

Vowels

əpɪə appear
əfens offence

ədʒɜ:n adjourn

in final position



su:nə sooner
meɪʒə measure
sʌlfə sulphur
æfrɪkə Africa
pɜ:ʃə Persia
flætərə flatterer
kʌlə colour
pɪktʃə picture
mə:dərə murderer

seɪlə sailor
kɒlə collar
ʃəʊfə chauffeur
əmerɪkə America
kænədə Canada
ədmaɪərə admirer
zefə zephyr
tʃaɪnə China
kəmpeuzə composer

More examples of /ə/ will be found in the next chapter when we consider the *weak forms* of certain words, such as *at* and *for* in *ət taɪmz at times* and *fə ju: for you*.

5.2 Diphthongs

A diphthong is a glide from one vowel to another, and the whole glide acts like one of the long, simple vowels; so we have *bi:*, *bɑ:*, *bɔ:* and also *beɪ*, *bəʊ*, *baɪ*, *baʊ*, *bɔɪ*, *brɪə*, *beə*, *bʊə*. The diphthongs of English are in three groups: those which end in /ʊ/, /əʊ, aʊ/, those which end in /ɪ, /eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ/, and those which end in /ə/, /ɪə, eə, ʊə/.

/əʊ, aʊ/

Both these diphthongs end with /ʊ/ rather than /u:/ although you will not be misunderstood if you do use /u:/. To get /əʊ/ as in *səʊ so*, start with /sɜ:/ and then glide away to /ʊ/ with the lips getting slightly rounded and the sound becoming less loud as the glide progresses. Be sure that the first part of the diphthong is /ɜ:/ (a real English /ɜ:/!) and not /ɔ:/ or anything like it, and be sure that the sound is a diphthong, not a simple vowel of the /ɔ:/ type. /əʊ/ and /ɔ:/ must be kept quite separate. Try the following:



ləʊ low
snəʊ snow
kləʊz close
kəʊl coal

lɔ: law
snɔ: snore
klɔ:z claws
kɔ:l call

səʊ so
bəʊt boat
kəʊk coke

sɔ: saw
bɔ:t bought
kɔ:k cork

For /aʊ/ start with /ʌ/. Say tʌn *ton*, and then after the /ʌ/-sound add an /ʊ/; this should give taʊn *town*. /aʊ/ is not difficult for most people. Be sure that /aʊ/ and /əʊ/ are different. Try the following:

naʊ now
laʊd loud
faʊnd found
raʊ row (quarrel)
daʊt doubt
taʊnz towns

nəʊ know
ləʊd load
fəʊnd phoned
rəʊ row (line)
dəʊt dote
təʊnz tones

Remember when you practise these examples that diphthongs are shorter before strong consonants and longer before weak ones, just like the other vowels, so bəʊt *boat* has a shorter diphthong than kləʊz *close* and daʊt *doubt* a shorter one than laʊd *loud*. Go back over all those examples and get the lengths right. When no consonant follows, as in ləʊ *low*, the diphthong is at its longest.

/eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ/

These diphthongs all end in /ɪ/, not /i:/ (though it is not serious if you do use /i:/ finally). /eɪ/ begins with /e/ as in *men*. Say *men* and then add /ɪ/ after /e/, gliding smoothly from /e/ to /ɪ/ and making the sound less loud as the glide progresses – this will give meɪn *main*. The most common mistake is to use a long, simple vowel, so try to be sure that there is a glide from /e/ to /ɪ/; however, if you do use a simple vowel for /eɪ/ it will not be misunderstood – some accents of English (e.g. Scottish) do the same. But /eɪ/ and /e/ must be quite separate. Try the following:


leɪt late	leɪt let	seɪl sail	seɪl sell
peɪpə paper	peɪpə pepper	treɪd trade	treɪd tread
reɪk rake	reɪk wreck	feɪl fail	feɪl fell

/aɪ/ glides from /ʌ/ to /ɪ/, and the loudness becomes less as the glide progresses. Say fʌn *fun*, and then add /ɪ/ after the /ʌ/, with a smooth glide; this will give you faɪn *fine*. Be sure that /aɪ/ is separate from /eɪ/:

waɪt white	weɪt wait	laɪd lied	leɪd laid
raɪs rice	reɪs race	raɪz rise	reɪz raise
laɪk like	leɪk lake	faɪl file	feɪl fail


/ɔɪ/ glides from /ɔ:/ to /ɪ/, and as usual the loudness becomes less during

the glide. Say *dʒɔ:* *jaw* and then add /ɪ/, as before. This will give you /dʒɔɪ/ *joy*. The /ɔ:/ sound is not as long in /ɔɪ/ as it is when it is alone, as in /dʒɔ:/. /ɔɪ/ is not a very common diphthong and it is not likely to be confused with any other vowel or diphthong. Try these words:

	bɔɪ boy	tɔɪ toy	əˈnɔɪ annoy	nɔɪz noise
	ɔɪl oil	dʒɔɪn join	əˈvɔɪd avoid	bɔɪlz boils
	vɔɪs voice	hɔɪst hoist	dʒɔɪnt joint	lɔɪtə loiter


/ɪə, eə, ʊə/

These are all glides to the sort of /ə/-sound found in final position, as described on p. 83. /ɪə/ glides from /ɪ/ (not /i:/) to this /ə/ in words like *hɪə hear*, *nɪə near*, etc. If you do use /i:/ at the beginning of the glide it will sound a bit strange but you will not be misunderstood. Try the following:


	ɪə ear	ɪə year	bɪə beer	klɪə clear
	fɪə fear	rɪəl real	bɪəd beard	aɪdɪəz ideas
	kæriən Korean	fɪəs fierce	pɪəs pierce	nɪərə nearer
	rɪəl really			

Words such as *fʌnɪə funnier* and *glɔ:riəs glorious*, where /ɪə/ is the result of adding an ending /ə/ or /əs/ to a word which ends with /ɪ/, should be pronounced in the same way as the /ɪə/ in *hear*, *near*, etc. The same is true for words such as *ɪndiə India*, *eəriə area*, *ju:nɪən union*, etc.

To make /eə/, start with the word *hæz has* (with the proper English /æ/, between /e/ and /ʌ/) and then add /ʌ/ after the /æ/, gliding smoothly from /æ/ to /ʌ/; this will give you the word *heəz hairs*. Notice that the beginning of the diphthong is /æ/ rather than /e/. You must keep /ɪə/ and /eə/ quite separate; try the following:

	hɪə here	heə hair	bɪə beer	beə bare
	stɪəd steered	steəd stared	ɪəz ears	eəz airs
	rɪəl really	reəl rarely	wɪəri weary	weəri wary

/ʊə/ starts from /ʊ/ (not /u:/) and glides to /ə/; if you use /u:/ at the beginning of the glide it will sound a bit strange but you will not be misunderstood. Try the following:

	pʊə poor	ɪnʃʊərəns insurance
	ʃʊəlɪ surely	kjʊəriəsətɪ curiosity
	fjʊəriəs furious	kjʊə cure

pjʊə pure
 ʃʊə sure

tʊərist tourist
 pjʊəlɪ purely

All these words may also be pronounced with /ɔ:/ instead of /ʊə/ in R.P., /pɔ:z, ʃɔ:z, kjɔ:z/, etc. Other words, like *fewer*, *bluer*, *continuous*, are also usually pronounced with /ʊə/ – fjuə, bluə, kəntɪnjuəs – though they can always be pronounced with /u:ə/ – fju:ə, blu:ə, kəntɪnju:əs – and in any case they must not be pronounced with /ɔ:/. This is also true for *cruel* and *jewel* which must have either /ʊə/ or /u:ə/.

5.3 Vowel sequences

There are vowel sequences as well as consonant sequences but they are not so difficult. In general, when one vowel (or diphthong) follows another you should pronounce each one quite normally but with a smooth glide between them. The most common sequences are formed by adding /ə/ to a diphthong, especially to /aɪ/ and /aʊ/ in words like *fire* and *our*. When you listen to these two sequences – /aɪə, aʊə/ – you will notice that the /ɪ/ in *fire* and the /ʊ/ in *our* are rather weak; in fact both sequences may sound rather like /ɑ:/. It is probably best for you not to imitate this but to pronounce the sequences as /aɪ + ə/ and /aʊ + ə/, though the /ɪ/ and the /ʊ/ should not be made too strong. Try the following:

taɪə tyre
 traɪəl trial
 kwaɪət quiet
 kaʊəd coward
 baɪə buyer
 flaɪə flyer
 aɪən iron
 aʊəz ours

taʊə tower
 traʊəl trowel
 taɪəd tired
 paʊəfʊl powerful
 baʊə bower
 flaʊə flower
 raɪət riot
 ʃaʊəri showery

The less common sequences /eɪə, əʊə, ɔɪə/ should be pronounced with the normal diphthong smoothly followed by /ə/. The /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ need not be weakened at all. Try:

greɪə greyer
 grəʊə grower
 pleɪə player
 rɔɪəl royal
 fɔləʊəz followers

ɪmplɔɪə employer
 θrəʊə thrower
 bɪtreɪəl betrayal
 lɔɪəz lawyers

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/i:/ and /u:/ are also followed by /ə/ in words like *freer* and *bluer* which may be pronounced *fri:ə* or *friə*, and *blu:ə* or *bluə*, as we have seen.

The verb ending *-ing* /ɪŋ/ gives various sequences in words like the following:



bi:ɪŋ being
du:ɪŋ doing
əlaʊɪŋ allowing
drɔ:ɪŋ drawing
gəʊɪŋ going

si:ɪŋ seeing
stju:ɪŋ stewing
bəʊɪŋ bowing
sɔ:ɪŋ sawing
nəʊɪŋ knowing

In words like *saying*, *enjoying*, *flying*, where *-ing* follows a word ending with /eɪ/, /ɔɪ/ or /aɪ/, it is common to pronounce *seɪŋ*, *ɪndʒɔɪŋ*, *flaɪŋ*, if you find this easier.

In words like *carrying*, *pitying*, etc., where a word which ends with /ɪ/ has /ɪŋ/ added to it, it is usual (and best for you) to pronounce *kæri:ɪŋ*, *pɪti:ɪŋ*, etc., although *kæri* and *pɪti* are the normal forms.

Other vowel sequences are found both within words and between words. These also should be performed with a smooth glide between the vowels. (See also p. 101.) Here are some examples:



keɪɔs chaos
bɪɔnd beyond
blu:ɪʃ bluish
ðɪ: end the end

rɔɪn ruin
rɪækt react
greɪ aɪd grey-eyed
maɪ əʊn my own

baɪɔgræfɪ biography
kəʊɔpəreɪt co-operate
ju: a:nt you aren't
gəʊ aʊt go out

tu: aʊəz two hours
meɪ aɪ əʊ ɪt tu: ju: may I owe it to you?

5.4 Exercises

(Answers, where appropriate, on p. 135)

- 1 What vowels and diphthongs do you have in your language? Which of the English ones cause you difficulty?
- 2 During your listening-time listen carefully to one of the difficult vowels at a time and try to get the sound of it into your head. Make a list of twenty words containing each difficult vowel and practise them.