



ENGLISH LONG AND SHORT VOWELS

جامعة ساوة

كلية التربية

قسم اللغة الانكليزية

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Introduction to Vowels

Vowels are sounds produced without any obstruction of the airstream.

They are voiced and depend on the position of the tongue and lips.

Unlike consonants, vowels allow free airflow.

What Are Short Vowels?

Short vowels: /ɪ/, /e/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɒ/, /ʊ/, /ə/

Examples:

/ɪ/ - *ship*

/e/ - *bed*

/æ/ - *cat*

/ʌ/ - *cup*

/ɒ/ - *hot*

/ʊ/ - *book*

/ə/ - *about*

What Are Long Vowels?

Long vowels: /i:/, /ɑ:/, /ɔ:/, /u:/, /ɜ:/

Examples:

/i:/ - **sheep**

/ɑ:/ - **car**

/ɔ:/ - **four**

/u:/ - **food**

/ɜ:/ - **bird**

Why Do We Have Long Vowels?

Long vowels help make contrasts in meaning:

ship /ɪ/ ≠ **sheep** /i:/

full /ʊ/ ≠ **fool** /u:/

luck /ʌ/ ≠ **lark** /ɑ:/

Length vs. Quality

The difference between long and short vowels is not only time (*duration*).

But also quality.

Quality = tongue shape + tongue position + lip rounding.

Quality: Tongue and Lip Position

Short vowels are more relaxed , long vowels are tenser.

Example :

/ɪ/ - front, near-high

/i:/ - front, high, spread lips

Minimal Pairs Practice

ship /ɪ/ **vs.** **sheep** /iː/

full /ʊ/ **vs.** **fool** /uː/

luck /ʌ/ **vs.** **lark** /ɑː/

Practice listening and repeating each pair.

Common Student Mistakes

- Confusing /ɪ/ and /i:/
- Not holding long vowels long enough
- Over-rounding lips or wrong tongue height

Phonetic Transcription Tips

Always write vowel sounds between slashes / /.

Example: beat /bi:t/, bit /bɪt/.

[] is used for narrow transcription.

Quick Summary Table

Feature | **Short Vowels** | **Long Vowels**

Duration | **Short** | **Long**

Quality | **Relaxed** | **Tense**

Example | **/ɪ/ ship** | **/i:/ sheep**

Factors Affecting the Length of English Vowels

The length of English vowels changes depending on several factors:

1. **Following consonant (voicing):**

- Longer before **voiced consonants** (/b, d, g, v, z/)
- Shorter before **voiceless consonants** (/p, t, k, f, s/)
- Example: *beat* /bi:t/ (short) vs. *bead* /bi:d/ (long)

2. **Stress:**

- Stressed vowels are **longer** than unstressed ones.
- Example: *record* (noun) vs. *record* (verb)

3. **Word position:**

- Vowels are **longer** at the end of a word or in open syllables.
- Example: *see* /si:/ vs. *seat* /si:t/

4. **Speech rate and emphasis:**

- **Slow** or **emphasized** speech makes vowels longer.
- Example: “I said *sheep*, not *ship*!”

Why Do We Use the Length Mark (:) in Long Vowels?

The **length mark** (:) in the **IPA** shows that a vowel is longer in duration and **different in quality** than its short counterpart.

We use the length mark to:

1. Show contrast in meaning

ship /ʃɪp/ vs. *sheep* /ʃi:p/

luck /lʌk/ vs. *lark* /lɑ:k/

The mark (:) helps us know which vowel is long.

2. Indicate correct pronunciation

/i:/ and /ɪ/ are two different vowel **phonemes**, not just one sound made longer.

/u:/ (**fool**) and /ʊ/ (**full**) differ in **length and quality**.

3. Guide learners in phonetic transcription

The mark (:) helps non-native learners pronounce long vowels accurately.

Practice & Discussion

Homework: Find 5 minimal pairs (short vs. long vowels) and practice pronunciation.

Example: **sit**-**seat**, **full**-**fool**, **luck**-**lark**, **bit**-**beat**, **pull**-**pool**.