How many speech sounds are there in the words below? For example, for the word “pot”, there would be three sounds, and for the word “spot” there would be four. Note that for these two examples the number of speech sounds is that same as the number of letters. This will not always be the case. For example, the word “note” has four letters but just 3 speech sounds; the word “know” has four letters but just two speech sounds. Answers are attached.

1. cat
2. sissy
3. pits
4. bill
5. phone
6. plant
7. this
8. breath
9. steak
10. cough
11. filly
12. Philly
13. league
14. throw
15. thought
16. limb
17. Kansas
18. cash
19. steal
20. beau
21. bath
22. bathe
23. lass
24. edit
25. bus
26. buzz
27. flew
28. plaid
29. ring
30. boxes
31. stroke
32. pants
33. show
34. pew
35. exist
36. tomb
37. chill
38. print
39. pillow
40. chew
Answers (and IPA transcriptions)

1. cat 3 [kæt] (the ‘ss’ in the middle represents a single /s/)
2. sissy 4 [sɪsi] (the ‘ss’ in the middle represents a single /s/)
3. pits 4 [pɪts] (the final ‘ll’ is a single /l/)
4. bill 3 [bɪl] (ph = /f/)
5. phone 3 [fɑn] (the ‘th’ at the beginning is a single sound, not 2)
6. plant 5 [plænt] (same deal, though this sound is not the same as the ‘th’ above)
7. this 3 [ðɪs] (the ‘th’ at the beginning is a single sound, not 2)
8. breath 4 [brəθ] (same deal, though this sound is not the same as the ‘th’ above)
9. steak 4 [stek]
10. cough 3 [kɔf]
11. filly 4 [fɪli]
12. Philly 4 [fɪli]
13. league 3 [lɪg]
14. throw 3 [θro]
15. thought 3 [θɔt] (‘th’=1 sound; ‘ough’ all represents 1 vowel; then the ‘t’)
16. limb 3 [lɪm]
17. Kansas 6 [kænzɪs] (1st letter ‘s’ corresponds to [z], the 2nd to [s])
18. cash 3 [kæʃ] (the ‘sh’ digraph corresponds to a single sound)
19. steal 4 [stɪl]
20. beau 2 [bo] (‘eau’ = 1 vowel)
21. bath 3 [bæθ]
22. bathe 3 [bæð] (note the difference in pronunciation between this ‘th’ and the one above)
23. lass 3 [læs]
24. edit 4 [ɛɾɪt] (the 2nd sound is a flap, not a /t/; more on this later)
25. bus 3 [bʌs]
26. buzz 3 [bʌz]
27. flew 3 [flu] (the ‘ew’ here represents just 1 vowel)
28. plaid 4 [plæd] (the ‘ai’ digraph corresponds to the single vowel [æ])
29. ring 3 [rɪŋ] (tricky: final sound here is not ‘n’ followed by ‘g’; it’s 1 consonant: [ŋ])
30. boxes 6 [baksɪz] (this is spoken like ‘bahksiz’)
31. stroke 5 [strəʊk]
32. pants 5 [pænts]
33. show 2 [ʃo] (1 consonant represented in spelling by ‘sh’, followed by 1 vowel)
34. pew 3 [pju] (tricky: there is a ‘y’ sound – [j] – after the [p])
35. exist 6 [ɛgzɪst] (spoken like “eggzist”)
36. tomb 3 [tum] (no [b])
37. chill 3 [ʃɪl] (‘ch’ = corresponds to just 1 sound – [ʃ])
38. print 5 [prɪnt]
39. pillow 4 [pɪlo]
40. chew 2 [tʃu] (again, the symbol [tʃ] uses 2 characters but represents one sound)