

ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION AND ENGLISH SPELLING – FRIENDS OR FIENDS?

Everybody knows how to pronounce the word “friends”. But if you are reading a text and come across the word “fiends”, you understand, using the context, that it means “evil spirits, little monsters”, but you will probably jump to conclusions and think it is pronounced the same way as “friends”, without the “r”. And you will mispronounce the word.

Reading on your own is an excellent way of increasing your vocabulary, but you might come across some tricky words, of which there are a great number, since there is no coherence between English spelling and English pronunciation. “Lemons” is no problem, everybody knows how to pronounce the word. But if you come across the word “demons”, as in the title of Dan Brown’s “Angels and Demons”, you’d better be careful!

You say “own” (my own problems), you say “owe” (I owe you some money, I owe you a favor), you even say bowl, beginning with a b (a bowl of fruit, a bowl of soup), always the same vowel sound. But what happens when you refer to a nocturnal bird, which has big eyes and is sometimes used as a symbol of wisdom? The bird that goes “hoot, hoot!” on a winter night? How do you say the name of that bird, spelled “owl”?

As I said, there is no coherence between the way we spell words in English and the way we say them. Just have a look at these sentences and observe the words in **bold**, all spelled with the same ending (-ough):

- . **Although** I know a little English, I can’t speak like a native speaker.
- . Getting to be as fluent as a native speaker can be really **tough**.
- . The time you devote to studying English never seems to be **enough**.
- . I got part of my English vocabulary **through** reading books, magazines, and so on, without hearing a native speaker say those words.
- . I walk in the park here in England and enjoy looking at the trees with their big **boughs** (the big branches) covered with leaves in the Autumn colors.
- . How many **boroughs** (districts) are there in London?

What do the words **in bold** have in common? The final **-ough** in their spelling, but they all sound differently. So, watch out!