

# Accent Survey

I created the survey to answer a question which arose in conversation with a British English speaker about the number of vowels in American English & my Canadian brain could not cope with 'fox' and 'dog' having different sounds.

To hear the target vowels, [go to this site](#), scroll down & click on the /ɒ/, /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ on the bottom right of the vowel diagram. Some N.Am. speakers say the /ɔ/. All say either or both of /ɒ/ & /ɑ/. Br. Eng speakers say all 3.

Because my vowels are so lacking in variety, I'll use sets of words from J.C. Wells' *Accents of English* to illustrate the results of the survey. See [this site](#) for a great explanation of vowel categories.

N.Am. English speakers can sort the first 4 groups of words on the right into 1 or 2 sounds. Many, but not all, British speakers can sort all 7 groups into the 3 sounds.

Survey responses included: 40 England, 32 Canada & 60 US. The sample from the northeast US was small (6) but has been included in the final numbers. The results do not capture variations within regions but do capture broad and significant differences for teaching spelling.

LOT	stop, odd, Tom
CLOTH	cough, long, gone
PALM	bra, Brahms, blah
THOUGHT	Waugh, hawk, broad
NORTH	for, York, storm
BATH	staff, clasp, dance (not surveyed, UK only)
START	far, sharp, farm (not surveyed, UK only)

## Canadian, American West & Midwest

LOT	stop, odd, Tom
CLOTH	cough, long, gone
PALM	bra, Brahms, blah
THOUGHT	Waugh, hawk, broad
This means that people with these 3 accents generally agreed there was only one vowel and they agreed on which words sounded the same or different. However, the sounds themselves might be different. i.e 'stop' in Vancouver will sound different from 'stop' in Chicago or even Seattle.	
NORTH, BATH and START words have 3 separate sounds extra to the target sounds.	

## British - England Only

LOT	stop, odd, Tom
CLOTH	cough, long, gone
PALM	bra, Brahms, blah
BATH	*staff, clasp, dance
START	far, sharp, farm
THOUGHT	Waugh, hawk, broad
NORTH	for, York, storm
Most people from all regions of England agreed on the sounds in the survey. This would have changed if the BATH sounds had been included because a significant number of British English speakers have a short /a/ sound in those words.	

## American Northeast and South

LOT	stop, odd, Tom
PALM	bra, Brahms, blah
THOUGHT	Waugh, hawk, broad
CLOTH	cough, long, gone
NORTH, BATH and START words have 3 separate sounds extra to the target sounds.	

There was variation between the Northeast and Southern accent responses but it was largely agreed that they have two distinct sounds where the rest of the country has one. Again, this does not mean that 'hawk' sounds exactly the same in New York and Fort Worth, just that the vowel sounds in 'hawk' and 'stop' sound different in both places.

## Distinguishing pairs amongst the American accents surveyed (+ Canadian & English)

Number indicates the percentage of respondents who said the words sounded <b>different</b>						
Pair	West	Midwest	South	Northeast	Canada	England
bought/plot	5	20	53	67	3	100
daughter/spotter	9	20	35	83	3	95
paw/pa	0	27	18	0	0	98
talk/tock	9	20	24	50	0	80
nod/gnawed	9	20	29	50	0	90
hot/dog	9	20	29	50	6	5
lot/lawn	14	40	35	67	25	93
dog/fox	18	20	41	33	16	10

