunciations "differnce," "vetern," etc.), the [r] in this prefix often gets switched.

perscription [prescription](#) Same as above. It is possible that we simply confuse "pre-" and "per-" since both are legitimate prefixes.

persnickety [pernickety](#) You may think us too pernickety to even mention this one. It is a Scottish nonce word to which U.S. speakers have added a spurious [s].

preemptory [peremptory](#) The old pre-/per- problem. Do not confuse this word with "preemptive;" the prefix here is per-.

prespire [perspire](#) "Per-" has become such a regular mispronunciation of "pre-," many people now correct themselves where they don't need to.

plute [pollute](#) This one, like "plice" [police], spose [suppose], and others, commonly result from [rapid speech syncope](#), the loss of unaccented vowels. Just be sure you pronounce the vowel when you are speaking slowly.

Read [here](#) for more on the problem.

(proably, proolly)	probably	Haplology is the dropping of one of two identical syllables such as the [ob] and [ab] in this word, usually the result of fast speech. Slow down and pronounce the whole word for maximum clarity and to reduce your chances of misspelling the word.
pronounciation	pronunciation	Just as "misspelling" is among the most commonly misspelled words, "pronunciation" is among the most commonly mispronounced words. Fitting, no?
prostrate	prostate	Though a pain in the prostate may leave a man prostrate, the gland contains no [r].

R

realator	realtor	As you avoid the extra vowel in " masonry ," remember to do the same for "realtor," the guy who sells what the mason creates.
revelant	relevant	Here is another word that seems to invite metathesis.
reoccur	recur	You don't have to invent a new word from "occur." We already have a verb "recur" that does the trick.
respite	respite	Despite the spelling similarity, this word does not rhyme with despite; it is pronounced ['re-spit]. Give yourself a permanent respite from mispronouncing it.

S

sherbert	sherbet	Some of the same people who do not like two [r]s in their words can't help repeating the one in this word.
silicone	silicon	Silicon is the material they make computer chips from but implants are made of silicone.
snuck	sneaked	I doubt we will get "snuck" out of the language any time soon but here is a reminder that it really isn't a word.

sose	<u>so</u>	The phrase "so as" has been reduced to a single word "sose" even when it is not called for. "Sose I can go" should be simply "so I can go." By the way, the same applies to alls, as in "Alls I want is to never hear 'alls' again."
spade	<u>spay</u>	You can have your dog spayed but so long as she is a good dog, please don't spade her.
spitting image	<u>spit and image</u>	The very spit of someone is an exact likeness. "The spit and image" or "spit image" emphasizes the exactness.
stob	<u>stub</u>	In some areas the vowel in this word has slid a bit too far back in the mouth. Don't choke on it.
stomp	<u>stamp</u>	Stamps are so called because they were originally stamped (not stomped) on a letter. You stamp your feet, too.
suit	<u>suite</u>	If you don't wear it (a suit [sut]), then it is a suite [sweet], as in a living room suite or a suite of rooms.
supposably	<u>supposedly</u>	Adding -ly to participles is rarely possible, so some people try to avoid it altogether. You can't avoid it here.
supremist	<u>supremacist</u>	This word is derived from "supremacy," not "supreme." A supremacist would be someone who considers himself supreme. You know there is no one like that.

T

tact	<u>tack</u>	If things are not going your way, do not lose your tact—that would be tactless—but take a different tack.
take for granite	<u>take</u> for <u>granted</u>	We do tend to take granite for granted, it is so ubiquitous. But that, of course, is not the point.
tenant	<u>tenet</u>	A tenant is a renter who may not hold a tenet (a doctrine or dogma).

tenderhooks [tenterhooks](#) Tenters are frames for stretching cloth while it dries. Hanging on tenterhooks might leave you tender but that doesn't change the pronunciation of the word.

Tiajuana [Tijuana](#) Why make Spanish words more difficult than they already are? Just three syllables here, thank you.

triathalon [triathlon](#) We don't like [th] and [l] together, so some of us insert a spare vowel. Pronounce it right, spell it right.

U

upmost [utmost](#) While this word does indicate that efforts are up, the word is "utmost," [a\(!\) historical](#) variation of "outmost."

V

verbage [verbiage](#) Here is another word that loses its [i] in speech. Pronouncing it correctly will help you spell it correctly.

volumptuous [voluptuous](#) Some voluptuous women may be lumpy, but please avoid this Freudian slip that apprises them of it.

W

wadn't [wasn't](#) That pesky [s] before [n] again. See "[bidness](#)" and "[idn't](#)."

ways [way](#) "I have a ways to go" should be "I have a way to go." The article "a" does not fit well with a plural.

wet [whet](#) In the Northeastern US the sound [hw], spelled "wh," is vanishing and these two words are pronounced the same. Elsewhere they should be distinguished.

Y

yoke

[yolk](#)

Another dialectal change we probably should not call an error: [l] becomes [w] or [u] when not followed by a vowel. Some people just confuse these two words, though. That should be avoided.

Z

zuology

[zoology](#)

Actually, we should say [zo], not [zu], when we go to the zoo but we'll let that pass. The discipline, however, must be pronounced [zo-'ah-luh-gee].

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