

# Course Reference Guide

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## *Conventions*

### Representing biblical Hebrew in English

In this course, students learn biblical Hebrew by pronouncing and listening to Hebrew words and syllables before learning to read Hebrew letters – not unlike how a child learns first to speak and then to read. This document presents the conventions used in this course to transcribe<sup>1</sup> the Hebrew sounds and syllables using English letters.

In general, the pronunciation of Hebrew words and syllables are formally transcribed as follows:

- The word or syllable will be bracketed by forward slashes, /.
- Syllables are separated by a dot, ‘.’’, but only when encountering the word for the first time.
- When the stress (or accent) falls on a syllable other than the last, it will be written in bold type.

For example, the pronunciation of the English word *subtle* would be transcribed as

/suh·təl/ -- /u/ as in **bat**tle

<sup>1</sup> Transcription is the means by which the pronunciation of words and syllables in one language are represented in another. This is not, as commonly represented, [transliteration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transliteration) as most websites claim. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transliteration> for additional information

However, when pronunciation is not in view, the word or syllable will be written without slashes, syllabification, or accents. Thus, when not discussing its pronunciation, the English word subtle would be written, *suhl̄təl*.

For example,

**Table 1: Representing the Hebrew words using English Letters**

| <b>Pronunciation Form</b> | <b>Written Form</b> |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| /El·o·heem/               | Eloheem             |
| /a·retz/                  | aretz               |
| /sha· <b>ma</b> ·yeem/    | shamayeem           |

NOTE: only when the stress(or accent) falls on a syllable other than the last, will we write the syllable in bold-type. This is because the stress in Hebrew is usually, but not always, on the last syllable.

The transcription of the Hebrew consonants are not presented in this reference guide since (1) consonants cannot be pronounced without vowel sounds, and (2) the representation of consonantal sounds is, with the exception of three consonants, identical to English.

First, here are the transcription values for all Hebrew vowel sounds.

**Table 2: Hebrew vowel sounds in English**

| <b>Transcription Symbol</b> | <b>Sound</b>                   |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| /ah/                        | <i>ah</i> as in “ahhhh”        |
| /e/                         | <i>eh</i> as in red, bed, head |
| /ə/                         | <i>uh</i> as in stupefy        |
| /ei/ or /ey/                | as in eight, they              |
| /ee/                        | <i>i</i> as in machine         |
| /i/                         | <i>i</i> as in it, sit         |
| /o/                         | <i>oh</i> as in boat, soak     |
| /u/ or /oo/                 | <i>oo</i> h as in boo, sue     |
| /ai/                        | rhymes with eye, thai          |

|      |                        |
|------|------------------------|
| /oy/ | rhymes with boy        |
| /uy/ | rhymes with bouy, suey |

Second, here is how we will represent the three consonantal sounds referenced in the previous paragraph.

**Table 3: Unique Hebrew consonant sounds in English**

| Transcription Symbol | Sound                        |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| /ch/, /kh/           | <i>ch</i> as in Bach         |
| /ph/                 | <i>f</i> as in fox           |
| /tz/ or /ts/         | <i>ts</i> as in <i>tetse</i> |

Finally, in biblical Hebrew, as presently understood and taught, there is no sound comparable to the following English pronunciations:

- /ch/ as in cherry
- /a/ as in ant, bat
- /w/ as in where, what<sup>2</sup>
- /j/ or /g/ as in jam, genesis

### Examples

Johann Sebastian Bach      /yo·hahn/ /su·**bas**·tyun/ /bach/

Seattle                              /see·**a**·təl/

Michael                              /**mai**·kahl/

Can't                                  /kan·tə/

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<sup>2</sup> In biblical days the Vav consonant was probably pronounced as /w/. In modern Hebrew the Vav consonant is pronounced using the /v/ sound and this is the convention used in this course.