Short & Long Vowel Sounds in English

Short Vowel Sounds

The long vowels say their names.

AEIOU!
This is an introduction to short and long vowels in English-- the most common sounds for each vowel.

It also gives an easy way to remember them using color words with the same sounds. (See the colored borders.)

English vowels:

(Sometimes ‘Y’ acts as a vowel instead of ‘I’, and sometimes ‘W’ is a substitute for ‘U’.)
Short Vowels: A

The most common sound for each vowel is its “short” sound:
Short ā, pronounced /æ/ as in apple, pan, or Dan’s black hat
Short Vowels: E

Short ě, pronounced /ɛ/ as in elephant, pen, or Ben’s red bedspread
Short Vowels: I

Short Ī, pronounced /ɪ/ as in insect, pin, or Rick’s silver fish
Short Vowels: O

Short ő, pronounced /ɒ/: octopus, frog pond, or Tom’s olive box
Short ŭ, pronounced /ʌ/ as in umbrella, sun, or Doug’s mustard-colored rug
Doubled Consonants Keep Short Vowels Short when Adding Endings

Verbs with a Short Vowel
present - past - continuous

> hop -- hopped – hopping
> pin -- pinned – pinning

Verbs with a Long Vowel
present - past - continuous

hope -- hoped -- hoping
pine – pined -- pining
Doubled Consonants Keep Short Vowels Short when Adding Endings

**Verbs with a Short Vowel**
- Present - Past - Continuous
  - plan – planned -- planning
  - tap – tapped – tapping

**Verbs with a Long Vowel**
- Present - Past - Continuous
  - plane -- planed -- planing
  - tape – taped -- taping
Long Vowels: A

Long A (ā ), pronounced /eɪ/ as in ape, mates, or Jake the gray whale
Long Vowels: E

Long E (ē), pronounced /iː/ as in eat, meat, or Jean’s green peas

“Eat some meat, Pete, or some green peas. Try these...”
Long Vowels: I

Long I (ī), pronounced /æɪ/ as in ice, might or my white light

Might Guy & I try ice climbing?
Long Vowels: O

Long O (ō), pronounced /ou/ as in oats, motor boat, or Joan’s rosy bow
Long Vowels: U

Long U (ū), pronounced /juːː/ in Utah or music or /uː:/ in Bruce’s blue suit.
Vowels are often long:

- before a silent E (babe, bike, cute, hope, time, tube.)

**Exceptions include:** done, give, gone, have, lose, love.
(See the lesson on ‘O’ for more.)

He’s such a cute baby! We hope he keeps sleeping. Don’t wake him!
Vowels are often long:

- at the end of a syllable (baby, be, future, go, he, human, I, nature, potato, tomato, provide, retire, we.)
Vowels are often long:

- *-lgh* and *-ight* are long I (& silent GH):
bright, fight, high, light, might, right, sigh.

“The bright lights might wake the baby,”
the mother sighed.
Vowels are often long:

- in certain digraphs: ai & ay (say, wait), ea (sometimes: meat, bean), ee (keep, need), oa (coat, soap), oe (goes, toe), & a few times ou or ow (dough, grow), ue (true), ui (fruit).

Wait! Don’t play with the baby. He needs to keep sleeping!
Common Examples of Short & Long Vowels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A: short</th>
<th>A: long</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>at</td>
<td>ate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>back</td>
<td>bake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can</td>
<td>cane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mad</td>
<td>made &amp; maid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tap</td>
<td>tape</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The men ate baked beans.
### Common Examples of Short & Long Vowels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E: short</th>
<th>E: long</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>bean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men</td>
<td>mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>met</td>
<td>mete, meat, &amp; meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>red</td>
<td>reed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>set</td>
<td>seat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The men ate baked beans.
Common Examples of Short & Long Vowels

I: short  I: long
dim   dime
fin   fine
hid   hide
lit   light & lite
sit   sight & site

The fish hid on the sand. Its fins waved like seaweed in the dim light.
Common Examples of Short & Long Vowels

O: short
hop
not
rob

O: long
hope
note
robe

U: short
cut
hug
tub

U: long
cute
huge
tube

Note to babysitter: before the kids’ bedtime, please fill the tub and get out a tube of toothpaste. Do NOT let them make a huge mess!
When in doubt, check a dictionary—or don’t worry about it!
To hear these words pronounced and learn more about short & long vowels— as well as the other vowel sounds of English— see the English Vowel Sounds & Spellings course: https://englishhints-academy.thinkific.com/courses/english-vowel-sounds-and-spellings
It includes practice and quizzes as well as videos.