

Description of English vowels

1. Openness of the mouth

Vowels differ from one another according to the extent to which the jaws are either **open** or **close** (not 'closed', as a complete closure would prevent the free flow of air out of the mouth). Look at yourself in a mirror and say the vowel sound /ɑ/, as in the word *palm*. It should be obvious that the jaws are wide apart and you have adopted a relatively open mouth posture

2. Tongue elevation

The tongue can take up a variety of positions in the mouth. On the vertical axis it is usually described as taking up one of three positions:

1. high
2. mid
3. low

3. Position of tongue elevation

Whereas the elevation of the tongue describes the position of the tongue on the vertical axis (high, mid, low), the 'position of tongue elevation' refers to where this elevation takes place on the horizontal axis. Again, three positions are recognized:

1. front
2. central
3. back