

Long vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs

Chapter Three

Q1\ Draw a diagram showing the place of long vowels.

Q2\ Describe the place of long vowels.

English long vowels

- There are five long vowels in English.

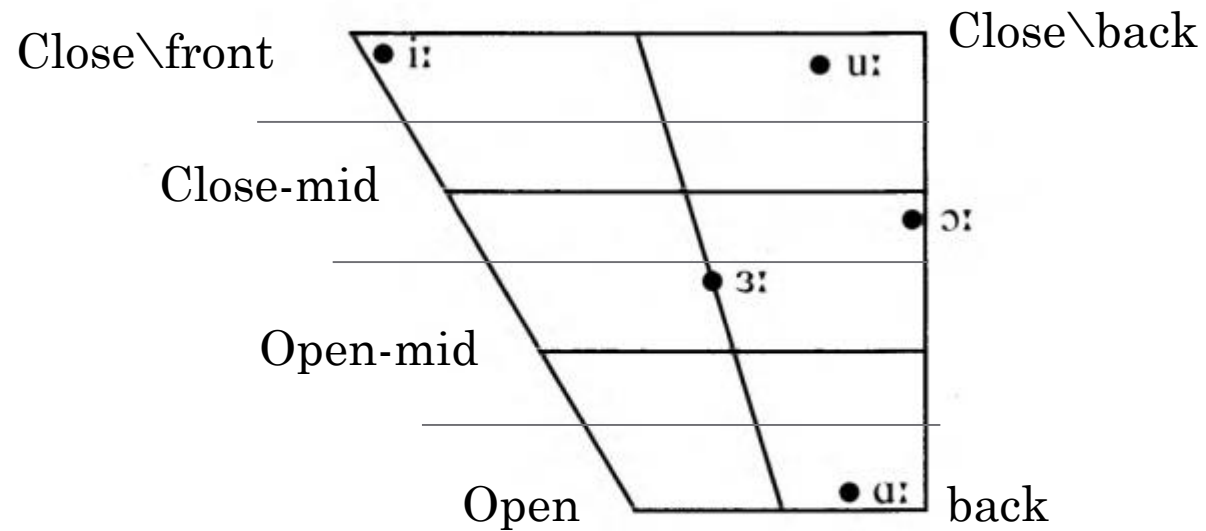


Fig. 6 English long vowels

Check each word in the dictionary and listen how the vowel is pronounced

- i:** (example words: 'beat', 'mean', 'peace') This vowel is nearer to cardinal vowel no. 1 [i] (i.e. it is closer and more front) than is the short vowel of 'bid', 'pin', 'fish' described in Chapter 2. Although the tongue shape is not much different from cardinal vowel no. 1, the lips are only slightly spread and this results in a rather different vowel quality.
- ɜ:** (example words: 'bird', 'fern', 'purse') This is a mid-central vowel which is used in most English accents as a hesitation sound (written 'er'), but which many learners find difficult to copy. The lip position is neutral.
- ɑ:** (example words: 'card', 'half', 'pass') This is an open vowel in the region of cardinal vowel no. 5 [ɑ], but not as back as this. The lip position is neutral.
- ɔ:** (example words: 'board', 'torn', 'horse') The tongue height for this vowel is between cardinal vowel no. 6 [ɔ] and no. 7 [o], and closer to the latter. This vowel is almost fully back and has quite strong lip-rounding.
- u:** (example words: 'food', 'soon', 'loose') The nearest cardinal vowel to this is no. 8 [u], but BBC u: is much less back and less close, while the lips are only moderately rounded.

Examples

- **i:** \ Beat, mean, peace
- **ɜ:** \ Bird, fern, purse, burn
- **a:** \ card, half, pass
- **ɔ:** \ horse, board, torn
- **u:** \ food, soon, loose

Diphthongs

- **Diphthongs** are sounds which consist of a movement or glide from one vowel to another.
- The total number of diphthongs is eight (though *oa* is increasingly rare). The easiest way to remember them is in terms of three groups divided as in this diagram (Fig. 7):

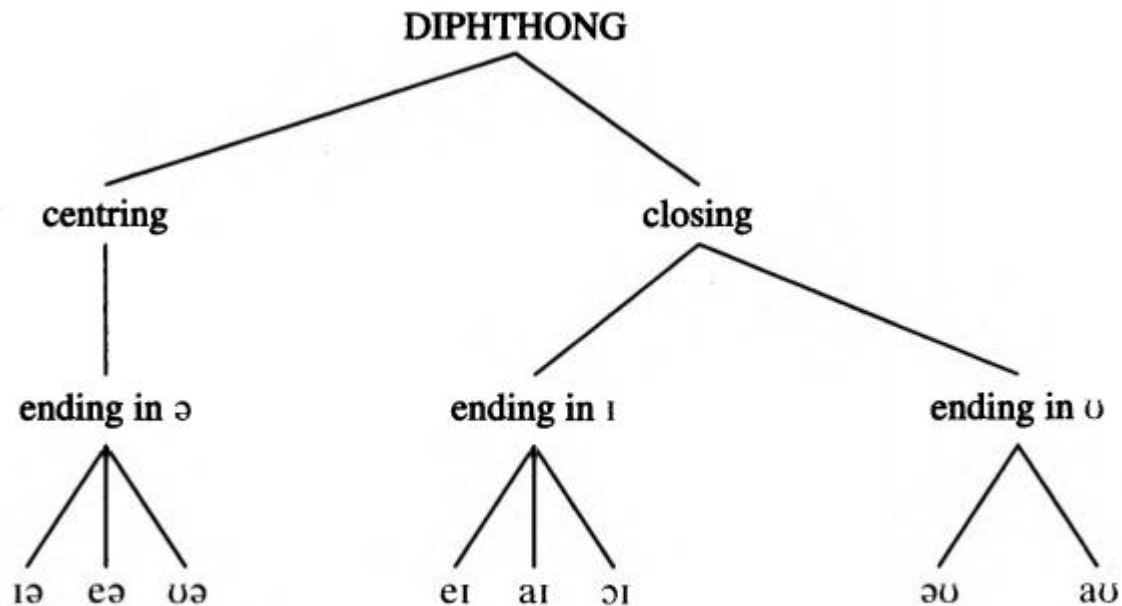


Fig. 7 Diphthongs

Centring diphthongs

- The centring diphthongs glide towards the ə (schwa) vowel.

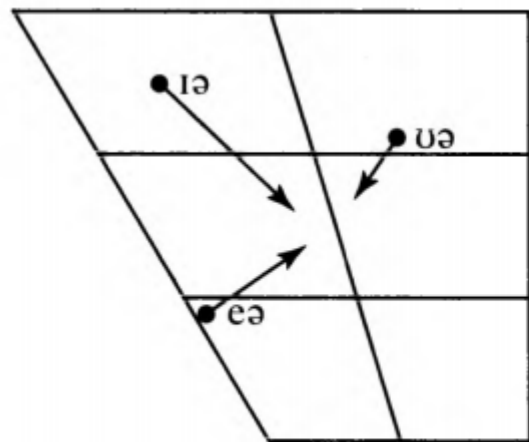


Fig. 8 Centring diphthongs

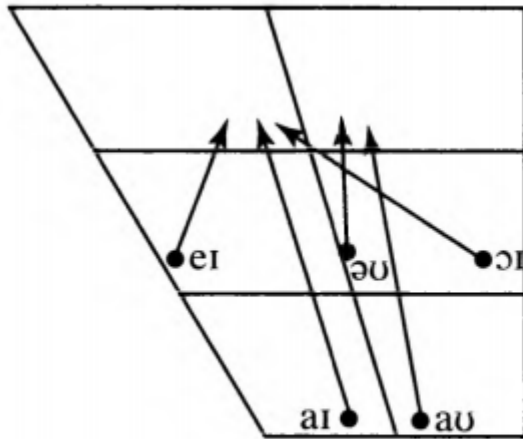
- - iə (example words: 'beard', 'weird', 'fierce') The starting point is a little closer than ɪ in 'bit', 'bin'.
 - eə (example words: 'aired', 'cairn', 'scarce') This diphthong begins with a vowel sound that is more open than the e of 'get', 'men'.
 - uə (example words: 'moored', 'tour', 'lure') For speakers who have this diphthong, this has a starting point similar to u in 'put', 'pull'. Many speakers pronounce ɔ: instead.

Centring

- ɪə\ beard, weird\ fierce
- eə\ aired\cain\ scarce
- ʊə\ moored\tour\ lure

Closing diphthongs

- The closing diphthongs have the characteristic that they all end with a glide towards a closer vowel.



eɪ (example words: 'paid', 'pain', 'face') The starting point is the same as the e of 'get', 'men'.

aɪ (example words: 'tide', 'time', 'nice') This diphthong begins with an open vowel which is between front and back; it is quite similar to the ʌ of the words 'cut', 'bun'.

ɔɪ (example words: 'void', 'loin', 'voice') The first part of this diphthong is slightly more open than ɔ: in 'ought', 'born'.

Fig. 9 Closing diphthongs

Closing diphthongs

Two diphthongs glide towards u , so that as the tongue moves closer to the roof of the mouth there is at the same time a rounding movement of the lips. This movement is not a large one, again because the second part of the diphthong is weak.

- $\text{ə}u$ (example words: 'load', 'home', 'most') The vowel position for the beginning of this is the same as for the "schwa" vowel ə , as found in the first syllable of the word 'about'. The lips may be slightly rounded in anticipation of the glide towards u , for which there is quite noticeable lip-rounding.
- $\text{a}u$ (example words: 'loud', 'gown', 'house') This diphthong begins with a vowel similar to $\text{a}i$. Since this is an open vowel, a glide to u would necessitate a large movement, and the tongue often does not reach the u position. There is only slight lip-rounding.

Closing diphthongs

- eɪ\ pay\ pain\ face
- aɪ\ tide\ time \ nice
- ɔɪ\ voice\ void\ loin
- əʊ\ load\ home\ most
- aʊ\ loud\ gown\ house

Triphthongs

- A triphthong is a glide from one vowel to another and then to a third, all produced rapidly and without interruption.
- The triphthongs can be looked on as being composed of the five closing diphthongs described in the last section, with ə added on the end.
- There are five triphthongs in English. These are shown below.
- Use the dictionary and imitate their pronunciation.

eɪə 'layer', 'player'

aɪə 'liar', 'fire'

ɔɪə 'loyal', 'royal'

əʊə 'lower', 'mower'

aʊə 'power', 'hour'