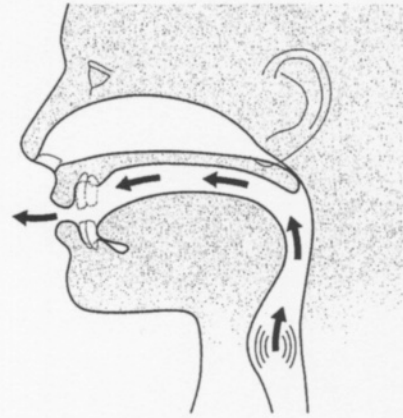
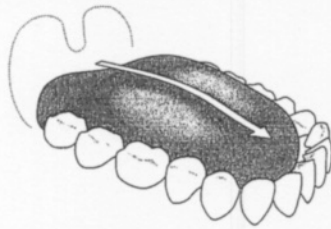


NURSE

/ɜː/

/ɜː/



Make the sound

Vowel grid reference: 6

This vowel is a longer version of the schwa (see page 54) with a slightly lower tongue position.



DVD

- 1 Part your lips and teeth, just a little.
- 2 Relax your tongue and leave the tip to rest naturally just behind your bottom front teeth; the tongue should be a fraction lower than for the /ə/ sound.
- 3 Now make a long vowel sound.
- 4 Don't allow the tongue to move or the lips to make a shape – however tempting! Lips, tongue and jaw are all neutral and relaxed.

When do I use this sound?

This sound is always spelt with a silent *r*. Never pronounce an /ɹ/; only pronounce the vowel sound.



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Spelling	Examples
<i>ur</i>	urgent, fur, curse
<i>er</i>	eternity, nervous, commercial
<i>ir</i>	bird, girl, virtue
<i>ear</i>	early, learn, heard
<i>or</i>	work, word, worst
<i>our</i>	journey, courteous, journalist

Now try it!



Say each of these words and sentences aloud. Then compare your pronunciation with the model on tracks 81–83.

- A** world word journey courtesy turn stir certain
 nerve girl bird skirt search earth heard
- B** 1 She urged him to curse less as she yearned for a perfect and virtuous partner.
 2 The circus clowns wore purple shirts and juggled thirty burning balls, making the front row of the audience very nervous.
 3 She turned up early to her first day of work to be certain of the perfect first impression.
- C** Birds

Have you ever heard the saying 'the early bird catches the worm'? It means that whoever gets to an opportunity first is most likely to do well. Birds do eat worms, and they also certainly do wake up early in the morning and start chirping and singing! Certain birds make massive journeys every year, migrating from cold to warm climates. This seems like very hard work; some fly almost half-way around the Earth. Bird watchers like to observe the times of these birds' journeys, and search for them when they arrive at their destination. Of course, not all birds travel like this. Some birds, like turkeys, can't even fly at all.

Am I doing something wrong?

This vowel is difficult for all students whatever their native language and these notes and exercises will be helpful for all learners.

In RP this long sound is always spelt with a silent *r*, and many learners will try to pronounce the *r* in some way. This makes the vowel sound seem shorter and less open (see pages 50–51 on *The spoken and the silent r*). Try the exercise below:

Look at this sentence:

She was so nervous she woke up early and took the purse that matched her perfect white shirt and black skirt outfit to work on her first day at the law firm.

Now let's change each *r* that we don't pronounce to grey:

She was so nervous she woke up early and took the purse that matched her perfect white shirt and black skirt outfit to work on her first day at the law firm.

Look how much space is created in the words. Imagine that space is time that you can add on to the vowel sound. Don't say the *r*, but use the space to create a longer, more open vowel.

First, read the grey *r* sentence in front of the mirror. Don't think about the meaning, just think about shape. Go very slowly, and check that on each /ɜː/ word you are making the same vowel shape.

Speed up, check again and record yourself if you want.

This vowel can feel very non-specific to some learners. Like the schwa, it is a neutral vowel – you do nothing with your mouth to make it. The idea of not shaping the sound can be hard to match with the various spellings used.

Think of it like this instead: this vowel *does* have a shape, but it's a very central shape. A way to learn the shape is to glide from the vowel sound in BATH (see page 68) to the vowel sound in SHEEP (see page 60). You will find the NURSE vowel in the middle of that slide. You can come back to this sound when you've had a chance to practise those other sounds if you like.

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