

The Vowel Sound

1. Definition

Vowels can be defined as continuous voiced sounds, which are articulated without any obstruction of the airstream at any point in the vocal tract. When produced these sounds are unaccompanied by any type of frictional noise.

2. Classification of Vowels

Vowels are classified in terms of :

a) Length or duration of production into : short vowels (/ɪ/ /e/ /æ/ /ə/ /ʊ/ /ɒ/ /ʌ/) and long vowels (/i:/ /ɜ:/ /ɑ:/ /u:/ /ɔ:/) ,

b) Tenseness of muscles into **tense** vowels which are produced with tight muscles and **lax** vowels that are produced with relaxed vowels .

N.B. Tense vowels are usually longer than lax vowels.

c) The Shape of the lips into **rounded** vowels (produced with round lips) and **unrounded** vowels (produced with spread or neutral lips) ,



Lips spread



Lips neutral



Lips open rounded



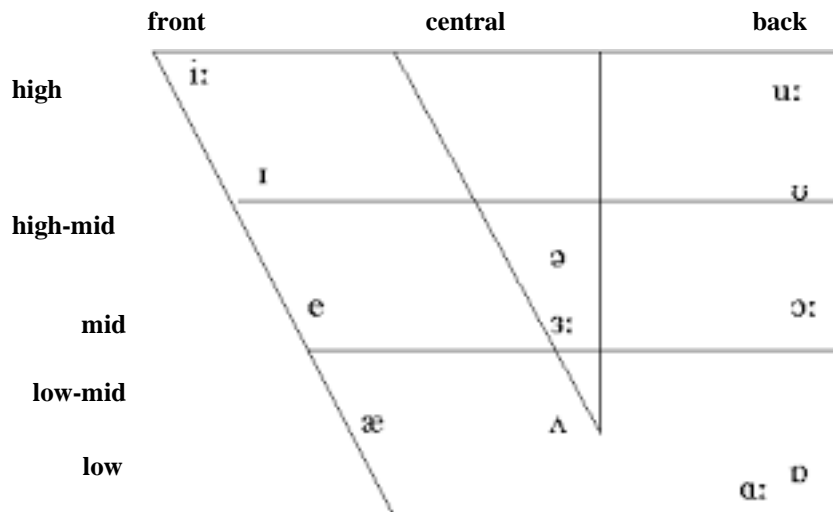
Lips close rounded

d) The position of the tongue up to down (vertically) (high , half-high , mid , half-low , and low) and forward to backward (horizontally) :

Heightness (high/ half-high/mid/half-low/low)	Frontness / Backness (Front/central/back)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How high or low is the tongue from the roof of the mouth ? ➤ The space between the tongue and the roof 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How front or back is the tongue in the mouth ? ➤ Which part of the tongue is involved to

<p>of the mouth.</p>	<p>produce a vowel sound, the front or the back ?</p> <p>If the front is raised, the body of the tongue will be pushed forward to produce front vowels.</p> <p>If the back is raised towards the velum, the body of the tongue will be pulled backward to produce back vowels.</p> <p>If neither the front nor the back is used, central vowels are produced</p>
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➤ **Classification of vowel sounds according to the position of the tongue**



N.B. 1. You may find in some references “close” and “open” instead of “high” and “low” respectively: close = high, close-mid=high-mid, open-mid=low-mid, open=low

2. Front vowels tend to be **unrounded** vowels and back vowels tend to be **rounded**.

Exercices:

1. Write the phonetic symbols of the vowel sounds in the words below:

seem, half, ill, hat, heat, believe, pool, store, said, ring, cut, card, learn, pot

2. **Circle and write the symbol for each vowel sound in the words below that matches the description given:**

a) **a high rounded vowel:** hot, root, shore, rule, foot

b) **a low unrounded vowel:** rat, unhappy, let, than, art

c) **a mid-lax vowel:** set, certain, connect, link, belt

d) **a mid-central vowel:** fur, pertain, wet, fit, painter

3. **Complete the definitions below:**

a)vowels are articulated with the front of the tongue raised towards the highest point in the mouth.

b)vowels are articulated with the body of the tongue pulled backward in the mouth.

c)vowels are produced with a spread or neutral lips.

d)vowels are articulated with tight muscles.

e)vowels are produced with the tongue in rest position and neutral lips.