**London, Leicester and Lincoln: Pronouncing English place names**

**https://dictionaryblog.cambridge.org/2018/11/14/london-leicester-and-lincoln-pronouncing-english-place-names/**

Place names are amongst the hardest words in English to pronounce. Even people with English as a first language are often unable to guess the pronunciation of an unfamiliar place. I have restricted myself to major English towns and cities because there simply isn’t enough space in one post to venture more widely, but do let me know if you’d like posts on the pronunciation of other major place names.

I want to start with the capital, [**London**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/london), because many learners of English pronounce the two ‘o’ sounds here to rhyme with the ‘o’ in ‘dog’. However, the correct pronunciation is /ˈlʌn.dən/. The first ‘o’ rhymes with the ‘u’ in ‘fun’ and the second one is almost omitted: if you simply try to pronounce ‘dn’ at the end, it will sound correct.

England’s second largest city is [**Birmingham**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/birmingham). The first ‘i’ is pronounced /ɜː/(UK) /ɝː/ (US), the same as in ‘bird’. The other important thing to know here is that Brits do not pronounce the ‘h’ in ‘-ham’ (though Americans do in their city of the same name). This is also the case with other towns and cities ending in ‘-ham’, such as **Nottingham, Durham, Rotherham** and **Cheltenham**.

Three of the strangest English county names are [**Leicestershire**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/leicestershire)**,** [**Gloucestershire**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/gloucestershire) and [**Worcestershire**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/worcestershire)**.** Despite appearances, they all have three syllables only. The first syllable for Leicestershire sounds the same as ‘less’, and for Gloucester ‘gloss’. Worcester is a bit harder to describe: in phonetic symbols is it /ˈwʊs/ – the same ‘u’ sound as in the common verb ‘put’. For all three, the final syllable is: /ʃər/ (UK) /ʃɚ/ (US). For the cities [**Leicester**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/leicester)**, Gloucester and Worcester**, just remove the /ʃər/.

I’ll turn now to some cities and counties with silent letters in their names. For [**Lincolnshire**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/lincolnshire)/ˈlɪŋ.kən.ʃər/, do not pronounce the second ‘l’: if you try to say the second syllable as ‘cn’, you will sound correct. For the city of **Norwich**, we omit the ‘w’ sound. This is also the case with several areas of London that end in -wich, such as **Dulwich, Woolwich** and **Greenwich**. However, the Suffolk town of **Ipswich** does have the ‘w’ sound. The city of **Salisbury** has a silent ‘i’: make ‘Salis-’ rhyme with ‘balls’ and you will sound correct – I know that sounds unlikely, but believe me!

I’ll end with three other important towns with tricky names. Firstly, **Slough** rhymes with ‘cow’. Secondly, the first syllable of **Reading** is the same as the colour ‘red’, not the verb ‘read’. And finally, the second syllable of the seaside town of **Torquay** is the same as ‘key’.

This is a small selection of our difficult place names, but I hope you will find it useful.