Swedish Made Easy – Vowel Workshops

There are nine vowels in Swedish: -a, -e, -i, -o, -u, -y, -å, -ä, and -ö.

The nine vowels though, can be separated into what are traditionally known as hard (hårda) and soft (mjuka) vowels.

The hard (back of the mouth) vowels are: -a, -o, -u, -å.
'Gå', 'gås', 'gata', 'gapa', 'gammal' – hard ’g’

The soft (front of the mouth) vowels are: -e, -i, -y, -ä, -ö.
'Ge', 'gäspa', 'gäst', 'genast' – soft ’g’

Pronouncing the vowels correctly will help you get the rhythm of the Swedish language correctly and so help you with the rhythm of a whole sentence.

It is important to pronounce the strong and weak syllables within a word correctly as doing it wrong can change the meaning. The long and short vowels should be pronounced correctly. For example, if you say you are eating ‘soppa’ – soup – correctly – short o and short, people will know you are eating soup. However, if you pronounce it ‘sorpa’ (with a long ‘o’), people will think you are eating soap, as the word for soap is såpa

So, to review:
Hard/back vowels: -a, -o, -u, -å
Soft/front vowels: -e, -i, -y, -ä, -ö

Vowels - I E A

Swedish vowels may also be termed ‘long’ or ‘short’. The main rule: short vowel sound before two consonants and a long vowel sound before one consonant.
For example:

- Long I - Pil (arrow) [PEEhl] like in feed
- Short I - Pinne (stick) like the bit
- Long E - Sen (late) [SEhn]
- Short E - Men (but) [MEhn]
- Long A - Fat (a saucer), [FAht] like in 'Father'
- Short A - Katt (cat), [CAht] like the a-sound in 'hat'

However, there are some exceptions, as always.

So, now let us begin to look at the first three vowels – IEA. To begin with let us say these letters IEA – I = eee; E = ay; and A = ah

The Vowel I – Pronounced ‘eee’ and ‘I’ as in the word ‘in’ in English

Long: Long I - Pil (arrow) [PEEhl] like in feed – an eee sound – as in English word bee or teeth

Examples: is (ice), vi (we), bi (bee), vit (white), bil (car)

Short: Short (i) - Pinne (stick) as in pill or in in English

Examples: sitta (to sit), inte (not), gilla (like), illa (bad), trilla (to fall), grilla (to BBQ),

gorilla

Combined examples in the same word: vitsippa (long/short) – (veetsippa), vitsippor (wood anemone) (long/short/long 'o')

Vitsippa – Wood Anemone

Examples:

1. Klockan n**i**o (long) ska v**i** (short) gå på b**i**o (long) t**i**llsammans (short). *At nine o'clock* we *will go to the cinema together.*

2. Vi (long) har ätit (short) en jättefin (long) middag (short), fisksoppa (long) med hembakat bröd. Och så drack vi (short) iskallt (long) vitt (short) vin (long) till (short). *We have eaten a really nice dinner, fish soup with home-baked bread. And we drank ice-cold white wine too.*

The Vowel E – Pronounced 'eh' and 'e' as in ten

Long: Long E - Sen (late) [SEhn] as the sound 'saye(r)' in English

Examples: se (to see), tre (three), le (to smile), be (to ask/beg), ben (leg), lera (mud), sten (stone)

Short: Short E - Men (but) [MEhn] as in 'men' in English

Examples: sett (seen), trettio (thirty), bett (asked/begged), penna (pen)

Example sentences:

1. Ursäkta att vi blev (long) så hemskt (short) sena (long) till eftermiddagsfikat (long). *We are sorry that we are so terrible late for afternoon fika*

2. Ett (short) skepp (long) kommer lastat fullt med (short) stora stenar (long). *A ship arrives with big stones.*

3. Hembakade (short) semlor (short) är så frestande (short) och goda! *Home-baked semla (cakes) are so tempting and good*

The Vowel A – Pronounced ‘arrh’ and ‘a’ as in hat

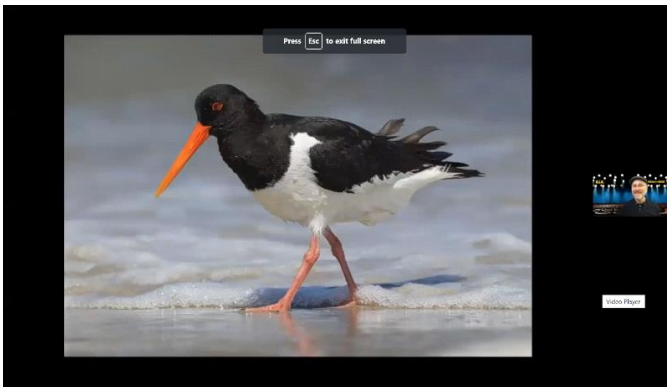
Long: Long A - Fat (a saucer), [FAht] like in 'Father'

Examples: ja (yes), svan (swan), bra (good), stad (town)

Short: Short A - Katt (cat), [CAht] like the a-sound in 'hat' or ‘cat’

Examples: att (to/that), satt (sat), aldrig (never), anka (duck)

Combined examples: bara (only), fara (danger), klara (to manage), vara (to be) strandskata (short/long/short) - oystercatcher



Oystercatcher Bird

1. Att vara (long/short) eller inte vara (long/short), det är frågan (short). *To be or not to be, that is the question*

2. Ska (long) vi träffas (short) klockan (short) arton (long) och ta (long) en öl? *Shall we meet at 18.00 for a beer?*

Vowels: Y.O.U

The Vowel Y – Pronounced ‘no equivalent English sound’ and ‘y’ as in yellow

Long: use the back of the tongue I, and protrude lips. Long Y - Frysa (to be cold) or fyra (four) German ü and French u as in 'début'. No equivalent English sound.

Examples: yr (dizzy), sy (sow), vy (view), yla (to howl), fyra (four), mysa (snuggle up, being cozy)

Short: slightly relaxed lips - Short Y - Ny (new)

Examples: yxa (axe), ylle (wool), lycka (happiness), yrke (occupation), mycket (much, a lot), kyckling (chicken)

More examples: nyttig (healthy), tystnad (silence), yllebyxor (wool trousers) (short/long), Ystad (a town in the south), yttrandefrihet (freedom of speech)

The Vowel O - Pronounced

Long: back of tongue A, protrude lips. Long O - Sol (sun) like in food

Examples: lo (lynx), stor (big), tro (believe), mor (mother), sol (sun), ort (small town)

Short: slightly relaxed lips. Short O - Blomma (flower) [BLOmah]

Examples: ost (cheese), lort (dirt), bott (lived), oliv (olive), potatis (potato), lom (a

bird: loon/diver), bonde (farmer), toalett (toilet)

More examples: storbonde (long/short) (well-to-do farmer), potatismos (short/long) (mashed potatoes), solros (long/long) (sunflower), osthyvel (short) (cheese slicer), stora oliver (long/short) (large olives)

The Vowel U - Pronounced -

Long: Long U - Mus (mouse) No equivalent English sound.

Examples: jul (Christmas), juni (June), sju (seven), ful (ugly), hjul (wheel), ljud (sound), ljus (light), gul (yellow)

Short: slightly relaxed lips. Short U - Buss (bus) like in under

Examples: upp (up), just (precisely, exactly), guld (gold), gummi (rubber), buss (bus), lussekatt (saffron bun), full (full or drunk), grupp (group), mums (yummy)

More examples: julmust (long/short) (trad. Christmas soda), tupplur (short/long) (nap), husgrund (long/short) (foundations of a house), busstur (short/long) (bus ride), sommarstuga (long) (summer house)

Vowels: Å.Ä.Ö

The Vowel Å – Pronounced 'Å' (lips make a circle) - sounds a bit like 'afford'

Long: Long Å - Låsa (to lock). Form your lips together in an 'o' but let some air pass through

Examples: å (river), på (on/at), gå (go/travel), blå (blue), två (two), åskmoln (thundercloud) this sound can be made by both the 'Å' and by an ‘O’ as in the previous example – åsk (short) moln (long)

Short: Short Å - Åtta (eight)

Examples: åtta (eight), påsk (Easter), sommar (summer), och (and), också (also), som (as/which), socker (sugar)

Examples of combined words: åskmoln – short/long (thundercloud), sångfågel – short/long (song bird), gånglåt – short/long (category of Swedish folk music), kålsoppa – long/short (cabbage soup), ånglok – long/long (steam engine), hjortron – long/short (cloudberry)

The Vowel Ä – Pronounced 'Ä' (mouth open) sounds like 'hair'

Long: Long Ä - Läsa (to read) No equivalent sound in English.

Examples: ära (honour), lära (to learn), kär (in love), nära (near), särskilt (particularly)

Short: Short Ä - Lätt (easy)

Examples: sätt (put/place), rätt (right), ände (end), bäst (best), ägg (egg), vän (friend), vem (who), pengar (money), cell (cell)

Examples of combined words: kärlek – long/short (love), träsko – long/short (clog), självklart – short/long (of course), perfekt – short/short (perfect), sällan – long/short (rarely)

The Vowel Ö – Pronounced - 'Ö' sounds like 'bird'

Long: Long Ö - Frö (a seed)

Examples: ö (island), över (over), öken (desert), sjö (lake), blöt (wet)

Short: Short Ö - Böcker (books)

Examples: önska (to wish), ört (herb), trött (tired), kött (meat)

Examples of combined words: sötmjölk – long/short (raw milk), rågmjöl – long/long (rye flour), söderfönster – long/short (south facing window), köttbulle – short/long (meatball), rönnbär – short/long (rowan-berry)