



Pronunciation Focus

Exercises for Lesson Nine (Diphthongs Lesson Two): Clouds and Closed

Introductory Note

The double-vowel sounds in Clouds and Closed are very expressive. Perhaps this is because they are colourful sounds that grab the ear's attention. Opening the mouth into an OH position seems to be a natural reflex in response to surprise or pain, as smiling is a response to kindness.

You may notice that *Playful Practice: Round-bellied Monks* has an annoying sound to it; that's because you're listening to someone say "Ow!" over and over again. And you may also notice that *Playful Practice: The Ocean Knows* sounds rather sad; that's because you're listening to someone say "Oh!" over and over again.

"Wow!" is an exclamation, used to express surprise, admiration, or sorrow, among other things. "Ow!" or "Ouch!" are used to express sudden pain.

"O!" can be used to express all kinds of emotions, from surprise to lament, and to add emphasis to the expression of a desire or wish:

Psalm 54 from the Bible (1535 translation)

O that I had wings like a dove!

“O!” or “Oh!” can also be used as a vocative marker—that is, it shows that we are using a person’s name to call him. “Oh John, before you go, I wanted to ask you a question...”

Tennyson (1850)

O heart, how fares it with thee now?

Finally, there is also “Lo!” This is an old-fashioned way of telling someone, “Look!”

FitzGerald (1859)

The bird of time has but a little way

To fly—and Lo! the bird is on the wing

Making the Sound in Clouds

Since “Ow!” is a familiar expression of pain, we shall use **OW** as our standard spelling for the double-vowel sound in **Clouds**.

The **OW** sound is a slide from the AH sound in *father* and *path* towards the V sound in *book* and *put*:

<p>Path + Put → Pout pAHth + pVt → pOWt</p>

Remember that AH is the relaxed sound of relief: “Ah...! That’s nice.” The lips are in an open, relaxed position and the tongue rests on the bottom of the mouth. That’s the beginning of OW. Then we slide toward the V sound in Put, the lips moving toward a kissing or whistling position.

Making the Sound in Closed

Since “Oh!” is a familiar expression of surprise, we shall use **OH** as our standard spelling for the double-vowel sound in **Closed**.

The **OH** sound is a slide from the schwa sound at the beginning of *surprise* (sə-prise) towards the V sound in foot and soot. Although correct, this explanation of OH is not very helpful, because we never make the schwa sound separately, all on its own. We can't say the sə- in *surprise* properly without saying it on the way to *-prise*.

So for practical purposes, let's say we start the OH slide from the closely related UH sound in *fur*:

Fur + Foot → Phone	Her + Hook → Home
fUH + fVt → fOHn	hUH + hVk → hOHm

Practise saying the pair “Ow!” and “Oh!” several times over. It may be helpful to notice two things.

Similarity. The first is that both sounds end close to the V sound in *put*—that is, with the lips close to a whistling or kissing position. *If you do not slide far enough toward the kissing position, OW and OH will lose their special expressive character!!*

The *difference* is that OW begins with the mouth much more open and relaxed, whereas OH starts with the mouth only half-open. The OW slide has a long way to go from AH in Path to V in Put, whereas the sound of the schwa (or the UH in *fur*) is quite close to the V in Foot. So in a way the OH sound is the second half of the OW sound; the OH sound starts half-way through the OW sound and has only half so far to go.

Standard Spelling: Notice and Identify

Exercises. Say these sentences aloud and then write down what you hear. You should:

- Use the standard spelling OW for the double-vowel sound in Clouds.
- Use OH for the sound in Closed.
- Mark the stressed syllables by underlining or by writing larger letters.

1. The Crown Prince loudly announced: "In our town, the bouncing of balls will not be allowed!"

WRITE YOUR ANSWER HERE:

2. So many times this rope has almost broken—that golden rope known as 'Hope.'

WRITE YOUR ANSWER HERE:

3. Ramona counts herself lucky to own a pretty gown to wear when she goes to town.

WRITE YOUR ANSWER HERE:

ANSWERS

1. The **CrOWn** Prince **LOWdly** ann**OWnced**: “In **OWə tOWn**, the **bOWncing** of **balls** will **not** be **allOWed!**”
2. **SOH** many **times** this **rOHp** has **almOHst** **brOHken**—that **gOHLden** **rOHp** **knOHn** as ‘**HOHp.**’
3. **RamOHna** **cOWnts** herself **lucky** to **OHn** a **pretty** **gOWn** to **wear** when she **gOHs** to **tOWn**.

Notice. The standard spelling of “our town” and “sour frown”:

our town	→	OWə tOWn
sour frown	→	sOWə frown

The R in **our** and **sour**—and **power**—is pronounced as a schwa. That means these words have three vowel sounds in a row; they are triple-vowel sounds or *triphthongs*.

By the way, did you catch the little joke in this sentence?

A duck will show you a sour frown if you call its fairest
friends ‘fowl.’

Although they are spelt differently, the words fowl and foul sound the same; they are *homophones*. *Fowl* is a noun for a kind of bird: birds such as ducks, chickens and turkeys are fowl. But *foul* is an adjective that means bad, ugly or disgusting—the opposite of *fair*. *Fair* and *foul* are also used in some sports; a ball that falls out of bounds is a foul ball. So although a duck’s friends may indeed be fowl, they aren’t necessarily foul! Fowl may play fair, and the fair may play foul. (Something can be fair by being beautiful, pale or light-coloured, or performed according to the rules.)

Rhythm

In almost every case, the OW sound occurs in stressed syllables only. Two lonely examples of unstressed syllables are found in

foundation [fOWn-**dAY**-shən] and **Cracow** [a city in Poland].

The OH sound, however, is found unstressed in many words such as **fo**llow and to**mo**rr**ow**. In such cases, OH will be shorter than the full length it gets when stressed. Compare for example:

Wherever you go, I shall follow:

Wherever you **GOH**, I shall **fo**-LOH.

A voice spoke from the marrow of my bones:

A voice **spOHk** from the **ma**-rOH of my **boHNz**.

As we often see, when syllables are added to a simple word, the stress shifts; and when the stress shifts away from OH, it often loses its character:

pose	pOHz	position	pə- zi -shən
whole	hOHL	holistic	hə- lis -tic

Even when the stress does not shift, sometimes OH becomes a short O:

know	nOH	knowledge	nO -lidge
joke	jOHk	jocular	jO -kyə-lə

[SCROLL DOWN]

Notes on the Playful Practice Poems

Some monks are renowned for wearing
Long brown robes with hoods called 'cowsls.'

It will be worth your while to memorise the lines above and to practise them many times over because they contain so many different colourful vowel sounds packed in close and thick.

Sum munks ah ri-**nOWnd** for **wearing**
LOng br**OWn** r**OHbz** with **hVdz** c**AWLd** c**OWLz**.

Remember from earlier lessons:

The word **hoods** has the same sound as **foot**
The word **called** has the same sound as **paw**

Say the three words below quite slowly and separately at first, being careful to give each sound its distinctive character, then slowly build up to a natural, moderate speed.

hoods called cowsls

These are good lines to memorise as well:

Deep below where the whales roam
They squeal and moan, squawk and groan,
Over the whole wide range of tones.

Notice especially all the long vowel sounds:

skwEEL and mOHn, skwAWk and grOHn

This line is actually designed to imitate the sound of a whale song. Exaggerate the length and colour of these sounds, make them big and loud, enjoy making the sounds of life with which the earth resounds!

[SCROLL DOWN]

Finally, we recommend you memorise this line...especially if it happens to be true:

My house is haunted by the ghost of a hound!

My **hOWs** is **hAWnted** by the **gOHst** of a **hOWnd!**

You may find it difficult to pronounce the word haunt. Start by saying 'awe' a few times. Notice the position of your mouth and lips as you prepare to make that AW sound. Now before you speak, get your mouth into that position, and begin by blowing an H sound. Now put it together:

AWE

H + AWE

Haunt