Vowels are the backbone of any language for without them there can be no speech as we know it. A vowel, as opposed to a consonant, is a speech sound produced without stopping or obstructing the flow of air from the lungs. A second, familiar definition is any letter of the alphabet representing (or usually representing) the sound of a vowel. In English, as we learned in grade school, these letters are A, E, I, O, U and sometimes W and Y.

The English language relies heavily on the five common vowels. Take any printed page and upon tallying up all the A's, E's, I's, O's and U's, and you will arrive at about 40 per cent of all the letters on the page. It seems, then, that consonants merely fill in gaps and stop the English language from being a sing-song parade of voiced noises. In part this is correct, although it can be argued that just the reverse is true -- namely that vowels merely fill in the gaps between consonants. Observe the word D-ST-NG-SH-D. It is easy to tell that with the vowels inserted the word is DISTINGUISHED. However, it would be very difficult to infer this if you wrote only the vowels in their correct positions and used spaces for the missing consonants, obtaining _I--_U--E_.

We are consonant-oriented, not only because we give emphasis to consonants in the formation of words, but because a large majority of all our words are composed of a majority of consonants. Even simple three-letter words as CAT and DOG have 66.7 per cent consonants. Of all common words, perhaps STRENGTHS holds the record with 88.9 per cent consonants. Of less common words, the mathematical term NTH attains the ultimate 100 per cent.

At the opposite extreme, there are a handful of short words that are composed only of vowel sounds. A partial list includes A, AA, AH, AI, AY, AYE, EH, I, IO, O, OE, OH, OI, OOH, OW, OWE and UH.

In contrast to English, the Hawaiian language is very definitely vowel-oriented. Of the twelve letters of the Hawaiian alphabet five are vowels! The list of words containing all vowels, instead of being a mere handful, is a copious collection of over 100. The complete list appears below and is extracted from the Hawaiian Dictionary (University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1971), compiled by Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel H. Elbert. A short definition has been provided for each word. Hawaiian words are not difficult to pronounce; just remem-
ber that each vowel is pronounced individually except when it forms part of a diphthong combination. For example, the word AAUA, often written with glottal stops as 'A'AUA would be pronounced "ah-ow-ah". The native Hawaiian hardwood tree AALII is often written 'A'AALI'I and is pronounced "ah-ahlee-ee".

A List of Hawaiian Words Containing Only Vowels

A of
AA lava
AAE network of veins
AAEA harvested taro patch
AAEA infant's attention cry
AAEA bright, as contrasting hues
AAEA demented
AAEA to rove about
AAUA coarse
AE kind of tree
AEA to rise up
AEA to stretch
AEA small green fish
AEI fine net
AEI food plant
IAI there; there is
IAIA dependent upon another
IAIA impious
IAIU weary
IAI to owe
IAEA kind of Hawaiian shrub
AO daylight
AIAO to bark
AIAOA boundary
AIAOA small seaside shrub
AIAE not
AIAO elderly
AU era
AU to observe
AAUAU elderly man
AAUA wrinkled skin
AUE alas
AUI to digress

E by
EA independence
EAA burning air
EIAE different
EAEA air
EE to extend greetings
EAA to bob up and down
EAE mischievous

A list of Hawaiian Words Containing Only Vowels

of Hawaiian Words Containing Only Vowels
It is interesting to note that nearly 10 per cent of these words -- AA, AEA, AO, AUE, IAO, IE, IEIE, IO, OO and OO-AA -- are listed above the line in boldface type in Webster’s Second Edition. However, the Websterian meanings do not in all cases match the meanings given above, and the words are variously identified as Hawaiian, Polynesian and Samoan in origin.