



LONG AND SHORT VOWELS

Say what you see, in your normal voice. Then look at the different regional pronunciations in the table below.



Word	Phonetic transcription		
	Southern English (RP)	Northern English	US (General American)
Bath	bɑ:θ	bæθ	bæθ
Gasp	gɑ:sp	gæsp	gæsp
Pass	pɑ:s	pæs	pæs

You may want to develop your own table(s) that illustrate(s) such variations and consider using images to help students memorise the pronunciation of certain words they find challenging to pronounce.

/ɔ:/ Examples: ***saw, lord, fought, sword***

This is a back vowel, between the half-open and half close positions in the mouth, with quite a pronounced degree of lip-rounding.

/u:/ Examples: ***soon, boot, lose, glue***

This is a close, back vowel which is made with lips fully rounded.

Of course there are variations on all of the above vowels, but the examples offer a general view of the system.

You may notice that, especially in non-RP dialects, some of the long vowels have a tendency towards becoming diphthongs. For instance, you may know of people who vary the pronunciation of:

soon from /su:n/ to /su:ən/
school from /sku:l/ to /sku:əl/
cord from /kɔ:d/ to /kɔ:əd/ [you may also hear /kɔ:rd/]

Usually, this kind of diphthongisation – or the gliding from one vowel to another so that they are pronounced as a single phoneme – involves a glide to the schwa position, the central unstressed vowel. But before we come on to diphthongs in English, let us point you towards a couple of great websites to help your students!



Stop and check

When looking at them in phonemic script, how can you easily identify the long vowels from the short ones? Or, to put it another way, what do the long vowel notations all have in common? Think about this and check back in the section if you aren't sure. The answer is under the following further research box.

Further research on short and long vowels

If you are working with young learners, you will find some excellent resources here on this website for practising both short and long vowels. The pages link to a series of long and short vowel sounds, ideal for practising what we have been learning, and giving your students a real visual stimulus.

You can see the page on short vowels here:

http://prek-8.com/kindergarten/phonics_shortvowel.php

and there are some great links to long vowel sounds from this page here:

http://prek-8.com/kindergarten/phonics_longvowel.php

Although they are aimed at kindergarten learners, you will find they could be used across a range of levels to help students with pronunciation difficulties in these areas.

Eslabout has a good page which may help with vowel sounds:

http://esl.about.com/od/speakingenglish/a/pr_longv.htm

Stop and check answer:

The 5 long vowels all have the symbol /:/ following them:

/i:/ /ɜ:/ /ɑ:/ /ɔ:/ /u:/

The short vowels don't! Simple!