

International Phonetic Alphabet [IPA]: Basic Vowels Used in English, Latin, and the Romance Languages

Remember that "home position" for *all* vowels is: tongue relaxed in the bottom of the mouth with the tip touching the inside of the lower front two teeth. This is the vowel α , "ah" as in "father", with a tall mouth and tongue in home position.

The four types of vowels:

1. Tongue Vowels, which are formed primarily by movement of the tongue;
2. Lip Vowels, which are formed primarily by rounding of the lips, with the tongue responding to the rounding of the lips;
3. Neutral Vowels, neither tongue nor lips exercising much control;
4. Mixed Vowels, which combine one tongue vowel and one lip vowel (used in French and German)

The *tongue vowels* in order, starting from the home position of α :

- α "ah" as in "father"; tall mouth, tongue in home position
- æ "aaaa" as in "angle"; tall mouth, tongue front slightly raised from "ah"
- ɛ "eh" as in "set"; medium-tall mouth, tongue begins to rise toward rear molars
- e "ay" without the final "ee" of English; medium-tall mouth, tongue barely touches rear molars
- i "ee" of "see!"; oval mouth, still tall inside, tongue definitely touching the rear molars, the center of the tongue rising and making a "ramp" toward the lower front teeth
- I "ih" as in "sit"; same as [i] but the front of the tongue relaxes toward $[\alpha]$

The *lip vowels* in order, starting from the home position of α :

- α "ah" as in "father"; tall mouth, tongue in home position
- ɔ "aw" as in "saw"; like $[\alpha]$ but with the lips slightly rounded; keep the tall space
- o "oh" as in "note" but without the final "oo" of English; tall mouth with definitely rounded lips; you start to feel the cheek muscles at this point!
(The cherubic choirboy/girl on a Christmas card or the Indian whoop :-)
- u "oo" as in "soon": the lips very rounded, with a small opening, with a "hooty" feeling inside. Make sure the tip of the tongue stays forward while the cheeks get a workout!

The *neutral vowels*

- U "uh" as in "done"; also known as the *schwa* and symbolized $[\text{ə}]$; oval, relaxed mouth and tongue in home position, not as resonant as $[\alpha]$ so we often shade it towards $[\alpha]$ instead for beauty (and ease of production)
- ɝ "er" as in "water"; in singing, we sing this as the British speak it, as $[\text{U}]$ without the $[\text{r}]$ sound

Vowel Drills We Often Use:

The five most basic vowels: a e i o u We often put consonants at the front in order to energize the air stream.

The tongue vowels in order from home: a æ ε e i

The lip vowels in order from home: a ɔ o u

The whole series, with home in the middle: i e ε æ a / a ɔ o u

TIP: In drilling vowels, it is very important the tip of the tongue stay touching the lower front two teeth,
no matter what the rest of the tongue does!