

English Pronunciation – The Letter 'i'

English vowels have different pronunciations, depending on the surrounding consonants. For example, the letter 'i' can be:

- short Examples: *big, pencil, family*
- long Examples: *fine, quite, microphone*
- “ee” as in “bee” Examples: *liter, quarantine, expertise*
- “ur” as in “bird” Examples: *first, third, thirsty*

Rule 1. In a short word, ‘i’ has a short sound:

in, win, bit, list, sit, kick, bin, fit

Rule 2. The letter 'i' followed by a double consonant also has a short sound:

winner, bitter, miller, bigger, dinner, written

Rule 3. The letter 'i' followed by a consonant and an ‘e’ (silent ‘e’/magic ‘e’) has a long sound:

wine, bite, smile, time, organize, file, senile, futile

There are some exceptions to the above rules. For example:

give, light, night, liter, microphone, happiness, quarantine, finance, engine, expertise, promise

Exercise 1. Pronounce these words, and say if the 'i' is *short* or *long*:

- lit
- life
- bill
- trip
- tripe
- sunrise
- fitter
- thinner
- finally
- finish

Sometimes the pronunciation of the letter ‘i’ can vary within one word. For example:

- inside (short / long)
- crisis (long / short)
- liability (long / short / short)
- exciting (long / short)
- viking (long / short)
- decisive (long / short)
- indecisive (short / long / short)
- itinerary (long / short)
- sinusitis (long / long / short)
- conjunctivitis (short / long / short)
- appendicitis (short / long / short)

Sometimes the pronunciation of the letter 'i' changes when we add a suffix:

sign (long) / signal (short)
revise (long) / revision (short)
inspire (short + long) / inspiration (short / short)
crime (long) / criminal (short / short)

Sometimes, there is no logic. Compare the pronunciations of these two words:

finite (long / long)
infinite (short / short / short)

Sometimes one written word can have **two** different pronunciations. For example:

<u>Short sound</u>	<u>Long sound</u>
live (verb)	live (adjective)
wind (noun)	wind (verb)

Sometimes the pronunciation of a word can vary between English versions. Consider these differences between British (BR) and American English (AM):

<u>Word</u>	<u>Short sound</u>	<u>Long sound</u>
fragile	AM	BR
advertisement	BR	AM
vitamin	BR	AM
simultaneous	BR	AM

Summary

The rules of pronunciation of English vowels have many exceptions! So, the best way to speak correctly is to remember how to pronounce every individual word!

Exercise 2. Pronounce these words.

- pile
- pillar
- plight
- triangle
- fiddle
- ink
- infinity

Suggested video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8zWWp0akUU> (4 mins)