
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Vocabulary

Words with 'ough'



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Finn

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary with me Finn...

Catherine

...and me Catherine. And in this programme we're talking about the letters **o-u-g-h**.

Finn

Yes, the letters **o-u-g-h** are found in lots of English words including **cough**, **rough**, **ought** and **through**, but there are lots of different pronunciations. So let's start with George. He's talking about last winter, when he was ill.

Catherine

And think about this question while you listen: What did George do in February?

INSERT

George

Last winter I had a **cough** for **roughly** three months. By February, I **thought** I **ought** to go to the doctor. He gave me a **thorough** check and some medicine. I got better in the end, **although** the **cough** lasted right **through** till April. I'm so glad spring's here!

Finn

Poor George. And we asked: what did George do in February?

Catherine

Well, George **thought** that he **ought** to go to the doctor. So that's what he did.

Finn

Good. Now the words **thought**, spelt **t-h-o-u-g-h-t** and **ought**, spelt **o-u-g-h-t**, both have the **o-u-g-h** pattern in them and it's pronounced **or**. **Thought**, **ought**.

Catherine

Thought, **ought**. And there are more **o-u-g-h** verbs with the same pronunciation, like **fought**, the past of **fight**, and **bought**, the past of **buy**...

Finn

...and **brought**, **b-r-o-u-g-h-t**, the past of **bring**. People sometimes confuse **bought** and **brought** so Catherine, can you give us an example sentence with both words?

Catherine

I **bought** a new TV from the hypermarket and I **brought** it home in a taxi. Now let's have another clip. And how **o-u-g-h** words are there in this one?

INSERT CLIP 1

Last winter I had a **cough** for **roughly** three months.

Finn

So there were two **o-u-g-h** words there: **Cough**: **c-o-u-g-h** and **roughly**: **r-o-u-g-h-l-y**. **Roughly** means **about**, so George had a **cough** for about - or **roughly** - three months.

Catherine

But the pronunciation of these two words is different. The **o-u-g-h** in **cough** sounds like **off**. **Off, cough**.

Finn

And the **o-u-g-h** in **roughly** sounds like **uff**. **Uff, roughly**.

Catherine

Right. So we're beginning to see that there is no real rule for pronouncing these words, Finn.

Finn

Sadly not, that's right. You are just going to have to learn to spell and say each word on its own.

Catherine

OK. Let's have another clip.

INSERT CLIP 2

He gave me a **thorough** check...

Finn

And the **o-u-g-h** word there was **thorough**: **t-h-o-r-o-u-g-h**. It means **very careful and exact**.

Catherine

And the pronunciation is different again. Listen to this one: **thorough**. It's an **uh** sound at the end of the word. **Uh, thorough, uh, thorough**.

Finn

Here's one more clip.

INSERT | CLIP 3

I got better in the end, **although** the cough lasted right **through** till April.

Finn

This time we heard **although** spelt **a-l-t-h-o-u-g-h** and **through**, spelt **t-h-r-o-u-g-h**. Now the **o-u-g-h** in **although**, sounds like **oh**. **Although**.

Catherine

And in **through**, it sounds like **ooo**. **Through**.

Finn

So you know what, that gives us six different pronunciations for the letters **o-u-g-h**.

Catherine

That's right, six of them. We had: **thought**, **cough**, **roughly**, **thorough**, **although** and **through**.

Finn

So in fact there are more than six pronunciations for **o-u-g-h** in the English language, but these are the most common ones.

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6 Minute Vocabulary from BBC Learning English.

Finn

And now it's time for the quiz! OK, question number one: How do you spell **brought**, the past simple of the verb **bring**?

Catherine

It's **b-r-o-u-g-h-t**.

Finn

Very good. Number two: How do you pronounce the word that is spelt **t-h-o-u-g-h**?

Catherine

That's **though**. **Though**.

Finn

That's the one. Number three: **Roughly** and **enough** have similar spelling and pronunciation. How do you spell **roughly**?

Catherine

It's **r-o-u-g-h-l-y**.

Finn

Well done if you got all those right. Now before we go, here's our vocabulary tip. If your phone or computer lets you record audio, try recording the spelling and pronunciation of tricky words so you can play them back if you need help to remember them.

Catherine

There's more about this on our website at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again soon for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary points to take away:

Verbs with **o-u-g-h** in the past simple form, like **thought** and **bought**, are pronounced **or**:
/ɔ:/

Taught and **caught** are pronounced like this too, but notice the different spelling: **a-u-g-h-t**.

There are at least five other ways to pronounce words with **o-u-g-h** in them. Common examples are:

cough /'kɒf/

roughly /'rʌfli/, enough /ɪ'nʌf/

through /'θru:/

although/though /ɔ:l'dʒəʊ/ /'dʒəʊ/

thorough /'θʌrə/

There is no rule for learning the spelling and pronunciation of **ough** words. It's best to practise writing and saying or recording each one.