
CHAPTER 5

The Sounds of English—Vowels

5.1 Vowels in British Received Pronunciation

There are twenty distinct vowels in British Received Pronunciation (R.P.). Received Pronunciation, or Educated Southern British English, is a form of English socially acceptable (well received) in all parts of the country. The twenty vowels are:

Pure Vowels

/ i: /	as in	<i>these</i>	/ ði:z /
/ ɪ /	as in	<i>bit</i>	/ bɪt /
/ e /	as in	<i>bed</i>	/ bed /
/ æ /	as in	<i>bad</i>	/ bæd /
/ ʌ /	as in	<i>bus</i>	/ bʌs /
/ ɑ: /	as in	<i>card</i>	/ kɑ:d /
/ ɒ /	as in	<i>hot</i>	/ hɒt /
/ ɔ: /	as in	{ <i>all</i>	/ ɔ:l /
		{ <i>force</i>	/ fɔ:s /
		{ <i>horse</i>	/ hɔ:s /
/ ʊ /	as in	<i>book</i>	/ buk /
/ u: /	as in	{ <i>rule</i>	/ ru:l /
		{ <i>tube</i>	/ tjʊ:b /
/ ɜ: /	as in	<i>serve</i>	/ sɜ:v /
/ ə /	as in	<i>account</i>	/ ə'kaʊnt /

Diphthongal

Glides

/ eɪ /	as in	<i>gate</i>	/ geɪt /
/ aɪ /	as in	<i>bite</i>	/ baɪt /
/ ɔɪ /	as in	<i>boil</i>	/ bɔɪl /
/ əʊ /	as in	<i>home</i>	/ həʊm /
/ aʊ /	as in	<i>house</i>	/ haʊs /
/ tʃɪə /	as in	<i>cheer</i>	/ tʃɪə /
/ ɛə /	as in	<i>air</i>	/ ɛə /
/ pʊə /	as in	<i>poor</i>	/ pʊə /

Seven of these vowels — / ɪ, e, æ, ʌ, ɒ, u, ə / — are short, and the others are long. Among the long vowels, five — / i:, ɑ:, ɔ:, u:, ɜ: / — are monophthongs (sometimes called pure vowels), and the others are diphthongs (vowel glides within the syllable). Three of the diphthongs — / eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ / — involve glides to / ɪ /, two — / əʊ, aʊ / — involve glides to / u / and the remaining three — / ɪə, ɛə, uə / — are glides to / ə /.

5.2 Vowels in General Indian English

Corresponding to the twenty-vowel system of British R.P., General Indian English generally has a system of 11 pure vowels and 6 vowel glides. These are:

Pure Vowels

/ i: / ¹	as in	<i>these</i>	/ di:z /
/ ɪ /	"	<i>bit</i>	/ bɪt /
/ e: /	"	<i>gate</i>	/ ge:t /
/ ɛ /	"	<i>bed</i>	/ bɛd /
/ æ /	"	<i>bad</i>	/ bæd /
/ a: /	"	<i>card</i>	/ ka:rd /
/ ɒ /	"	{ <i>hot</i>	{ / hɒt /
		{ <i>horse</i>	{ / hɔ:rs /
/ o: /	"	{ <i>home</i>	{ / ho:m /
		{ <i>force</i>	{ / fo:rs /
/ u: /	"	<i>book</i>	/ bu:k /
/ u: /	"	{ <i>rule</i>	{ / ru:l /
/ ə /	"	{ <i>bus</i>	{ / bəs /
		<i>account</i>	/ ə'kaʊnt /

Vowel Glides

/ aɪ /	"	<i>bite</i>	/ baɪt /
/ ɔɪ /	"	<i>boil</i>	/ bɔɪl /
/ aʊ /	"	<i>house</i>	/ haʊs /
/ ɪə /	"	<i>cheer</i>	/ tʃɪər /
/ eə /	"	<i>air</i>	/ eər /
/ uə /	"	<i>poor</i>	/ puər /

¹ Long vowels tend to have reduced length in unaccented syllables.