

DIPHTHONGS

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A vowel, by definition, is a sound produced by the vibrations of the vocal cords without the friction or stoppage which characterizes consonants. The alphabetical vowels are A, E, I, O, and U, comprising about 40 per cent of the letters in all written words. Actually, A and I are diphthongs; one vowel sound immediately followed by another I is pronounced ah-ee.

There are dozens of possible vowel sounds. These can be designated by the International Phonetic Alphabet, by diacritical marks, or by the so-called American Phonetic method in which vowel sounds are spelled out. The third method is used in this article.

Various dictionaries give from eight to twenty-one vowel sounds. Some differentiate between stressed and unstressed vowels, consonant-colored vowels, or normal and lengthened vowels. I believe ten sounds can well represent the vowels used in normal speech.

Long e: ee, as in sleek	Flat a: a, as in cat
Broad a: ah, as in not	Short e: e, as in met
Long o: oh, as in road	Short u: uh, as in hull
Round u: oo, as in mood	Short i: i, as in ill
Broad o: aw, as in hawk	Short u: uuh, as in book

With these vowel sounds, it is theoretically possible to construct 90 diphthongs. Aided by Philip Cohen, I have identified 38, including Deep South and East Texas dialects. Can readers add any more?

ee-ah hear (heah)	oo-ee we
ee-oh yo	oo-ah walk
ee-oo you	oo-oh woe
ee-aw yacht	oo-aw wok
ee-a yak	oo-a wagon
ee-e yet	oo-e wet
ee-uh fear (feuh)	oo-uh swum
ee-i yip	oo-i will
ee-uuh your	oo-uuh wool
ah-ee ice	a-ee bay
ah-oh dog (dahog)	a-ah and
ah-e lard (lahed)	a-oh how
ah-uuh loud	a-e varied (vaad)
ah-ee boy	e-oh go (gao)
ah-oo down	e-uh yeah
ah-uh for (fouh)	uh-e worried (wuhed)
oh-ee boy	uuh-uh sure (shua)
oh-uh four (fouh)	uh-ee third (thoid)
oh-uuh bowed	uh-uuh house