

## 7 Pronunciations of 'OUGH' with International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols

1. In these words <ough> sounds like the ~aw in **saw**. IPA= ɔ: Adding a < t > at the end makes /ɔ:t/

bought /bɔ:t/  
brought /brɔ:t/  
thought /θɔ:t/  
fought /fɔ:t/

This spelling pattern occurs in a few Past Simple verbs, like the common examples above, but also in the less-used verbs **sought** (from seek), **wrought** (from an old version of 'work'). We also find it in **ought** and **nought**. The < gh > is silent.

Students should be careful not to confuse the < ht > at the end with < th >. Sometimes students say **bought** as /bɔ:θ/ instead of /bɔ:t/.

2. These words rhyme with **off** IPA= /ɒf/

cough /kɒf/  
trough /trɒf/

A **trough** is a long, narrow container that animals eat or drink out of.  
A **trough** is also the opposite of a **peak** in graphs.

3. These rhyme with **stuff** IPA= /ʌf/

rough /rʌf/  
tough /tʌf/  
enough /I'nʌf/

If you ever need to go to **Loughborough**, make sure you pronounce the first **ough** as /ʌf/ and the second as /ə/. The < o > in < bo > is dropped, which gives the overall pronunciation of /'lʌfbrə/.

4. These rhyme with **go**. The < gh > is silent. IPA= /əʊ/

dough /dəʊ/  
though /ðəʊ/  
although /ɔ:t'ðəʊ/

5. Rhymes with **too** /u:/

through /θru:/

6. The ough sound in these words is the **schwa** sound IPA= /ə/

borough /'bʌrə/  
thorough /'θʌrə/

In these words, the stress falls on the first syllable and therefore the < ough > is only said as a schwa /ə/. Despite the number of letters used in < ough >, it is NOT the important part of the word, so remember to make it weak.

7. In these words the ough sound is like the ~ow in **cow** IPA= /aʊ/

bough /baʊ/  
plough /plaʊ/  
slough /slaʊ/

A **bough** is the main branch of a tree, a **plough** is piece of farming equipment to turn the soil and a **slough** is a swamp, or, a situation where nothing much is happening.

Unfortunately these multiple pronunciations of < ough > have historical origins and there's not much to do but memorise which one has which sound - good luck!

Spelling list: ough words

Ough words have many different sounds:

dough We need to knead the dough to make bread.

though He kept running even though he was tired.

although Although it was raining, the children still wanted to go out to play.

through He kicked the ball through the window.

bough The bird sat on the bough .

plough We plough the fields.

rough The path was rough and rocky.

tough This meat is far too tough to eat.

enough A dozen eggs will be enough .

cough She had a terrible cough .

trough The farmer put the pigs' food into the trough .

wrought The gates were made of wrought iron.

thoroughly The carpet had been thoroughly cleaned.

throughout The singer was famous throughout the land.

breakthrough Scientists have made a breakthrough in the search for a cure.

thoroughfare The quiet footpath suddenly became a busy thoroughfare.

overwrought After studying English for an hour, the students were overwrought.

Last Thursday we had a thorough walk through the rough boroughs of Loughborough.

Although I had a cough, we bought some doughnuts.

A rough-coated, dough-faced, thoughtful ploughman strode through the streets of Scarborough; after falling into a slough, he coughed and hiccupped.