

Course : Phonetics

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Level : L2

Revision of vowel sounds in British English

Lecture Objectives: Revision of vowel sounds

In this lecture, the student will

- Review of vowel sounds in received pronunciation (RP)
- Make difference between monophthongs and diphthongs
- Identify the symbol used for each sound

The vowel is a sound in the production of which the air stream does not meet an obstruction and there is no noise component. Vowels are classified according to:

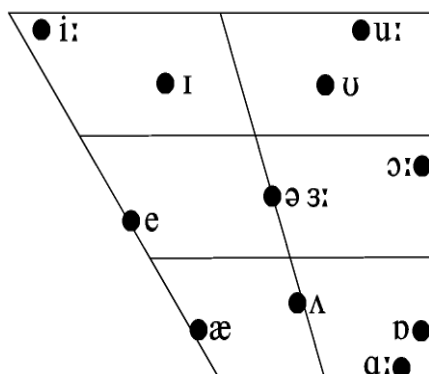
- tongue height (high, mid, low)
- tongue position (front, central, back)
- lip position (rounded vs unrounded)
- vowel length (short vs long)

In British English, there are **20 vowel sounds** divided into **5 long vowels**, **7 short vowels** and **8 diphthongs** (*gliding vowels*), which are composed of a combination of *two short vowels*.

Pure vowels are classified according to the part of the tongue involved in their articulation: Front vowels, central vowels and back vowels as shown in figure 1.

Diphthongs are divided into closing and centring depending whether the glides is towards the closing or centring area as shown in figure 2.

Figure 1 Pure vowel/ monophthongs



1. Front vowels

/i:/ seat, feet, heat, repeat, recent, leave/ people, key. This sound may be produced by ea, ee ; e and less by eo and ey.

/ɪ/sit, fit, hit, sity, pretty, italy, busy, explore

Short /ɪ/ is produced most of the time by the letter i or e ; /i/ intermediate, occuring at the end like busy, city, angry.

/e/ leg, best, head, fed, better. This sound is produced by e or ea

/æ// sat, hat, happy, jazz, catch, matter. Produced by the letter a

Read these words aloud. What is the difference between them ? How do you call them

lead	lid	led	lad
seat	sit	set	sat
bead	bid	bed	bad
litre	litter	letter	latter

2. Central vowels

/ʌ/luck, butter, brother, london, enough. It is produced by u, oo or ou.

/ə/around, polite, Saturday, driver. This weekest sound can produced by different vowels.

/ɜ:/heard, bird, person, circle, research, burn. This long vowel is produced by ur, er, ir or ur.

Bird	bud	bard	bad
Lurk	luck	lark	lack
Burn	bun	barn	ban
Hurt	hut	heart	hat

Back vowels

/ɑ:/calm, part, hard, father. In RP, it produced most of the time by ar contrary to American pronunciation

/ɒ / hot, clock, what, cough, australia. It is often produced by the letter o

/ɔ:/ bought, caught, explore, born, course, board. It is produced by or, our, or oar.

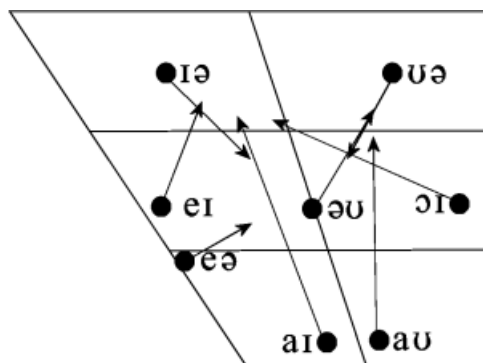
/ʊ/ put, look, full, good, should. It is prodced by u , oo and lesss comon ou

/u:/ food, move, suit, group, rude, blue. This long vowel is produced by oo, o, ui, u ,ou, ue.

port	pot	port	part	pool	pull
cord	cod	court	cart	fool	full
stork	stock	store	star	suit	soot

sport	spot	former	farmer	cooed	could
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A. Diphthongs



1. Closing diphthongs

/aɪ/ quite, tried, shy, night, tight. Spelling with I, ie, ight

/ɔɪ/ enjoy, toy, avoid, lawyer. Spelling with oy or oi.; Spelling: a, ai, ey; igh and ea.

/eɪ/ take, late, rain, wait, grey, eight and even ea like break

/əʊ/ old, hope, load, know, snow (spelling : o, oa, ow, less with ou like though.

/aʊ/ cow, town, sound, mountain : ow, ou

late	light	late	let	buy	boy
hay	high	mate	met	tie	toy
lake	like	fail	fell	pint	point
ace	ice	sale	sell	isle	oil
slate	slight	age	edge	tile	toil

2. Centring diphthongs

/ɪə/ here, sphere, dear, beer, near, experience.: er ; ear, It is possible with ea or e like zero

/eə/ hair, where, repair, care, pear, bear : air, are, ere, ear

/ʊə/ sure, cure, rural, furious, Europe, tourist : u, ure, or eu.

ear	ear	tour	two	dared	dead
hear	hair	sure	shoe	blared	bled
beer	bear	cure	queue	Mary	merry
feer	fair	steward	stewed	fairy	ferry

