

CHAPTER FOUR

The Fronting Vowels

[i] Production

The international vowel sound [i], also found in German, Italian, and French, is the highest and most forward of the English vowels. It is found in words such as: he, she, need, peace, scene, people, feat, and receive. The vowel [i] occurs *only* in *stressed syllables*.

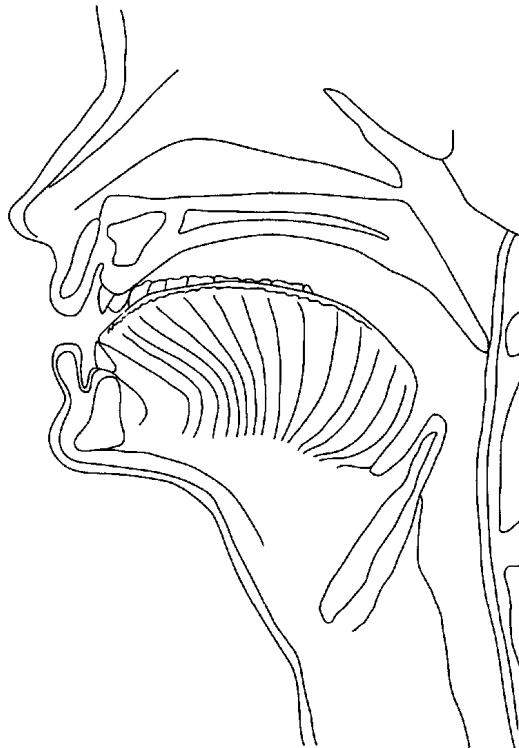


FIGURE 4.1 [i]

Action

<i>Tongue</i>	tip on lower front teeth front of tongue arched forward toward hard palate sides of tongue touching <i>upper molars</i>
<i>Jaw</i>	lower jaw released, loose no teeth clenching drop as if yawning teeth most closed together but must practice producing [i] with teeth further apart for passaggio and high notes
<i>Lips/Facial Muscles</i>	lips horizontal, soft, relaxed energize cheek muscles surrounding lips and cheek bone area

Pitfalls to Avoid

No glottal attacks.

No “on-off glides.” For example, “steal”- stea-(uh)-l, which occurs when [l] is anticipated.

Be careful not to tense throat muscles, flatten tongue, or grin by pulling lips back at corners of the mouth.

Avoid nasality when [i] is adjacent to [m] and [n].

Tips for Vocal Ease

In the passaggio or the extremes of the register, try modifying [i] to the unlauded or mixed vowel [y] for greater vocal ease and more point and focus on the lower notes.

Wil - low, if he once should be re - turn - ing

(“Willow Song” from *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, Douglas Moore)

The Lowered [ɪ] Vowel

In Standard American Speech for the Stage and British Received, there is a lowered [ɪ] vowel used for final unstressed “y” endings as in the words “pretty” and “only.” This sound

is halfway between [i] and [ɪ]. The [ɨ] symbol is used in the IPA for an unstressed mixed vowel. It was chosen in this book because it is the best visual reminder to de-intensify an unstressed final “y” ending.

RULE Final unstressed “y” and its plural (“-ies” endings) should always be sung as [ɨ].

EXAMPLES	daisy [deɪzɨ]	daisies [deɪzɨz]
	beauty [bjuːtɨ]	beauties [bjuːtɨz]
	duty [dʒuːtɨ]	duties [dʒuːtɨz]
	carry [kæɹɨ]	carries [kæɹɨz]

EXERCISES

1. Practice intoning and singing the following words:

me	read	deceive*	achieve
he	weep	believe*	pleasing
she	creed	release*	people
we	queen	relieve*	eagles
seal**	shield**	reveal**	yield**

2. Transcribe the following words into IPA observing the rules above:

merrily	mysteries	joyfully
only	very	visionaries
sunny	journey	melodies

3. Practice examples from vocal texts:

He shall speak peace unto the heathen.

(G. F. Handel, *Messiah*)

*The unstressed prefixes in the third column above should be pronounced with [ɪ] (rule, p. 48).

** Avoid off-glides with the letter l.

O sleep, why dost thou leave me?

(G. F. Handel, *Semele*)

Over the ripening peach
 Buzzes the bee
 Splash on the billowy beach
 Tumbles the sea
 But the peach
 And the beach
 They are each
 Nothing to me!

(W. S. Gilbert, *Ruddigore*)



4. Transcribe the following text and intone/sing it:

I shall find for you shells and stars,
 I shall swim for you river and sea.
 Sleep, my love, sleep for me,
 My sleep is old.

I shall feed for you lamb and dove.
 I shall buy for you sugar and bread.
 Sleep, my love, sleep for me
 My sleep is dead.

Rain will fall but Baby won't know,
 He laughs alone in orchards of gold.
 Tears will fall but Baby won't know,
 His laughter is blind.

Sleep, my love, for sleep is kind.
 Sleep is kind when sleep is young.
 Sleep for me, sleep for me.

I shall build for you planes and boats.
 I shall catch for you cricket and bee.
 Let the old ones watch your sleep.
 Only death will watch the old.
 Sleep.

(Gian Carlo Menotti, "Lullaby" from *The Consul*)

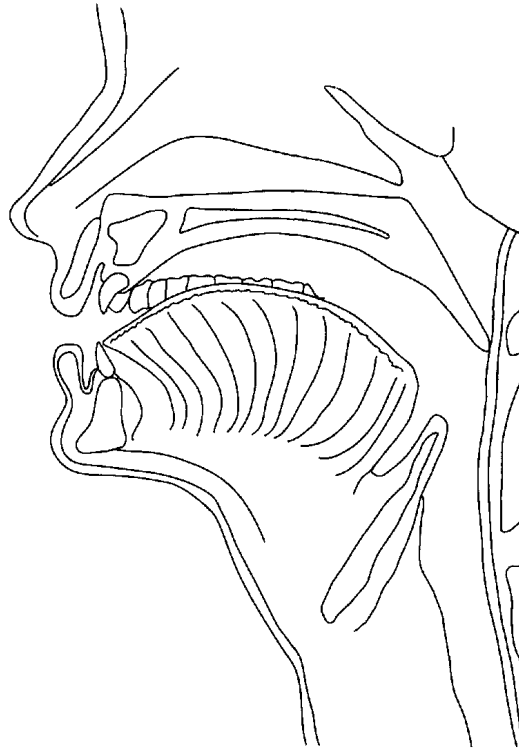
[ɪ] Production

FIGURE 4.2 [ɪ]

The international vowel sound [ɪ] is also found in German, but not in Italian or French. It is found in both *stressed and unstressed syllables*.

Compared to [i], the [ɪ] vowel sound is generally shorter in duration. It is found in stressed positions in words such as: it, been,* build, women, sing, think. It can be found in unstressed positions such as: beautiful, individual, and all “ing” endings such as: singing, going, and loving. It is also frequently used as a substitution for the unstressed [ə] schwa vowel, for example, musical, delicate.

Action

<i>Tongue</i>	tip behind lower front teeth front arched slightly less toward hard palate sides touching upper molars
<i>Lips</i>	horizontal, relaxed cheek muscles energized
<i>Jaw</i>	dropped slightly more open

*AS and weak form in RP/MA [bɪn].

Pitfalls to Avoid

Avoid singing substitution of [i] for [ɪ].

EXAMPLE I love h[ɪ]m not h[i]m
 [i] [ɪ] [i] [i]
 She bid me take life easy

Do not let sound fall back in throat.

Do not keep jaw too wide.

Do not keep tongue too slack or arched too low.

Avoid regional substitutions of [ɛ] for [ɪ].

EXAMPLES [hɪm] not [hɛm]
 [pɪn] not [pɛn]
 been [bɪn] not Ben [bɛn]

Avoid southern off-glides.

EXAMPLES him [hɪ(ə)m]
 since [sɪ(ə)ns]

Tips for Vocal Ease

In the passaggio and register extremes, try modifying [ɪ] to the mixed German or French vowel [y] for greater vocal ease.

[y - -] [y - - - - -]

Dream - ing as I watch it gleam,

(“The Silver Aria” from *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, Douglas Moore)

RULE The unstressed prefixes or syllables spelled ‘re-’, ‘be-’, ‘se-’, ‘de-’, ‘e-’, and ‘e’ plus a consonant as in the words receive, believe, select, deceive, elect, and escape as well as ‘im-’ and ‘in-’ should be sung with [ɪ]. The suffixes ‘-ing’ and ‘-ic’ use [ɪ] as well.

- EXCEPTIONS
1. When the unstressed syllable is elongated or at a very slow tempo, use a full vowel sound, either [i] or [ɛ] as appropriate
 2. The *stressed* 're-' prefix, stressing that an action is performed again, also uses [i]. For example, words like "revisit" or "reconnect."

EXAMPLES [ɪ] [ɪ] [ɪ] [ɪ] [ɪ] [ɪ] [ɪ]

 remember delight excite secure important include singing

Since this vowel sound is found only in the lyric repertoire in English and German, it often poses difficulties for native speakers of the Romance and Asian Languages. Great care must be taken to drill and differentiate between the [i] and [ɪ] vowel sounds.

The following is a list for *non-native speakers*. They are the most frequently found words that are pronounced with [ɪ]. Memorizing this list should greatly decrease the mistaken substitution of [i] for the [ɪ] vowel in at least the most common usages.

Always [ɪ]

it, is, him, with, which, this, since, been,* slip, sing, live, sick,
sin, bid, sit, will, lips, ship, still, win, wing, hit, winter, pity,
wither, whither, miss, lit, lids, give, city, kiss, whisper, pity, riches.

* In RP, "been" has two pronunciations: sf [i] wf [ɪ].

EXERCISES

1. Read aloud the following words alternating, between the [i] and [ɪ] columns:

[ɪ]	[i]	[ɪ]	[i]
itch	each	hitting	heating
slip	sleep	filling	feeling
rid	read	bitter	beater
mill	meal	dipper	deeper
been	bean	riches	reaches
sin	seen	living	leaving



2. Transcribe the following song text into IPA using care to differentiate between the [i] and [ɪ] vowels. Then read and sing it aloud:

Down by the Sally Gardens my love and I did meet,
 She passed the Sally Gardens with little snow white feet.
 She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree
 But I being young and foolish with her did not agree.

In a field by the river, my love and I did stand,
 And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow white hand;
 She bid me take life easy as the grass grows on the weirs,
 But I was young and foolish and, now am full of tears.

(W. B. Yeats, Traditional)

3. Transcribe the following words into IPA observing the prefix rules above:

decision	deserve	delightful
restore	rejoice	respond
begun	belittle	behavior
secure	seduce	seclusion
erode	event	elusive
enjoy	enhance	exaggerate



4. Transcribe the following text in IPA and practice speaking/singing it using care to differentiate the [i] and [ɪ] vowels:

"If with all your hearts ye truly seek me,
 Ye shall ever surely find me," Thus saith our God.
 Oh! that I knew where I might find Him,
 That I might even come before His presence!

(Felix Mendelssohn, *Elijah*)

[ɛ] Production

The international vowel [ɛ] appears in varied versions in Italian, German, and French. It is found in stressed syllables like in the words: wed, many, bury, friend, head, guest, any, says, said, and saith (saith is archaic form of said, the past tense of "to say" and is pronounced as [sɛθ]). It is also a frequent substitute for the unstressed [ə] vowel.

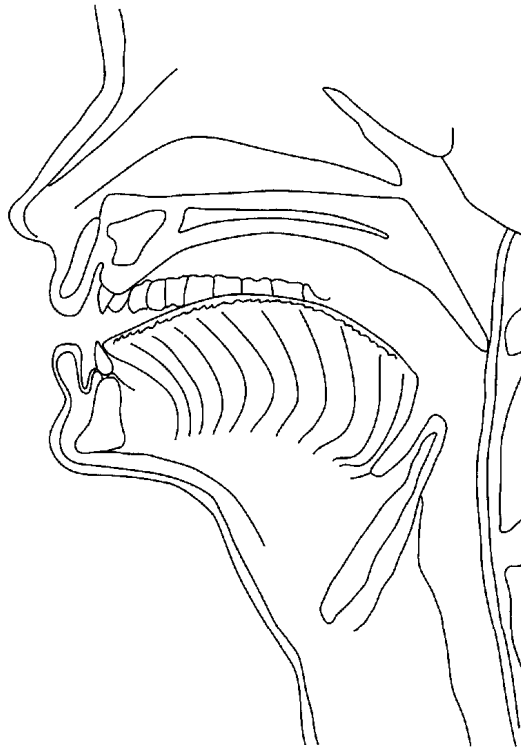


FIGURE 4.3 [ɛ]

Action

<i>Tongue</i>	tip in contact with lower front teeth front of tongue less arched toward soft palate
<i>Lips</i>	lowest of lip vowels to still have contact with upper molars relaxed, slightly spread cheeks still energized
<i>Jaw</i>	lower than for [ɪ] or [eɪ] diphthong

Pitfalls to Avoid

Avoid tense tongue, lips, or mouth.

Avoid glottal attacks.

Avoid off-glides: [heed] for head [hed].

Avoid nasal Midwestern twang.

EXAMPLES many—not [mɪni] but [mɛni]
 any—not [ɪni] but [ɛni]

Avoid American Southern substitution of [ɪ] for [ɛ].

EXAMPLES pencil—not [pɪnsəl] but [pɛnsəl]
forget—not [fɔɪgɪt] but [fɔɪgɛt]

Tips for Vocal Ease

If the [ɛ] spreads in the passaggio, try closing to a more closed [e], as in the first vowel of the diphthong [eɪ]. Be careful to just sing [e] and not add the second [ɪ] vowel.

Larghetto e piano [e - - - -]

He shall— feed His flock like a shep - - - herd

(“He Shall Feed His Flock” from *Messiah*, G. F. Handel)

EXERCISES


1. Practice intoning/singing the following words:

get	wed	bed	head	guest
met	let	next	send	gentle
well	tell	quell	quest	bury
said	saith	says	fetch	weather
death	breath	bells	heaven	whether

2. Transcribe and practice reading the following text:

I attempt from Love’s sickness to fly in vain,
Since I am myself my own fever and pain,
No more now, no more now,
Fond heart, with pride no more swell:
Thou canst not raise forces enough to rebel

(Henry Purcell, from *The Indian Queen*)

3. Transcribe the following song text into IPA and practice with care the [ɛ] vowel sounds: 

Low as the singer lies
In a field of heather,
Songs of his fashion bring
the swains together.
And when the west is red
With the sunset embers,
The lover lingers and sings,
And the maid remembers.

(Robert Louis Stevenson / Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Bright Is the Ring of Words")

[æ] Production

The vowel [æ] is a distinctively English vowel that is not found in German, Italian, or French. A long vowel sound in duration, it is the most common stressed vowel in English. *In American Standard pronunciation, all [æ] vowels are pronounced alike.*

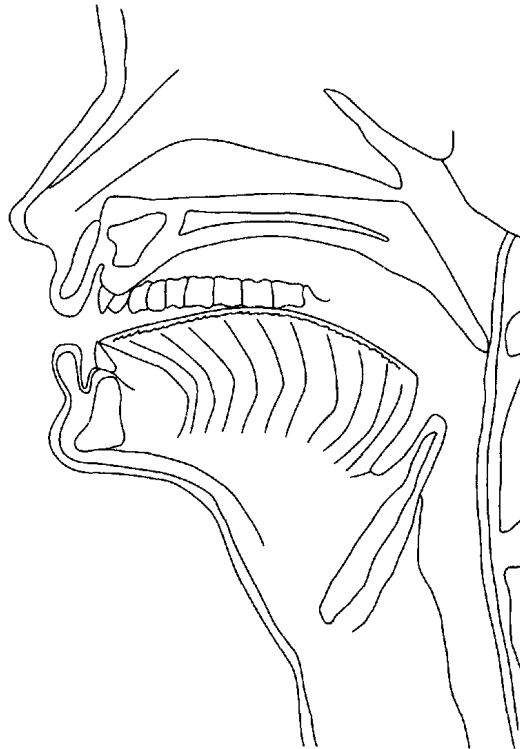


FIGURE 4.4 [æ]

Because the [æ] vowel does not exist in the other lyric languages, it is often overlooked and seldom vocalized. A well produced [æ] can be a very beautiful sound.

Action

<i>Tongue</i>	tip in contact with lower front teeth front arched less than for [ɛ] sides of tongue aligned with <i>lower molars</i> <i>first vowel to be in contact with lower teeth</i>
<i>Lips</i>	released, not spread cheeks still energized
<i>Jaw</i>	more open than for [ɛ]

Pitfalls to Avoid

Do not stretch lips against teeth.

Do not pull back corners of mouth.

Do not tighten tongue muscles under chin.

Do not nasalize by directing vowel through nose.

Do not substitute [ɑ] for [æ] vowel—it sounds affected

EXAMPLES hand: [hænd] not [hand]
 man: [mæn] not [man]

Be careful not to produce flat, nasal sound when adjacent to nasal consonants.

EXAMPLES hands, lands, sang, dance

Avoid Midwestern regional substitution of [ɛ] for [æ]

EXAMPLES tarry [tæɹi] not terry [tɛɹi]
 marry [mæɹi] not merry [mɛɹi]

Tips for Vocal Ease

For greater comfort in the passaggio and high range, modify [æ] to [ɛ]. Be sure to really sing a true [æ] in the middle range, or else the listener can hear that the vowel has been modified and your diction will sound artificial.

EXERCISES

1. Practice intoning/singing the following words, avoiding nasality:

cat	hand	land	passion
hat	man	stand	matter
sad	valley	happy	balance
than	lamb	capture	rapture
bag	magic	hallowed	understand

2. If you find that you are tempted to substitute [ɛ] for [æ], which is common pronunciation for many people who live in areas of North America, practice the following words using the correct [æ] pronunciation:

arrow	carry	charity	embarrass
marry	marriage	narrow	paradise
Arab	Carol	Harry	Paris

3. Practice maintaining an [æ] vowel without nasalization when in close proximity with nasal consonants:

Repeat:

had/had/ <u>hand</u>	bad/bad/ <u>band</u>
sad/sad/ <u>sand</u>	cad/cad/ <u>candy</u>
lad/lad/ <u>land</u>	mad/mad/ <u>mandate</u>
glad/glad/ <u>gland</u>	gad/gad/ <u>gander</u>

Review of Front Vowels


Repeat the following words, carefully differentiating between the various vowel sounds:

[i]	[ɪ]	[eɪ]	[ɛ]	[æ]
bean	been	bane	Ben	ban
read	rid	raid	red	rad
feast	fist	faced	fest	fast
seat	sit	sate	set	sat
Pete	pit	pate	pet	pat
peel	pill	pail	Pell	pal
keen	kin	cane	Ken	can

If you experience difficulty in finding the [æ] vowel easily, practice drilling back and forth between the adjacent vowels on the vowel chart:

[ɛ] . . . [æ] . . . [ɑ] or [ɑ] . . . [æ] . . . [ɛ]

The same approach can be helpful with finding the mouth position for [ɪ]:

[i] . . . [ɪ] . . . [e] or [e] . . . [ɪ] . . . [i]

Although [ɑ] is neither considered a fronting nor a backing vowel, it will be included here because of the physiological sequence of the vowel chart.

[ɑ] Production

The [ɑ] vowel is the most favored sound in singing internationally. It is found in various forms in Italian, French, German, Russian, and so on. It is the most open of all English vowels. In American Standard, it is found in words such as: father, God, calm, hot, and doctor. In RP and MA, the words spelled with “o,” God, not, honour, are pronounced with [ɒ]. See page 217.

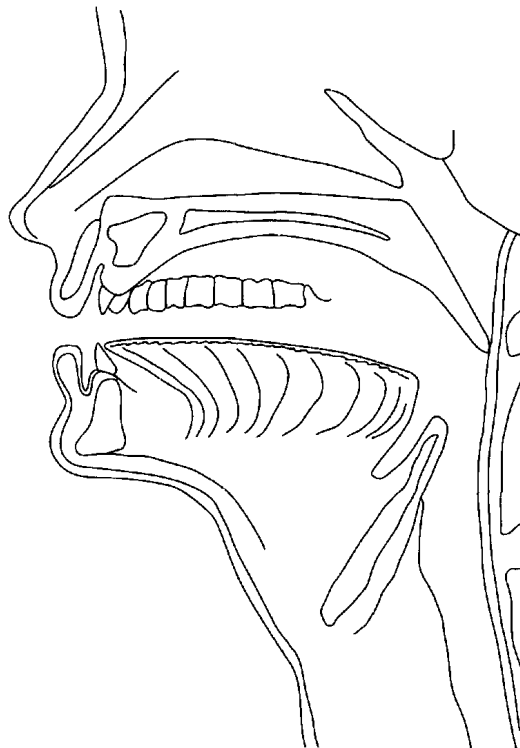


FIGURE 4.5 [ɑ]

It is a long vowel in duration. In the United States, [ɔ] is often substituted in areas of Germanic immigration; and [ɒ] is often heard in New England and the Eastern seaboard.

Action

<i>Tongue</i>	tip on lower front teeth body of tongue lying in lowest position front of tongue flat, middle still slightly arched
<i>Lips</i>	relaxed, no specifications no protrusion toward [ɔ] cheeks still lifted and energized
<i>Jaw</i>	most relaxed, lowest vertical drop

Pitfalls to Avoid

No pressure under chin.

Do not press tongue down.

Do not protrude lips—results in [ɔ] vowel.

No lip rounding or tensing lips.

No off-glides to [ə] vowel—for example, calm not [kɒ(ə)m].

Avoid [a] or [ɒ] substitutions in AS.

Tips for Vocal Ease

Try singing [ɑ] with [ɪ] placement if the [ɑ] poses problems in the passaggio. Again, to the listener, this vowel must always sound exact and not Italianate or artificial.

EXERCISES

1. Intone/sing the following words focusing on [ɑ] for AS pronunciation:

body	John	bomb	accomplish
doctor	box	shock	possibility
got	common	Tom	problem
Robert	collar	motto	popcorn
Psalm*	calm*	palm*	balmy*
not	upon	on	God

*While many regionalisms may pronounce the letter “l,” it is in fact silent in all neutral pronunciations (AS, RP, and MA).



If the [ɑ] pronunciation on these “o” spellings seems very foreign to your regional pronunciation, keep a list of [ɑ] words for frequent reference.



2. Transcribe the following text into American Standard Pronunciation IPA and practice intoning/singing it:

Sure on this shining night
Of star made shadows ound,
Kindness must oatch for me
This oide the ound.
The late year oies down the north.
All is healed,
All is health.
High summer holds the earth.
Hearts all whole.
Sure on this shining night
I weep for wonder.
Wond'ring oar alone
Of shadows on the oars.

(James Agee / Samuel Barber, “Sure on This Shining Night”)

CHAPTER FIVE

The Backing Vowels

[u]/[ju] Production

The vowel sounds [u] and [ju] are related in English. The vowel [u] appears in German, Italian, and French, though the European version has more intensity. The vowel [ju] is found only in English. The vowel [u] is found in the words: too, wound, blue, juice; [ju] in the words: view, beautiful, usual, music.

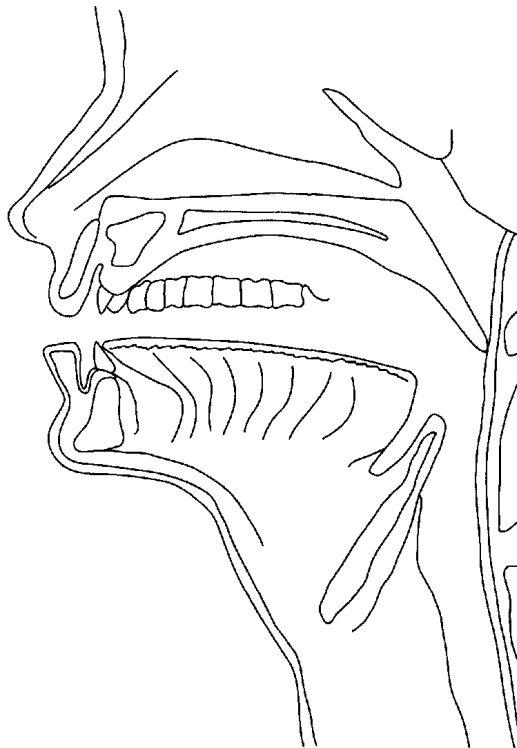


FIGURE 5.1 [u] / [ju]

Action

<i>Tongue</i>	tip touching lower front teeth back of tongue arched toward <i>soft palate</i> sides of tongue in contact with upper molars for [ju]-movement begins with [j] glide position— sides in contact with inner surface of upper teeth, then glides forward as it merges with [u]
<i>Lips</i>	round, smallest circular shape lip rounding essential to accurate production the rounder the lip contour, the higher the tongue arch
<i>Jaw</i>	mouth opening and jaw very small vertically <i>wide opening</i> in center of mouth between tongue and hard palate

Pitfalls to Avoid

Do not arch tongue too high in back.

Do not hold tongue/jaw too stiffly—muffles sound.

Do not nasalize [u] when adjacent to m, n—moon, fume.

Do not form vowel in throat—squeezed and guttural.

Avoid regional substitution of [ʊ] for [u].

EXAMPLES roof: [ɹuf] not [ɹʊf]
 root: [ɹut] not [ɹʊt]

Avoid off-glides with l.

EXAMPLES fool [ful] not [fu(ə)l]
 school [skul] not [sku(ə)l]

[ju] PRONUNCIATION: THE LIQUID U

Certain words often spelled “u” or “ew” can have two different pronunciations—either [u] or [ju]. The words “duty” and “duke” can be pronounced either [duti] or [djuti], [duk] or [djuk]. The second pronunciation, commonly called the Liquid U, is considered preferable when singing art song, oratorio, and opera and is the *only* pronunciation for RP and MA. Of course, there are exceptional circumstances. In North American songs with a juvenile text or colloquial flavor, the [ju] sounds too stuffy.

The words with two possible pronunciations usually contain the English spellings “u,” “ew,” “eu,” or “ue” and are preceded by one of the following consonants: d, n, l, s, t, or th.

Below is a list of the most commonly used of these words:

d	duty, duly, due, dew, duke, endure, induce, duplicate
n	new, knew, renew, news, nuisance, numerous, nuclear*
l	lute, alluring, illusion, elude, prelude, interlude
s	suitor, pursuit, assume, consume, presume, resume
t	tune, Tuesday, tumult, student, stupid, gratitude, multitude, astute, tutor
th	enthuse, enthusiasm

Exceptions to these spellings are words that should be pronounced with [u] only: blue, blew, clue, include, exclude, flute, flew, flue, glue, plume, slew, and words spelled with “u” but that have an [ʌ] pronunciation: dumb, numb, lung, sung, tumble, thunder, and so on.

[ju] only: There are some words not listed that always use the [ju] pronunciation. The most common of them are:

music, amuse, huge, few, cure, imbued, human, Hugh,
humility, humorous, excuse, calculate, refute, future,
beautiful, mute, value, hue, unison, university, unit,
usurp, community

* Nuclear is often mispronounced in the United States as [nukjulə-]. The American Standard pronunciation is [nuklɪə-] or [njuklɪə-].

EXERCISES

1. Practice intoning/singing the following words containing [u] vowel:

too	cool	blue	blew
through	lose	who	whom
fruit	moon	noon	flute
roof	choose	glue	flew
gloom	soothe	tomb	wounded
June	bruise	peruse	recruit
school*	fool*	tool*	cool*

* Avoid off-glide [ə] by not anticipating [l].

2. Practice making the distinction between [u] and [ju] in the following words:

stoop → stupid	noon → new
two → tune	do → dew
pooh → pew	who → hue
coo → cue	flute → lute*



3. Transcribe and recite the following text:

I have wished a bird would fly away
 And not sing round my house all day.
 I have clapped my hands at him from the door
 When it seemed as if I could bear no more.
 The fault must partly have been in me,
 The bird was not to blame for his key.
 And besides there must be something wrong
 In wanting to silence any song.

(Robert Frost / Celius Dougherty, "A Minor Bird")**



4. Transcribe the following song text:

Slowly, silently, now the moon
 Walks the night in her silver shoon;
 This way, and that, she peers, and sees
 Silver fruit upon silver trees;
 And moveless fish in the water gleam,
 By silver reeds in a silver stream.

(Walter de la Mare / John Duke, "Silver")



5. Transcribe the following song text:

See how they love me,
 Green leaf, gold grass,
 Swearing my blue wrists
 Tick and are timeless.
 See how it woos me,

*In AS and Historic RP/MA, [ljut], in Modern RP/MA, [lut].

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