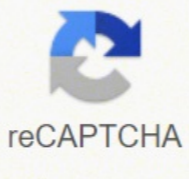




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What is the most complicated word to say

The pronunciation of words in English is not always straightforward. Unlike some languages, such as French or Spanish, there is not always a direct relationship between the spelling of words and how they are said aloud. In technical terms, there is not always a consistent relationship between graphemes (basically, writing units) and their phonemes (sounds) in English. There are a couple of reasons for this. The English language is a wondrous hodgepodge of loanwords, or words borrowed from other languages all of which follow their own conventions for pronunciation, and English spelling was not standardized until relatively recently in its history. For native English speakers and English language learners alike, there are words that are hard to pronounce. To help give you a leg up on some of the trickier words you may come across in everyday life, we have broken down 26 of the hardest-to-pronounce words in the English language, from A-Z ... or from A-W, anyway. Bonus: click on each word to hear its proper pronunciation on its entry page! accessory The double C in accessory is part of what makes this word tricky. People are often tempted to replace the C with a single S sound. However, each of these C letters represents a different sound (a "hard C" and a "soft C"). With that in mind, accessory is pronounced [ak-ses-uh-ree]. anemone This word is so hard to pronounce that it was even featured as a joke in the popular Pixar film Finding Nemo. There are two elements that make the word anemone tricky—the preponderance of M and N sounds and the [uh-nee] ending that looks like it should be pronounced like the number one. That said, this word does have a particular rhythm to it that can help you pronounce it correctly: [uh-nem-uh-nee]. choir It's tempting to pronounce the CH in choir with a [ch] sound, but that would be incorrect. The word choir is actually pronounced [kwahyuhr]. An antique and sadly obsolete spelling of this word is quire, which is a clearer representation of how it is pronounced. colonel The word colonel came to English through French, where it was spelled coronel. For historical reasons, which you can read about at our entry for the word, the R was eventually replaced with an L. Keeping this in mind, colonel is still pronounced [kur-nl]. Learn about where colonels sit in military rankings, here. coup Another word that has been adopted into English from French, complicating pronunciation, is coup. In French, the letters -oup at the end of a word is pronounced [oo]. We didn't just adopt this French word into English, we adopted the French pronunciation, too. That means coup is correctly pronounced [koo]. epitome In words that have been adopted into English from Greek, it is typical to pronounce all of the vowels. This is how we get the pronunciation epitome, from the Greek epitomé. Unlike many words in English, the final -e here is not silent; epitome is pronounced [ih-pit-uh-mee]. espresso Coffee snobs love to correct folks on their pronunciation of the word espresso. It's tempting to replace that first S with an X, because ex- is a common prefix in English. However, the word comes from Italian and is correctly pronounced [e-spres-oh]. Sip on even more coffee terms that may be easier to pronounce but are just as tricky to spell. February The word February is often pronounced as if the first R is not present: [feb-yoo-er-ee]. This is because R sounds and Y sounds are quite closely related. Therefore, this is considered a correct pronunciation of the word. However, it is also considered correct to pronounce the R, as in [feb-roo-er-ee]. hyperbole Like the other words from Greek we have covered, the final -e in hyperbole is not silent. Hyperbole, from the Greek hyperbolé, is correctly pronounced [hahy-pur-buh-lee]. isthmus The word isthmus presents a challenge of pronunciation when read aloud, because most English speakers would be tempted to pronounce the TH in this word. However, in this case, the TH is silent, making the correct pronunciation [is-muhs]. Another word you may be familiar with that has a silent TH is asthma [az-muh]. juror The R sounds in English can be particularly tricky. It can be hard to get your mouth around them. The word juror is pronounced [joor-er] or [joor-awr]. Pronouncing R sounds in English simply takes practice. Relaxing your jaw and reciting tongue twisters like "Round and round the rugged rocks the ragged rascal ran" can help. library Speaking of R sounds, the R in library throws many people off. They feel tempted to make the first R sound an [er], making the word four syllables, as in [lah-y-ber-er-ee]. However, there is no E in library, so the word is simply pronounced with three syllables: [lah-y-brer-ee]. mischievous Another word where you may be tempted to add an unnecessary syllable or two is mischievous. The -ie and -ous endings often make people think there are [ee] sounds in the word [mis-chee-vee-uhs], but there aren't. The word is simply three syllables long, without any [ee] sounds: [mis-chuh-vuhs]. murderer As we noted earlier, the R sound in English can be tricky. That's what makes murderer, with its three R sounds particularly difficult to pronounce. The word is pronounced [mur-der-er]. Did you know a group of crows is called a "murder"? Learn about other fanciful and strange names for groups of animals. nuclear For whatever reason, many people like to add an additional [yoo] sound to the word nuclear. However, it is pronounced with a single [oo] or [yoo] sound: [noo-klee-er] or [nyoo-klee-er]. onomatopoeia The word onomatopoeia is a riot of vowels, making it a challenge to pronounce. The ending -poeia is pronounced simply [pee-uh]. The O is silent. Onomatopoeia, which describes a word that imitates a sound, is pronounced [on-uh-mat-uh-pee-uh]. remuneration A common mistake people make when pronouncing the word remuneration is to swap the easily-confused M and N sounds, likely because the word number is so common in the English language. The word, although it describes pay, does not come from the word number, but the Latin münus, meaning "gift." Remuneration is pronounced [ri-myoo-nuh-rey-shuhn]. rural Rural, like juror and murderer, is challenging because of all of its R sounds. Rural is pronounced [roor-uhl]. schadenfreude The word schadenfreude is a loanword from German. It means "satisfaction or pleasure felt at someone else's misfortune." The pronunciation of schadenfreude also comes from German, so it does not follow typical English pronunciation guidelines: [shahd-n-froi-duh]. scissors Like in our first example, accessory, there is some confusion about whether the C in scissors is a "hard C sound" or a "soft C sound." Well, the SC in scissors is pronounced simply [s], making the correct pronunciation of this word [siz-erz]. specific People often like to swap the S and P sounds in the word specific, rendering it closer to the name of the ocean: Pacific. However, the word is pronounced with the sounds in the order they appear, [spi-sif-ik]. squirrel One of the hardest words in the English language to pronounce, especially for non-native English speakers, is squirrel. They tend to want to add an additional [uh] sound in there. However, remember that this slippery-sounding word has only two syllables: [skwur-uhl]. The -edly ending of supposedly tends to trip people up. They like to swap it out for the more-common -ably. But, the word should be read as written, making the correct pronunciation [suh-poh-zid-lee]. If you mix up these two terms, you're definitely not alone. Even Joey from Friends famously and hilariously couldn't figure out if supposedly and supposably were different words. Shockingly, supposably is, in fact, a real word and has been used since at least the 1700s. Learn more about its surprising meaning here. synecdoche This word is almost as hard to spell as it is to pronounce correctly. As you may have guessed from some of the other terms on this list, synecdoche comes from Greek synekdoché. The first C and the CH here are both pronounced as hard K sounds. The correct pronunciation of synecdoche is [si-nek-duh-kee], not to be confused with the name of the town in New York: Schenectady, pronounced [skuh-nek-tuh-dee]. Worcestershire (sauce) If you are a fan of Bloody Marys, making your own salad dressing, or eating a nice steak, you are likely familiar with Worcestershire sauce. British English conventions for the pronunciation of place names is something we could write a whole article on. For now, though, just trust us that Worcestershire is pronounced [woos-ter-sheer]. vocabulary Ironically, one of the hardest vocabulary words to pronounce is vocabulary. People often will pronounce the U in the word as [uh]. However, the U here makes a [yuh] sound. The correct pronunciation of this word, therefore, is [voh-kab-yuh-ler-ee]. Are there words we have not covered here that you find difficult to pronounce? You can use the dictionary to help you out there. In every entry, you will find a guide and audio files to help you pronounce the word correctly. It's a great resource to help you ensure you nail even the trickiest pronunciations in the English language.

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