

# Lesson 35: Errors with Confusing Combinations of Letters

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Hi students! In this lesson we're going to look at some combinations of letters that often lead to pronunciation mistakes.

A lot of students ask me about rules, like how do we know when the letter e sounds like ee vs. eh, or when the letter g sounds like juh (general) vs. guh (get). Although there are some trends in English spelling / pronunciation, there are so many complications and exceptions that I'd encourage you NOT to focus on remembering rules.

Instead, when you learn new words, *always* look them up in an audio dictionary like [www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com) - listen to the pronunciation and repeat it. Don't try to figure it out by analyzing the spelling.

I know it's frustrating! In your language, maybe there are clear rules, or maybe each letter is only pronounced one way, the same way every time. English is very irregular, so it's best to just learn the correct pronunciation of each word and not try to interpret them based on a logical system.

## **Error #161 – Always pronouncing “oo” as it is in “food”**

The first letter combination is oo. A lot of students pronounce this oo as in food all the time... but it's not always!

We also have words like good. It's a slightly different sound: Food. Good.

Let's look at some words that have oo with different pronunciations. As always, repeat the words after me so you can practice.

First the easiest one, the oooo sound:

- food
- root
- pool
- cartoon
- proof
- moon
- room
- school

Now pronounced like in “good”:

- cook
- look
- wood
- hood
- book
- hook
- foot

And one big exception:

- door (like store and four!)

## **Error #162 – Problems with “ou”**

Another very common letter combination that can be pronounced several different ways is ou. We have “ow” as in house - this is probably the most common.

But it can also be pronounced “oh” as in shoulder, and “uh” as in couple. And in the words could, would, and should, it’s pronounced more like “ouh.” Let’s work on some of these words:

Like in “house”:

- house
- loud
- sound
- couch
- about
- noun

Like the “o” in “no”:

- shoulder
- soul

Like the “u” in “cut”:

- cousin
- couple
- double
- touch
- young

Like the “oo” in “food”:

- group
- youth
- soup

Like the “oo” in “good”:

- would
- should

- could

“Our” pronounced like “er”:

- journalist
- nourish

## **Error #163 – Problems with OUGH**

Related to that is the combination of letters “ough,” which is really confusing, and a lot of English learners mispronounce it! OUGH can be pronounced 5 different ways. Let’s practice them - repeat after me:

Oh like in “no”:

- dough
- though
- although
- thorough

Aw like in “saw”:

- bought
- brought
- ought
- fought
- thought
- (also taught and caught)

Uff like in “stuff”:

- enough
- tough
- rough

Like “off”:

- cough

Oo like in “food”:

- through

## **Error #164 – Problems with “ea”**

Ea is another letter combination with multiple pronunciations - do you pronounce it like an e, like an a, or what? Well, there are several different ways:

Ee like in “see”:

- read
- sea
- hear
- east
- peach

Eh like in “get”:

- bread
- head
- deaf
- heavy
- measure

A like in “make”:

- steak
- great

When we have EAR, it can be pronounced “ear” like in clear, near, and year. But there are some exceptions:

Ar like in “car”:

- heart

Er like in “her”:

- early
- earn
- learn
- earth

Air like in “chair”:

- wear
- pear
- swear
- bear

## **Error #165 – Mispronouncing “urgent”**

A very common mistake that I’ve corrected for a number of students involves words like “urgent,” which they might pronounce with a strong “u” sound like oor-gent.

But urgent and urban actually start with more of an “er” sound like in bird or early.

Repeat after me:

- early
- urgent
- urban

This “er” sound is also present in the words:

- during
- furniture

- nurse
- burn

Some learners assume that “u” is always pronounced like oo (rude) or uh (but), but in these words, the UR should sound more like ER.

## Error #166 – Mispronouncing WOR

There’s a similar error with word, work, worse, and world. The “o” in these words isn’t pronounced like “oh.” Instead, wor- sounds like “were.”

Let’s practice:

- word
- work
- worse
- world

## Error #167 – The “invisible Y” sound

The final mistake we’ll cover in this lesson has to do with what I like to call the “invisible Y” sound. Some English learners pronounce “music” like **moo**-zik instead of **myoo**-zik. Can you hear the difference?

It also happens with uniform. Don’t say “**oo**-ni-form,” say “**you**-ni-form.” The “u” should be pronounced like “you,” not just “oo.”

Here are some more examples - listen and repeat:

- university
- community
- continue
- issue

- reunion
- distribute
- regular
- huge
- cute
- use
- fuel
- human

How can you tell when to say “you” instead of “oo”? Again, there’s no way to know just by looking at the word or analyzing the spelling. The best way is to look up the word in a dictionary that includes audio, so that you can listen to it and learn the right sound.

Thanks for practicing with me! Now you can move on to the next lesson, where we’re going to work on pronouncing words with tricky spellings.

**THIS IS A FREE SAMPLE LESSON FROM THE**  
**[200 COMMON ERRORS IN ENGLISH COURSE:](#)**

