

Learn ALL the Monophthongs in English

i: sheep	ɪ ship	ʊ good	u: shoot
e bed	ə teacher	ɜ: bird	ɔ: door
æ cat	ʌ up	ɑ: far	ɒ on

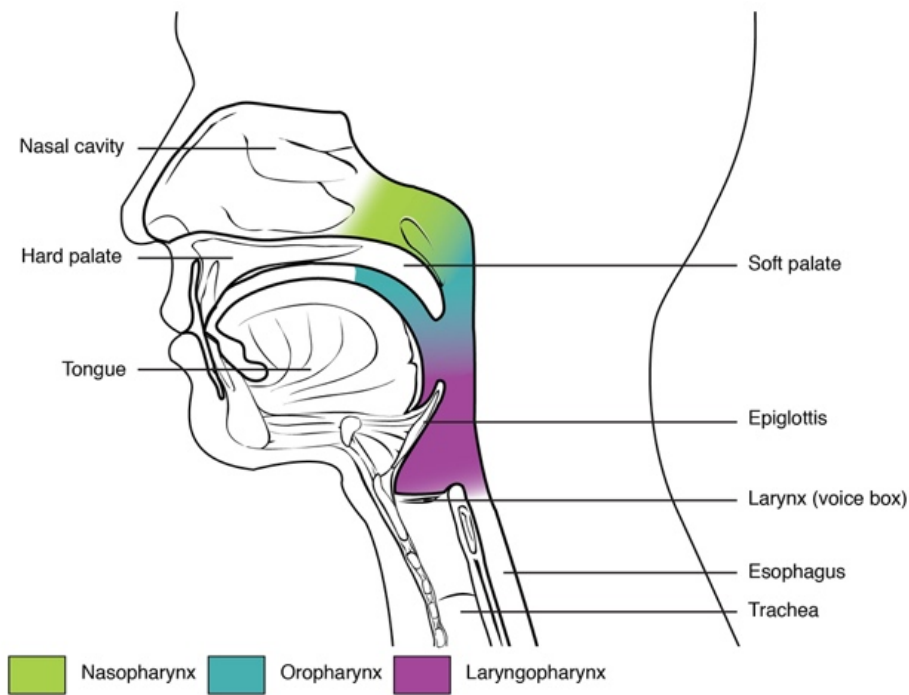
Monophthongs are simple vowel sounds where the tongue remains relatively stable throughout the duration of the sound. In English, there are 12 monophthong sounds, some are long, and some are short, but each has its own unique pronunciation. Mastering these sounds is crucial for clear and effective communication. In this worksheet, we'll explore each monophthong sound and talk about the correct position of your mouth, (tongue, jaw, lips etc) with example exercises and sentences.

It is important to point out that these monophthongs are said here the way they would be said in Standard Southern British English – the pronunciation of these vowel sounds can vary greatly in other regional accents in the UK.

A great tip to make the most of this practice is to do the exercises in front of a mirror to see if you are making the correct mouth shape and that your tongue and jaw are in the right position.

I. /æ/ - "Trap"

Example Words: cat, bat, mat, sat, latter, matter, apple, dangle, angry



This is a short vowel so it is roughly half the length of a long monophthong like 'ee' in beach and roughly half the length of a diphthong. It is usually represented by the letter 'a'. It is a short sound which is produced about midway in the throat and you can feel the sound being projected from the back of the throat. It has what we call a mid-note quality, not too high not so low.

Note: In the north of England more words have a short a sound here are a few examples: 'a' sound : laugh, bath, giraffe, grass, glass, master, task, nasty

Mouth position

The mouth is open and relaxed with a slight spread at the corners of the mouth. The tongue is flat and will sit behind the bottom teeth, the back of the tongue, (also known as the hump of the tongue is slightly forward, there is some tension in the back of the tongue).

Example Sentences:

The cat sat on the mat and stared at the bats eating the apples.

She was angry that I put the bat in the bag and took off the tag.

2. /e/ - "dress"

Example Words: bet, said, met, dead, letter, enemy, feather, weather,

This is a short vowel sound which is often represented by the letter 'e' like in 'bet' but also by 'ea' as in 'head', and it also can be 'ai' as in 'said'.

Mouth position:

It is made slightly higher up in the throat giving it a slightly higher pitch than 'æ'. The lips are spread a little bit, and the hump of the tongue is slightly forward and raised. The tip of the tongue will sit behind the bottom teeth. In a similar way to 'a' you can feel the sound coming from the back of the throat area but bringing in a little bit more air in the nose which gives it that slight nasal quality.

Example Sentences:



*The vet said that if the cat gets wet she will be an unhappy pet.
Have you met Fred yet?*

3. /ɪ/ - "kit"

Example words: bit, sit, swim, thin, minute, busy, listen, grin,

This is one of the hardest sounds to locate as many languages do not have this sound it is somewhere between short /e/ and long eee but it is much lower in pitch than long e. It is a short monophthong. It is often

represented by the letter 'i' as in 'fish' and 'swim' but it can be spelt with a 'u' as in 'busy' and 'minute' or an 'e' as in 'English'.

Mouth position:

There is tension in the back of the throat to make this vowel. The hump of the tongue is forward and high but slightly back from the gum ridge. The lips are spread a little bit but the mouth is open.

Example Sentences:

You can eat chips on the ship but not on the pitch.

Jim sits too much that is why he is not slim.

4. /ɒ/ - "lot"

Example Words: hot, not, got, cotton, lot, yacht, swan.

This is a short monophthong which is represented by the 'o' letter very often, but not always, it can be represented by 'a' as well as in 'yacht' and 'swan'

Mouth position:

Your cheeks will be hollowed with the lips being apart and gently rounded and coming forward. The resonance is at the back of the mouth, and it has a low quality. The tip of the tongue is relaxed and behind the bottom teeth, there is a slight hump in the back of the tongue.

Example Sentences:

'The black copper coffee pot was on the hob getting hot'.

'The swan was top-notch to dodge the yacht'

5. /ʌ/ - "strut"

Example Words: cup, up, run, bun, butter, done, fun, sun, come, money, blood

This is a short monophthong which is usually represented by 'u' like in 'cup' but it can be represented by 'o' like in 'money' and 'come' and even double o like in 'blood'. Note : accents in the North of England do not have this vowel, it is merged with the vowel in foot, (number 6).

Mouth position: The jaw falls, and the lips and cheeks are neutral and relaxed. The tongue is flat, and the pitch is low but not as low as the long thinking vowel in 'bird'.

Example Sentences:

It is fun to sit in the sun in Dublin.

It is dull without the young blood in the club.

6. /ʊ/ - "foot"

Example Words: put, book, look, cook, pull, full, bull

This is a short vowel, and it is similar to the vowel above, but the pitch is higher. This is the vowel that can confuse learners as they may try and say the long 'ooo' vowel instead but this one is much shorter. You must say this one if you want to distinguish between words such as 'full' and 'fool' or 'pull' and 'pool'.

Mouth position: The lips come forward and are rounded. The tip of the tongue is relaxed and behind the bottom teeth. The hump in the tongue is at the back and raised.

Example Sentences:

I looked at the cookbook that you put on the shelf.

The bull is full but he looked good.

7. "ə," – letter

Example words: banana, happen, enemy, teacher, doctor, family, sofa

This is also known as the schwa sound which means unstressed pronunciation, it is a lazy sound essentially. It is simply the sound the mouth makes in English when it is relaxed. It is the most common vowel sound in the English language, and it is a very versatile vowel sound meaning any vowel in the spelling can be pronounced as a schwa. In sum it is neutral, unstressed, and a mid-central vowel sound. The schwa occurs in unstressed syllables and is found in many words across the English language. Mastery of the schwa sound is essential for clear and natural English pronunciation, as it occurs frequently in English.

Mouth position: Relax your tongue and jaw muscles. Keep your mouth in a neutral position, neither fully open nor fully closed. Allow the sound to be produced in the central part of your mouth, with the tongue in a relaxed, mid-position. Keep the airflow steady and consistent but keep the sound quick and lazy.

Example sentences:

'I am going to the doctor with my sister later.'

'Mr. Porter makes great pasta, but his daughter makes it even better.'



8. /i:/ -fleece

Example words: beach, freeze, teach, leave, reason, league

This is a long vowel sound. It is usually spelt as 'ee' or 'ea' as in 'peace' and 'squeeze'. The vowel has quite a high pitch and is made at the front of the mouth. This is slightly similar to the /ɪ/ vowel sound but much shorter and with a higher pitch. It is confusing for learners though as in many languages these sounds are rolled into one.

Mouth position: The sides of the mouth go outwards into the beginning of a smile, the sides of the tongue squeeze into the top teeth and the lips are slightly spread.

Example sentences:

The breeze from the sea is fresh on the beach.

She is free to climb the tree

Please can you pass me the cheese

9. /ɜ:/ - nurse

Examples words : bird, heard, burn, nurse, third, curve, learn, word, world

The long /ɜ:/ sound, also known as the "nurse" sound in phonetics. This is actually the sound we make when we are thinking. It can be spelt with 'ur' 'er' and 'ir' but also 'ear'. It is the length and depth of this vowel that makes it hard for learners of English.

Mouth position: Place the middle part of your tongue in the middle of your mouth, not touching the roof of your mouth. Your tongue should be relaxed and not tense. Open your mouth slightly: Open your mouth wider than you would for many other vowel sounds, but not as wide as you would for some other sounds like /ɑ:/ (as in "car"). Your lips should be relaxed and not rounded. It is a steady vowel so don't be tempted to add in an 'r' sound even if you see it written in the word- remember British English is non-rhotic. Keep your jaw slightly dropped and relaxed. Avoid tensing your jaw muscles as it can affect the sound quality.

Example sentences:

Have you heard about the bird that spread the word.

Reserve the third shirt.

Are you certain about the purple curtains?

10. /u:/ - goose

Example words: flute, boot, tune, fruit, true, cute, suit, moon, mood

The 'oo' vowel is a long and steady sound and as you can see it can be spelt in a variety of ways. It is made at the front of the mouth and has a mid-tone pitch. It is often spelt with 'oo' but not always it can be just a 'u' like in 'flute' and 'cute', or one of the most confusing spellings for learners of English is 'ui' like in 'fruit' and 'suit'.

Mouth position:

Begin by rounding your lips into a tight circle almost like you are going to kiss someone but the mouth stays a bit open. This is crucial for producing the correct sound quality. Imagine saying "oo" as in "moon" or "blue." Relax your tongue and keep your tongue low and flat in your mouth, resting in a neutral position. Focus on maintaining the rounded lip position throughout the duration of the sound.

Example sentences:

Those boots are so cute.

He wore a blue suit when he was the duty officer.

It is true that when he plays the flute it reflects his mood.

11. /ɑ:/ bath

Example words – heart, car, master, laugh, safari, guitar, bath, grass, giraffe

The /ɑ:/ sound in British English is a long, open back vowel sound. It can be spelt in a variety of ways, but it is often spelt using the letter 'a'. It is the sound that we are asked to make when we go to the dentist as it makes us open our mouth wide. In the North of England this sound is used less as it is often replaced by the short /æ/ sound like in 'cat', in words such as grass, task, bath etc

Mouth position: Begin by opening your mouth quite wide. Relax your jaw muscles. Position your tongue low in your mouth, with the back of your tongue raised towards the soft palate – feeling that little lift in the back of the tongue is key to making this sound correctly.

Allow the sound to resonate from the back of your throat. You must open your mouth quite wide for this sound – a lot of students don't make the sound deep enough and this is due to not opening their mouth wide enough.

Example sentences:

My father doesn't like to dance.

I can't park my car in that car park.

My dog saw the shark and started to bark.

12. /ɔ:/ thought

Caught, taught, law, course, horse, fought, core, poor, draw, saw

The "ɔ:" sound in British English is a long, back, rounded vowel sound. It is spelt in a variety of ways but it is often represented by 'aw' or 'ou'.

Mouth position: The tip of the tongue is relaxed and behind the bottom teeth. The hump of the tongue is raised slightly. The cheeks come in and the lips become gently rounded and come forward. The resonance is at the back of the mouth and it has a low quality. Keep your tongue fairly tense and keep the sound steady.

Example sentences:

I thought I saw a horse

I am not sure if it is a taught course.

Are you sure that you wouldn't like some more?