

**University of Tikrit**

**College of Education for Human Sciences**

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## **Long Vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs**

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## 1 .Introduction

Vowels are essential in English pronunciation because they carry syllable weight, stress patterns, and rhythm. English vowels differ by length, tongue position, lip shape, and dynamic quality.

This chapter focuses on:

- Long vowels
- Short vowels (for comparison)
- Diphthongs (two-part vowel sounds)
- Triphthongs (three-part vowel sequences)

Mastering these vowels is crucial for intelligibility, natural speech, and IPA transcription.

## 2 .Short and Long Vowels

### 2.1 Short Vowels

/ɪ/ – as in sit, hit – brief, front vowel

/e/ – as in bed, pen – mid-front vowel

/æ/ – as in cat, man – low-front vowel

/ʌ/ – as in cup, luck – mid-central, unstressed vowel

/ɒ/ – as in hot, dog – low-back vowel (British English)

/ʊ/ – as in put, good – high-back, short vowel

/ə/ – as in about, sofa – schwa, very short and unstressed

Teaching Tip: Short vowels are usually in unstressed syllables. Students should pronounce quickly but clearly.

### 2.2 Long Vowels

/i:/ – as in see, machine – high-front, tense, sustained

/ɑ:/ – as in father, start – low-back, long vowel

/ɔ:/ – as in saw, law – mid-back, rounded

/u:/ – as in food, true – high-back, long, rounded

/ɜ:/ – as in bird, learn – mid-central, stressed

Tip: Long vowels contrast with short vowels. Minimal pair examples: ship / sheep, pull / pool. Hold the vowel and pay attention to tongue tension and lip rounding.

### 3 .Diphthongs

Diphthongs are vowel glides: two vowel qualities in one syllable.

#### 3.1 Centring Diphthongs (glide toward /ə/):

/ɪə/ – as in here, near – front → central

/eə/ – as in care, hair – mid-front → central

/ʊə/ – as in poor, tour – back → central

#### 3.2 Closing Diphthongs (glide upward):

/eɪ/ – as in day, say – mid-front → high-front

/aɪ/ – as in my, light – low-front → high-front

/ɔɪ/ – as in boy, coin – mid-back → high-front

/aʊ/ – as in now, cow – low-front → high-back

/əʊ/ – as in go, home – central → high-back

Tip: Students should practice the glide smoothly. Stress usually falls on the first part. Use minimal pairs for practice.

#### 4 .Triphthongs

Triphthongs are three-part gliding vowels in one syllable. They are dynamic and complex.

/aɪə/ – as in fire, higher – low-front → high-front → central

/aʊə/ – as in hour, flower – low-front → high-back → central

/eɪə/ – as in player, mayor – mid-front → high-front → central

Tip: Break into diphthong + schwa first, then blend smoothly. Usually appear in stressed syllables.

#### 5 .Minimal Pairs to Distinguish Vowels

ship / sheep – /ɪ/ vs /i:/

pull / pool – /ʊ/ vs /u:/

cat / cart – /æ/ vs /ɑ:/

Exercise: Repeat slowly, noticing tongue height, lip rounding, and duration.

#### 6 .Vowel Length vs Quality

- Length is not just duration.

/ • i:/ (long) is also tenser and higher than /ɪ/ (short).

- Practice holding long vowels and contrast with short vowels.

#### 7 .Vowel Reduction and Unstressed Syllables

In unstressed syllables, vowels often reduce to /ə:/

- photograph → /'fəʊtəgrɑ:f/
- photography → /fə'tɒgrəfi/

Tip: Teach students how stress affects vowel length and quality.

## 8 .Vowel Chart Reference

- Front vowels: /i:, ɪ, e, æ/
- Central vowels: /ɜ:, ə, ʌ/
- Back vowels: /u:, ʊ, ɔ:, ɑ:/

Tip: Use the chart to locate tongue height and backness, and practice diphthong/triphthong movements.

## 9 .Classroom Exercises

- .1 Minimal pairs – ship / sheep, pull / pool, cat / cart
- .2 Diphthong identification – listen to: boy, cow, go, care
- .3 Triphthong blending – break into diphthong + schwa: /aɪ/ + /ə/ → /aɪə/
- .4 Transcription practice – words: day, night, flower, player

## 10 .Summary

Short vowels – brief, unstressed

Long vowels – sustained, full-quality, often stressed

Diphthongs – two-part gliding vowels in one syllable

Triphthongs – three-part gliding vowels in one syllable

Key skills – pronunciation, IPA transcription, minimal pair distinction