

10-01-2012 Advanced Lesson: Pronouncing the letter *i*

General rules for pronouncing the letter *i*:

1. The most common spelling pattern for [ɪ] (short *i* sound) is the letter *i* followed by a final consonant: win this hit kid
2. The letter *i* followed by *gh*, *ld*, or *nd* is usually pronounced [aɪ] – it sounds like the name of the letter *i*: sight wild find
3. When *i* is in a syllable ending in a silent *e*, the letter *i* is pronounced [aɪ] – it sounds like the name of the letter *i*: bite fine retirement confine

There are **always** exceptions to rules in English! We will discuss some of them later. Today's lesson will focus on the [ɪ] vowel sound – what most Americans call the “short i” sound.

[ɪ] is a short, quick sound; your lips should barely move as you say it!

Listen and repeat.

[ɪ] At the Beginning of Words

is	if
ill	itch
ink	into
instant	it
issue	inch

[ɪ] In the Middle of Words

pin	lift
miss	listen
little	minute
simple	timid
give	winter

The vowel [ɪ] does not occur at the end of words in English.

The letters *y* and *ui* can also have the [ɪ] sound.

Listen and repeat.

<i>y</i>	<i>ui</i>	<i>i</i>
gym	build	sin
syrup	quick	lips
symbol	quilt	with
system	guilty	gift
rhythm	guitar	differ

The boldfaced words in the following sentences all contain the vowel [ɪ].

1. **This is it.**
2. **What is this?**
3. **This is my sister.**
4. **This is Miss Smith.**
5. **This is big business.**
6. **I will sit in a minute.**
7. **Give the list to Lynn.**
8. **My little sister is timid.**
9. **Is the building finished?**
10. **Did you give him his gift?**

There are a few words that have the vowel sound [ɪ], but do not contain the letter *i*. (or *y* or *ui*). Some of these words are: **women** (*but not woman*), **busy** (*but not bus*), **been** (*but not seen*), and **pretty** (*but not Betty*).

All of the boldfaced words in this paragraph contain the vowel sound [ɪ].

The Winter Olympics

Since 1924, the **Winter Olympics** have **been** an **international** event. Now these **activities** are seen by **millions** on **television**. Men and **women** from **distant cities** and countries **participate in this competition**. They all **wish** to be **winners**. They ski **downhill amidst pretty** scenery. **Figure** skaters **spin** to **victory**. **Skill** will make a **difference**. Some **will finish with** a **silver** medal, and some **with** a gold medal. But all **will win** our hearts and **infinite** respect.

Work with a partner. Complete each sentence with a phrase or a word that rhymes with the boldfaced [ɪ] words. Think of as many responses as you can for each rhyme.

Example: My sister **Jill** _____.
(ran up a **hill**/ took a **pill**/ felt very **ill**/ has a cat named **Bill**/ fell off the windows**ill**)

1. My friend **Tim** _____.
2. He will **sit** _____.
3. The boy liked to **grin** _____.
4. What do you **think** _____.
5. We went on a **ship** _____.

It is easy to confuse the sound of the vowel [ɪ] with the sound of vowel [i] – or the “long e” sound.

Teachers: read each sentence, choosing one of the words. Students: circle the word you hear as the teacher reads.

1. They cleaned the (ship/sheep).
2. Will he (leave/live)?
3. The boy was (beaten/bitten).
4. His clothes are (neat/knit).
5. She has plump (cheeks/chicks).
6. I like low (heels/hills).
7. The children will (sleep/slip).
8. I heard every (beat/bit).
9. They stored the (beans/bins).
10. Everyone talks about the (heat/hit).

After checking your answers, read each of the sentences aloud twice. Use the first word the first time you read and the second word the second time.

**Circle all the words in this conversation that are pronounced with [ɪ] (short i).
Underline the words pronounced with [i] (long e).**

Jim: Hi, Linda! Do you have a minute?

Linda: Yes, Jim. What is it?

Jim: My sister is in the city on business. We will eat dinner out tonight. Can you recommend a place to eat?

Linda: There is a fine seafood place on Fifth Street. The fish is fresh, and the shrimp is great. But it isn't cheap!

Jim: That's OK. It will be "feast today, famine tomorrow"! I'll just have to eat beans the rest of the week!

What is the meaning of "feast today, fast tomorrow"?

**In the poem below: Circle all of the words that are pronounced with the [ɪ] sound.
Underline the words pronounced with the [aɪ] sound (long i).**

April Rain Song

Let the rain kiss you
Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops
Let the rain sing you a lullaby
The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk
The rain makes running pools in the gutter
The rain plays a little sleep song on our roof at night
And I love the rain.

-Langston Hughes

Discussion questions:

What comes to mind when you hear the word "rain"?

How does rain change your feelings?

What kind of rain do you like?

What do you think about the sound and smell of rain?

What do you usually do when it is raining?

When was the last time you got soaked in the rain?

Can you think of a time when it rained and you really wished it would stop?

Do you think rain means the same thing to people in different countries?

Do you know any songs or poems about rain in your language?

Has anyone ever "rained on your parade"?

Can you think of a time when you indulged (feasted) and then had to go without (fasted)?