

FIRST AID KIT: VOWELS

This document is meant as a rough guide to help you with some of the most common issues in the pronunciation of the Norwegian vowels. It does not provide a detailed explanation to all the sounds in Norwegian, but gives some guidelines to help you overcome some common difficulties which may cause misunderstandings.

In the explanations below, letters between slashes, like /u/, refers to the pronounced sound, not the written letter.

The Norwegian vowels

Norwegian has nine vowels: *a, e, i, o, u, y, æ, ø* and *å*. Here are some things to notice regarding the pronunciation of the vowels in Norwegian:

a	The written <i>a</i> is always pronounced like <i>a</i> in the English word <i>father</i> . It is also pronounced in this way before <i>-ll</i> , like in the words <i>ball</i> and <i>alle</i> in Norwegian.
e	The letter <i>e</i> is usually pronounced like in the English words <i>send</i> and <i>very</i> . However, in some frequent words it is pronounced like the letter <i>æ</i> (see under <i>æ</i> below). The words <i>er</i> and <i>her</i> are examples of this. In the word <i>de</i> , the <i>e</i> is pronounced as a Norwegian <i>i</i> .
i	In Norwegian, the letter <i>i</i> is always pronounced as English <i>ee</i> in <i>sleep</i> .
o	To say an /o/, round your lips like when you whistle and pull your tongue as far back as you can. This is the same sound as represented by the letter <i>u</i> in many languages, like Spanish, Italian and Slavic languages. The letter <i>o</i> is usually pronounced /o/ in Norwegian, but sometimes it is pronounced like /å/ (for example <i>komme, over</i>).

u	<p>To pronounce the letter <i>u</i>, round your lips like when you whistle and say an /i/ with your lips rounded. You can practise this with the English word <i>sleep</i>. If you say this with the lips rounded, the <i>ee</i> will be replaced by a perfect /u/!</p> <p>The written letter <i>u</i> in Norwegian is usually pronounced like this, but sometimes it is pronounced /o/ (for example <i>ung, dum</i>).</p>
y	<p>To pronounce the <i>y</i>, say an /i/ with rounded lips. The lips should be slightly apart. You should not be able to whistle with the lips like this.</p>
æ	<p>The <i>æ</i> is pronounced as a mix between /a/ and /e/. To produce this sound, open your mouth wide open – pretend you try to eat a hamburger in one bite! – while saying /e/.</p> <p>The letter <i>æ</i> is always pronounced like this. In addition, the <i>æ</i>-sound is also frequently used for the letter <i>e</i>, like in the words <i>er</i> and <i>her</i>.</p>
ø	<p>The /ø/ is an /e/ with rounded lips. The tongue should be in the same position as when you say /e/, and your lips should be rounded. The opening between the lips should be too big to whistle. Make sure to push your tongue forward as for the /e/. If the tongue slides back, you will end up with an /å/ (see below).</p> <p>Several languages have this sound, like German (<i>Vögel</i>) and French (<i>sœur</i>). In American English, the words <i>bird</i>, <i>nerd</i> and <i>learn</i> are pronounced with vowels quite close to the Norwegian /ø/.</p> <p>The /ø/ is always represented by the written letter <i>ø</i> – and no other letter is pronounced in this way.</p>
å	<p>The letter <i>å</i> is always pronounced like the letter <i>o</i> in most European languages (Italian, Spanish, German, Russian ...). In English, you will find this sound in the word <i>song</i>. Warning: The /å/ is often confused with /a/.</p>

Long and short vowels

In Norwegian, any vowel may be long or short. This distinction is important as the length of the vowel can change the meaning of the word. For instance, *tiger* (long /i/) means “tiger”, whereas *tigger* (short /i/) means “beggar”.

A vowel is long if it

a) is followed by just one or no consonant, *and*

b) carries stress

Both criterias must be present for the vowel to be long. All other vowels are short:

sk <u>o</u> le	- long o: carries stress, one consonant behind
forst <u>å</u>	- long å: carries stress, no consonant behind
vas <u>ke</u>	- short a: carries stress, but two consonants behind
but <u>i</u> kk	- short u: no stress - short i: two consonants behind

How short should a short vowel be? Like one clap of the hands.

To get the right length of the long vowels, pretend you are stretching a rubber band while saying the vowel. (Or better: do it!) The rubber band should be slightly stretched. Let go of the vowel - and the rubber band! - when you start feeling tension in the band.