

# How to Talk to Animals in English: 17 Animal Sounds

Meow! Woof! Chirp!

Do you know which animals make these sounds?

Cats, dogs and birds all speak the same language, but the words used for their sounds vary from language to language.

Some animal sounds and verbs are also used in everyday conversation to mean different things. So besides learning some fun new words, knowing animal sounds in English will also show you new ways to express yourself in conversation.

## Don't Animals Sound the Same in All Languages?

Animal sounds are a form of **onomatopoeia**, which are words that imitate sounds. Words like “pop” “buzz” and “boom” are forms of onomatopoeia, and so are “meow,” “woof” and “moo.”

Cats and explosions might sound the same all over the world, but the way we hear sounds is different depending on where you're from. For example, if you speak a language that doesn't have the letter “l,” like Japanese, you might say that a chicken says “koke,” not “cluck.”

Most animal sounds around the world are similar, with some variations depending on the language and the way we hear things.

## Why Learning English Animal Sounds Is Important

Knowing animal sounds in English might seem unimportant, but these sounds are a part of culture. Animal sounds are one of the first things babies learn when they're learning to speak. You may not need to use the word “moo” in everyday conversation too often, but knowing it will take you one step closer to speaking—and thinking—like a native.

Animal sounds, and onomatopoeia in general, can also help you understand how to pronounce words better, since it helps you hear things differently. The more you know about the English language, no matter how trivial (unimportant) the information seems, the better you will become at it!

## Hee-Haw! 17 Fun Animal Sounds in English

### 1. Cats — meow

As any cat owner knows, cats **meow** when they want something. When they're content (happy), like if they're enjoying some petting, they **purr**. Cat purring sounds like a little engine!

Unhappy cats might **yowl**, or cry out loudly. Or they might **hiss**, which is also the sound a snake makes.

## 2. Dogs — woof

Dogs make many noises, depending on what they're feeling and even how big they are. Angry dogs **growl**, scared dogs **whimper**, and some dogs (and wolves) **howl**.

Many dogs **woof** or **ruff**, but small dogs **yip** and **yap** (someone yappy is someone who talks a lot), while large dogs have a deep **bow-wow**. All these sounds are called **barking**. A dog that says "woof" is not "woofing," it's barking.

## 3. Horses — neigh

If you've ever heard a horse's sound, you know it's hard to describe. In English the sound is written as a **neigh**, and is called a **whinny**.

The word "whinny" might be another attempt to write the sound a horse makes, or might be related to the word "whine," which is a complaining sound (and in fact, can be used to talk about humans who are complaining a lot in a childish way).

Horses also make a **snorting** sound and the less often used **nicker**, which is a low whinny.

## 4. Goats and sheep — baa

[A classic nursery song](#) mentions the sounds of goats and sheep: "Baa baa black sheep have you any wool?"

These farm animals make the sound **baa**, which is unusual because we don't normally see two a's next to each other in English. The double a's are used to show that the sound is elongated (lengthened). This cry is called a **bleat**.

## 5. Pigs — oink

Pigs seem to speak differently in every language, and in English they say **oink**. Pigs also **squeal**, which is a high-pitched whine. Humans squeal too, usually to show happiness (i.e. "She squealed in delight when she saw the present").

"To squeal on someone" also means to tell on them, especially when it concerns a crime. For example, "The robber would have gotten away with the money, but his partner squealed to the police."

Another pig noise is the **grunt**. You probably grunt sometimes too, since it's the sound you make when you do something physically difficult. A grunt is also the name for the lowest level workers and soldiers. This led to the term "grunt work," used to describe boring jobs that no one wants to do. We seem to take a lot of inspiration from pigs!

## 6. Cows — moo

The sound a cow makes is **moo**. This sound is officially called **lowing**, which comes from a word that means to shout, but you'll probably never hear it called that in real life. Saying that "the cow is mooing" is just fine!

## 7. Donkeys — hee-haw

Donkeys have a two-toned call that sounds pretty funny. In English, this sound is called **braying**, and is written as **hee-haw**.

The British version is a bit different from the American though; it's written as **eeyore**. Sound familiar? That's the name of the sad donkey in the Winnie the Pooh stories.

## 8. Chickens — cluck

Female chickens are called hens and they make a **clucking** sound. Baby chickens say **cheep**, and are called **chicks**, which is also an extremely informal and somewhat insulting way to refer to women.

Different languages seem to agree on these sounds pretty closely, but roosters (male chickens) are a different matter!

## 9. Roosters — cock-a-doodle-do

When a rooster calls in the morning, that's called **crowing** (similar to the bird "crow," but in this case it's a verb). In English, the sound of a rooster is written as **cock-a-doodle-do**. How is that different from the sound a rooster makes in your language?

## 10. Birds — chirp

Birds of all sizes are known for their sounds, which are usually called **singing**.

Birds **chirp**, **trill** and **warble**. They also **tweet** and **twitter**, which you might recognize as the name of a very popular social media website with a bird logo. Now you know why!

## 11. Owls — Hoot

Owls might be birds, but they make different sounds. In fact, they're known for not using too many sounds at all as they fly; they're silent predators (animals that hunt other animals for food).

The owl's sound is called a **hoot**. Owls, and other birds of prey like eagles and hawks, can also **screech**—a loud, high-pitched yell.

## 12. Ducks and geese — quack and honk

Do you think ducks and geese sound the same? In English, they make two very different sounds. Ducks **quack** and geese **honk**. Both words are also used in regular English: cars and trucks also honk when they blast their horns.

## 13. Turkeys — gobble

The sound a turkey makes is called a **gobble**. That's also a word that means to eat quickly. So every Thanksgiving—an American holiday when people traditionally eat turkeys—we gobble up turkeys.

## 14. Mosquitoes — buzz

How many times have you been awakened in the middle of the night as a mosquito flew by your ear? Many insects like mosquitoes, flies and bees, make a **buzzing** sound. In the middle of the night, the sound is more like a **whine**, which you've already read means to complain. We should be the ones complaining!

## 15. Crickets — chirp

Crickets, like birds, say **chirp**. Many crickets chirping together make a beautiful symphony. One cricket chirping indoors can drive you crazy.

## 16. Frogs — ribbit

In English, frogs **croak** or say **ribbit**, and you can thank Hollywood for that! Ribbit is the accepted sound for a frog in English, but only one frog species actually says ribbit, and it was introduced into our language by Hollywood when sounds came to the movies.

## 17. Lions — roar

If you're out in the African wilderness and you hear a low **growl** or a loud **roar**, get out of there fast! That's the sound of a lion, the "king of the jungle."

Now you'll always know which verb or sound to use when you're talking about animals. You might have also learned some useful words to use in everyday conversation. You're one step closer to speaking like a native!