

Table of Contents

Author Note.....	4
How to Use This Book.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Short A.....	7
Short E.....	13
Short I.....	19
Short O.....	25
Short U.....	31
Long A.....	37
Long E.....	43
Long I.....	49
Long O.....	55
Long U.....	61
Letter Y.....	67
Review.....	71
Answer Keys.....	81

Vowels

An Introduction

The English language is made up of Vowels and Consonants. Vowel sounds are made by using your vocal cords without any friction from your teeth, lips, or tongue. They are represented by the letters A, E, I, O, U, and sometimes Y. All of the other letters are called Consonants, and they provide more structure to the word sounds (B,C,D,F,G,H,J... and so on).

Many pronunciation struggles in English are due to the complexity of English vowels. The English vowels are different than most other languages as there are two distinct sounds for each vowel: Short and Long. These sounds can change depending on how we are using the vowel.

For the purpose of this workbook, we will be practicing the main short and long vowel sounds. There are many exceptions, such as "r" and "l" controlled vowels, diphthongs, etc., which go into too much detail for this activity book.

A note on Schwa:

The most common sound in the English language is called Schwa and is written as /ə/ in pronunciation dictionaries. This is an "uh" sound found only in unstressed syllables. Since all English words need at least one stressed syllable, you will only find a schwa in words with two or more syllables.

The Schwa sound can be represented by any of the vowel letters:

a in "ago" - ə/go

e in "silent" - si/lənt

i in "pupil" - pu/pəl

o in "pilot" - pi/lət

u in "focus" - fo/ cəs

Short A

The short a vowel sound in General American English has a very distinct and unique sound. Each area of the United States adds its own regional flair to the short a, but in the Midwestern United States, the sound has a little stronger emphasis.

Many online videos try to isolate the short a sound into an “ahh” sound, but that is closer to the short o sound, as in “dot.” Short a in General American English is harsher, with your tongue pushing forward slightly, as in “cat.” It is a crisp, quick sound that does not stretch out. Try this simple maze to see if you can correctly identify the short a sound.

Vowel Maze



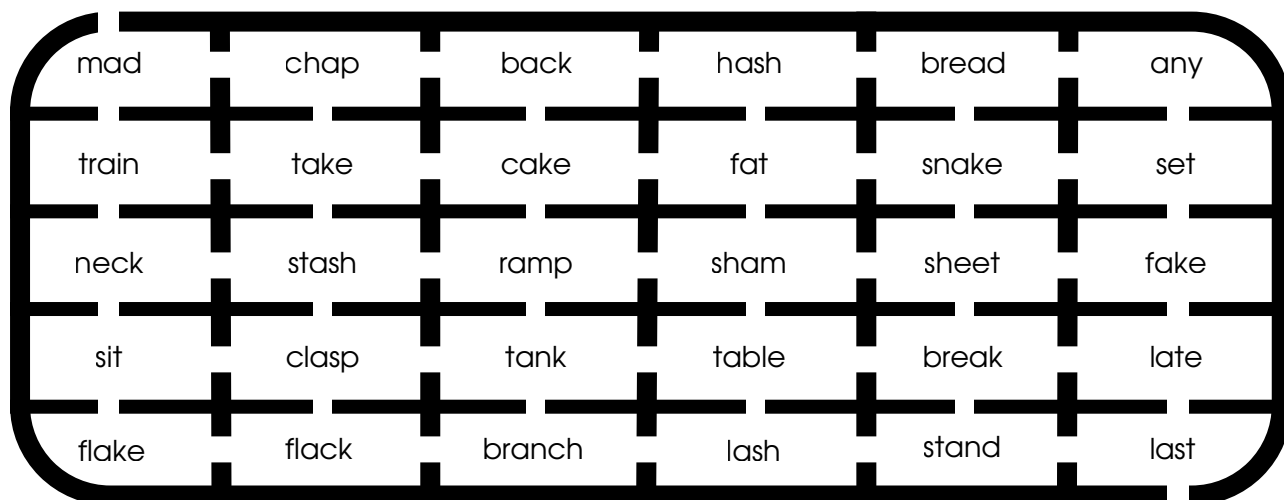
Anniehoo
English

Short A

ENTER



Follow the maze of words with the short “a” sound as in the word “bat.” Make sure you check your answers in the back of the workbook when finished.



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EXIT



Short Vowel Sound "a" Match

Directions: Match the words in the first column
with the same short vowel sound in that row.

Circle the answer.

lash	red	ham	again
stand	mat	send	dead
slant	hack	egg	sweat
tag	train	bell	shag
quack	gem	ranch	head
crab	any	said	snag
glass	rant	spread	blouse
mast	break	black	many

Pronunciation Path

Short A



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Make a path with the Short A sound as in "Cat." Enter on top left and move only across or up and down. Exit on bottom right.

Enter



cat	bake	chat	shack	man
rash	tact	slack	dread	slam
realm	ate	play	lack	sand
lake	champ	strand	bag	wait
stray	bask	gave	bacon	hand
any	lag	ash	wag	name
made	chain	pay	fan	many
cash	cramp	grand	pack	eight
band	cane	gate	place	said
branch	brag	plant	land	clam



Exit

A closer look at decoding:

General Vowel and Consonant Spelling Rules

Basic decoding of American English pronunciation can be done by the general spelling rules. Although there are many exceptions, the placement of the vowel at the end of a syllable usually determines whether it is a Long or Short sound.

In a Vowel - Consonant pattern as in "HAT," the vowel A will be short. The same is generally true with a Vowel - Consonant - Consonant pattern as in "BACK," with a short A.

If the pattern is vowel - consonant - vowel, most commonly found in the "silent E" pattern like "ATE" or "CANE," the first vowel will be long. Most syllables ending in a "silent e" take the long sound of the first vowel. The same is generally true with a Vowel - Vowel - Consonant pattern like "AIM" or "EAT."

There are, of course, many exceptions, which adds to the complexity of English pronunciation! Read on to find many hints and tips.



Hop Scotch

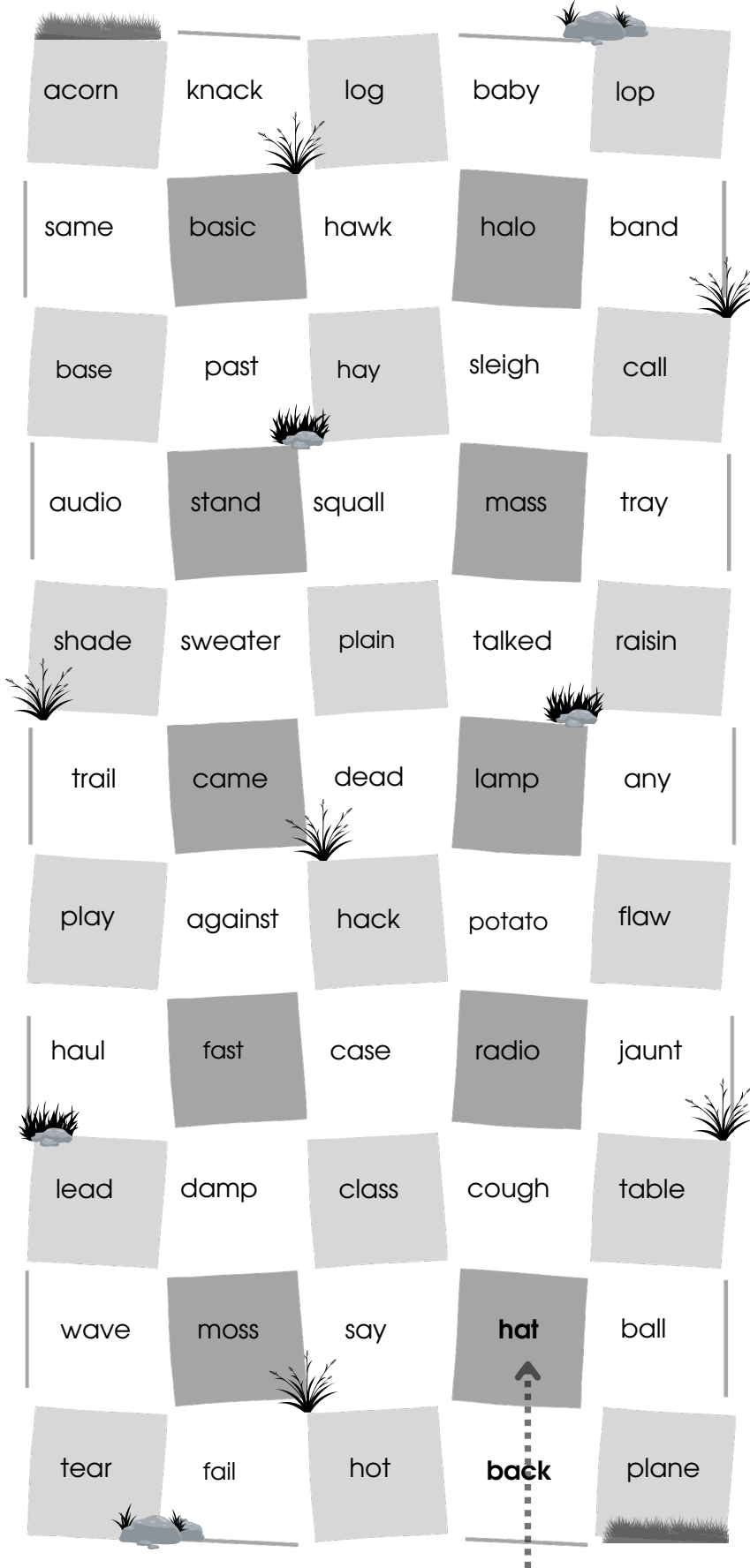
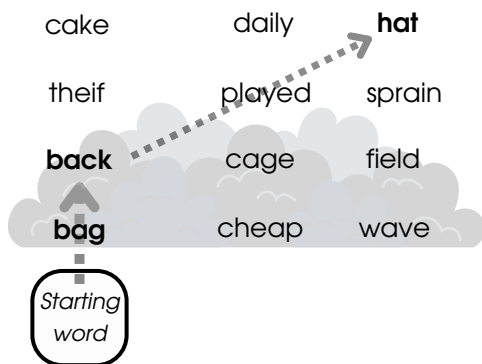
Vowel Sound Short A

Directions:

Start at the bottom and hop your way up the sidewalk row by row to the top. Only land on blocks that have a "short a" sound.

Move horizontally, vertically, or diagonally. You can hop over a block if it is in direct line with a correct word.

Example short a:



[illegible]

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Mastering Vowel Sounds Activity Book

A Pronunciation Workbook for Advanced English Language Learners
(ESL)



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