

First Year (second Course) Ninth Lecture

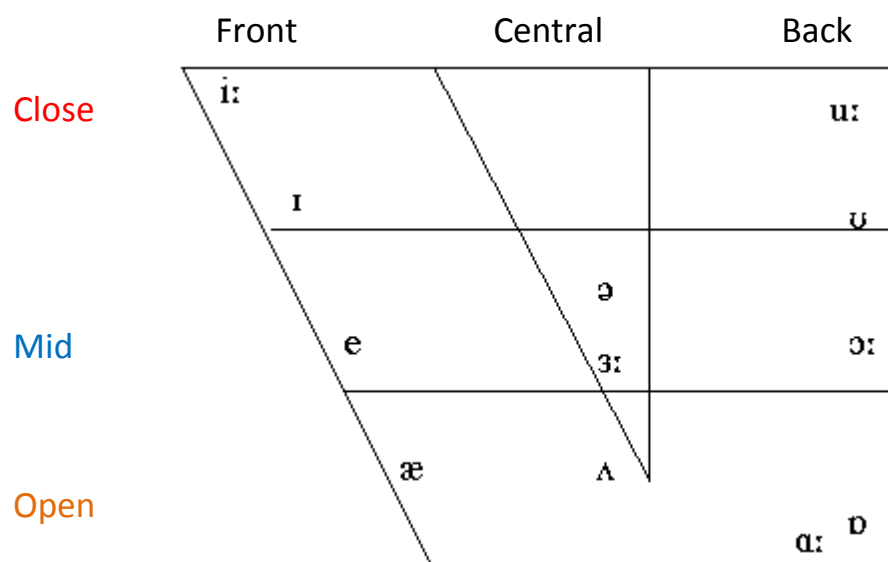
Chapter 5: The Description of English Vowels (p. 79)

- **Describing vowels is a difficult task, why?**

1. Vowels are located in a very limited space (vowel space).
2. They are so close to each other (immediate and near neighbors)
3. They share similar features, so they are easily misperceived and mispronounced for one another.
4. There are accent differences in vowels more than in consonants (RP and GAM), which adds more difficulty.

Q: Pure (simple, Monophthongs) Vowels?

A: They are fixed. It means they remain in their positions i.e. they do not glide from one vowel position to another.



The chart above shows English vowels (short & long)

Example	Symbol	Features
heed	i:	Close, Front, Long, unrounded
hid	ɪ	Close, Front, Short, unrounded
head	e	Half-open, Front, Short, unrounded
had	æ	Open, Front, Short, unrounded
Hudd	ʌ	Open, Central, Short, unrounded
hard	ɑ:	Open, Back, Long, unrounded
hod	ɒ	Open, Back, Short, rounded
hoard	ɔ:	Half-open, Back, Long, rounded
hood	ʊ	Close, Back, Short, rounded
who	u:	Close, Back, Long, rounded
heard	ɜ:	Half-open, Central, Long, unrounded
ago	ə	Half-open, Central, Short (Schwa), unrounded

Notes:

- Vowel length is affected by following consonants.
Strong (voiceless) consonants make vowels shorter and weaker.
Weak (voiced) consonants make vowels longer and stronger.
Example (save) and (safe)
Voiced voiceless
- The vowel /ɜ:/ is one of the most difficult vowels to pronounce by foreign learners, but you can practice two techniques to pronounce it correctly:
 1. Keep your teeth close to each other.
 2. Do not round your lips.
- The /ə/ (Schwa) is considered a distinct vowel and thus it should be included in the list of English vowels. However, some scholars

believe that it is not a distinct vowel, it is rather the weak form of all other vowels when they are pronounced in their weak forms.

Q: Do you think that spelling is a good guide to the pronunciation of vowels in English?