



IIT Madras
ONLINE DEGREE

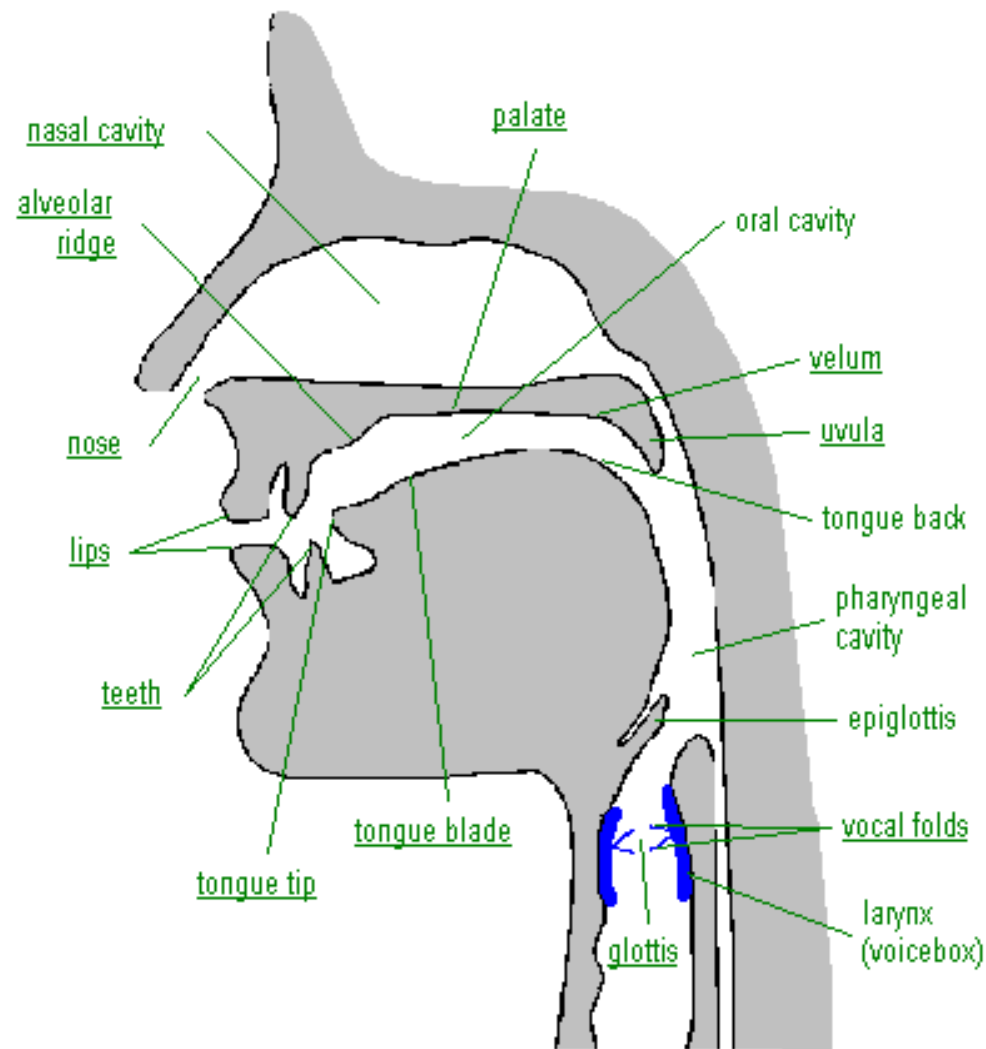
PHONETICS OF ENGLISH- **PART 1**

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SOME VOWEL SOUNDS

- Most sounds in all languages are produced with air going out flowing out of lungs through the glottis, pharynx and mouth.

Organs of Articulation



- As speech air passes through them, these organs manipulate speech air.
- Glottis, which has vocal chords, can be wide open letting air pass freely; in that situation, however, there is no voice, as is the case when you whisper.

- Glottis may be tightly shut. Air cannot pass, and there can be no speech.
- Within Glottis, vocal chords can be loosely together. Air passing through the glottis can, then, vibrate these chords resulting into voice. If these chords do not vibrate, there can be no voice, and we cannot be heard, at least not easily.

- Nothing much happens to the speech air in the pharynx.
- Once it enters mouth, the oral passage, uvula and the tongue manipulate it. If Uvula is raised, then all speech air passes through mouth; but if it is lowered, then some air can pass also through nose, the nasal passage.

- In the mouth, tongue and lips and the opening between jaws mainly contribute to variety in the production of sounds.
- **To know more about the production of speech sounds, you can see some books suggested in the desired reading list of this course.**

- Vowels are voiced sounds produced without any obstruction in the oral passage, in the mouth. This is how vowels are produced in all languages of the world.
- Though mouth does not create any obstruction in the production of vowel sounds, it can still manipulate their length and type by changing the shape of lips, opening of the jaws, and raising the tongue to different heights. All these things create various kinds of vowels in all languages.

- “Pill” and “pull” are different words because vowel in one is produced by stretching the blade or the front of the tongue towards the molar teeth, whereas in “pill” back of the tongue rises towards but does not touch the soft palate.
- In the production of one the lips are spread; in the other, they are rounded. In the production of “**pit**”, the jaws are very close to each other, though not closed; but in the production of “**part**”, jaws are far apart.

- English has more vowel sounds than many other languages. Standard British English has 20 vowel sounds. American English has one or two fewer.
- Like all other languages, English also has both long and short vowel sounds.

- But English long vowels are:
 1. Very long, almost twice as long as long vowel sounds in many Indian languages. They take anything between 900 to 1100 nano-seconds, whereas many long vowel sounds in Indian languages hardly exceed 600 nano seconds.
 2. Very many. Whereas Hindi has barely six or seven vowel sounds that may sound long, English has at least 12 long vowels.

3. Many long vowels in English make minimal pairs with short vowels. Look at the following lists of words made distinct from each other only by the length of the vowel

Short Vowel	Long Vowel
bit	beat
bet	bait
bell	bale
bid	bide
cell/sell	sale / sail
debt	date
did	deed
fill	feel
fit	feet
fell	fail
get	gate
hit	heat
let	late

ACTIVITY

1. By contrasting long and short vowels in the manner given above, add to this list and learn to pronounce long vowels as quite long, much longer than you perhaps do just now, and short vowels as quite short, much shorter than perhaps you do just now.

- Some English vowels are so long that the time they take equals almost to the production of two vowels, a long and a short one. Vowels of this kind are called “**Diphthongs**”, that is two bursts of voice vowels, or extra-long (XL) vowels.

- We have diphthongs in English words like

“bite”, “bout”, “boat”, “bait”, etc.

- It may be a good idea to learn to pronounce diphthongs as diphthongs. All English dictionaries show the pronunciation of words, and by merely looking at them you can come to know which vowels can be rendered as diphthongs. But even if you cannot render them as very long, you should produce them at least as words with long vowels.

Look at the following words:

Words with Short Vowels	With Long Vowels	With Diphthongs
live	leave	live
pull	pool	pile
fill	feel	file
mill	meal	mile
hit	heat	height
let		late
Kit		kite
hill	heel	hole
lick	leak	like
pill	peel	pile
sit	seat	sight
tell		tale/tile
it		it

ACTIVITY

2. You can create similar lists from your memory, or with the help of your dictionary.

Take all the short, long and extra-long vowels, or diphthongs, as they are called, and read them aloud, at a slow tempo, giving yourself time.

You will find that every time you produce a long or an extra-long vowel your tongue becomes stiff and more stiff, or it spreads towards the molar teeth, or tends to rise towards soft or hard plate.

Short vowels are produced mostly with tongue in the neutral position. Practice in this manner may help you acquire a standard, globally intelligible accent of English.

3. Lists of frequently used words contrasting long and short vowels are also given on **page nos. 172-185 of *Better Spoken English***. You can do the pronunciation drill with this book, and acquire standard English pronunciation within a few weeks.

Thank You