English is Tough Stuff

Dearest creature in creation,

Study English pronunciation.

I will teach you in my verse

Sounds like corpse, corps, horse, and worse.

I will keep you, Suzy, busy,

Make your head with heat grow dizzy.

Tear in eye, your dress will tear.

So shall I! Oh hear my prayer.

Just compare heart, beard, and heard,

Dies and diet, lord and word,

Sword and sward,[[1]](#endnote-1) retain and Britain.

(Mind the latter, how it’s written.)

Now I surely will not plague you

With such words as plaque and ague.

But be careful how you speak:

Say break and steak, but bleak and streak;

Cloven, oven, how and low,

Script, receipt, show, poem, and toe.

Hear me say, devoid of trickery,

Daughter, laughter, and Terpsichore,[[2]](#endnote-2)

Typhoid, measles, topsails, aisles,

Exiles, similes, and reviles;

Scholar, vicar, and cigar,

Solar, mica, war and far;

One, anemone, Balmoral,

Kitchen, lichen,[[3]](#endnote-3) laundry, laurel;

Gertrude, German, wind and mind,

Scene, Melpomene, mankind.

Billet does not rhyme with ballet,

Bouquet, wallet, mallet, chalet.

Blood and flood are not like food,

Nor is mould like should and would.

Viscous, viscount, load and broad,

Toward, to forward, to reward.

And your pronunciation’s OK

When you correctly say croquet,

Rounded, wounded, grieve and sieve,

Friend and fiend, alive and live.

Ivy, privy, famous; clamour

And enamour rhyme with hammer.

River, rival, tomb, bomb, comb,

Doll and roll and some and home.

Stranger does not rhyme with anger,

Neither does devour with clangour.

Souls but foul, haunt but aunt,

Font, front, won’t, want, grand, and grant,

Shoes, goes, does. Now first say finger,

And then singer, ginger, linger,

Real, zeal, mauve, gauze, gouge and gauge,

Marriage, foliage, mirage, and age.

Query does not rhyme with very,

Nor does fury sound like bury.

Dost, lost, post and doth, cloth, loth.

Job, nob, bosom, transom, oath.

Though the differences seem little,

We say actual but victual.

Refer does not rhyme with deafer.

Foeffer does, and zephyr, heifer.

Mint, pint, senate and sedate;

Dull, bull, and George ate late.

Scenic, Arabic, Pacific,

Science, conscience, scientific.

Liberty, library, heave and heaven,

Rachel, ache, moustache, eleven.

We say hallowed, but allowed,

People, leopard, towed, but vowed.

Mark the differences, moreover,

Between mover, cover, clover;

Leeches, breeches, wise, precise,

Chalice, but police and lice;

Camel, constable, unstable,

Principle, disciple, label.

Petal, panel, and canal,

Wait, surprise, plait, promise, pal.

Worm and storm, chaise, chaos, chair,

Senator, spectator, mayor.

Tour, but our and succour, four.

Gas, alas, and Arkansas.

Sea, idea, Korea, area,

Psalm, Maria, but malaria.

Youth, south, southern, cleanse and clean.

Doctrine, turpentine, marine.

Compare alien with Italian,

Dandelion and battalion.

Sally with ally, yea, ye,

Eye, I, ay, aye, whey, and key.

Say aver, but ever, fever,

Neither, leisure, skein[[4]](#endnote-4), deceiver.

Heron, granary, canary.

Crevice and device and aerie.

Face, but preface, not efface.

Phlegm, phlegmatic, ass, glass, bass.

Large, but target, gin, give, verging,

Ought, out, joust and scour, scourging.

Ear, but earn and wear and tear

Do not rhyme with here but ere.

Seven is right, but so is even,

Hyphen, roughen, nephew Stephen,

Monkey, donkey, Turk and jerk,

Ask, grasp, wasp, and cork and work.

Pronunciation -- think of Psyche!

Is a paling[[5]](#endnote-5) stout and spikey?

Won’t it make you lose your wits,

Writing groats[[6]](#endnote-6) and saying grits?

It’s a dark abyss or tunnel:

Strewn with stones, stowed, solace, gunwale,[[7]](#endnote-7)

Islington and Isle of Wight,

Housewife, verdict and indict.

Finally, which rhymes with enough --

Though, through, plough, or dough, or cough?

Hiccough has the sound of cup.

My advice is to give up!

-- Author Unknown

Found at <http://reality.sgi.com/employees/relph/humor/english.html>

1. **sward** (swôrd) also **swarth** (swôr*th*) *noun*

   **1.** Land covered with grassy turf.

   **2.** A lawn or meadow.

   [Middle English, from Old English *sweard*, skin.] [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. **Terp·sich·o·re** (tûrp-SÎK¹e-rê) *noun*

   **1.** *Greek Mythology.* The Muse of dancing and choral singing.

   **2.** **terpsichore**. The art of dancing.

   [Latin *Terpsichor*, from Greek *Terpsikhor*, from feminine of *terpsikhoros*, dance-loving : *terpein*, to delight + *khoros*, dance.] [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. **li·chen** (LIE-kun) *noun*

   **1.** A fungus, usually of the class Ascomycetes, that grows symbiotically with algae, resulting in a composite organism that characteristically forms a crustlike or branching growth on rocks or tree trunks.

   **2.** *Pathology.* Any of various skin diseases characterized by patchy eruptions of small, firm papules.

   *verb*, *transitive:***li·chened**, **li·chen·ing**, **li·chens:** To cover with lichens.

   [Latin *lchn*, a kind of plant, from Greek *leikhn*, from *leikhein*, to lick.] [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. **skein** (SKAYN) *noun*

   1. a. A length of thread or yarn wound in a loose, elongated coil. b. Something suggesting the coil of a skein; a complex tangle: a twisted skein of lies.

   2. A flock of geese or similar birds in flight. See synonyms at FLOCK.

   [Middle English skeine, from Old French escaigne.] [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. **pal·ing** (PAY-ling) *noun*

   **1.** One of a row of upright, pointed sticks forming a fence; a pale.

   **2.** Pointed sticks used in making fences; pales.

   **3.** A fence made of pales or pickets. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. **groats** (GROTES) plural noun (used with a sing. or pl. verb)

   Hulled, usually crushed grain, especially oats.

   [Middle English *grotes*, from Old English *grotan*.] [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. **gun·wale** also **gun·nel** (GUN-nul) *noun*

   *Nautical.* The upper edge of the side of a vessel.

   [So called because guns were mounted on it.] [↑](#endnote-ref-7)