

Pronunciation Rules: Hard & Soft C

Reference

In English, the letter C has a hard and a soft sound. Hard C, or /k/, is the "k" sound in "could" and "cat." Soft C, or /s/, is the "s" sound in "city" and "center." How do you know which sound to make when you see a new word? The following rules will help you!

A. Hard & Soft C 🔊

#	Rule	Listen & Repeat	
1	When c is followed by e , i , or y , the sound is soft .	- ceiling - cell - cinema	- decide - icy - recipe
2	When c is followed by a , o , or u , the sound is hard .	- cake - correct - cup	- rescue - scared - unicorn
3	When c is followed by a consonant , the pronunciation is hard .	- class - crab - crosswalk	- fact - quickly - uncle
4	When there is a double c , the pronunciation is often hard .*	- broccoli - occupy - occur	- raccoon - soccer - tobacco
5	When a word ends in c or ck , the pronunciation is hard .	- back - comic - knock	- magic - sac - sick
6	When a word ends in c + e , the pronunciation is soft .	- fence - ice - nice	- office - race - voice

Reference cont.

B. Notes

***Note 1**

For some words with a double c, the pronunciation is an "x" sound (a combination of a hard C followed by a soft C).

- accent
- acceptable
- vaccination
- accept
- access
- vaccine

Note 2

When c is followed by an h, it is pronounced /tʃ/.
The "ch" spelling makes the /tʃ/ sound in "cheese."

- bench
- chew
- matches
- catch
- church
- watch

Practice

Put a check mark under Hard C or Soft C.

Use the rules you learned to help you.

#	Word	Hard C	Soft C
Ex.	voice		✓
1	classroom		
2	cat		
3	icy		
4	rock		
5	broccoli		
6	office		
7	cup		
8	decision		
9	ceiling		
10	public		

Answer Key

Reference

Go through the pronunciation rules for reference chart A by playing the recording and having students repeat the examples for each rule. For further practice, see if students (in pairs or as a class) can come up with more examples for each rule.

You may also want to challenge students with this list of words that contain both hard and soft C. Can your students identify which C is soft and which is hard?

Words with both hard and soft C:

- bicycle (soft, hard)
- calcium (hard, soft)
- circle (soft, hard)
- clearance (hard, soft)
- concert (hard, soft)
- vacancy (hard, soft)

If you'd like to point out the International Phonetic Alphabet symbols for the hard and soft C sounds (in order to write these sounds on the board and/or for students to be able to recognize them in certain dictionaries), hard C is written as /k/ and soft C is written as /s/.

Practice

Have students complete the chart based on the rules they learned in this lesson. To follow up, put students in pairs and have them read the words out loud. Monitor their pronunciation.

#	Word	Hard C	Soft C
Ex.	voice		✓
1	classroom	✓	
2	cat	✓	
3	icy		✓
4	rock	✓	
5	broccoli	✓	
6	office		✓
7	cup	✓	
8	decision		✓
9	ceiling		✓
10	public	✓	

SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the word *Center*. Most other English-speaking countries spell it this way: *Centre*. Make it a challenge for your students to find this word in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spelling.