

IPA Braille for Lyric Diction by Cheri Montgomery

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) provides symbols for the pronunciation of multiple languages. Singers study phonetic transcriptions to discover accurate pronunciation of repertoire assignments. Identification of speech sounds, as defined by the IPA, helps students explore the function of the voice.

Each IPA symbol represents one phoneme. A phoneme is the smallest element of sound in a language. Phonetic symbols are enclosed in brackets to distinguish them from other content within a text.

The keystrokes needed to create documents with standard IPA symbols are awkward for both the sighted and the blind. This modified system provides a mutually accessible set of symbols. Grade 1 braille is used for all symbols. The digital output is visually similar to standard IPA characters helping the sighted transition to a new system.

The symbols are listed in alphabetical order on the chart below. A sample word accompanies each symbol.

IPA braille chart with sample words:

uppercase [A]: *father*

lowercase [a]: *voila*

lowercase [ae]: *glad*

lowercase [b]: *baby*

lowercase [c]: There is no *c* in IPA.

lowercase [d]: *deed*

lowercase [d] + uppercase [Z]: *judge*

lowercase [e]: *chaos*

uppercase [E]: *bell*

lowercase [f]: *faith*

lowercase [g]: *good*

lowercase [h]: *heart*

lowercase [i]: *key*

uppercase [I]: *sit*

lowercase [j]: *yet*

lowercase [k]: *kiss*

lowercase [l]: *little*

uppercase [L]: as in the Italian word *figlio*

lowercase [m]: *mist*

lowercase [n]: *nine*

uppercase [N]: *wing*

[-] dash + lowercase [j]: as in the Italian word *signore*

lowercase [o]: *obey*

uppercase [O]: *ought*

lowercase [oe]: as in the German word *schön*

uppercase [OE]: as in the German word *können*

lowercase [p]: *pure*

lowercase [q]: *song*. This vowel sound is replaced with uppercase [A] for lyric diction.

uppercase [R]: *rose*

lowercase [r]: *thread*

lowercase double [rr] is a rolled *r* as in the Italian word *rosa*

lowercase [s]: *sing*

uppercase [S]: *sheep*

lowercase [t]: *tone*

lowercase [t] + uppercase [S]: *child*

lowercase [th]: *thin*

uppercase [Th]: *them*

lowercase [u]: *moon*

uppercase [U]: *book*

lowercase [v]: *voice*

uppercase [V]: as in the *uh* sound of the word *up*

lowercase [w]: *wish*

uppercase [W]: *wheat*

lowercase [x]: *hue*

uppercase [X]: *Nacht*

lowercase [y]: as in the German word *Blüte*

uppercase [Y]: as in the German word *Küsse*

lowercase [z]: *zeal*

uppercase [Z]: *measure*

The schwa is indicated with a period [·]. The schwa represents an undefined sound in an unstressed syllable. Pronunciation must be assigned. For example, the word *remarkable* contains two pronunciations of the schwa. If the schwas were defined, the third syllable would be transcribed with an uppercase [V], while the fourth syllable would be transcribed with an uppercase [U].

The glottal stop is indicated with a question mark [ʔ]. A glottal stop is a speech sound in English and German. It is a manner of articulating a word or element that begins with a vowel. Notice the attack in the throat that occurs while enunciating the words *I*, *ever*, and *it*. These words could be transcribed with a glottal stop at the beginning of each word. Articulation of the glottal stop should be executed with care. It should be reserved for initial vowel words or elements that are stressed within the phrase.

A stressed syllable is indicated with a comma [,]. The comma is placed before the stressed syllable. The word *believe* is transcribed with a comma preceding the second syllable. Note: stress indications are not necessary for French. The final syllable of a word or phrase is stressed, except when that syllable contains a schwa. The penultimate syllable is stressed for final schwa words.

A long mark is indicated with a semicolon [;]. A semicolon is placed after the vowel that is lengthened. In English, we lengthen the first vowel of a diphthong or triphthong while singing. Vowel length is not typically indicated. However, the long mark is necessary for the transcription of foreign languages. For example, the *i* of the Italian word *mio* is long in both the spoken and sung forms of the word.

A dash [-] is used to indicate nasality. The French language has four nasal vowels. A nasal mark precedes the nasalized vowel. For instance, the word *l'ombre* is transcribed with a dash preceding a lowercase [o] symbol: [-o].

Nasal consonants. There is one consonant in this system that has a nasal mark. The *gn* spelling of *signore* has a lowercase [j] formation with a nasal air flow. The dash + lowercase [j] symbol describes formation as well as air flow: [-j]. Words with *ng* spelling, as in *sing* and *finger* are transcribed with an uppercase [N] symbol.

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