

Introduction to British English Pronunciation

Welcome to the British Accent & Pronunciation Workshop! The purpose of this workshop is to help you understand the basics of how to articulate the sounds of British English in a native-like manner.

Vowel Sounds in British English:

- Short vowels
- Long vowels
- Diphthong vowels

There are seven short vowel sounds, five long vowel sounds and eight diphthong vowel sounds in British English. Long vowel sounds are represented by two triangles to the right of the symbol in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Monophthongs are defined as vowels that have a single perceived auditory quality. Diphthong vowels are a combination of two monophthongs.

The sounds used in your native language are likely to differ from the sounds used in British English. This can result in a perceived foreign accent when speaking English. However, by learning the sounds of British English and the positioning of the articulators, you can improve your pronunciation.

Tools for Understanding British English Pronunciation

- International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)
- Monophthong Chart

The vowel sound chart helps us identify the position of the tip of the tongue for each vowel sound. The position of the tongue affects the shape of the mouth and the type of vowel sound produced. Open vowel sounds result from a lowered tongue and a more open jaw, while close vowel sounds result from a raised tongue and a closed jaw.

The English alphabet is not phonetic, making it difficult for non-native speakers to accurately pronounce words. The IPA symbols, however, provide a more reliable method for identifying sounds and can be found next to the spelling in a dictionary.

Articulators

- Mouth
- Tongue
- Lips
- Teeth

In addition to the vocal cords, the articulators and the lungs play a crucial role in articulating sounds and speech. The position of the tip of the tongue affects the movement of the mouth and lips. Front vowel sounds tend to stretch the bottom lip, while central vowel sounds result in relaxed facial muscles and the back vowel sounds tend to push the lips outwards.

The Schwa Sound /ə/ and the Long Vowel Sound /ɜ:/

The schwa sound /ə/ and the long vowel sound /ɜ:/ are both mid-central vowels. The schwa sound /ə/ is the short version of the /ɜ:/ sound.

The schwa sound /ə/ is the most common sound in English and appears in unstressed syllables in words with two or more syllables. This sound can also be used in weaker forms for natural rhythm in speech. The long vowel sound /ɜ:/ appears in single and multi-syllable words and is used by native English speakers when pausing or transitioning between sentences.

Exercise: Take a moment to think about the sound you make when pausing and thinking in your native language. Consider the position of your tongue and which facial muscles you tend to use.

The Near-Open Front Unrounded Vowel Sound /æ/

The near-open front unrounded vowel sound (IPA /æ/) is produced by stretching the bottom lip wide and open as if biting into something. The short vowel sound /æ/ can be found in words such as "cat", "man", "hand", and "that".

Exercise I: Watch the following video and write down as many words as you can hear containing the /æ/ sound.

Exercise II: Identify words you regularly use that contain the short vowel sound /æ/.

The Near-Open Central Vowel Sound /ʌ/

The near-open central vowel (IPA /ʌ/) is produced by starting from the position of the schwa and slightly dropping the jaw and tongue, resulting in relaxed facial muscles and a relaxed mouth. The short vowel sound /ʌ/ can be found in words such as "love", "mud", "sun", and "none".

Exercise I: Watch the following video and write down as many words as you can hear containing the /ʌ/ sound.

Exercise II: Identify words you regularly use that contain the short vowel sound /ʌ/.

The Open Back Unrounded Vowel Sound /ɑ:/

The open-back unrounded vowel (IPA /ɑ:/) is produced by pushing the tip of the tongue down and back, resulting in a vertical oval shape with the chin slightly down. This long vowel sound can be found in words such as "car", "heart", "far", and "path".

Exercise I: Watch the following video and write down as many words as you can hear containing the /ɑ:/ sound.

Exercise II: Identify words you regularly use that contain the short vowel sound /ɑ:/.

Further resources & materials are available at: <http://www.mypronunciation.co.uk>