

ENGLISH DICTION: PRONUNCIATION SHIFTS IN SINGING

VOCALIC SHIFTS

Flat *a*



[æ] / [ɛ] before *r*



[æ]

“Hand Words”

accent	band	Carolina	dagger	gather	have	marriage	plastic	shall
act	barracks	carriage	dash	glad	hazard	marry	rabble	shallow
am	barrel	Carrie	dazzle	gram	lack	Mass	rancid	sparrow
and	barren	carrot	drank	grand	lamb	match	rant	stab
anguish	Barry	carry	drastic	graphic	lamp	matter	rapture	stance
ant	barrow	cat	embarrass	had	land	narrate	ravage	stand
apparel	bombast	catch	expanse	hallowed	language	narrow	ravish	tarrif
apparent	cabin	charity	fancy	hand	languish	parachute	relax	tarry
Arab	camp	chasm	fantastic	happy	Larry	paradise	romance	thank
arrant	can	chastise	fashion	Harold	lass	Paris	sad	that
arrow	Canada	clash	fathom	Harriot	latch	parish	sang	traffic
as	cancel	classic	finance	harrow	lavish	parrot	sank	transit
aspect	cannot	compassion	flash	Harry	mad	passage	sarcastic	valley
attack	capture	crash	franchise	has	magic	passenger	savage	vanish
axe	carol	crass	garrison	hast	majesty	passion	scaffold	wagon
affle	Carol	daffodil	gas	hath	man	passive	shadow	wax, etc.

Broad *a*



[æ]



[ɑ]

“Ask Words”

advance	basket	cask	dance	flask	laugh	pastor	rather	steadfast
advantage	bath	cast	demand	France	mask	path	reprimand	task
after	bathroom	castle	disaster	gasp	mass	paths	sample	trance
aghost	blanch	chance	draft	ghastly	mast	plant	sampler	vast
answer	blast	chancellor	draught	glance	master	prance	shaft	wrath, etc.
ask	branch	chant	enchant	grant	pass	quaff	shan't	
aunt	brass	clasp	entrance (vb)	grasp	passed	raft	slander	
avalanche	calf	class	example	grass	Passover	rascal	slant	
banana	calves	command	fast	half	past	rasp	soprano	
bask	can't	craft	fasten	halve	pastime	raspberry	staff	

Broad *a*



- words not found on the “Ask List”
- often in *alm* spellings, and when *a* is followed by *r*

afar	aria	balm	card	far	la	park
alarm	art	bar	char	father	ma	psalm
arch	bah	calm	chart	ha	palm	qualm
are	Bahamas	car	embalm	jar	par	tar, etc.

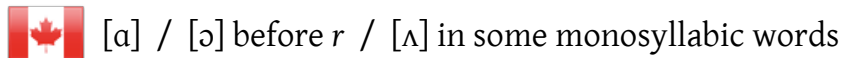
Short *u*



- normally spelled *u*, *ou*, or *o* before intervocalic *r(r)*

borough	courage	encourage	furrow	hurry	scurry	surrogate	turret
burrow	current	flurry	hurricane	nourish	Surrey	thorough	worry, etc.

Short *o*



- in a short word position, or in monosyllabic words
- usually spelled with *o*, sometimes *a*

blossom	coffee	gone	hot	modern	on	song	upon	wash
Bob	forest	gospel	John	odd	orange	sorry	wander	wasp
bomb	from	horrid	long	of	scoff	Tom	want	watch
box	God	horror	mock	office	somber	throng	was	what, etc.

Open-o



[ɑ] / [ɔ] before r



[ɔ]

• usually in *al, -ald, -alk, -all, alt, a* and *o* before *r, au, aught, aw, ough(t)* spellings

<i>al</i>	<i>-all</i>	<i>alt</i>	<i>au</i>	<i>au</i>	<i>aught</i>	<i>aw</i>	<i>or</i>
almost	all	altar	aubrun	gaunt	caught	draw	for
also	ball	alter	audacious	gauntlet	daughter	drawl	lord
although	befall	exalt	audience	gauze	distraught	flaw	nor
always	call	falter	audition	haul	fraught	gnaw	north
appal	enthrall	halt	August	haunch	haughty	hawk	
falcon	fall	malt	applaud	inaugurate	naught	hawthorn	-ough(t)
stalwart	hall	psalter	assault	jaunt	naughty	jaw	besought
withal	install	salt	autumn	laud	onslaught	law	brought
	mall		bauble	launch	slaughter	lawn	cough
-ald	recall	ar	because	Paul		raw	fought
bald	small	swarm	cause	paunch	aw	saw	ought
scald	squall	war	caution	pauper	awe	scrawl	sought
	stall	warm	clause	pause	awful	scrawny	thought
-alk	thrall	warn	daunt	precaution	bawl	shawl	trough
balk	wall	warp	default	raucous	brawl	tawdy	
walk			exhaust	sauce	brawny	tawny	Misc.
stalk			faun	taut	claw	thaw	broad
talk			gaudy	vault	crawl	withdraw	water
walk					dawn	yawn	brought, etc.

Closed-o



[oʊ]



[əʊ]

sing [oʊ]

• often spelled *o, oa, ow*, with several other possible spellings

although	bowl	control	goat	know	note	road	shoulder	soldier	toe
beau	brooch	don't	hole	loaf	note	robe	so	soul	tote
boat	clothe	dough	home	mauve	old	roll	soap	though	window, etc
both	coal	go	Joe	no	own	sew	sold	toad	

CONSONANT-RELATED SHIFTS

“Flapped” medial *t* and *d*

North American speakers usually “flap” medial *t* and *d*. That is, in a words such as *later* and *rider*, the phoneme [ɾ] is substituted for these plosives. The distinctive quality of *t* and *d* is lost. Therefore, many pairs of words become homophones in this accent: *betting/bedding*, *coated/coded*, *grating/grading*, *latter/ladder*, *patting/padding*, *putting/pudding*, *rating/raiding*, *seating/seeding*, *tutor/Tudor*, *waiting/wading*, etc. In RP, the aspiration of *t* and *d* is always retained, as is the voiced/unvoiced distinction between the two consonants. These are also the variants preferred in singing, regardless of the accent.

Initial *wh* words

Nearly all English dialects have undergone the WHINE-WINE merger. That is, initial *w* and initial *wh* words are all pronounced with [w] by the vast majority of English speakers. However, most coaches and singers still agree that it is advisable to sing the unvoiced version [ɱ] in initial *wh* words before all vowel letters except *o*. When the distinction is made, pairs of words such as the following have distinct pronunciations: *whit/wit*, *which/witch*, *whew/way*, *whale/wail*, *whether/weather*, *whet/wet*, *whirr/were*, etc.

Retaining the yod glide

Most consonants are immediately followed with the yod glide when they precede the phoneme [u] spelled *u* or *ew*. Consider the words *music* [mjuzɪk] and *pew* [pjʊ], for example. In the case of the consonants *d*, *n*, *l*, *s*, *t*, and *th*, however, many speakers — especially Americans — drop the yod glide. It should **always** be retained in formal singing. Remember the consonants to which this applies with the mnemonic “Daniel sitteth”. The rule does not apply to a consonant + *l* combination, as in “blue” [blu], (unless it is double *l*, as in *illusion* [ɪljuzən],) nor to proper names, as in *Susan*. [suzən]