

British English Vowel Sounds

How many vowel sounds are there in British English?

There are 5 vowels in the English alphabet (A, E, I, O and U), and sometimes Y is included. But there are 20 vowel sounds in standard British English, in other words, in Received Pronunciation (RP).

1) The 12 Monophthongs

A monophthong is a vowel in which the tongue stays in the same position.

Note: You do not have to learn the phonetic symbols that correspond to these sounds, but many students find them useful.

There are **7 short monophthongs**:

1. /ɪ/

sit /sɪt/

build /bɪld/

2. /ʊ/

good /gʊd/

should /ʃʊd/

3. /e/

pen /pen/

said /sed/

4. /ə/ (this is the schwa)

the /ðə/

teacher /'ti:tʃə(r)/

polite /pə'laɪt/

5. /æ/
ant /ænt/
cat /kæt/

6. /ʌ/
duck /dʌk/
fun /fʌn/
some /sʌm/

7. /ɒ/
hot /hɒt/
what /wɒt/

There are **5 long monophthongs**.

We call them long vowels because they are normally longer than short vowels. (the two dots indicate a long vowel)

1. /iː/
seat /siːt/
sheet /ʃiːt/

2. /uː/
food /fuːd/
through /θruː/

3. /ɜː/
girl /gɜːl/
word /wɜːd/

4. /ɔː/
four /fɔː(r)/
walk /wɔːk/

5. /ɑː/
ask /ɑːsk/
fart /fɑːt/

2) The 8 Diphthongs

There are also **8 diphthongs**.

A diphthong is a vowel in which the position of the tongue changes. Basically, it is a combination of two vowels.

1. /ɪə/

near /nɪə(r)/

here /hɪə(r)/

2. /eɪ/

day /deɪ/

rain /reɪn/

3. /ʊə/

pure /pjʊə(r)/

mature /mə'tʃʊə(r)/

4. /ɔɪ/

toy /tɔɪ/

coin /kɔɪn/

5. /əʊ/

go /gəʊ/

boat /bəʊt/

6. /eə/

hair /heə(r)/

where /weə(r)/

7. /aɪ/

buy /baɪ/

like /laɪk/

8. /aʊ/

cow /kaʊ/

house /haʊs/