Common Spellings for Vowel Sounds

Here are all of the vowel sounds and their common spellings — notice that many include more than one letter for the given vowel sound. The order of the graphemes is organized from **most to least commonly used in English words**. Graphemes that are listed as "less frequent" occur less than 5% of the time in English words.

Vowel Sound	Possible Spelling	Keywords
/ē/	Most common: y, e, ee, ea Less frequent: e_e, ey, ie, ei	happ**y**, m**e**, s**ee**, **ea**t, th**e**s**e**, k**ey**, ch**ie**f, **ei**ther
/ĭ/	Most common: i Less frequent: i_e, y	s**i**t g**i**v**e**, g**y**m
/ā/	Most common: a, a_e, ai, ay Less frequent: ea, ei, eigh, ey	b**a**by, m**a**k**e**, r**ai**n, pl**ay**, gr**ea**t, v**ei**n, **ei**ght, th**ey**
/ĕ/	Most common: e Less frequent: ea	b**e**d br**ea**th
/ă/	Most common: a	c**a**t
/ī/	Most common: i_e, -i, -y, igh Less frequent: ie	t**i**m**e**, r**i**fl**e**, cr**y**, r**igh**t p**ie**
/ŏ/	Most common: o, (w)a Less frequent: al	f**o**x, sw**a**p p**al**m
/ŭ/	Most common: u, -o Less frequent: oo, ou, o_e	c**u**p, c**o**ver fl**oo**d, t**ou**gh, c**o**m**e**
/aw/	Most common: a, au, aw Less frequent: (w)a, ough	c**a**ll, p**au**se, s**aw** w**a**ter, b**ough**t
/ō/	Most common: o-, o_e, oa, ow Less frequent: oe	**o**pen, v**o**t**e**, b**oa**t, sn**ow** t**oe**
/o͝o/	Most common: u, oo, o Less frequent: ou	p**u**t, t**oo**k, w**o**men c**ou**ld
/o͞o/	Most common: oo, u, o, u_e, ou Less frequent: ue, ew, ui	m**oo**, tr**u**th, wh**o**, t**u**b**e**, s**ou**p bl**ue**, ch**ew**, s**ui**t

Common Spellings for Vowel Sounds

Vowel Sound	Possible Spelling	Keywords
/yū/	Most common: u, u_e Less frequent: ew, ue	h**u**man, c**u**t**e** f**ew**, f**ue**l
/oi/	Most common: oi, oy	b**oi**l, b**oy**
/ow/	Most common: ou, ow, ou_e	**ou**t, c**ow**, h**ou**s**e**
/er/	Most common: er, ur, ir Less frequent: or, ar	h**er**, f**ur**, s**ir** od**or**, cell**ar**
/ar/	Most common: ar Less frequent: are, ear	c**ar**t **are**, h**ear**t
/or/	Most common: or Less frequent: ore	sp**or**t m**ore**
Schwa /ə/	Most common: a, o, e, i, u, y, ou	**a**bout, less**o**n, **e**lect, def**i**nition, circ**u**s, vin**y**l, fam**ou**s

Note: This list of common spellings includes many, but not all, possible spellings of each vowel phoneme.

Many of these examples come from the **Vowel Valley** chart that is often used in early elementary classrooms