**Welsh Alphabet [+ How To Pronounce the Letters]**

The Welsh language has its own alphabet which can look a little intimidating at first – so many letters, and many of them double! Having grown up in North Wales, speaking Welsh fluently for as long as I can remember, I can assure you that it’s not really as difficult as it looks upon first glance.

One thing to keep in mind is once you know the sound that each letter makes, you can more or less tell how a word is pronounced by looking at it – which is very different from English! Let’s take a look at the letters in Welsh and how to pronounce them.

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Welsh Alphabet With Pronunciation

The Welsh alphabet contains 29 letters, these are A, B, C, Ch, D, Dd, E, F, Ff, G, Ng, H, I, J, L, Ll, M, N, O, P, Ph, R, Rh, S, T, Th, U, W, and Y.

You may not realise when you first look at it that there are a lot of diagraphs – two letters together than make one sound – in the Welsh alphabet. These count as a separate letter, as a glance through a Welsh dictionary or a Welsh Scrabble board (yes, they exist!) will show you.

You will hear some debate at whether there are 28 or 29 letters – this is because J is not officially part of the Welsh alphabet, but it has been adopted in recent years and appears in many loan words such as “jam” or “garej”. We have included it above as do many other reputable sources.

A note on pronunciation – we always emphasise the penultimate syllable (the last sound but one) in a word. Whether a vowel is spoken in its long or short form often depends on whether or not it is stressed.

| LETTER | IPA (PHONETIC) SOUND | PRONUNCIATION EXAMPLE | EXAMPLE WORD + (BRITISH) ENGLISH  PRONUNCIATION GUIDE |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **a** | /a, ɑː/ | short a: the “a” in “**a**pple” long a: the “a” in “c**a**r” | afal (apple) – *ah-vahl* glas (blue) – *glar-ss* |
| **b** | /b/ | the “b” in “**b**all” | byw (to live) *biw* |
| **c** | /k/ | the “k” in “**k**angaroo” | Cymru (Wales) *come-rih* |
| **ch** | /x/ | as in **loch** (Scottish) | coch (red) *kor-ch* |
| **d** | /d/ | the “d” in “**d**ad” | dyn (man) *dirn* |
| **dd** | /ð/ | the “th” sound in “**th**is” or “**th**e” | addas (suitable) *ath-ass* |
| **e** | /ɛ, eː/ | short “e”: the “e” in “**e**gg” long “e” – sounds like “**ai**r” (in British English) | eglwys (church) – *egg-loo-is* deg (ten) – *dare-g* |
| **f** | /v/ | v as in “**v**an” | fy (my) *vuh* |
| **ff** | /f/ | soft f as in “**f**an” or “**f**ly” | ffôn (phone) *fawn* |
| **g** | /ɡ/ | the “g” in “**g**oat” | gafr (goat) *gav-ur* |
| **ng** | /ŋ/ | the nasal “ng” in “so**ng**“ | angel (angel) *ang-el* |
| **h** | /h/ | the “h” in “**h**at” | hi (she) *he* |
| **i** | /ɪ, iː, j/ | short “i”: the “i” in “f**i**ll” long “i”: the “ee” in “t**ee**n” | Idris (male name) – *id-riss* tir (land) – *teer* |
| **l** | /l/ | the “l” in “**l**ike” | i lawr (down) *ee lah-oor* |
| **ll** | /ɬ/ | there’s no equivalent to this in English – [watch this video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQBGOb7iQZ0)for a guide! | allan (out) *aɬ-an* |
| **m** | /m/ | the “m” in “**m**other” | mawr (big) *mah-oor* |
| **n** | /n/ | the “n” in “**n**o” | nawr (now) *nah-oor* |
| **o** | /ɔ, oː/ | short “o”: the “o” in “**o**range” long “o”: the “oa” in “r**oa**r” | nodi (to note) – *noddy* môr (sea) – *more* |
| **p** | /p/ | the “p” in “**P**eter” | paid (don’t!) *pide* |
| **ph** | /f/ | the “ph” in “**ph**one” | ei phen (her head) *ay ffen* |
| **r** | /r/ | a trilled/rolled ‘r’, such as in Spanish | ar (on) *arr* |
| **rh** | /r̥/ | a voiceless trilled “r”, that sounds as if you are pronouncing a “h” before a rolled “r” | rhedeg (to run) *hrred-egg* |
| **s** | /s/ | the “s” in “**S**aturday” | sâl (sick) *sah-l* |
| **t** | /t/ | the “t” in “**t**ower” | tad (father) *tah-d* |
| **th** | /θ/ | the “th” in “**th**ing” or “**th**in” | cath (cat) *kaah-th* |
| **u** | /ɨ̞, ɨː/ (N), /ɪ, iː/(S) | short “u”: the “i” in **bit** (short), long “u”: something like the “ir” if you phonetically pronounce “dir” in British English – see below for video links | canu (to song) – *kan-ih* du (black) – *dihr* |
| **w** | /ʊ, uː, w/ | short “w” – the “oo” in “b**oo**k” long “w” – the “oo” in “p**oo**l” | cadw (to keep) – *kad-oo* dwr (water) – *dooh-r* |
| **y** | /ɨ̞, ɨː, ə/ (N) | short “y” – also the “i” in “b**i**t” (unstressed) or a schwa sound “uh” (stressed) long “y” – an emphasise schwa, as in the “e” of “h**e**r” | ynys (island) – *uhn-iss* Llŷn (Lleyn) – *ɬiirn* |

**What Are the Consonants in Welsh?**

**There are 22 consonants in Welsh, these are B, C, Ch, D, Dd, F, Ff, G, Ng, H, J, L, Ll, M, N, P, Ph, R, Rh, S, T, and Th.**

As seen above, many of the consonants in Welsh are the same as in English – for example, B, C (always pronounced “k”), D, F (always a “v”), G (always a hard “g” like in “goat”), H, L, M, N, P, R, S, and T.

However, also considered as consonants are the double-lettered sounds such as Ch, Dd, Ff, Ng, Ll, Ph, Rh and Th. These are considered letters in Welsh rather than two letters stuck together as they would be in English. We’ll talk more about these later.

Check out [**this pronunciation guide**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zph1l9D9XfY) on YouTube for help with Welsh consonants.

**What Are the Vowels in Welsh?**

**There are seven vowels in Welsh – A, E, I, O, U, W, and Y.**

This can throw people off at first, because in English W and Y are considered consonants. When people exclaim “Welsh is so full of consonants!” it’s likely that they have seen a word such as “Bwyd” (pronounced *boo-id*), which of course in Welsh has two vowels.

Have a look [at this video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irVKUBPbKzQ) for a guide on pronouncing the short and long vowels in Welsh.

**What Letters Are Not in the Welsh Alphabet?**

**There are some letters that you find in the English alphabet that don’t appear in the Welsh alphabet – these are K, Q, V, X and Z.**

J was traditionally not a part of the Welsh alphabet, either, but it has been semi-officially adopted in the last few years (perhaps largely because Jones is one of the most common surnames in Wales!).

This is not to say that the missing sounds cannot appear in Welsh at all – when using words borrowed from English there is always a way to spell them in a Welsh way.

For example, C always creates the sound of K, for example in “cangarŵ” (kangaroo), while a Q can be created with a CW – for example, “cwîn” (queen) – note that this is not the official word for Queen, but a slang that might be used in jest. As for the other letters – see fan (van), tacsi (taxi) and sebra (zebra) – all pronounced the same as in English.

It is also worth noting that a “si” creates the “sh” sound, as in “siop” (shop), while we use “ts” to create the “ch” from “champion”; for example, in the word wats (watch).

**Why Are Some Letters Joined Together in Welsh?**

A [digraph](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digraph_(orthography))is a pair of characters or symbols placed together to produce a particular phoneme (or sound). We see this in English, for example an S and a H together always produce the same sound (as in *hush, shoe*or *usher*). However, in the English alphabet, these are always considered to be two separate letters coming together.

**Welsh contains 8 digraphs: Ch, Dd, Ff, Ng, Ll, Ph, Rh and Th.**

See the table above for their pronunciation and examples of their use.

Although they are each written with two symbols, they are each considered as single letters – meaning they are each given their own tiles in Welsh Scrabble or in crosswords!

This can be quite confusing – technically, the word *Llanelli* only contains six letters! However, only the first symbol is capitalised at the beginning of a sentence or name, as you’ll see in Llanelli or Rhys.

**Welsh Letters With Accents**

Accent marks, other than the circumflex (^) are rare in Welsh – but are used more commonly in recent times on loan words.

* The main one is the **diaeresis** (¨), used to indicate that two adjoining vowels should be pronounced separately (not as a diphthong). For example, the word gweddïo (to pray) is pronounced *gooeth-EE-oh*(three syllables), while its appearance without the diaeresis would suggest that it is a two syllable word (*GWETH-ioh*).  
  ㅤ
* You may also see an **acute accent (´)**used to move the emphasis/stress from a word away from the usual penultimate one – for example in the word agosáu (*ah-gos-AI /*to come closer) – the word ends with a short stressed “a”, whereas without the accent we would pronounce it *ah-GOS-ai.*  
  ㅤ
* The **grave accent**(**`**) on the other hand turns what would normally be a long vowel into a short one. For example, compare “mwg” (smoke), which we pronounce *MOOG* with “mẁg” (mug), which sounds something like “mug” in a Northern English accent!

However, these accent marks are not often used or taught in school these days – perhaps because we are used to the correct pronunciation of words, or because of the perceived difficulty of including them when using technology.

**Diphthongs in Welsh**

You will find many diphthongs in Welsh, which is a combination of two or more vowels. Some of the most common ones are listed below, with examples of words and their pronunciation.

Please note that it is very hard to denote accurate Welsh pronunciation using English spelling – largely because a lot of these sounds don’t quite exist in English, and also because of the inconsistent spelling-pronunciation relationship within English (e.g. cough vs though – how is “gh” prounced?).

| DIPH-THONG | IPA (PHONETIC) SOUND | PRONUNCIATION EXAMPLE | EXAMPLE WORD + (BRITISH) ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION GUIDE |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ae** | /aːɨ̯/ | something like “eye” without the final “ee” sound being as strong | cae (field) – *kaah-ih*or *kai* |
| **ai** | /ai̯/ | like the “i” in “b**i**ke” | Nain (grandmother) – *nine* |
| **au** | /aɨ̯/ | in South Wales, the same as “eye”. In North, something like *ah-ir* (in British English, flowing together) | cau (to close) – *kaih* |
| **aw** | /au̯/ | like the “ow” in “n**ow”** | nawr (now) – *now-rr* |
| **ei** | /ei̯/ | like the “a” in “f**a**me” | Eidaleg (Italian) –  *ey-dal-eg* |
| **ew** | /eːu̯, ɛu̯/ | the “e” of “egg” (short form) or the sound of “air” flowing into the “oo” of “book” | mewn (in) – *meh-oon* llew (lion) – *lleh-oo* |
| **iw** | /ɪu̯/ | the constricted “ee” followed by an “ooh” | ciw (chick) – *kee-ohh* |
| **oe** | /oːɨ̯/ | the “o” as in “or” followed by the “i” of “kiss” | toes (dough) – *toh-iss* |
| **oi** | /ɔi̯/ | the “oy” as in “boy” | ffoi (to flee) – *ffoy* |
| **wy** | /uːɨ̯, ʊɨ̯/ | the “oo” of “pool” followed by the “i” of “in” | mwy (more) – *moo-ih* |
| **yw** | /ɨ̞u̯/ | the “i” of “in” followed by the “oo” of “book” | byw (to live) – *bih-ooh* |

## ****Welsh Letters with Roofs****

The main diacritic you will see in the Welsh language is the [circumflex](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circumflex)– aka the “little roof”, or tô bach.

This diacritic can be added to any vowel, and basically it elongates the sound. It is also an important way to differentiate certain words, for example:

Tan = until (pronounced much like the English word ‘tan’)  
Tân = fire (pronounced in British English as “tarn” – with a long “a” like in “car”)

## ****Related Questions****

### Is There a V in the Welsh Alphabet?

**No, there is no ‘v’ in the Welsh alphabet.**However, the sound ‘v’ is made with a single ‘f’ (while a double ff creates the ‘f’ as in fanor fight). The letter V did exist in the Welsh alphabet until \_\_\_ and can be seen in old documents and maps, for example in the old spelling Caernarvon (now Caernarfon).

### **Is There a K in the Welsh Alphabet?**

**No, there is no ‘K’ in the Welsh alphabet.**However, a ‘K’ sound in Welsh is created by using a ‘C’, which always produces a hard sound such as in ‘car’ or ‘cat.

### **Is There a U in the Welsh Alphabet?**

**Yes, there is a U in the Welsh alphabet.**The pronunciation is a little different, and can sound like an “ee” in the South Wales dialect or something like “iir” (in British English) up in the North. We can see it in words such as Cymru (Wales) or Un (one).

A person sitting on grass by water

Description automatically generated with low confidence

**Gwyneth Jones**

Gwyneth grew up in a small village on the Lleyn Peninsula in North Wales, speaking Welsh and English fluently from a young age. She loves to travel and has taught languages all over the world. Today, Gwyneth teaches Welsh online and she even has her own Welsh YouTube channel to help beginners get started.