


Table 1 - IPA Vowel Sound System



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IPA Symbol	Key Word	Personal Key Word 	Spelling Variations
/i/	me		e, i, ea, ei, ie, ey, e__e ^a , ee, i__a
/ɪ/	it		e, i, y, u__y
/e/	ace		a, ai, ay, a__e, ei, ey
/ɛ/	end		e, ea, ue
/æ/	add		a, au
/ɑ/	on		a, o
/ə/	agree		any vowel in a weak ^b syllable
/ɔ/	off		a, o, au, aw, ou, augh, oug
/ʌ/	us		u, o, oo, ou
/o/	oak		o, oa, ou, ow o__e, ew
/ʊ/	cook		o, u, oo, ou
/u/	do		o, u, oe, oo, ou, u__e, ue, ui, eq, ew
/ɔɪ/	boil		oi, oy
/aʊ/	house		ou, ow
/aɪ/	l		y, i, igh, i__e, uy, y, ei, ye, ai, ie
/ɜː/	earn		er, ir, or, ur, our, ear
/ə/	other		er, or ("er" in a weak ^b syllable)
/ɑr/	arm		ar, ear
/er/	airs		ear, are, air, ere, eir
/ɪr/	hear		ir, ear, ier, ere, eer
/or/	nor		ar, or, oar, oor, our, ore
/aɪr/	fire		ire, oir, uire, ier, iar, uyer, yer

^a "e__e" refers to spelling combinations of "e" + any consonant + "e"

^b a "weak" syllable in English receives neither primary nor secondary stress in a word



Key Words

The IPA Vowel System table is the complete set of North American English vowels. Sample words are given for each vowel sound, as well as the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols for each. Here's an idea to make your practice more meaningful: Why not add your own words to the Personal Key Word column in Table 1? Make sure they are words that contain the true vowel sound.

Table 2 - Vowel Placement



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Mouth/Jaw Opening	Tongue Height	Tongue Position <i>Is the tongue pushed forward or pulled back?</i>		
		Front	Central	Back
<i>Is the mouth open wide or almost closed?</i> almost closed ↑↓ open wide	<i>Is the tongue high or low in the mouth?</i> high ↑↓ mid ↑↓ low	i ɪ		u ʊ
		e ɛ	ir* ɜ̄r er* ə̄r ar* or ɑɪr* ə ʌ	o
		æ		ɔ
				ɑ
Lip Rounding <i>Are the lips pulled back or pushed forward?</i> lips retracted ←→ lips rounded				

/r/-Colored Vowels

The Central Vowels highlighted in blue are called **/r/-Colored Vowels**. These Vowel + /r/ combination sounds are very high frequency sounds in North American English.

*The /r/ coloring and the end of these 4 vowels is often produced with the lips in motion (like the **Diphthongs**). The lips move from a “slightly pulled back” position to a “tightly rounded” position.

Diphthongs - ɑɪ, ɔɪ, ɑʊ

These 3 vowels are actually 2-vowel combination sounds that occur within the same syllable. They are often called *gliding vowels* because the tongue moves during pronunciation to approximate (but not fully) **both** of the vowels.