

Lexical Sets

from J.C. Wells' *Accents of English: Introduction* Chapter 2.

Typical spellings taken from *Reference Vowels & Lexical Sets in Accent Acquisition* by Douglas N. Honorof.

1. KIT

Typical Spellings: iC

ship, bit, sick, stitch, stiff, pith, this, wish,
rib, kid, dig, bridge, give, his,
dim, skin, sing, fill,
milk, limp, hint, drink, lift, list, plinth, mix,
slither, vision, spirit, dinner, silly, winter, sister,...;
myth, symbol, rhythm, Syria,...;
pretty, England, English,
build, guilt,
women, sieve,
busy, business.

2. DRESS

Typical Spellings: eC

step, bet, neck, fetch, Jeff, mess, mesh,
ebb, bed, egg, edge, rev, fez,
hem, pen, bell,
shelf, hemp, tent, theft, best, sex, next,
effort, method, terror, tenor, jelly, centre/center, pester,
...;
threat, sweat, deaf, death,
bread, dead, head, health, realm, meant, breast,
ready, jealous, pleasant, weather, treacherous,...;
any, many, Thames,
friend, says, said, Leicester, bury.

3. TRAP

Typical Spellings: aC

tap, cat, back, batch, gaff, math(s), mass, dash,
cab, mad, rag, badge, have, jazz,
ham, man, hang, shall,
scalp, lamp, ant, hand, thank, lapse, tax,
arrow,¹ carriage,¹ banner, abbey, tassel, cancel,
panda,...;
plaid.

¹ GenAm also with /ε/.

4. LOT

Typical Spellings: oC

stop, pot, sock, notch, Goth,
rob, odd, cog, dodge,
Tom, con, doll,
solve, romp, font, copse, box,
profit, possible, proverb, bother, rosin,
honest, ponder, ...;
swan, quality, yacht, wasp, watch, squabble,
waffle,...;
knowledge, acknowledge.

5. STRUT

Typical Spellings: uC

cup, cut, suck, much, snuff, fuss, rush,
rub, bud, jug, budge, buzz,
hum, run, lung, dull,
pulse, bulge, punch, lump, hunt, trunk,
butter, study, punish, number, mustn't, Guthrie,...;
done, come, love, mother, stomach,
monk, tongue, onion, money, front,...;
touch, enough, young, double, southern, country,...;
blood, flood.

6. FOOT

Typical Spellings: uC, ooC, ouC

put, puss, bush,
full,

cuckoo, butcher, cushion, pudding, bullet,...;

good, stood, wood, cook, look, shook, wool,...;

woman, wolf, bosom,

could, should, would, shouldn't.

7. BATH

Typical Spellings: (a) aff, ath (voiceless), ass, aft, asp, ast,

ask, augh; (b) ance, ant, anch, CVCand, ample; (c)

alf, alv, an't + many unpredictable, e.g. trans- SEE

"ASK LIST"

(a) staff, giraffe,

path, lath,

brass, class, glass, grass, pass,

raft, craft, graft, daft, shaft, aft, haft, draft,

clasp, grasp, rasp, gasp,

blast, cast, fast, mast, aghast, last, past, contrast, vast,

avast,

ask, bask, mask, flask, cask, task,

after, rafter, Shaftesbury,

master, plaster, disaster, castor, pastor, nasty,

disastrous,

basket, casket, rascal,

fasten, raspberry, ghastly, castle,

laugh, laughter, draught;

(b) dance, advance, chance, France, lance, glance,
enhance,

prance, trance, entrance v.,

grant, slant, aunt, chant, plant, advantage, vantage,

chantry, supplant, enchant,

branch, blanch, ranch, stanch, stanchion,

demand, command, remand, slander, chandler,

commando, Alexander, Sandra, Flanders,

example, sample,

chancel, chancellor, Frances, Francis, lancet, answer

(c) calf, half, calve, halve, rather, Slav,

shan't, can't,

Iraq, corral, morale, Iran, Sudan, banana.

chaff, graph, alas, hasp, Basque, masque,

plastic, drastic, elastic, gymnastic, (Cornish) pasty, en-

thusiastic, bastard, paschal, pastoral, masculine, mas-

querade, exasperate, blasphemy, masturbate, Glasgow,

lather, stance, askance, circumstantial, intransigent,

substantial, transit, transport, transfer, transform,

transitory, transient, transept, and other words in

trans-;

contralto, alto, plaque, Cleopatra.

8. CLOTH

Typical Spellings: (a) o, au + fricative – rhyme with

THOUGHT in GenAm and older RP; (b) o, - rhyme

with THOUGHT in GenAm and *never* in RP; (c) or –

same pattern as (b).

(a) off, cough, trough, broth, froth, cross, across, loss,

floss, toss,

fosse, doss,

soft, croft, lost, oft, cost, frost, lost,

often, soften, lofty,

Australia, Austria, Austen, Austin,

gone;

(b) moth, boss, gloss, joss, moss, Ross,

long, strong, wrong, gong, song, thong, tongs, throng,

accost, coffee, coffer, coffin, offer, office, officer, glossy,

foster, Boston, Gloucester, sausage

wash;

(c) origin, Oregon, oratory, orator, orange, authority, borrow, categorical, correlate, coroner, coral, florid, Florida, florist, florin, historic(al), horrid, horrible, majority, horrify, horror, metaphoric(al), morrow, Morris, moral, Norwich,¹ porridge, rhetorical, sorrel, moribund,...; sorrow, tomorrow, sorry, Laurence/Lawrence, laurel, laureate,² quarrel, quarry, warrant, warren, warrior, Warwick.¹

¹ as English place-names or surnames RP /'nɒrɪdʒ/, /'wɒrɪk/.

² RP also with /ɔ:/.

9. NURSE

Typical Spellings: ur, or, ir, er, earC
 usurp, hurt, lurk, church, turf, purse
 curb, curd, urge, curve, furze,
 turn, curl, spur, occurred,
 burnt, burst, murder, further,
 shirt, irk, birch, birth, bird, dirge
 firm, girl, fir, stirred, first, circus, virtue,...;
 myrrh, myrtle, Byrne;
 twerp, assert, jerk, perch, serf, berth, terse,
 verb, erg, emerge, nerve,
 term, stern, deter, err,' preferred
 certain, person, immersion, emergency, kernel
 Earp, earth, dearth, hearse, rehearse, search
 heard¹ earn, yearn, earl, pearl,
 rehearsal, early, earnest;
 wort, work, worth, worse, word, worm, whorl,
 worst, Worthing, worthy, whortleberry;
 scourge, adjourn, courteous,² journal, journalist,
 journey;
 attorney, colonel, liqueur,³ masseur,³ connoisseur.³

¹ occasionally with the vowel of DRESS.

² occasionally with the vowel of FORCE.

³ also sometimes with the vowel of CURE.

10. FLEECE

Typical Spellings: (a) e, ee, eCe (b) ea, oeC (c) i
 (a) creep, meet, seek, beech, reef, teeth,
 seed, sleeve, seethe, cheese,
 seem, green, feel,
 see, tree, agree,
 needle, feeder, sweeten,...;
 grebe, these, Peter, even,...;
 shriek, brief, piece, believe, field,...;
 ceiling, Keith, Sheila,...;
 be, me, ...
 key, people;

(b) reap, meat, speak, teach, leaf, beneath, peace, leash,
 bead, league, leave, breathe, please,
 team, mean, deal,
 sea, tea,
 feast, reason, weasel, easy, Easter,...;
 metre, equal, decent, legal, penal,
 complete, scene,...;
 deceive, receive, seize,...;
 Caesar, an(a)emic, Aesop,...;
 phoenix, subpoena, f (o)etus,...;
 quay;

(c) police, unique, machine, prestige, elite,
 mosquito, casino, visa, trio, ski, chic, ...;

11. FACE

Typical Spellings: (a) aCe; (b) aiC, ay, ey, eiC, aig; (c) ea
 (a) tape, late, cake, safe, case,

babe, fade, vague, age, wave, bathe, craze,
 name, mane, vale,
 change, waste, ...;
 taper, bacon, nature, station, lady, raven, invasion,
 April, ...;
 bass (in music), gauge, gaol/jail,
 crêpe, fete, bouquet;

(b) wait, faith, plaice, aitch, raid, nail, main, faint, ...;
 day, play, way, grey/gray, ...;
 rein, veil, beige, feint, ...;
 they, whey, obey, ...;
 weigh, weight, eight, straight, ...;
 reign, campaign, deign, ...;

(c) great, steak, break, yea.

12. PALM

Typical Spellings: (a) native Anglo-Saxon al, a#, ah; (b)
a memorize foreign word pronunciations
 (a) calm, balm, psalm, alms, father,
 bra, ma, pa, mamma, pappa, aha,
 ah, ha(h), blah, hurrah;¹

(b) baht, Bach, facade, couvade, roulade, raj, taj,
 salaam, Brahms, Kahn, Afrikaans, kraal, Transvaal, Taj
 Mahal,
 spa, Shah, Pooh-Bah, Armagh, schwa,
 cantata, innamorato, legato, sonata, staccato, pizzicato,
 Lusaka, Karachi, mafia,²
 Dada, bravado, incommunicado, Mahdi, Mikado,
 laager, lager,¹
 Zhivago, (maha)rajah, kava, guava, Java, Swazi,
 Dali, Mali, Guatemala, Somali(a),
 lama, llama, Yokohama, swami, Brahmin, guano, piano
 ('softly'), marijuana, iguana, Botswana, (maha)rani,
 ha-ha, Malawi, Bahai, Sumatra, candelabra.³

¹ GenAm also with /ɔ:/.

² RP also with /æ/.

³ also with other vowels.

12b. PALM/BATH

Typical Spellings: *a memorize foreign word pronunciations*
 boa, bah,
 Koran, khan, Pakistan, Shan, chorale, rationale, locale,
 khaki, pasha, Nazi,
 Colorado, enchilada, Nevada, aubade, lava, palaver,
 plaza,
 almond, drama, pajama/pyjama, panorama,
 Ghana, nirvana, sultana, soprano, piranha, Bali, finale.

13. THOUGHT

Typical Spellings: (a) auC, ough, aw, al, alk; (b) alC
 (other than 'k') – in England merges with
 THOUGHT or LOT depending on generation or
 region

(a) taught, caught, Maugham, Vaughan, Waugh,
 naughty, haughty, slaughter, daughter,
 ought, bought, wrought, brought, fought, nought,
 sought,
 taut, auk, debauch, sauce,
 applaud, cause, faun, haul, Paul,
 autumn, author, taunt, laundry, gauntlet,...;
 gawp, hawk, crawl, shawm, awn, yawn,
 Jaw, law, saw, draw, awe,...;
 chalk, talk, walk, stalk, caulk,
 all, fall, small, wall, appal, instal, Raleigh,¹...;
 bald, water, broad;

(b) halt, salt, malt, false,
 alter, also, alderman, walrus, . . .

fault, vault.

¹RP also with /æ, ɑ:/

14. GOAT

Typical Spellings: (a) o, oC, oa; (b) ow, ol
(a) soap, boat, oak, roach, loaf, oath,
road, loathe, coal, roam, loan, boast, coax,...;
note, rope, joke, both, gross,
robe, code, rogue, grove, clothe, rose,
hole, home, tone,
so, no, toe, foe, don't, host,
noble, ocean, explosion, holy,...
brooch, beau, gauche, mauve

(b) bowl, own, tow, know, grow, owe, Owen,...;
soul, poultry, mould/mold, shoulder,...;
colt, holster, old, bold, soldier,...;
roll, scroll, control,...;
sew, dough, though, although.

15. GOOSE

Typical Spellings: (a) o, oo, oCe, ou (b) uCe, euC, ew,
uiC, iew#, eaut
(a) loop, shoot, spook, smooch, proof, tooth, loose,
tarboosh,
boob, mood, Moog, groove, smooth, choose,
boom, spoon, fool, too,
boost, schooner, booty,...;
move, prove, lose, whose,...;
tomb, do, who, two,...;
group, youth, ghoul, you, Vancouver, through,...;

(b) dupe, mute, duke, truth, obtuse,
cube, rude, fugue, huge, amuse,
plume, tune, mule, blue,
funeral, lucre, prudent,...;
pu, duty, pupil, mucus, lucid, crucial, confusion,
ludicrous, music, human, lunatic,...;
sleuth, deuce, feud, neutral, feudal, eunuch,...;
newt, lewd, few, knew, pewter, sewage,...;
fruit, juice, cruise, nuisance,...;
view, review,
beauty, beautiful.

16. PRICE

Typical Spellings: iCe, I, y
(a) ripe, write, like, knife, ice,
tribe, side, arrive, writhe, rise,
time, fine, mile, fire, die, tried,...;
Friday, tiger, silent, violent, liar, science,
indict /in'daɪt/, isle /aɪl/, child, pint, find, ninth, Christ,
viscount /'vaɪkaʊnt/, bicycle, island,
hi-fi, chi,...;
type, try, Cyprus, hybrid, dye, Glynde,...;
eider, kaleidoscope, eye, height, aisle, buy, choir
/'kwaɪə(r)/
(b) fight, high, sign,....

17. CHOICE

Typical Spellings: oy, oiC
(a) boy, toy, joy, annoy, oyster...;
noise, voice, choice, rejoice,
void, moist...;

(b) coin, join, oil, boil, soil, spoil, toil,
poison, ointment...;
buoy, employ ...;

(c) groin, hoist, joist.

18. MOUTH

Typical Spellings: ouC, ow
out, pouch, south, house,
loud, gouge, mouth v., rouse,
noun, foul, thou,
count, round, pronounce, oust,
flour, sour, trousers, mountain, council, boundary,...;
crowd, browse, owl, down, cow, allow,
dowry, flower, coward, towel, powder,...;
bough, plough/ plow, doughty,...;
MacLeod.

19. NEAR

Typical Spellings: (a; c) eer, ere, ier, ear; erV; (b) ierC,
eirC
(a) beer, deer, career,...;
here, mere, sincere, interfere,...;
bier, pier, cashier,...;
weir;
fear, ear, appear, yearling,...;

(b) fierce, pierce
weird, Deirdre
beard;

(c) serious, mysterious, period, serum, diphtheria,
hero,...
eerie, peerage, Madeira, dreary, weary.

19b. NEAR+

idea, Korea, diarrh (o) ea, Galatea,...;
European, Jacobean, Crimean,...
ratafia, Maria, Sophia,...;
museum, Colosseum, Te Deum,...;
real, ideal.

¹GenAm also /'hiro/.

several of these words also have RP variants with /iə/.

20. SQUARE

Typical Spellings: (a; c) are#, air#, ear#, ere#, ary;
(b) arC
(a) care, share, bare,...;
air, fair, pair,...;
bear, pear, wear, swear,...;
heir, their, there, where, Ayr, Eyre, prayer, mayor;¹
(b) scarce;
(c) vary, canary, Mary, aquarium, various, rarity, area,
Pharaoh,...;
dairy, prairie, fairy,...;
aerial,² Dun Laoghaire, Eire.

¹GenAm also /'meɪə/, rhyming with player.

²GenAm also /eɪriəl/, rhyming with imperial

21. START

Typical Spellings: (a; b) ar#: arC; (c) ar
(a) far, star, bar,...;
bazaar, Saar;

(b) sharp, part, bark, arch, scarf, farce, harsh,
garb, card, large, carve, parse,
farm, barn, snarl, Charles,
party, market, marvellous,...;
heart, hearken, hearth;
sergeant;
aardvark;

(c) sari, Bari, safari, cascara, curare, Mata Hari¹, arza¹
scenario¹, Sahara¹, tiara¹.

¹GenAm also /æɪr - er/.

22. NORTH

Typical Spellings: (a) or#; ar#; (b; c) orC, uar; aur
(a) or, for, nor, Thor;
war;

(b) Thorpe, assort, cavort, consort, distort, exhort,
resort, re-
tort, short, snort, tort, cork, fork, stork, torque, York,
scorch, torch, morph, gorse, horse, remorse,
orb, absorb, accord, chord, cord, lord, re'cord, George,
gorge,
corn, form, reform, storm, adorn, born, corn, horn,
morn, porn, scorn, shorn, thorn, corpse,
porpoise, torpid, torpor, fortify, fortunate, fortune,
important,¹ corporal, importunate, mortal, mortar,
shorten, tortoise, orchestra, orchid, Dorking, torture,
forfeit, morpheme, morphia, morphine, orthodox,
torso,
orbit, order, border, ordinary, organ, organism,
organize, Morgan,
dormer, Mormon, normal, ornament, corner, forward,
fortress;
quart, quarter,² quartz, sward, swarm, swarthy, warble,
ward, warden, wardrobe, warlock, warm, warmth,
warn, warp, Warsaw, wart;

(c) aura, aural, Laura, Taurus.

¹ in accents other than GenAm usually a FORCE word.

² GenAm also /'kwɒtər/.

23. FORCE

Typical Spellings: (a, bi, ci) ore, oar#, oor#, our#, ourC
(bii) oarC, ourC

(a) ore, adore, afore, before, bore, chore, core, crore,
deplore, explore, fore, galore, gore, ignore, implore,
more, ore, pore, restore, score, shore, snore, sore, spore,
store, swore, tore, whore, wore, yore
boar, hoar, oar, roar, soar;
floor, door;
four, pour;

(bi) deport, export, fort, import, port, report, sport,
support,
pork, porch, forth, divorce,
afford, ford, horde, sword, forge,
borne, shorn, sworn, torn, worn,
portent, porter, portrait, proportion, Borneo;

(bii) coarse, hoarse, board, hoard, boarder;
court, fourth, course, resource, source, mourn,¹
courtier,
mourning;¹

(c) oral, adorable, angora, aurora, borax, boron, choral,
Dora, fedora, flora, floral, glory, gory, moron,
Nora(h), porous, story, thorax, torus, Tory,
ensorious, euphoria, gloria, glorious, Gregorian, his-
torian, laborious, memorial, meritorious, mora-
torium, notorious, pictorial, pretorian, stentorian,
thorium, uxorious, Victoria(n), *other words in*
-orial,
hoary, uproarious.

¹also sometimes with RP /ʊə/, GenAm /ʊr/.

24. CURE

Typical Spellings: (ai, b, ci) oor#, our#, ourC, oori, ouri,
(aii, cii) ure, urV, eur

(ai) boor, moor, Moor, poor, spoor;
amour, dour,¹ tour, your

(aii) abjure, adjure, allure, assure, con'jure, demure,
endure,>
ensure, immure, insure, inure, lure, McClure, manure,
mature, obscure, procure, pure, secure, sure

(b) bourse, gourd, Bourbon,² bourgeois,³ gourmand,
gourmet,
tournament,² tourney,² tourniquet;²

(ci) boorish, houri, tourism, tourist

(cii) Ural, angostura, assurance, bravara, bureau,³
c(a)esura,
Huron, incurable, insurance, mural, plural, rural,
Truro,
anthurium, centurion, curious, furious, injurious, luxu-
rious, Muriel, penurious, spurious, Uriel,

curate, during, fury, futurity, jury, lurid, maturity, ob-
scurity, purify, purity, security, sulfuric/sulphuric, tel-
lurium, thurible;

Europe, neural, neuron/neurone, pleurisy.

¹GenAm also /daur/.

²GenAm also with NURSE vowel.

³alternatively stressed on the final syllable.

25. happY

Typical Spellings: (a) y#, i#, ie# (b) ee#, ey#, ea#

(a) copy, city, inky, baby, ready, foggy,
fluffy, heavy, breathy, fussy, busy, fishy,
tetchy, edgy, gloomy, penny, sorry, lily,
canopy, vanity, strategy, economy,. . .
scampi, spaghetti, khaki, corgi, Nazi,
taxi, hibachi, salami, macaroni, sari, chilli,...;
sortie, talkie, birdie, boogie, movie,
lassie, budgie, stymie, prairie, calorie. . .

(b) committee, coffee;
hockey, abbey, covey, curtesy, jersey,
money, comfrey, valley,...;
Chelsea, Swansea.

26. lettER

Typical Spellings: er#, or#, o(u)r#, yr#, ure#
paper, better, whisker, rubber, order, tiger,
offer, cover, leather, dresser, cruiser,
usher, teacher, soldier, customer, liner,
scorer, dealer, tower,. . .
metre, centre/center, acre, fibre/fiber, ogre,...;
calendar, sugar, polar, liar,...;
stupor, indicator, anchor, Tudor, camphor, survivor,
author, professor, razor, major, tremor,
donor, error, pallor...;
succo(u)r, harbo(u)r, odo(u)r, vigo(u)r,
flavo(u)r, armo(u)r, humo(u)r, colo(u)r...;
martyr, satyr, zephyr ;
figure, pressure, measure, feature, perjure, tenure,
failure...;

27. commA

Typical Spellings: a#, ia# - All non-native borrowings;
Middle English had no final vowel corresponding to
schwa.

catalpa, quota, vodka, am(o)eba, panda, saga,
sofa, saliva, Bertha, balsa, visa, acacia,
dementia, neuralgia, drama, arena, opera,
Cinderella, phobia,. . .