English graphophonemics

or

how to pronounce what you see
(focusing on stressed vowels)
How do you pronounce these words:

VALP
PEFFY
PLOMP
SKULCH
How do you pronounce these words:

BARVY
ZOR
SHURPITUDE
How do you pronounce these words:

SLABE
PEME
VIMY
PUNOR
How do you pronounce these words:

PLARE
KIRE
KLURE
How do you pronounce these words:

BARVY → BAVY
VIMY → VIMMY
SLABE → SLAB
KLURE → KLURT
In each of these lists of real words, which ones have an apparently illogical pronunciation?

alive, dive, drive, five, give, hive

cave, Dave, gave, have, pave, rave, save, wave

bone, code, coke, come, cone, cope, joke, move, pope, role, some, woke, zone
Make sure you remember how to classify vowels:

- **Stressed vowels**
  - **Lax (relâchées)** = short (brèves)
    - [æ e i u ã œ]
  - **Tense (tendues)**
    - **Long**
      - [əː ɔː iː uː]
    - **Diphthongs**
      - [ɛi ëi ûe ûa]
How to pronounce stressed (monographic) vowels?

Basic graphophonemic rules in short words

The following tables show the basic pronunciations of stressed vowels according to their orthographical contexts (C = consonant, V = vowel).

→ It especially applies in short words of one or two syllables, or in words where the stressed vowel is in the final or penultimate syllable, provided there is no particular stress-imposing ending.

→ The symbol # refers to the final position in a word (when the vowel is followed by nothing).

| If the vowel is NOT followed by a single <r> (and NO stress-imposing ending!) |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Checked context          | Free context             |
Two (orthographical) checked contexts with no `<r>`:

*(FR: contexte entravé)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checked context</th>
<th>→ short (/lax) vowel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;-VC#&gt;</code></td>
<td><code>&lt;-VCC&gt;</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;a&gt;</code></td>
<td><em>cat, pad</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;e&gt;</code></td>
<td><em>set, hen</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;i&gt;, &lt;y&gt;</code></td>
<td><em>pin, slip, gym</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;o&gt;</code></td>
<td><em>hot, fog</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;u&gt;</code></td>
<td><em>cut, hum</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**VALP**

**PEFFY**

**ZIV**

**PLOMP**

**SKULCH**
Five (orthographical) free contexts with no `<r>`:

**(FR: contexte libre)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Free context</th>
<th>tense (alphabetical) vowel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;V#&gt;</code></td>
<td><code>&lt;VCV&gt;</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(see below)</td>
<td>fate, 'navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be, me</td>
<td>com 'pete, 'veto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hi, pi, by</td>
<td>dine, 'vital, 'byte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so, no</td>
<td>dote, 'holy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gnu, mu</td>
<td>mute, 'duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;VCI/rV&gt;</code></td>
<td>'fable, 'matrix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'metre, 'Kebler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'rifle, 'fibre, 'hydra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'noble, 'Locris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'ruble, 'lucre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;Ve#&gt;</code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'chaos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'Cleo, 'deism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pie, dye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'vial, 'Lionel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>foe, foe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'boa, 'Chloe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;VV&gt;</code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/ei/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/iː/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/ai/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/əʊ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/(j)uː/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special case with stressed `<a#>` → /ɑː/ (not /eɪ/): fa, ta, bra...
One (orthographical) checked contexts modified by <r>:

(FR: contexte entravé coloré par <r>)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checked context</th>
<th>→ long vowel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>&lt;-VC#&gt;</strong></td>
<td><strong>&lt;-VCC&gt;</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;a&gt;</code></td>
<td><em>car</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;e&gt;</code></td>
<td><em>her</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;i&gt;, &lt;y&gt;</code></td>
<td><em>sir</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;o&gt;</code></td>
<td><em>nor</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;u&gt;</code></td>
<td><em>lur</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BARVY**

**ZOR**

**SHURPITUDE**
Two (orthographical) free contexts modified by `<r>`

*(FR: contexte libre coloré par `<r>`)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Free context</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ diphthong (except with <code>&lt;o&gt;</code>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><code>&lt;-VrV&gt;</code></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>care, 'vary</em></td>
<td>/eə/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>'hero, sin'cere</em></td>
<td>/ɪə/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ad'mire, 'tyre</em></td>
<td>/aɪ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>more, a'dore, 'tory</em></td>
<td>/ɔː/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>cure, ma'ture, 'fury</em></td>
<td>/ʊə/, /ɔː/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Careful with `<o>` + `<r>`, no difference between checked and free contexts: *nor, more* = /ɔː/
BE CAREFUL:

1) <-VrC> = long vowel, but short vowel if <-Vrr>
   'carry /æ/ vs 'caring /eə/ ; 'marry /æ/ vs 'Mary /eə/

   Except if meaning intervenes: carry vs tarry
   - *carry* does not derive from *car*, therefore <rr> makes the stressed vowel short
   - *tarry* has two meanings:
     → 'to stay longer than expected' /ˈtærri/
     → 'covered in tar' /ˈtɑːrri/
        but if written *tary*: /ˈteərri/

2) *have, give, river, put, done, come, gone* ...
   = old words, old rules, old pronunciations
How do you pronounce these words:

VALP
VALPITY
VARPITY
VALPION
VALPUOUS
SLABE
SLABITY
SLABION
SLABUOUS
How do you pronounce these words:

volˈcano → volˈcanic
inˈsane → inˈsanity
exˈtreme → exˈtremity
mode → ˈmodify
grade → ˈgradual
page → ˈpaginate

(but oˈbese → oˈbesity … duhhh ...)
WHATEVER THE ENDING:

→ always a short vowel if <-VCC>
  synˈtactic /æl/, inˈtensify /el/, ˈintegrate /ɪl/, ˈdoctorate /ɒl/, eˈmulsify /ʌl/, ˈnullity /ʌl/...

→ always a long vowel with <-VrC>
  leˈthargic /ɑːl/, ˈcertify /ɜːl/, conˈformity /ɔːl/...

→ always a tense (alphabetical) vowel if <-VV>
  arˈchaic /eɪl/, heˈroic /əʊl/, ˌspontaˈneity /iːl/...
Otherwise, if the stressed `<V>` is followed by a single `<C>` + any of these stress-imposing endings:

\[-ate\ (3+\ syllables),\ u+V, -ic, -ity/-ety, -ify/-efy, -ible\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>vol’cane /e\</th>
<th>vol’canIC /æ\</th>
<th>'cubIC /ju:/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ar’thritis /æ\</td>
<td>ar’thritIC /i\</td>
<td>'musIC /ju:/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in’sane /e\</td>
<td>in’sanITY /æ\</td>
<td>'nudITY /ju:/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex’treme /i:\</td>
<td>ex’tremITY /e\</td>
<td>,oppor’tunITY /ju:/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mode /ɔ\</td>
<td>'modIFY /v\</td>
<td>'crucIFY /u:/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grade /e\</td>
<td>'gradUAL /æ\</td>
<td>'mutUAL /ju:/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>page /e\</td>
<td>'paginATE /æ\</td>
<td>ac’cumulate /ju:/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>vi’tuperATE /ju:/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'cruciIBLE /u:/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ `<a, e, i, o>` = short vowels

→ `<u>` = long `/u:/`

**SLABE**

**SLABITY**

**SLABIC**

**SLABIFY**

**SLABOUS**

**SLUBE**

**SLUBITY**

**SLUBIC**

**SLUBIFY**

**SLUBOUS**
Otherwise, if the stressed `<V>` is followed by a single `<C>` + the stress-imposing endings e+V or i+V:

\[ \rightarrow e+V, i+V \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLABE</th>
<th>SLABION</th>
<th>SLABIAL</th>
<th>SLABEOUS</th>
<th>SLABEON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SLIBE</td>
<td>SLIBION</td>
<td>SLIBIAL</td>
<td>SLIBEOUS</td>
<td>SLIBEON</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ 'pəTIENCE /ɛv/ \]
\[ a'blatION /ɛv/ \]
\[ ce'tacEAN /ɛv/ \]

\[ de'letION /iː/ \]
\[ re'medIAL /iː/ \]

\[ eks'plɔsION /ɔʊ/ \]
\[ Na'polEON /ɔʊ/ \]

\[ pe'culIAR /juː/ \]
\[ 'unION /juː/ \]
\[ 'glutEAL /uː/ \]

\[ \rightarrow \langle a, e, o, u \rangle = \text{tense vowels} \]

Except:

\[ de'liʃIOUS /i/ \]

\[ am'phibIAN /i/ \]
\[ ju'diʃIAL /i/ \]

\[ am'biʃION /i/ \]
\[ fa'miʃIAR /i/ \]

\[ \rightarrow \langle i \rangle = \text{short} /i/ \]
BE CAREFUL:

1) - *i+V* makes the stressed vowel tense
    - *-ate* makes the stressed vowel short

→ what about *ir’radiate*?

Apply the *i+V* rule: /eɪ/ (not /æ/)

2) There are common exceptions to these rules:
   → *I’talian /æl/, com’panion /æl/, ‘special /eə/, ‘onion /ʌ/ ...*
   → *‘basic /eɪ/, o’besity /iː/, ‘isolate /aɪ/, ‘codify /əʊ/ ...*
compare:

millennium
/e:/
selenium
/ɪː/ 
ingenuous
/ɪɡˈnjuːəs/
ingenious
/ɪɡˈnɛʃəs/
Your printed guide contain 'minor' rules which affect many words and contradict the general rules that we have just seen.

eg.:

ask = /ɑː/, not /æ/ (despite <-VCC>)
salt = /ɔː/, not /æ/ (despite <-VCC>)
sold = /əʊ/, not /ɒ/ (despite <-VCC>)
work = /ɜː/, not /ɔː/ (although it is <o>, not <e>)

Most of them are simple and do not need explaining in class. Please just read them and make sure you know them.

(I forgot 3 of them, they will be available online)
How do you pronounce these words:

WAX, QUACK, WAGGON, SWANK
/æː/

WHAT, WAS, WASH, WANT
QUALITY, SQUADRON, SQUALID
/ɒ/

WAR, WARN
/ɔː/
THE SWAN RULE

When a stressed <a> follows /w/ (not just <w> !), it can be pronounced either as an <a> or as an <o>.

- It is pronounced as an <a>:
  → in free contexts, when followed by <-aCV(C)>
  -wage, 'wafer, a 'wake(n)… → /eɪ/
  -a 'ware, square… → /eə/
  (exception: 'water /ˈwɔːtə/)

- when followed by velar consonants /k, g, ŋ/
  wax, 'wacko, quack… 'waggon, swag, wag… swank, twang, 'quango… → /æ/
THE SWAN RULE

When a stressed <a> follows /w/ (not just <w> !), it can be pronounced either as an <a> or as an <o>.

- In other contexts, it is pronounced as an <o>:

  → what, want, wash, wasp, was, swan, 'wapiti, 'waddle, 'quality, 'squadron, 'squalid... → /ɒ/

  → war, warn, Schwartz... → /ɔː/

  (for waste, wall, walk ... see the other minor rules)
FINAL WARNINGS !

- All these rules apply to words which follow the contemporary logic of English. Many exceptions remain, because they are the fossilized pronunciation of older words.

- Words which are borrowed from foreign modern languages usually obey other rules.

 ˌukuˈlele /eɪ/, moˈsquito /iː/, marˈtini /iː/, saˈlami /ɑː/, baˈnana /ɑː/  
  (cf. toˈmato:  RP /təˈmaːtəʊ/ vs GA /təˈmeɪtəʊ/)

- More generally, English comes from many original languages, and with many influences (Celtic, Germanic, Latin, ancient Greek, old French, English derivatives, etc.). As a result, most graphophonemic rules will not be 100% regular.

  → by the way:  phoˈnetic /e/ vs phoˈnemic /iː/