Voice Training: Active

International Phonetic Alphabet [IPA]: Basic Vowels Used in English, Latin, and the Romance Languages

Remember that "home position" for all vowels is: tongue relaxed in the bottom of the mouth with the tip touching the inside of the lower front two teeth. This is the vowel α, "ah" as in "father", with a tall mouth and tongue in home position.

The four types of vowels:
1. Tongue Vowels, which are formed primarily by movement of the tongue;
2. Lip Vowels, which are formed primarily by rounding of the lips, with the tongue responding to the rounding of the lips;
3. Neutral Vowels, neither tongue nor lips exercising much control;
4. Mixed Vowels, which combine one tongue vowel and one lip vowel (used in French and German)

The tongue vowels in order, starting from the home position of α:

α   "ah" as in "father"; tall mouth, tongue in home position
æ   "aaaa" as in "angle"; tall mouth, tongue front slightly raised from "ah"
ε   "eh" as in "set"; medium-tall mouth, tongue begins to rise toward rear molars
e   "ay" without the final "ee" of English; medium-tall mouth, tongue barely touches rear molars
i   "ee" of "see!"; oval mouth, still tall inside, tongue definitely touching the rear molars, the center of the tongue rising and making a "ramp" toward the lower front teeth
I   "ih" as in "sit"; same as [i] but the front of the tongue relaxes toward [a]

The lip vowels in order, starting from the home position of α:

α   "ah" as in "father"; tall mouth, tongue in home position
ɔ   "aw" as in "saw"; like [a] but with the lips slightly rounded; keep the tall space
ɔ   "oh" as in "note" but without the final "oo" of English; tall mouth with definitely rounded lips; you start to feel the cheek muscles at this point! (The cherubic choirboy/girl on a Christmas card or the Indian whoop :-)
u   "oo" as in "soon": the lips very rounded, with a small opening, with a "hooty" feeling inside. Make sure the tip of the tongue stays forward while the cheeks get a workout!

The neutral vowels

U   "uh" as in "done"; also known as the schwa and symbolized [ə]; oval, relaxed mouth and tongue in home position, not as resonant as [a] so we often shade it towards [a] instead for beauty (and ease of production)
ə   "er" as in "water"; in singing, we sing this as the British speak it, as [U] without the [r] sound
Vowel Drills We Often Use:
The five most basic vowels: a e i o u  We often put consonants at the front in order to energize the air stream.

The tongue vowels in order from home: a æ ɛ e i

The lip vowels in order from home: a ɔ o u

The whole series, with home in the middle: i e æ æ a / a ɔ o u

TIP: In drilling vowels, it is very important the tip of the tongue stay touching the lower front two teeth, no matter what the rest of the tongue does!