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### ● ● ● TIP 1. Spanish [a] vs. English [ɑ:] [æ] [ʌ]

#### Common mistake

🔊	b <u>a</u> rn	[baɾn]
	b <u>a</u> n	[ban]
	b <u>u</u> n	[ban]

#### Expected pronunciation

🔊	b <u>a</u> rn	[bɑ:n]
	b <u>a</u> n	[bæn]
	b <u>u</u> n	[bʌn]

#### Description

English has three vowels with an a-type of quality ([ɑ:], [æ] and [ʌ]), as opposed to Spanish which only has one, that is, [a]. The most common mistake for a Spanish speaker is to produce the three English vowels with the Spanish [a]. This obviously leads to possible misunderstandings since an English speaker will not be able to determine whether the Spanish speaker means *ban* or *bun*.


The word *barn*, on the other hand, can be more easily understood given the production of the [r] by Spanish speakers. As we will discuss in tip 26, the [r] sound is only produced in RP English when it is followed by a vowel. Thus, in *barn* ([bɑ:n]) the [r] is not produced in RP since a consonant follows. Those speakers that want to adopt RP as their model of pronunciation should not produce the [r] in *barn*. In this case, *barn* will be distinguished from *ban* and *bun* by means of the vowel quality only. In many other English dialects, however, the presence of the [r] is common. Spanish speakers may choose to produce the [r] to facilitate distinguishing the word *barn* from the other two. However, it is important for Spanish speakers to note that English [r] is different from the Spanish one (see tip 26 for details).

Let us now look at the three English vowels and their qualities.

### [ɑ:]

[ɑ:] is a long and back vowel. In order to understand how this vowel should be produced, imagine that you are yawning or gargling. When we yawn, we lower the back of the tongue in a similar way to the production of English [ɑ:]. Try to place the articulators in a position of yawning and then utter the [ɑ:] sound. Furthermore, you should also know that [ɑ:] is a long vowel. This means that, compared to other vowels, such as [æ] or [ʌ], [ɑ:] has a longer duration. In phonetic transcription, the two dots (:) indicate a long sound.


Listen to a few words containing [ɑ:]. Repeat and imitate the speaker's pronunciation.

 farm	[fɑ:m]
car	[kɑ:]
start	[stɑ:t]
f <u>a</u> ther	['fɑ:ðə]
balm	[bɑ:m]

### [æ]

The quality of the [æ] sound is between Spanish [a] and [e]. In order to produce this vowel, say a long Spanish [a] and in the middle try to change it to [e] while keeping the same degree of mouth opening as for the [a]. If you compare the production of the Spanish vowels [a] and [e], you can feel that the tongue is lower (and the mouth usually more open) for [a] than for [e]. For the uttering of English [æ] the mouth has to have a similar degree of opening as for the Spanish [a] but the position of the tongue is similar to Spanish [e].

Listen to a few words containing [æ]. Repeat and imitate the speaker's pronunciation.

 lad	[læd]
cat	[kæt]
sad	[sæd]
m <u>a</u> dam	['mædəm]
pack	[pæk]

## [ʌ]

[ʌ] is the shortest a-type vowel in English. Its quality is quite similar to Spanish [a] but it is a bit shorter.

Listen to a few words containing [ʌ]. Repeat and imitate the speaker's pronunciation.

🎧	sun	[sʌn]
	flood	[flʌd]
	love	[lʌv]
	rubber	['rʌbə]
	luck	[lʌk]

Compare the pronunciation of words containing the three vowel qualities. Repeat and imitate the speaker's pronunciation.

🎧	lark	[lɑ:k]	lack	[læk]	luck	[lʌk]
	bard	[bɑ:d]	bad	[bæd]	bud	[bʌd]
	march	[mɑ:tʃ]	match	[mætʃ]	much	[mʌtʃ]
	tarn	[tɑ:n]	tan	[tæn]	ton	[tʌn]
	clerk	[klɑ:k]	clack	[klæk]	cluck	[klʌk]
	calm	[kɑ:m]	cam	[kæm]	come	[kʌm]

## Common spellings

🎧	[ɑ:]	«a»	blast	[blɑ:st]
		«ar»	larder	[ˈlɑ:də]
		«au»	laugh	[lɑ:f]
		«ah»	shah	[ʃɑ:]
		«al»	psalm	[sɑ:m]
	[æ]	«a»	bad	[bæd]
	[ʌ]	«u»	cut	[kʌt]
		«o»	come	[kʌm]
		«oo»	blood	[blʌd]

**Ear training****🎧 Exercise 1**

You will now listen to the pronunciation of one of the following words: *barn* [bɑ:n], *ban* [bæn] and *bun* [bʌn]. For each pronunciation, tick the word that is produced.

Example: ✓ barn    ban    bun

1. barn    ban    bun
2. barn    ban    bun
3. barn    ban    bun
4. barn    ban    bun
5. barn    ban    bun
6. barn    ban    bun
7. barn    ban    bun
8. barn    ban    bun
9. barn    ban    bun
10. barn    ban    bun

**🎧 Exercise 2**

Listen to the pronunciation of the following words and decide whether they are produced with [ɑ:], [æ] or [ʌ]. Tick your answer.

Example: sad    [ɑ:]    ✓ [æ]    [ʌ]

1. last            [ɑ:]    [æ]    [ʌ]
2. bar            [ɑ:]    [æ]    [ʌ]
3. sand          [ɑ:]    [æ]    [ʌ]
4. done          [ɑ:]    [æ]    [ʌ]
5. black         [ɑ:]    [æ]    [ʌ]
6. love          [ɑ:]    [æ]    [ʌ]
7. cut            [ɑ:]    [æ]    [ʌ]
8. farm          [ɑ:]    [æ]    [ʌ]
9. matter       [ɑ:]    [æ]    [ʌ]
10. fun          [ɑ:]    [æ]    [ʌ]

### 🎧 Exercise 3

You will now hear three sentences which only differ in one word containing an a-type of vowel. Listen to the three sentences and decide in which order they are produced. Write 1 for the first sentence you hear, 2 for the second and 3 for the third.

Example: 2 I paid three hundred pounds for a cart. [kɑ:t]

3 I paid three hundred pounds for a cat. [kæət]

1 I paid three hundred pounds for a cut. [kʌt]

1. He's got a big bark. [bɑ:k]

He's got a big back. [bæk]

He's got a big buck. [bʌk]

2. There's no harm. [hɑ:m]

There's no ham. [hæm]

There's no hum. [hʌm]

3. He was parting. ['pɑ:tɪŋ]

He was patting. ['pæɪtɪŋ]

He was putting. ['pʌtɪŋ]

4. I've got a blue carp. [kɑ:p]

I've got a blue cap. [kæp]

I've got a blue cup. [kʌp]

5. Marnie makes the world go round. ['mɑ:ni]

Manny makes the world go round. ['mæni]

Money makes the world go round. ['mʌni]

6. It's a mark. [mɑ:k]

It's a Mac. [mæk]

It's a muck. [mʌk]


### Other accents

In General American some of the words that in RP English contain an [ɑ:] vowel are produced with [æ]. This mainly occurs in words which have no [r] or [l] sounds after the vowel. Thus, for example, *fast* is pronounced as




[fɑ:st] in RP and as [fæst] in GA. The words *car* and *calm*, on the contrary, maintain the [ɑ:] sound in GA since the vowel is followed by [r] or [l] ([kɑ:r], [kɑ:lm]).

Listen to the following words produced with an RP accent and a GA accent.

	RP	GA
fast	[fɑ:st]	[fæst]
last	[lɑ:st]	[læst]
bath	[bɑ:θ]	[bæθ]
laugh	[lɑ:f]	[læf]
glass	[glɑ:s]	[glæs]
chance	[tʃɑ:ns]	[tʃæns]

Note the pronunciation differences and similarities of *can* and *can't* in the following expressions in RP and GA.

	RP	GA
Yes, I can.	[kæn]	[kæən]
No, I can't.	[kɑ:nt]	[kæənt]

#### Exercise 4

Listen to the following words and decide whether they are produced with an RP accent or a GA accent. Tick your answer.

Example:	grant	✓ RP [gra:nt]	GA [grænt]
1.	pass	RP [pɑ:s]	GA [pæs]
2.	can't	RP [kɑ:nt]	GA [kæənt]
3.	dance	RP [dɑ:ns]	GA [dæns]
4.	flask	RP [flɑ:sk]	GA [flæsk]
5.	France	RP [frɑ:ns]	GA [fræns]
6.	demand	RP [dɪ'mɑ:nd]	GA [dɪ'mænd]
7.	nasty	RP ['nɑ:sti]	GA ['næsti]
8.	grant	RP [gra:nt]	GA [grænt]
9.	master	RP ['mɑ:stə]	GA ['mæstər]
10.	past	RP [pɑ:st]	GA [pæst]

## ● ● ● TIP 2. Spanish [e] vs. English [e] [ɜ:]

### Common mistake

👂 bed [bet]  
 bird [beɾt]

### Expected pronunciation

👂 bed [bed]  
 bird [bɜ:d]

### Description


English e-type vowels are [e] and [ɜ:] which differ both in duration and in quality. Spanish students of English tend to produce these two vowels with a Spanish [e] whose quality is rather different from English [e] even though both sounds are transcribed with the same symbol ([e]). Furthermore, Spanish speakers tend to produce the word *bird* with an [r]. The presence of [r] is common in many English dialects and it can facilitate the distinction between *bed* and *bird* if it is produced properly (see tip 26). However, for those speakers that want to adopt an RP accent the [r] must be dropped since in RP English the [r] is not produced before a consonant (see tip 26). For details on the differences between [t] and [d] refer to tip 15.

### [e]

English [e] is a bit more open than the Spanish [e]. In order to grasp the different quality between English [e] and Spanish [e], Spanish speakers should produce a long Spanish [e] and in the middle they should open their mouth a bit more by lowering the jaw and the tongue. The resulting sound should be similar to an English [e].


*If any help...* This vowel is similar to the Catalan sound in the words *pera* or *mel* and to the Galician sound in the words *terra* or *tes*.

Listen to a few words containing an English [e]. Repeat and imitate the speaker's pronunciation.

 tell	[tel]
mess	[mes]
bread	[bred]
ready	['redi]
less	[les]

Sometimes Spanish speakers may have problems in differentiating [e] from [æ]. Once they know that the [æ] vowel has a quality between Spanish [a] and [e], a common mistake is to produce [æ] too close to [e], and thus the word *marry* ['mæri] is often heard as *merry* ['meri]. It is important that they pay special attention to this distinction in order to avoid misunderstandings.


Compare the pronunciation of pairs of words containing [e] and [æ]. Repeat and imitate the speaker's pronunciation.

 merry	['meri]	marry	['mæri]
pen	[pen]	pan	[pæn]
belly	['beli]	bally	['bæli]
many	['meni]	Manny	['mæni]
leg	[leg]	lag	[læg]

### [ɜ:]

The vowel [ɜ:] is longer than English [e] and is produced in a rather different way. [ɜ:] has a very similar quality to the English weak vowel [ə], the only difference being that [ɜ:] is much longer than [ə]. For the production of [ɜ:], Spanish speakers should open their mouth very little, as in mouth breathing, and smile a bit. Then, they should try to produce a sound without moving any of the articulators. The [ɜ:] and [ə] vowels are similar to the sound Spanish speakers sometimes produce when they think aloud (eehhh). See tip 6 for more details on the [ə] vowel.

Listen to a few words containing [ɜ:]. Repeat and imitate the speaker's pronunciation.

 shirt	[ʃɜ:t]
purse	[pɜ:s]

serve	[sɜ:v]
<u>early</u>	[ˈɜ:li]
learn	[lɜ:n]

Compare the pronunciation of pairs of words containing [e] and [ɜ:]. Repeat and imitate the speaker's pronunciation.

🔊 ferry	[ˈferi]	furry	[ˈfɜ:ri]
Ben	[ben]	burn	[bɜ:n]
head	[hed]	heard	[hɜ:d]
Ness	[nes]	nurse	[nɜ:s]
bled	[bled]	blurred	[blɜ:d]

Note the pronunciation of the verb *weren't* with one syllable and with the vowel [ɜ:].

weren't [wɜ:nt]

Compare the two sentences:

🔊 We <u>weren't</u> there.	[wɜ:nt]
We <u>went</u> there.	[went]

### Common spellings

🔊 [e]	«e»	let	[let]
	«ea»	dead	[ded]
	«ai»	said	[sed]
[ɜ:]	«ir»	sir	[sɜ:]
	«ur»	fur	[fɜ:]
	«er»	verdant	[ˈvɜ:dənt]
	«ear»	pearl	[pɜ:l]

### Ear training

#### 🔊 Exercise 1

Listen to the pronunciation of the following words and decide whether they are produced with [e] or [ɜ:]. Tick your answer.

Example: fresh ✓ [e] [ɜ:]

- |            |     |      |
|------------|-----|------|
| 1. pen     | [e] | [ɜ:] |
| 2. berry   | [e] | [ɜ:] |
| 3. servant | [e] | [ɜ:] |
| 4. nerve   | [e] | [ɜ:] |
| 5. refer   | [e] | [ɜ:] |
| 6. reflect | [e] | [ɜ:] |
| 7. third   | [e] | [ɜ:] |
| 8. curd    | [e] | [ɜ:] |
| 9. better  | [e] | [ɜ:] |
| 10. firm   | [e] | [ɜ:] |

## Exercise 2

You will now hear pairs of sentences which only differ in one word containing either [e] or [ɜ:]. Listen to the sentences and decide in which order they are produced. Write 1 for the first sentence you hear and 2 for the second.

Example: 2 I've got a big bed at home. [bed]

1 I've got a big bird at home. [bɜ:d]

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 1. He's got a big head.                 | [hed]    |
| He's got a big herd.                    | [hɜ:d]   |
| 2. The parcel is for Betty.             | [ˈbeti]  |
| The parcel is for Bertie.               | [ˈbɜ:ti] |
| 3. It's a huge shed.                    | [ʃed]    |
| It's a huge sherd.                      | [ʃɜ:d]   |
| 4. Benny took the car.                  | [ˈbeni]  |
| Bernie took the car.                    | [ˈbɜ:ni] |
| 5. He's got a tenner.                   | [ˈtenə]  |
| He's got a Turner.                      | [ˈtɜ:nə] |
| 6. She lent lots of things last summer. | [lent]   |
| She learnt lots of things last summer.  | [lɜ:nt]  |

### Exercise 3

Look at the following pairs of words containing [e] or [æ] and decide which one the speaker produces. Tick the word that you hear.


Example: flesh [fleʃ]    ✓ flash [flæʃ]

- |           |          |        |          |
|-----------|----------|--------|----------|
| 1. kettle | [ˈketəl] | cattle | [ˈkætəl] |
| 2. met    | [met]    | mat    | [mæt]    |
| 3. led    | [led]    | lad    | [læd]    |
| 4. letter | [ˈletə]  | latter | [ˈlætə]  |
| 5. said   | [sed]    | sad    | [sæd]    |
| 6. ten    | [ten]    | tan    | [tæn]    |
| 7. bed    | [bed]    | bad    | [bæd]    |
| 8. Terry  | [ˈteri]  | tarry  | [ˈtæri]  |
| 9. bet    | [bet]    | bat    | [bæt]    |
| 10. dead  | [ded]    | dad    | [dæd]    |

### Other accents

In General American, the [ɜ:] vowel is usually pronounced with an extra [r] quality, as if the two sounds ([ɜ:] and [r]) were produced simultaneously. The symbol used to transcribe this vowel is [ɜːr]. Also American [ɜ:] tends to be pronounced with rounded lips. In order to produce an American [ɜːr], try to utter [ɜ:] and [r] at the same time and round your lips.

Listen to the following words produced with a GA accent.

-  shirt    [ʃɜːt]  
 purse    [pɜːs]  
 serve    [sɜːv]  
early    [ˈɜːli]  
 learn    [lɜːn]

### Exercise 4

Listen to the following words and decide whether they are produced with an RP accent or a GA accent. Tick your answer.

Example: fur ✓ RP [fɜː] GA [fɜː]

1. sir	RP [sɜː]	GA [sɜː]
2. earth	RP [ɜːθ]	GA [ɜːθ]
3. worm	RP [wɜːm]	GA [wɜːm]
4. term	RP [tɜːm]	GA [tɜːm]
5. pearl	RP [pɜːl]	GA [pɜːl]
6. <u>earn</u> est	RP [ˈɜːnɪst]	GA [ˈɜːnɪst]
7. firm	RP [fɜːm]	GA [fɜːm]
8. curd	RP [kɜːd]	GA [kɜːd]
9. dirt	RP [dɜːt]	GA [dɜːt]
10. <u>kernel</u>	RP [ˈkɜːnəl]	GA [ˈkɜːnəl]

### BE AWARE 1: Using phonetic transcription


Spanish is a language in which sounds and letters always agree. This means that the pronunciation of a word is predictable from the spelling. It is, therefore, quite straightforward to teach Spanish pronunciation to non-native speakers since it is possible to give them generalizations of this kind:

«In Spanish the letter “a” is always pronounced as [a] (as in *casa*).»

Given the close relationship in Spanish between sounds and letters, Spanish speakers tend to apply similar generalizations when they speak English. Therefore, words such as *board* or *quay* tend to be produced as [boɜːd] or [kwai] by Spanish speakers instead of [bɔːd] and [kiː].

In English, sounds and letters do not agree, that is, one letter can have several pronunciations and one sound can be spelt in many different ways. This is illustrated below for the letter «a» and the sound [ɪ].

In English the letter «a» can be pronounced as:

	[æ]	cat
	[ɑː]	bar
	[ɔː]	call
	[ɒ]	watch
	[eɪ]	sale
	[eə]	fare
	[ə]	again