

## Vowels and consonants

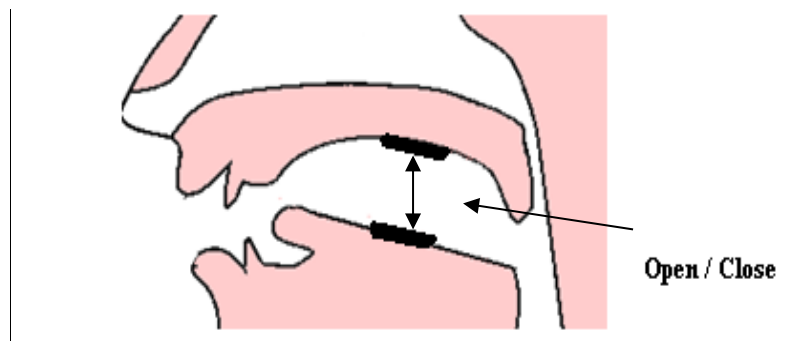
The sounds of the language may be consonants or vowels. These sounds are classified according to the way they are produced (the way they are made).

- **Consonants** are produced with an obstruction to the flow of the air and **vowels** are made without any obstruction of the air. However, there are some cases where the distinction between consonants and vowels is not obvious. Sounds like /j / as in the word “yet” and /w/ in the word “way” were objects of disagreement and uncertainty. Some phoneticians said that these are consonants; others believe that they are vowels since there is not a clear obstruction of air. To avoid this disagreement, sounds (consonants and vowels) may be classified in another way rather than the way they are made. Sounds should be classified according to their position in a word (their distribution in language). Thus /h/ can be considered as consonant and not as a vowel simply because in general it is followed by a consonant.

1. **English vowels:** when we deal with vowels, it is important to know how these vowels differ from each other. For this reason it is important to consider two main articulators:

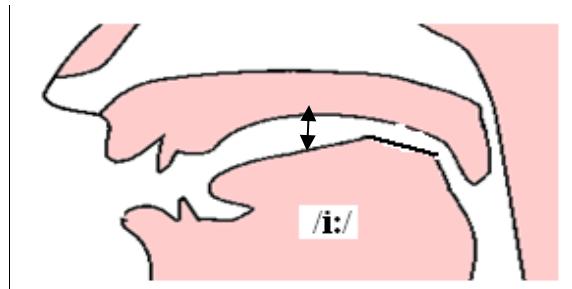
- 1) The tongue
- 2) The lips.

Vowels are classified according to the tongue height i.e. the vertical distance between the upper surface of the tongue and the palate (which is called: close and open).

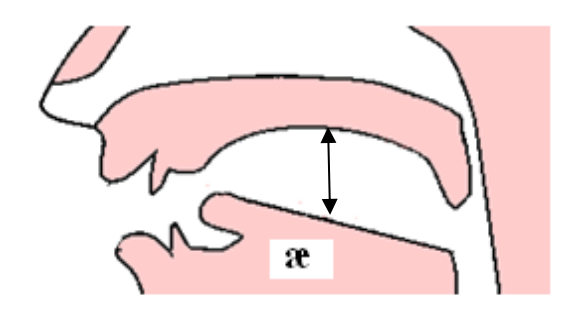


Vowels are also classified according to the back and front of the tongue (the part of the tongue between front and back which is raised), and the lips' position (spread, neutral, or rounded).

**Close vowels:** /i:/ of meat is indeed a close vowel. It is called as such because the tongue is held-up close to the roof of the mouth.



**Open vowels:** /æ/ of cat is said to be an open vowel because the distance between the surface of the tongue and the roof of the mouth is much greater than with the production of /i:/.

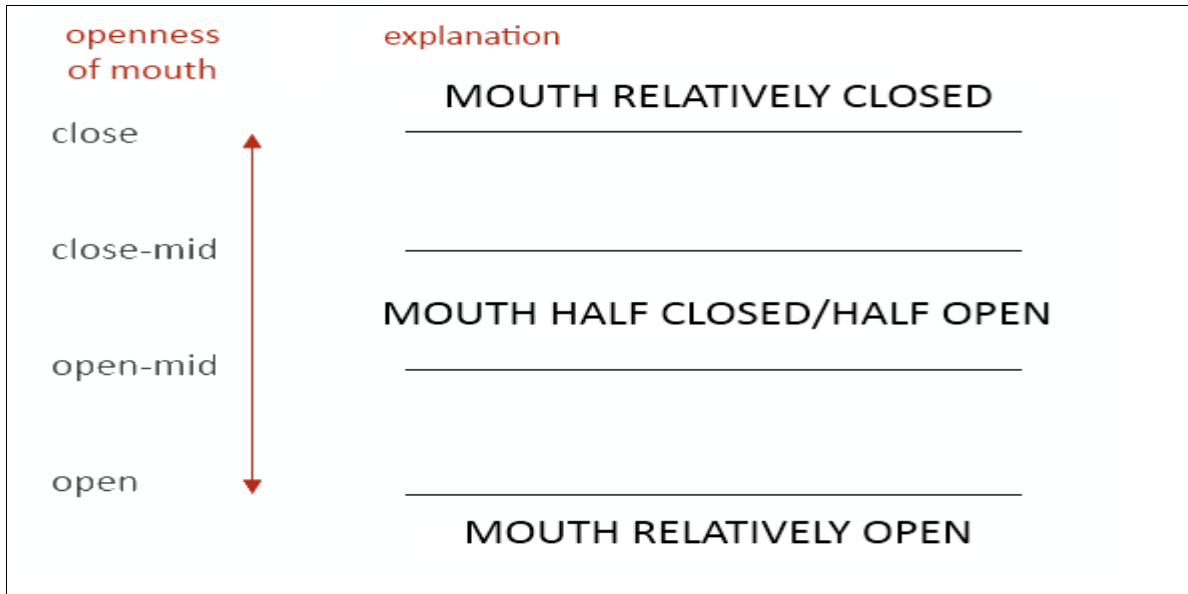


**Front vowels:** in making the two vowels described above, it is the front part of the tongue which is raised. We could therefore describe /i:/ and /æ/ as: Front vowels.

**Back vowels:** if you make a vowel like /ɑ:/ of calm, it is visible that it is the back of the tongue which is raised. /ɑ:/ is therefore a Back vowel.

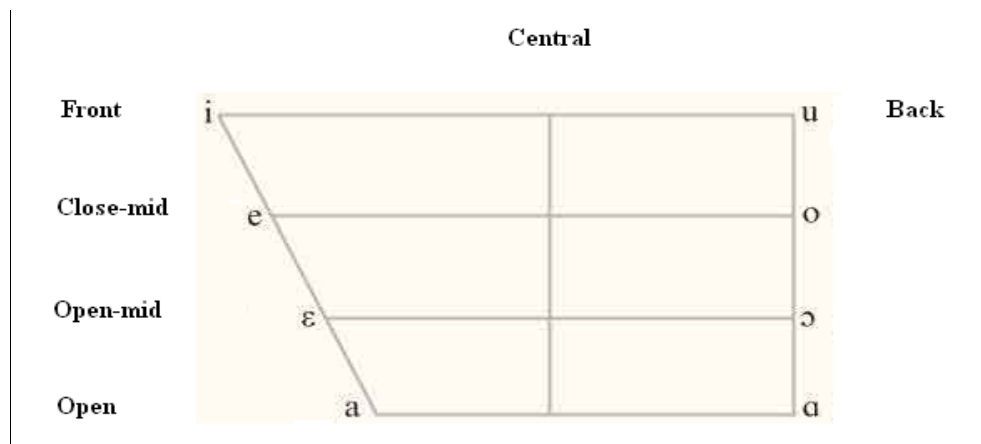
/u:/ is also a back vowel, but compared with /ɑ:/ it is close.

Vowels are also classified as mid-open and mid-close, as it is shown in the following diagram:



Source: Vowel Parameters SLT-info

**Primary Cardinal Vowels:** are a set of standard reference vowels that phoneticians use to describe, classify, and compare the sounds of languages.



Primary Cardinal Vowels

