

Most of these sounds, represented again by letters in italic type, occur surrounded by consonants, and this is typical, although most of them can also occur initially and finally too. These sounds are called *vowels*.

NOTICE

- 1 Five of these words, *curt, cart, tier, tear, tour*, have a letter *r* in them. In many English accents, e.g. American, Canadian, Scottish, Irish, this would be pronounced exactly like the consonant at the beginning of *red*, but in R.P. and various other accents the letter represents part of a basic vowel unit. There is more detail about this on p. 61.
- 2 There is one other vowel, making twenty in all, which occurs in the word *banana*. This is a very special and very important vowel in English and it is discussed in full on pp. 82-4.

1.5 Letters and sounds

These must never be mixed up. Letters are written, sounds are spoken. It is very useful to have written letters to remind us of corresponding

The basic sounds

position and those which are distinctive in final position you will find that there are twenty-four altogether. These twenty-four sounds which occur initially and finally, though they occur in other positions too, are called *consonants*.

Now look at these lists:

feel	cat	tier
fill	cot	tear
fell	cut	tour
fall	curt	
full	cart	
fool		
fail		
foal		
file		
foul		

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1.6 Sounds and sound-groups

A sound is made by definite movements of the organs of speech, and if those movements are exactly repeated the result will always be the same sound; it is easy to show that there are more than forty-four sounds in English even in the pronunciation of a single person, without worrying about differences between people. For instance, if you say *tea* and *two* **ti**, **tu**: you will notice that the lips are in a rather flat shape for **ti**: but are made rounder for **tu**, and this is true for both the consonant /t/ and for the two vowels. So the organs of speech are not making *exactly* the same movements for the /t/ of *tea* and the /t/ of *two*, and therefore the resulting sounds are not exactly the same. You can prove this to yourself by only saying the consonant sounds of these words: think of the word *tea* and pronounce the beginning of it but not the vowel. Then do the same for *two*; think of the word but stop before the vowel: you can hear and feel that the two sounds are different. Obviously most of the movements we make when pronouncing these two sounds are the same, and therefore sound

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English and it is discussed in full on pp. 82-4.

1.5 Letters and sounds

These must never be mixed up. Letters are written, sounds are spoken. It is very useful to have written letters to remind us of corresponding sounds, but this is all they do; they cannot make us pronounce sounds which we do not already know; they simply remind us. In ordinary English spelling it is not always easy to know what sounds the letters stand for; for example, in the words *city, busy, women, pretty, village*, the letters *i, y, u, o, e* and *a* all stand for the same vowel sound, the one which occurs in *sit*. And in *banana, bather, man, many* the letter *a* stands

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Letters and sounds