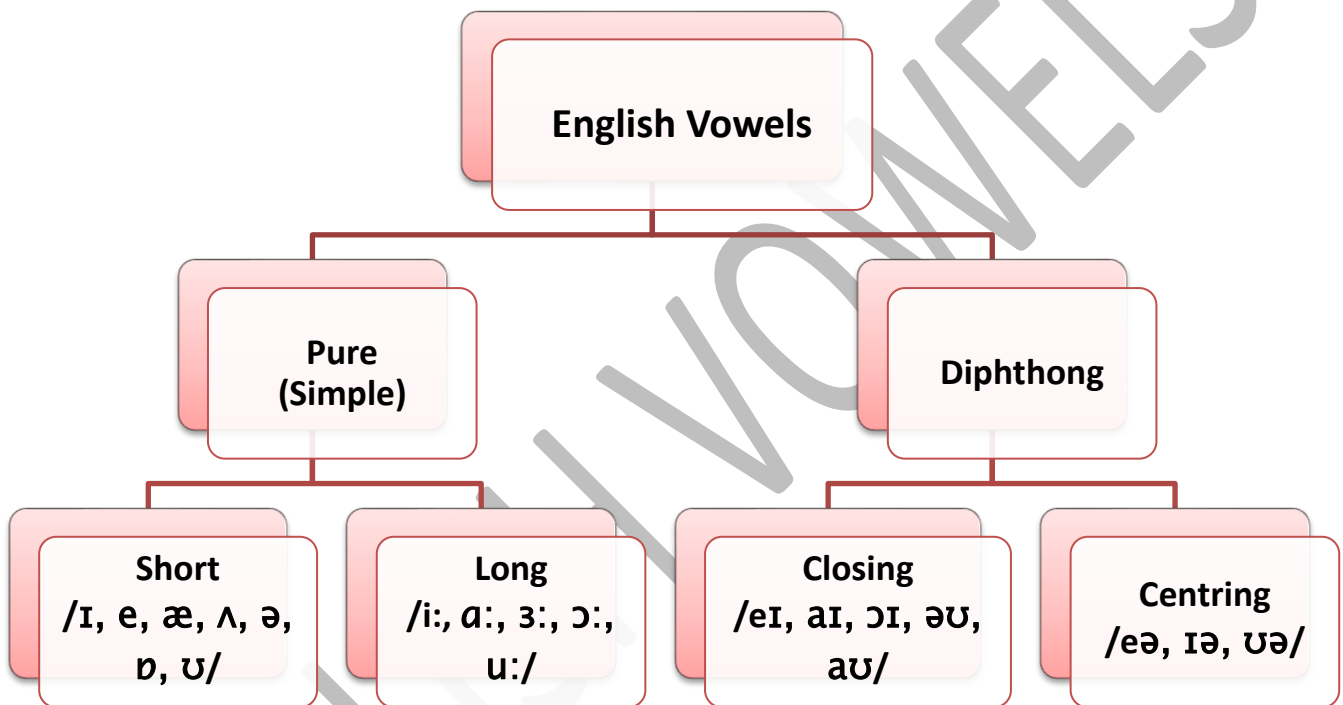


English Vowels

A vowel sound is a speech sound which is produced without any obstruction in the mouth. For all the vowel sounds, THE SOFT PALATE IS RAISED. Regarding the activity of the vocal cords, the vocal cords vibrate during the articulation of the vowels. All the vowel sounds are voiced, except when occurring after /p, t, k/, they lose their voicing feature either partially or completely. In other words, they become devoiced when occurring after /p, t, k/, and are released with a very slight friction. The English vowels are as follows:



The criteria according to which English vowels can be classified include tongue height, tongue parts and lip shapes; they are as follows:

1. Tongue height refers to the vertical distance between the tongue (the upper surface of the tongue) and the palate (the roof of the mouth). Tongue height can be changed by moving the tongue up and down. Accordingly, vowels can be classified either as close, close-mid, open-mid or open.
2. Tongue part refers to the part of the tongue responsible for the production of a particular vowel, for example, if a vowel is articulated by using the tongue-front, it is called a front vowel.
3. Lip shapes refer to the three main shapes the lips may take. They can either spread (extended) as for /i:/, rounded as for /ɔ:/ or neutral as for /ɜ:/.

English Pure Vowels

They consist of only one vowel sound which is either short or long. The length is indicated by using two dots (:) after the pure long vowel. Look the examples in your textbook. They are illustrated on the diagram below:

A. Pure Short Vowels;

1. /ɪ/ is a close front vowel. The lips are slightly spread. For example, fish /fɪʃ/.
2. /e/ is a close front vowel. The lips are slightly spread. For example, set /set/.
3. /æ/ is more open than and is a front vowel. The lips are slightly spread. For example, cat /kæt/.
4. /ʌ/ is more open than open-mid tongue height and is a central vowel. The lips are neutral. For example, cut /kʌt/.
5. /ɒ/ lies between open-mid and open tongue heights and is a back vowel. The lips are slightly rounded. For example, pot /pɒt/.
6. /ʊ/ is a close back vowel. The lips are rounded. For example, put /pʊt/.
7. /ə/ lies between close-mid and open-mid tongue heights and is a central vowel. The lips are neutral. For example, obey /ə'beɪ/.

B. Pure Long Vowels:

1. /i:/ is a close front vowel. The lips are slightly spread. For example, seat /si:t/.
2. /ɜ:/ lies between close-mid and open-mid tongue heights and is a central vowel the lips are neutral. For example, purse /pɜ:s/.
3. /ɑ:/ is an open back vowel. The lips are neutral. For example, card /kɑ:d/.
4. /ɔ:/ is nearer to close-mid tongue height and is a back vowel. The lips are strongly rounded. For example, port /pɔ:t/.
5. /u:/ is a close back vowel. The lips are moderately rounded. For example, pool /pu:l/.

Diphthongs

A diphthong is a vowel sound which consists of a smooth and quick glide from one vowel to another. That is, it is constituted of two vowels (elements or parts); and the first part is usually made longer than the second one. However, the two parts are treated as one long vowel. Diphthongs can be further classified into closing diphthongs ending either with the close front /ɪ/ or close back /ʊ/, and centring diphthongs ending with the central vowel /ə/. Look at the examples in your textbook. The positions of these vowels are best illustrated on the following diagram.

ENGLISH VOWELS