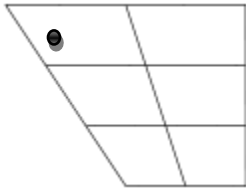
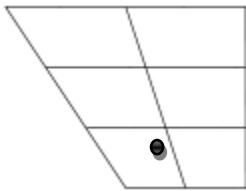


## The Classification of the English Vowels

### 1. The Classification of the English short vowels

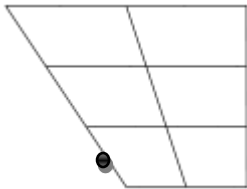


**/ɪ/** in a word like in the word “bit”, “fit”, and “sit” is a close, front vowel with lips slightly spread. If we compare it to the cardinal vowel / **ɪ** /, it is more open and nearer to the center.



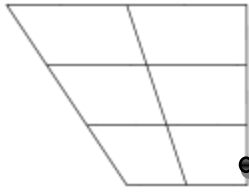
**/ʌ/** like in the words: but, some, rush...

This is a central vowel. It is between mid-open & open. The lip position is neutral.



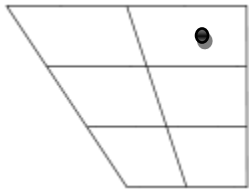
**/æ/** like in the words: fat, man.

This is a front vowel. It is open. The lips are slightly spread.



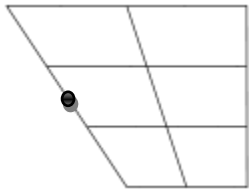
**/ɒ/** Example words : gone, cross...

This is a back vowel and between mid-open and open in tongue height. The lips are slightly rounded.



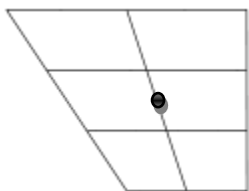
**/ʊ/** Example words: put, full, push.

The nearest cardinal vowel is [u], but it can be seen that is more open and nearest to central. The lips are rounded.



**/e/** like in the words bet, men, yes...

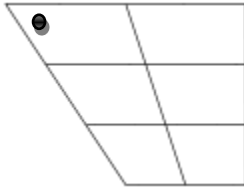
This is a front vowel between the cardinal vowel /e/ & /ɜ/. The lips are slightly spread /e/ is between mid-close and mid-open.



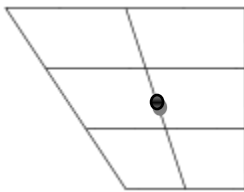
**/ə/** of at is a central vowel. It is between mid-close and mid-open in the

tongue height. The lips are neutral.

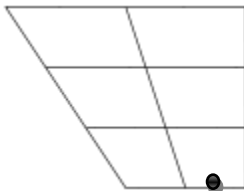
## 2. The Classification of the English Long Vowels



**/i:/** This vowel is closer and more front than the short /ɪ/. The lips are only spread.



**/ɜ:/** Example words: bird, girl, purse... This is a central vowel. It is between mid-close and mid-open (but nearest a mid-open). The lip position is neutral.



**/ɑ:/** Example words: card, half, pass... This is an open vowel in the region of cardinal vowel [ɑ], but not as back as this. The lip position is neutral.



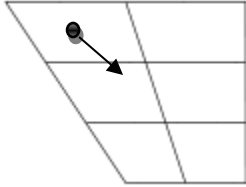
**/ɔ:/** Example words: board, tone, horse... This is a back vowel. It is between mid-close and mid-open. The lips are strongly rounded.



**/u:/** Example words: food, soon, loose... A back vowel. It is close. The lips are moderately rounded.

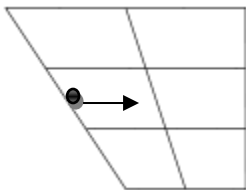
### 3. Diphthongs: Diphthongs are of two types:

- a. **Centering Diphthongs:** the diphthongs ending in /ə/ are called centering diphthong as they glide toward the /ə/ as the symbols indicate.



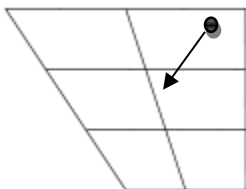
/ɪə/ Example words: beard, fierce

The starting point is a little closer than /ɪ/ in “bit”, “bin”.



/eə/ Example words: aired, scarce

This diphthong begins with the same vowel sound as /e/ of “get”, “men”



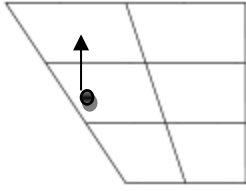
/ʊə/ Example words : four, moored...

This is a starting point slightly closer than ʊ in “put”, “pull”...

- b. **Closing Diphthongs:** closing diphthongs have the characteristic that they all end with a glide towards a closer vowel.

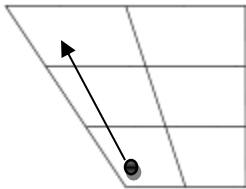
The second part of the diphthong is weak; they often do not reach a position that could be called close. The important thing is that a glide from a relatively more open to a relatively closer vowel is produced.

Three of the diphthongs glide toward /ɪ/, as described below:



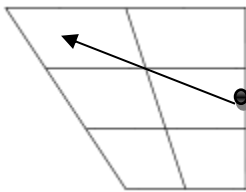
**/eɪ/** Example words: paid, pain...

The starting point is the same as the of get.



**/aɪ/** Example words: tide, time, nice...

This diphthong begins with an open vowel which is between front & back, it is quite similar to the /ʌ/ of the words “cut”, “bun”...

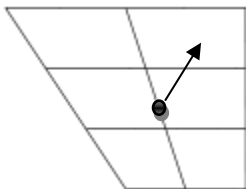


**/ɔɪ/** Example words: void, voice...

The first part of this diphthong has the same quality as /ɔ:/ of born

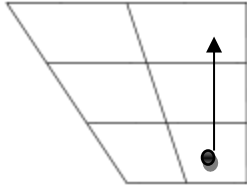
Two of the diphthongs glide toward /ʊ/: the tongue moves closer of the roof of the mouth there is at the same time a rounding movement of the lips.

This movement is not a large one, again because the second part of the diphthong is weak.



**/əʊ/** Example words: load, home, most...

The initial vowel is schwa. The lips may be slightly rounded in anticipation of the glide towards /ʊ/ for which is a noticeable lip-rounding.



**/aʊ/** Example words: loud, house...

This diphthong begins with a vowel similar to /a:/. This is an open vowel similar to /ʊ/ but the glide is not completed (the end of the diphthong being somewhere between close-mid and open-mid in tongue height). There is only slight lip rounding.

4. **Triphthongs:** a triphthong is a glide from one vowel to another and then to the third, all produced rapidly and without interruption. For example: The word “hour” begin with a vowel quality similar to /a:/ goes on to a glide towards the back close rounded area (for which we use the symbol /ʊ/), then it ends with a mid-central vowel schwa /ə/.

The triphthongs can be looked as being composed of the five closing diphthongs already described, with / ə / added at the end. Thus, we get:

**eɪ + ə = eɪə**

**əʊ + ə = əʊə**

**aɪ + ə = aɪə**

**aʊ + ə = aʊə**

**ɔɪ + ə = ɔɪə**

## **Bibliography:**

- John Laver, "Linguistic Phonetics." *The Handbook of Linguistics*, ed. by Mark Aronoff and Janie Rees-Miller. Blackwell, 2001
- Peter Roach, *English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course*, 4th ed. Cambridge University Press, 2009
- (Peter Roach, *Phonetics*. Oxford University Press, 2001)
- Katrina Hayward, *Experimental Phonetics: An Introduction*. Routledge, 2014
- The Ball, M. J., Howard, S. J. and Miller, K. (in press). Revisions to the extIPA chart. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*.

