



English Pronunciation

Barbara Howarth

A Student's Guide to

Vowel Sounds



Vowel Sounds - Monophthongs

i:	ɪ	ʊ	u:
e	ə	ɜ:	ɔ:
æ	ʌ	ɑ:	ɒ

Monophthongs - High

i:	ɪ	ʊ	u:

Monophthongs - High

The jaw is fairly closed

Vowel Sounds - Low

æ	ʌ	ɑ:	ɒ

Monophthongs - Low

The jaw is open

Monophthongs - Mid

e	ə	ɜ:	ɔ:

Monophthongs - Mid

The jaw is neutral

Monophthongs - Front

i:			
e			
æ			

Monophthongs - Front

The front part of the tongue is positioned forward in the mouth

The front part of the tongue is raised towards the hard palate

The lips are spread out

Monophthongs - Back

			u:
			ɔ:
			ɒ

Monophthongs - Back

The back part of the tongue is positioned towards the back of the mouth

The back part of the tongue is raised towards the soft palate

The lips are rounded

Monophthongs - Central

	ɪ	ʊ	
	ə	ɜ:	
	ʌ	ɑ:	

Monophthongs – Central

The central part of the tongue is positioned centrally in the mouth

The central part of the tongue is raised towards the area along the hard and soft palate

The lips are neutral but..

quite spread in /ɪ/

quite rounded in /ʊ/

Vowel Sounds – Diphthongs

Iə	eɪ	
ʊə	ɔɪ	əʊ
eə	aɪ	aʊ

Diphthongs – Centring (to /ə/)

Iə		
ʊə		
eə		

Diphthongs – Centring (to /ə/)

The vowel sound 'glides' (i.e. moves) from one sound: /ɪ/, /ʊ/, or /e/ to the central vowel /ə/

This movement occurs within a single syllable

Diphthongs – Gliding to /ɪ/

	eɪ	
	ɔɪ	
	aɪ	

Diphthongs – Gliding to /ɪ/

The vowel sound 'glides' (i.e. moves) from one sound: /e/, /ɔ/, or /a/ to the central vowel /ɪ/

This movement occurs within a single syllable

The vowel /a/ is a low, central vowel. It does not exist as a single vowel in English

The pronunciation of /a/ is somewhere between /ʌ/ and /ɑː/

Diphthongs – Gliding to /ʊ/

		əʊ
		aʊ

Diphthongs – Gliding to /ʊ/

The vowel sound 'glides' (i.e. moves) from one sound: /ə/, or /a/ to the central vowel /ʊ/

This movement occurs within a single syllable



References:

Underhill, A. (1994). *Sound Foundations*. Heinemann

For further practice see:

Hancock, M. (2003). *English Pronunciation in Use*. Cambridge University Press

Web-link to EFL Tutoring – Vowel Charts

<http://www.efltutoring.com/>

