

The
Power
of Voice

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A Single Breath

Here is an exercise you can try. It's one of my favorites because it addresses breath, voice, and articulation simultaneously. Begin the sequence by using one breath per line, then gradually add another line on one single breath, until you are saying the entire sequence on one breath. Feel the placement of your voice on the lips and the tip of your tongue. You can go across in the sequence, or down. Remember, a sustained, relaxed breath in through the mouth and accurate articulation are your goals. Speed will come with practice.

Mah Nah Lah Thah Vah Zah

May Nay Lay Thay Vay Zay

Mee Nee Lee Thee Vee Zee

May Nay Lay Thay Vay Zay

Mah Nah Lah Thah Vah Zah

Maw Naw Law Thaw Vaw Zaw

Moo Noo Loo Thoo Voo Zoo

Maw Naw Law Thaw Vaw Zaw

Mah Nah Lah Thah Vah Zah





Let's Begin

- Start with your posture. How are you sitting right now? Are you slouched, with your shoulders rounded?
- Adjust your spine by lengthening your torso. Just imagine you are being pulled by a string from the top of your head. Make sure that your chin is not jutting forward or tucked in.
- Now imagine that you are being pulled by a string from both sides of the point where your upper arms meet your shoulders. This gentle imaginative pull will allow your chest to widen without forcing or protruding it.

You are now creating maximum space in your torso and back for lung expansion. You are also creating space for the voice to resonate in the chest cavity with relative ease.

This spine adjustment can have an additional beneficial effect on your head, neck, shoulders, and jaw—like dominoes. The goal is to create maximum space between each vertebra of the spine, space between the tip of the upper spine and the base of the skull, and finally space in the jaw and the back of the throat. When you compromise this small but precious real estate, the negative vocal impact can be huge. Take, for example, that minute but highly influential space between the tip of your upper spine and the base of your skull.

1. See it in your mind's eye. Place your fingers at the base of your skull, and gently massage that spot. The space

I'm referring to is about the distance of your four fingers stacked one on top of the other.

2. Now imagine that you're able to insert a golf ball in that four-finger space. That simple golf ball image will help create a cavernous space in the back of your throat, allowing for an unobstructed release of voice.
3. If you add to that image the simple act of blowing out through the lips, this will raise the soft palate in the back of the throat and naturally create more space without hyperextending. I'm not talking about blowing out through the lips as if you are extinguishing candles on a birthday cake. I mean a more vigorous but relaxed fluttering of the lips; you may also add gentle sound.



Speak It!—Part I

With the exception of upspeaking, which is covered in the bonus section that follows, all the vocal issues that I have discussed in this chapter can be easily improved with the same series of exercises because they are similar in nature. Addressing them sooner rather than later can potentially prevent the need for medical solutions. Vocal fry and the persistent clearing of the throat are a result of the voice lingering in the back of the throat, sometimes causing a tickle. Due to a lack of breath and a lack of nasal resonance, the voice will either settle back or escape into the nasal region. Hence, the clearing of the throat, vocal fry, and nasalization.

Breath (as discussed in the previous chapter) is a crucial component of the effortless release of voice. However, if you lack awareness of nasal resonance or a sense of vibration in the front of your face, you will resort to regional or cultural habits like those we are discussing. The following exercises will help resolve these issues. First, follow these steps:

1. **Breathe in through the mouth and blow out through the lips, causing them to flutter.** Blowing out through the lips gives you a visceral and visual sense of the voice resonating there as opposed to the back of the throat. It also raises the soft palate in the upper back of the mouth, creating more space for the voice to be released.
2. **Do not add voice just yet. Simply release the breath with fluttering lips for the duration of that breath.** If you're finding it difficult for your lips to flutter, it is solely related to the amount of tension in the lips. Gently continue to try until they become more relaxed and you're able to sustain the lip flutter over a continuous blowing out of the breath.

3. **Breathe in through the mouth and add voice to the lip flutter**, easily going up and down your vocal register. Avoid going too high into a falsetto voice or too low, which potentially pulls the voice back into the throat. Be very gentle.
4. **Now breathe in through the mouth and gently release the voice on a vibrant, continuous “mmmmm” sound**. Make sure that your jaw is released and that the entire body of your tongue is relaxed on the floor of your mouth.
5. **Place your fingers onto your mouth and feel the tickling on your lips**. Move your fingers to your nasal passages and sinuses; gently massage while feeling the vibration there. Do this five to seven times.

Okay, let's take it up a notch. The poetic passage that follows was chosen because of its vast imaginative and emotional landscape. We've discussed breath; we've warmed up the voice with an awareness of vocal placement and resonance. Now let's add the imagination. The impact of the written word on your voice lies in your ability to imagine the poet's thoughts and emotions. All great poets use the phonetic sounds of language to convey deep meaning. These euphonious verses, coupled with the power of imagery, have a profound effect on the voice. Read them aloud. Allow the beautiful sounds of speech and the rich images to ignite deep diaphragmatic breathing and the effortless release of an easy, open, and expressive voice.

The Sea

Barry Cornwall (1787–1874)

*The sea! The sea! The open sea!
The blue, the fresh, the ever free!
Without a mark, without a bound,
It runneth the earth's wide regions round;
It plays with the clouds; it mocks the skies;
Or like a cradled creature lies.*

*I'm on the sea! I'm on the sea!
I am where I would ever be;
With the blue above, and the blue below,
And silence wheresoe'er I go;
If a storm should come and awake the deep,
What matter? I shall ride and sleep.*

*I love, O, how I love to ride
On the fierce, foaming, bursting tide,
When every mad wave drowns the moon
Or whistles aloft his tempest tune,
And tells how goeth the world below,
And why the southwest blasts do blow.*

Other poems to read aloud include “Hymn Before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834); “Sympathy” by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906); and “Caged Bird” by Maya Angelou (1928–2014).

Speak It!—Part II

Now that we've addressed the physiological challenges that can lead to vocal distractions, let's talk about the intellectual and emotional impediments to clear speech that Greg Louganis and Soledad O'Brien faced. They'd gotten too much into their heads about the story, going off on a tangent as Greg did, or habitually rushing their words as Soledad did. But again, these vocal distractions can be overcome when you use your imagination to make the story the star. These three suggestions will help.

Free yourself to take a more visceral approach to the images of the story. When you come across the word “blue,” what do you see? The sky? The ocean? A blue crayon? Simply seeing the word “blue” spelled out won't cut it. You need an image to create an emotional connection and draw your attention out of your head and into the imaginative heart of the story. Color your narrative.

Take that speech, presentation, or piece of reportage and map out the images beforehand. Go through the written text and assign visuals to the most important verbs, nouns, and adjectives. Think about these images and how they make you feel. Develop a visceral connection to the story as you practice your speech in front of the mirror, in the shower, or in the car—wherever you feel most comfortable speaking out loud.

As always, remember to slow down and breathe! Take your time, using an entire breath for each thought, and a new deep breath will naturally emerge for every new thought.

When you get out of your head and take this more visceral approach to the story, enabling yourself to see the story, you will naturally connect to your authentic voice. When you have the visceral connection through imagery, along with the breath, all those other pesky vocal distractions will simply fall away.



What Goes Up Must Come Down: Correcting Upspeak

To correct a vocal upswing on the last word of a statement, think of a waterfall starting high at the top of a cliff, then cascading down into the river below. In multisyllabic words, the upspeaker lowers the pitch of the syllable that precedes the final syllable and raises the pitch of the final syllable:

tion
trans-por-
ta-

In a monosyllabic word, the upspeaker starts low and raises the pitch on the vowel or diphthong sound:

r
ca-

Let's reverse upspeak to downsppeak! Raise the pitch of the syllable that precedes the final syllable, then lower the pitch of the final syllable:

ta-
trans-por-
tion

In monosyllabic words, start slightly higher in pitch and lower the pitch on the vowel or diphthong sound:

ca-

r

In phrases and sentences, raise the pitch of the word that precedes the final word, then lower the pitch of the final word:

torch

song

audience

The singer's torch song made the

cry.

Practice Words

Remember to think of a waterfall cascading downward. Avoid making these single-syllable words two syllables.

As you do this practice material, let your hand become a gesture for the voice. Allow your hand to start high and come down as your voice does. An easy physical gesture is an extremely useful visual tool during practice. However, don't allow it to become habitual; excessive gestures can be distracting.

*Feet . . . Fit . . . Fed . . . Fact . . . From . . . First . . . Fun . . .
Food . . . Foot . . . Fault . . . Fond . . .*

Practice Phrases

Start slightly higher in pitch on the first word, then lower the pitch on the final word.

Use upward and downward hand gestures to help see the vocal journey.

Three
feet

A *quick*
fix

Fed *in a*
shed

That's *a*
fact

From here *to there*
together

Thirty-Third *and*
Third

Fun *in the*
sun

The *Food*
Dude

On the *good*
foot

Paul's
fault

Fond of
songs

Practice Sentences

Note that the final monosyllabic word in the statement or the final syllable of a multisyllabic word in the statement go downward.

Please keep three feet from
the
street.

It's my Fitbit that slipped out of my
poc
ket.

Ted fed the med tech girls instead of the medi
cal
head.

Ask the cabbie if he has cash
on
hand.

We went from here to there to
ge
ther.

Earl met his girlfriend on Thirty-Third
and
Third.

My mother and brother had fun in the sun and I ^{had}
none.

The Food Dude includes stew on his ^{men}
u.

The cook shook a good book while dancing on ^{one}
foot.

It was Paul's fault that all his daughters were ^{law}
yers.

I'm fond of songs that are calming ^{to}
Tom.





Vowel, Diphthong, and Consonant Sounds

The following is a quick snapshot of the sounds of General American Speech. There are three categories of vowel sounds—front, mid, and back—starting with more closed sounds and moving toward more open ones.

The four front vowel sounds are represented in the words “deed,” “did,” “dead,” and “dad.” The vowel sounds become more open as the jaw releases for each word.

The three mid vowel sounds are represented in the words “fur,” “sofa,” and “fun.” The vowel sounds become more open as the jaw opens for each word.

The five back vowel sounds are represented in the words “pool,” “pull,” “poetic,” “Paul,” and “palm.” The vowel sounds become more open as the jaw releases for each word.

In addition to these vowel sounds, we have ten diphthong sounds.

Five diphthong sounds are represented in the words “bay,” “buy,” “boy,” “bone,” and “Bowzer.”

Five always short diphthongs of “r” are represented by the words “pier,” “pair,” “poor,” “pour,” and “par.”

Finally, we have the consonant sounds.

The twenty-five consonant sounds are grouped in six categories represented here by these sounds (not letters):

Stop plosives—"p," "b," "t," "d," "k," "g"

Affricates—"ch," "j"

Nasals—"m," "n," "ng"

Lateral—"l"

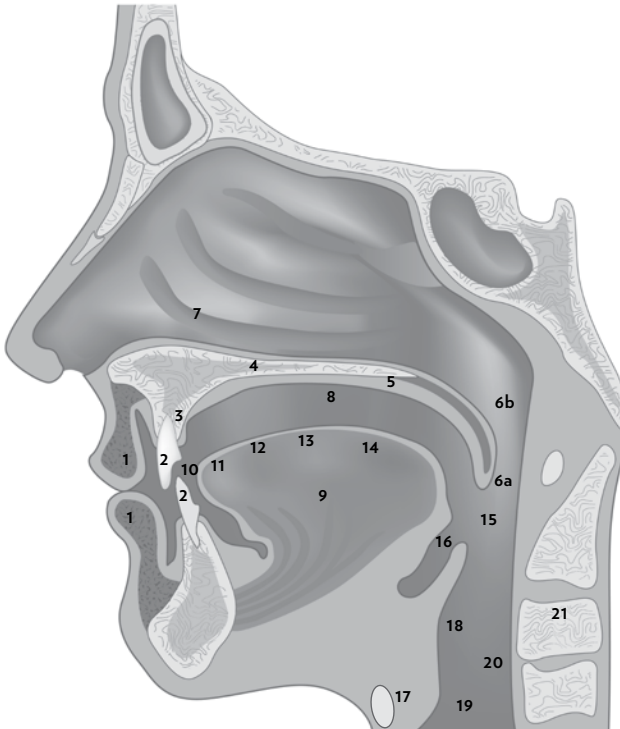
Fricatives—"f," "v," "s," "z," "sh," "zh," "th" (voiced),
"th" (voiceless), "r," "h" (voiced), "h" (voiceless)

Glides—"w," "y"

I will dive into these categories in more detail at the end of this book.



The Articulators



1	LIPS	11	BLADE OF THE TONGUE
2	TEETH	12	FRONT OF THE TONGUE
3	GUM RIDGE	13	MIDDLE OF THE TONGUE
4	HARD PALATE	14	BACK OF THE TONGUE
5	SOFT PALATE	15	THROAT
6	UVULA	16	EPIGLOTTIS
a	RELAXED	17	VOICE BOX (LARYNX)
b	RAISED	18	VOCAL FOLDS
7	NASAL PASSAGE	19	WINDPIPE (TRACHEA)
8	MOUTH	20	FOOD PASSAGE (ESOPHAGUS)
9	TONGUE	21	SPINE
10	TIP OF THE TONGUE		

Speak It!

Just as a pianist practices musical scales in preparation for playing “the music,” these articulation tongue twisters will improve the accuracy and dexterity of your speech. As you articulate these fun exercises, go very slowly at first and be aware of the following:

1. The stop plosive sounds “p” and “b” and the nasal consonant sound “m” are formed with the lips coming together (#1 in the diagram on page 185).
2. The stop plosive sounds “t” and “d,” the nasal consonant sound “n,” and the lateral consonant sound “l” are formed with the tip of the tongue lifted onto the gum ridge (#10 lifted to #3).
3. The stop plosive sounds “k” and “g” and the nasal consonant sound “ng,” as in “sing,” are formed with the back of the tongue lifted to the hard palate (#13 lifted to #4).

NOTE: Stop plosive sounds “p,” “b,” “t,” “d,” “k,” and “g” start with the lips coming together, the tip of the tongue connecting to the gum ridge or the back of the tongue connecting to the hard palate, and then are released with a gentle explosive breath for the voiceless sounds and voice for the voiced sounds. The sound of nasal consonants “m,” “n,” and “ng” is released through the nose. The lateral sound “l” is formed with the tip of the tongue on the gum ridge, and the sound is released on both sides of the body of the tongue.

Now repeat the following:

A tutor who tooted the flute
Tried to tutor two tooters to toot
Said the two to the tutor
“Is it tougher to toot
Or to tutor two tooters to toot?”

Betty Botter bought a bit of butter;
“But,” she said, “this butter’s bitter!
If I put it in my batter
It will make my batter bitter.
But a bit o’ better butter
Will make my batter better.”
Then she bought a bit o’ butter
Better than the bitter butter,
Made her bitter batter better.
So ’twas better Betty Botter
Bought a bit o’ better butter.

Delilah de Dardy was fat,
Delilah de Dardy was old,
(No doubt in the world about that)
But Delilah de Dardy had gold.
Lorenzo de Lardy was tall,
The flower of maidenly pets,
Young ladies would love at his call,
But Lorenzo de Lardy had debts.

Give me the gift of a grip-top sock,
A clip drape shipshape tip-top sock—
Not your spin slick slapstick slipshod stock,
But a plastic, elastic grip-top sock.
None of your fantastic slack swap slop
From a slapdash flash cash haberdash shop;
Not a knickknack knitlock knock-knead knickerbocker sock
With a mock-shot blob-mottled trick-ticker top clock;
Not a rucked up, puckered up, flop top sock,
Nor a super-sheer seersucker rucksack sock;
Not a spot-speckled frog-freckled cheap sheik’s sock
Off a hodgepodge moss-blotched scotch-botched block;
Nothing slipshod, drip drop, flip flop, or glip glop;
Tip me to a tip-top grip-top sock.

The daily drill that follows is an effective way to replace your old habitual speech pattern with a new one. Notice that the second word of each numbered line is a more open sound. The practice phrases will also help you feel the physical differences in the two sounds while speaking at conversational speed. I have inserted a word in between to make the distinction easier:

1. Pin-pet-pen

Are you adjusting the safety pin while writing with a pen?

2. Sinned-set-sent

He sinned when he sent the gem.

3. Tin-septet-ten

Hold the tin over the heads of the ten men.

4. Bin-bet-Ben

Where's the garbage bin, Ben?

5. Gin-jet-gentle

Please don't give gin to that gentle gentleman.

Over a relatively short period of time, you'll find these regionalisms begin to soften but you'll also be able to welcome them back when you choose.

Speak It!

Adjusting your *isms* starts with the voice. Depending on your region, you are placing your voice in different parts of the mouth. In the case of Fran Drescher, for example, her voice has a nasal quality that is distinctive of a Queens girl—her voice is largely placed in her nasal region. We want voice placement to start from the middle of the mouth and move forward, incorporating equal amounts of head and chest resonance.

Look in the mirror to watch yourself as you are speaking. Is your jaw tight or released? Are you visibly tightening the muscles in your face to make a sound? Try relaxing your face, jaw, and tongue to soften your articulation.

Find a vocal role model, and study how they speak in YouTube videos or on news shows. Choose someone with whom you can identify or who has already arrived at your destination. Do not mimic the person—simply listen and identify what makes the voice so compelling.

Repeat, repeat, repeat challenging groups of words and phrases until the alternate pronunciation feels natural (“pin”/“pen,” “tin”/“ten”).

Visualize the origin of your voice and where it’s going. Is it for an audience of one or one hundred? The voice is visceral; we can’t see it, but we hear it and feel it. Use the power of vibrant imagery to spark your imagination and ignite the space between you and your listener.

If you find that you're too overscheduled to fit in a daily practice of vocal and articulation exercises, read aloud. People don't do this often enough. It forces you to slow down, listen, and become more aware of phonetic sounds and how they are made.

Record a voice memo on your phone, and play it back. Hearing yourself in that way will make you acutely aware of vocal distractions and help you correct them.

Love not just where you are from, but all the many places you will go!

Speak It!

Your Voice and Speech Workout Bonus

I have decided to close out this book with something more useful than an epilogue: a four-week speech workout! Having shared the triumphant anecdotes of my students and clients and even my own personal voice and speech journey, it's time for me to give you more detailed speech rules and drills to complete the tips and exercises I have already shared. You are now ready.

When I was a student at Juilliard, I had several teachers who enlightened me and helped take my talent to new heights. However, one teacher in particular went above and beyond the norms and pedagogical style of the day. Tim Monich, who is now my mentor and friend, had a passion for speech that was infectious. Although humble and affable, he taught speech like a titan. Tim left the Juilliard faculty in the eighties to become one of the most sought-after dialect coaches in the world. In 2000, he ushered me into the film industry as his replacement for a blockbuster movie when he was called away to coach an even larger one. It was the perfect teacher/student relationship. Certainly, my opera training

had developed my ear, making it even more of a winning situation. My current approach to the work and my style of teaching are much like Tim's: take the work seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously in the work.

Tim encouraged me to take what I learned at Juilliard forty years ago and update the classical approach with a more contemporary flair, and that's what I have done here. This twenty-first-century makeover, stripped of anachronisms, gives these sounds more relevance for users of all backgrounds. The list that follows is your GPS, or navigational system, for the sounds of speech; it shows you where they live and how they are formed in your mouth. It will give you an acute awareness of where the sounds are placed, as well as the articulators needed to form each one.

Your Friendly User's Guide

You've probably noticed by now that I often repeat myself. That's because these principles, definitions, and concepts *require* repetition. We often don't get the meaning of a principle until we have a larger context in which to put it. As you master more of these sounds, it's helpful to go back and revisit the lists contained in this workout. When you do, your "aha" moment will come. You just have to keep practicing these sounds of speech until it clicks, and then some. Time and again I've seen the light switch on in my students days or weeks into this practice.

But first, here are the definitions you need to know. You've heard some of this before, at times with a slightly different spin.

VOWEL SOUNDS are made with a pure, uninterrupted, or unimpeded release of voice. All vowels and diphthong sounds are voiced as opposed to voiceless. A voiced sound occurs as a result of vibration of the vocal folds; a voiceless sound is the release of pure breath without vibration of the vocal folds. **FRONT VOWELS** vibrate in the front of the mouth. **MID VOWELS** vibrate in the

middle of the mouth. **BACK VOWELS** vibrate in the back of the mouth.

The lips smile slightly for front vowels, and the smile diminishes as the vowel sounds become more open. Mid vowels are neutral and require no lip involvement at all. The lips are rounded for back vowel sounds, and the rounding diminishes as the vowel sounds become more open. The tip of the tongue is relaxed behind the lower front teeth for all vowel sounds, and the quality of the sound is determined by the arch and height of the tongue position in the mouth. The higher the tongue arch in the mouth, the more closed the vowel sound. As the tongue lowers, the sound becomes more open.

Drill each vowel sound from the most closed to the most open, using the single signature word provided. Then practice with the words, phrases, and sentences that follow it.

DIPHTHONG SOUNDS are a combination of two vowels blended so closely together that they are perceived as a single sound. The second sound of the diphthong pair is weaker than the first. You can distinguish a diphthong sound by seeing, hearing, or feeling the articulatory movement from the first sound to the second.

CONSONANT SOUNDS are made with a stop, or impeded interruption to the flow of breath or voice. Most voiced consonant sounds have a voiceless partner. These pairs are known as “cognates”: two sounds formed in the same place of articulation, one voiced and the other voiceless.

Consonant sounds are grouped into six categories.

STOP PLOSIVES: The sound or breath is stopped and abruptly released.

FRICATIVES: The sound or breath is made through a narrow opening in the articulators, resulting in audible friction.

AFFRICATES: A combination of a stop plosive sound and a fricative sound, blended so closely that they become a single phonetic sound.

LATERAL: The tip of the tongue is placed on the gum ridge, and the sound is released over the sides of the tongue.

GLIDES: The articulation for these sounds begins in one place and swiftly glides to the vowel or diphthong sound that follows.

NASALS: The sound is emitted through the nose.

Begin your daily speech workout with the relaxation, breath, and vocal warm-up exercises that you learned in the previous chapters. Do your warm-up for at least 5–7 minutes, lying on the floor or seated. Say the words, phrases, and sentences of each phonetic group. The sound of each vowel, diphthong, and consonant is indicated by a signature word at the beginning of each section. The sound should remain consistent when saying each of the practice words, phrases, and sentences. As with any daily routine, start slowly for 3–5 minutes a day after the warm-up, and gradually increase your time as you begin to add more information to your daily regimen. Your total daily routine (including warm-up) by week 4 and thereafter should not exceed 25–30 minutes. Feel free to modify the times as needed once you feel secure. Finally, the goal here is accuracy, not speed. So, by all means, take your time and enjoy the ride!

Your Workout Schedule

WEEK ONE: Vowels (3–5 minutes per day)

Monday: front vowels

Tuesday: front vowels

Wednesday: mid vowels

Thursday: back vowels

Friday: back vowels

WEEK TWO: Vowels (5–7 minutes per day)

Monday: front vowels

Tuesday: front vowels and mid vowels

Wednesday: mid vowels

Thursday: mid vowels and back vowels

Friday: back vowels

WEEK THREE: Vowels and Diphthongs (7–9 minutes per day)

Monday: front, mid, and back vowels

Tuesday: long and short diphthongs

Wednesday: long and short diphthongs

Thursday: diphthongs of “r”

Friday: long and short diphthongs and diphthongs of “r”

WEEK FOUR: Vowels, Diphthongs, and Consonants (10–15 minutes per day)

Monday: front and mid vowels and stop plosives

Tuesday: back vowels and fricatives

Wednesday: long and short diphthongs, fricatives, and affricates

Thursday: diphthongs of “r,” lateral “l,” nasals, and glides

Friday: all vowels, diphthongs, stop plosives, fricatives, affricates, lateral “l,” nasals, and glides

Now let's get serious, but by all means, let's also have fun. Like Anastasia, whom you met in chapter 6, you will add to these lists and adapt them to meet your specific needs. In the pages that follow, I will address vowels, diphthongs, and consonant sounds in words, phrases, and sentences for you to practice more in depth.

Front Vowels

The front vowel sound "Lee"

LONG: This front vowel sound is long when it's the last sound of a word, such as "see," and when it's followed by a voiced consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as "seem." The tip of the tongue is relaxed behind the lower front teeth, and the front of the tongue is arched high in the mouth. The lips are slightly smiling.

Word List

Agree, agreed, beam, fields, flea, keen, key, knee, kneel, me, mean, pea, see, seen, she, tree, trees, we, weed

Phrase List

A need to kneel
The team beamed
Agreed to flee
Fields of weeds
Sheila and Neil

Sentence List

The green team agreed to be lean mean machines of the league.
As seen on TV, we achieved the need to succeed by being mean.

Dean appeased the bees with ease.
Appeal to Eve to ease the steel beams.
Feel free to spree; it's on me.

SHORT: This front vowel sound is short when it's followed by a voiceless consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as "leaf," and in the unstressed suffix of a word, such as "leaky."

Word List

Beach, beef, cheat, discreet, eat, grease, grief, leaf, meek, neat,
peace, people, seat, sheets, sleep, teeth, thief, week

Phrase List

Eat the beef
Greet the Greeks
Seek peace
The thief is weak
The people speak

Sentence List

Eating beef is a relief for the chief.
There was a meet and greet for the Greeks in Greece.
People seek peace in Topeka.
Denise and Keith teach speech.
The discreet sleek sheik has a unique physique.

The front vowel sound "will"

This front vowel sound is always short. It is found in stressed syllables of words such as "willow" and in the prefixes of most words, such as "remind." The lips are slightly smiling, the sound resonates over the front of the tongue, and there is still considerable tongue arch. The tip of the tongue is relaxed behind the lower front teeth.

Word List

British, critic, Dixon, fix, glib, him, it, kick, lilt, mix, nickel, open, pit, Richard, strip, tick, Winston

Phrase List

The British critic
Phil is fit
Pick a wish
Tickle the kitten
Bring in the bins

Sentence List

The British critic is vigilant in Bristol.
Fixing widgets is big in Indiana.
Tickle Minnie and giggle with Mickey.
Bring Rick into the gym with Phil and Jill.
Sitting still in the middle of the busy city.

The front vowel sound “let”

This front vowel sound is always short and is found in the stressed syllables of words such as “letter.” The lips are less smiling than for “Lee” or “will”; the sound resonates over the front of the tongue, and there is still considerable tongue arch. The tip of the tongue is relaxed behind the lower front teeth.

Word List

Bet, cherry, debt, effort, February, get, headache, jet, leather, men, pen, Wednesday

Phrase List

Ben is ten
The jet is set
A headache never gets better on a ledge

Leather gives you cred
Trendy Wednesdays

Sentence List

Ed is ending the trend to head to South Bend at the end of
the semester.

It's an effort to bend when your legs extend.

Get Ken to send Emma cherries in February.

Betty ended economic debt in Encino.

Send an extra pen to use again and again.

The front vowel sound "pat"

This front vowel sound is always short and is found in the stressed syllables of words such as "pattern." It is the most open front vowel, and there is no smiling of the lips or tongue arch. It resonates over the front of the tongue with the tip of the tongue relaxed behind the lower front teeth.

Word List

Apple, back, category, Dad, factory, happy, Jared, lamp, map,
staff

Phrase List

Apple Jacks

Back on the map

A happy dad

A blast from the past

Staff shenanigans

Sentence List

Pass Ann an apple to put in Harry's bag.

We had a blast doing fancy dances at the Hampshire.

Dr. Sam is the go-to man with a gentle hand.

Actually, Harry had to be dragged out of the lavish establishment.

Sandy's dramatic fashions are so last year.

Mid Vowels

The mid vowel sound "stir"

LONG: This mid vowel of "r" is long in the stressed syllable when it's the last sound of the word, such as "stir," and when it's followed by a voiced consonant sound, such as "stern." The tip of the tongue is relaxed behind the lower front teeth, and the middle of the tongue is arched halfway in the mouth. The lips are neutral.

Word List

Adjourn, dirge, earn, emerge, firm, girdle, heard, kernel, learn, nerd, purge, stern, turn, world

Phrase List

Bernie emerged
A stern word
The girl twirled
I heard Herb
The sermon was adjourned

Sentence List

Merle gave a stern word to the girl.
Bernie turned on Third.
Pearl stirred the curd.
She has an urge to serve on Thursday.
Early birds prefer worms.

SHORT: This mid vowel sound is short when followed by a voiceless consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as “earth,” and in the unstressed syllable of a word, such as “mother.”

Word List

Alert, batter, chatter, curtsy, dirt, disaster, earth, Easter, fisher, flirt, gesture, Heather, hurt, inner, interpret, jerk, joker, killer, leader, meter, neither, ogre, pertain, purple, skirt, surrender, teacher, work

Phrase List

Dirty thirty
Flirt in a purple skirt
Rehearse at work
Burt’s dirty shirt
A search for turf
Surprise the ogre
The greater gesture
A picture of perfection
A batter with butter
October, November, and December

Sentence List

Kurt worshipped with a nurse.
Burt has the worst shirt in the circus.
Don’t divert the search in Perth.
Eartha curtsied, then worked with a purpose.
Be alert when you rehearse with Gertie.
The disaster was after a major tremor.
Easter is neither in the summer nor the winter.
A glimmer of a gesture is better than a whisper.
Heather’s mother is my sister’s teacher.
It was a picture-perfect adventure with my brother and sister.

The mid vowel sound “the”

This vowel is always short. It is a weak vowel sound in unstressed words such as “the” and “a” and in the unstressed syllables of words such as “again.” It’s a neutral sound. The lips are neither smiling nor rounded, the sound resonates over the middle of the tongue, and there is no tongue arch. The tip of the tongue is relaxed behind the lower front teeth.

Word List

Again, balloon, Dakota, facetious, galore, Jamaica, massage, Napoleon, potato, Ramona, support, Tacoma, Valencia

Phrase List

Jamaica and Aruba
Again and again and again
Attention Alicia
Concerned about an aroma
A potato and asparagus atrocity

Sentence List

Ramona arrived ashore in Jamaica in amazingly appealing apparel.
Vanilla is considered a botanical.
The balloon careened around the ravine.
Alicia’s support was appreciated.
It was an anonymous collision in the Tacoma arena.

The mid vowel sound “cup”

This vowel sound is the most open of the three mid vowel sounds and is always short. It is found in the stressed syllables of words such as “cut.” This neutral sound requires no smiling or rounding of the lips. It resonates over the middle of the tongue, and there is no tongue arch. The tip of the tongue is relaxed behind the lower front teeth.

Word List

Another, butter, cut, Dutch, fudge, grudge, hunt, juggle, love, mother, oven, puppy, rough, tough, up, wonderful

Phrase List

Love another
Rough cut
Up tuck
Wonderful fudge
Tough stutter

Sentence List

The other glove was rough.
We hunted for Mother's fudge fresh from the oven.
They smuggled Dutch butter for their mother.
Another stutter will be covered.
Learning to juggle was a wonderful struggle.

Back Vowels

The back vowel sound "who"

LONG: This back vowel sound is long in the stressed syllable when it's the last sound of a word, such as "zoo," and when it's followed by a voiced consonant sound, such as "room." The tip of the tongue is relaxed behind the lower front teeth, and the back of the tongue is arched high in the mouth. The lips are rounded.

Word List

Brood, cruise, dues, ensue, grew, infuse, Jude, lewd, move, noon, ooze, Pooh, rude, two, voodoo, who, woo

Phrase List

Noon snooze
Two dues
Voodoo brood
Lewd dude
Who knew

Sentence List

The crew removed Mr. Moody at noon.
Jude brooded over the rude move.
I knew the two who flew.
Pooh chewed as the honey oozed.
Move the shoes before you snooze.

SHORT: This back vowel sound is short when it's followed by a voiceless consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as "root."

Word List

Brutus, Cooper, duet, futile, gruesome, hoot, Jupiter, lute,
moot, noose, pooch, suit, tooth, Yukon

Phrase List

Moose tooth
Loose pooch
A flute juke
Refute Brutus
Tutti-frutti

Sentence List

From Yukon to Butte we had a hoot.
The moose and pooch were duped.
Bruce wore a droopy zoot suit.

Ruth was aloof as she drank vermouth.
Rufus played an uncouth spoof on a guy from Duluth.
Get fruit juice for your youth group.

The back vowel sound “would”

This back vowel sound is always short and is found in the stressed syllables of words such as “good.” The lips are slightly rounded, the sound resonates over the back of the tongue, and there is minimal tongue arch. The tip of the tongue is relaxed behind the lower front teeth.

Word List

Book, bully, cookie, could, foot, full, good, hood, look, pull,
push, put, should, stood, wood

Phrase List

Should’ve could’ve
Good druid
Neighborhood bully
Good book
Misunderstood adulthood

Sentence List

The bully took the cookies.
Look where the redwood stood.
Good crooks read books.
Push the rook and you should win.
The druid stood at the brook.

The back vowel sound “obey”

This back vowel sound is always short and is found in the unstressed syllable at the beginning of a word, such as “overt.”

The lips are slightly rounded, the sound resonates over the back of the tongue, and there is minimal tongue arch. In General American Speech, it is often substituted by the weak mid vowel sound as in the word “the.” The tip of the tongue is relaxed behind the lower front teeth.

Word List

Bohemian, Croatia, donation, grotesque, hotel, location, momentum, November, oasis, phonetic, poetic, romantic, stoic, vocation

Phrase List

A Bohemian oasis
A robust Othello
Somalian donations
The grotesque hotel
The poetic Olympian

Sentence List

Olivia’s Croatian hotel was like a Bohemian oasis.
Othello received an ovation in Romania.
A robust ogre is grotesque.
The Osakan Olympian is of nobility.
The Ohio motel location is gaining momentum.

The back vowel sound “all”

LONG: This back vowel sound is long in the stressed syllable when it’s the last sound of a word, such as “jaw,” and when it’s followed by a voiced consonant sound, such as “call.” The tip of the tongue is relaxed behind the lower front teeth, and there is no back-of-tongue arch. The jaw is released and open, and the lips are slightly rounded into an oval shape.

Word List

All, ball, call, draw, gall, hall, jaw, law, mall, pauper, raw,
straw, tall, wall

Phrase List

Saul called
Drawing straws
Fall squall
Tall Paul
Applause for Claude

Sentence List

The hall in the mall will lead you to the stall.
A loll in the jaw will create a drawl.
Install the laws by nightfall.
Rainfall draws the small squalls.
Paul bought a shawl in Senegal.

SHORT: This back vowel sound is short when it's followed by a voiceless consonant sound in the stressed syllable of the word, such as "caught."

Word List

Alter, Boston, coffee, Dawson, distraught, fought, halt, talk,
vault, walk

Phrase List

Gawking hawk
Shot block
Halting talks
Chalky coffee
Unlocked vault

Sentence List

We caught the hawk in the vault.

Dawson gawked as he awkwardly fought the author.

The sauce was bought for naught.

I had an awesome talk with my daughter in the crosswalk.

Don't talk or walk when you're distraught.

The back vowel sound "fathers"

LONG: This back vowel sound is long when it's the last sound of a word, such as "Gaga," and when followed by a voiced consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as "calm." The tip of the tongue is relaxed behind the lower front teeth, the back of the tongue is completely low in the mouth, and the jaw is the most open of all the vowel sounds. There is no lip rounding.

Word List

Ahhhh, aria, bomb, calm, Don, fond, gone, Holly, jog, log, Mom, nod, palm, rob, Slavic, Tom

Phrase List

Long gone

Blond mom

Yonder lawn

Proton photon

Sentence List

John jogged at dawn for the marathon.

The long aria made me yawn.

Mom is gone to the Amazon.

Tom is fond of logs of palm.

The mastodon was gone in the phenomenon.

SHORT: This back vowel sound is short when it's followed by a voiceless consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as "taco."

Word List

Box, cot, dropped, flop, gotten, hock, jockey, knot, lock, mop, ox, Picasso, rock, shot, stopped

Phrase List

Hot shot

Pop lock

Dropped mop

Not hot

Pot shot

Sentence List

The hockey shot won the pot.

The ox trotted until he stopped.

I dropped my taco on the rocks.

The top robot does not stop.

I got apricots at Camelot.

Diphthongs

A diphthong sound is a combination of two vowel sounds in which the second element or sound of the diphthong is weaker than the first. Because of the weak quality of the second element, it can often be imperceptible and mistaken for a pure or single vowel sound. The sure way to identify a diphthong sound is by seeing, hearing, and feeling the shape of the sound move from one position to another. There are ten diphthong sounds. The five so-called long diphthong sounds can be long or short depending

on the sound that follows. The five diphthongs of “r” are always short.

Long and Short Diphthongs

The diphthong “pay”

LONG: This diphthong is long when it’s the last sound of a word, such as “day,” and when followed by a voiced consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as “daze.”

Word List

Arcade, bay, day, delayed, graze, haze, invade, James, maid, name, phase, play, raid, shade, trade, way

Phrase List

Pay day
Play date
Say okay
Gray haze
Made clay

Sentence List

It’s a gray, hazy day at the shady bay.
James laid in the clay with no delay.
I played at the arcade on the parkway.
They made the trade to win the game.
Raise the cow to graze on hay.

SHORT: This diphthong is short when it’s followed by a voiceless consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as “date.”

Word List

Bait, date, fate, great, hate, Jason, Kate, late, mate, nape,
plate, rate, shape, trait, vapor, wafer

Phrase List

Late date
Great shape
Eight plates
Fate dictates
Freight weight

Sentence List

Kate was late to decorate.
Don't imitate the bad traits that you hate.
Jason dictates the rate for the freight.
Concentrate to navigate the state.
The plate was great and quite ornate.

The diphthong "my"

LONG: This diphthong is long when it's the last sound of a word, such as "tie," and when it's followed by a voiced consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as "tide."

Word List

Buy, died, eye, find, guide, hide, kind, lie, mind, nine, pile,
ride, sigh, tie, wide

Phrase List

Mind's eye
High tide
Kind guide
Shy guy
Dry sky

Sentence List

The guide helped me find Mount Sinai.

Buy the fried swai [fish].

Multiply by nine and pi.

Try to be kind or tell a lie.

Don't sigh or whine; just use your mind.

SHORT: This diphthong is short when followed by a voiceless consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as "tight."

Word List

Bite, dice, fight, height, ice, kite, light, mighty, ninety, pipe, sight, tight, wipe, write

Phrase List

Mighty fighter

Tight pipe

White ice

Quite all right

Right height

Sentence List

The kite is too light to survive the mighty wind.

The height of the sprite was frightening.

The knight was right to fight his plight.

It's not polite to bite.

The satellite is out of sight.

The diphthong "boy"

LONG: This diphthong is long when it's the last sound of a word, such as "enjoy," and when followed by a voiced consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as "join."

Word List

Boy, destroy, enjoy, noise, oil, poised, Roy, spoil, Troy

Phrase List

Joyful noise

Troy's toys

Spoiled boys

Oily soil

Enjoy corduroy

Sentence List

I toil in the soil.

Don't spoil Roy with toys.

They deployed the noisy employees.

Enjoy the turmoil in Illinois.

Troy is poised in his corduroys.

SHORT: This diphthong is short when followed by a voiceless consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as "joint."

Word List

Appointment, boisterous, Detroit, joint, oyster, points

Phrase List

Exploited Detroit

Adroit oyster

Jointed cloister

Boisterous appointment

Moist voice

Sentence List

The oyster joints are easy to exploit.

Detroit is a boisterous city.

Too much moisture makes joints ache.

My appointments are adroit.

The point is to stay buoyant.

The diphthong “go”

LONG: This diphthong is long when it’s the last sound of a word, such as “grow,” and when followed by a voiced consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as “grown.”

Word List

Bowl, cold, dough, fold, go, hold, know, low, mole, old, pole,
rose, sew, told

Phrase List

Low blow
Old mold
Cold coal
Dough bowl
Rose gold

Sentence List

I rolled the dough to enfold the marigold.
You know a cold will make you blow your nose.
The mole burrows low to grow its holes.
The old crow goes to Chicago.
The snow glistens and glows.

SHORT: This diphthong is short when it’s followed by a voiceless consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as “growth.”

Word List

Boat, coat, dope, elope, float, goat, hope, mope, note, oats,
pope, rope, soap, tote

Phrase List

Boat rope
Goat's throat
Soap on a rope
Hopeful pope
Moat float

Sentence List

Tote the note that you wrote.
The pope's quote gave hope.
Moping is not coping.
The goat eats oats as he pulls his rope.
Elope on the boat.

The diphthong "now"

LONG: This diphthong is long when it's the last sound of a word, such as "allow," and when it's followed by a voiced consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as "loud."

Word List

Around, cow, down, found, ground, hound, loud, mound,
noun, ounce, pound, town, vows

Phrase List

Cow sound
Brown hound
Ground down
Loud vows
Around town

Sentence List

The cow pounded through the town.
The plow ground through the mound.

The crown weighed a pound and an ounce.

I found the sound too loud.

The hound ate a mound of puppy chow.

SHORT: This diphthong is short when it's followed by a voiceless consonant sound in the stressed syllable of a word, such as "louse."

Word List

Count, devout, douse, fountain, gout, mountain, pounce, shout, south

Phrase List

About to shout

A mountain house

Counting accounts

A bout of gout

Count the scouts

Sentence List

The mountain goat pounced.

The devout shout.

The count's fountain faces south.

A mouse is in the house.

A spouse will douse love.

Short Diphthongs of “R”

The diphthong “here’s”

This diphthong is always short in words, such as “clear.”

Word List

Appear, beer, career, cashmere, deer, endear, fear, hear, Lear,
near, pier, revere, sincere

Phrase List

Mere tears
A fearful deer
Revered cashmere
Sincere career
A veering pier

Sentence List

The deer fears the pier.
It’s the time of year for cashmere.
Lear is enduring and sincere.
I hear the auctioneer.
A revered career as an engineer.

The diphthong “their”

This diphthong is always short in words, such as “hair.”

Word List

Air, bear, care, compare, dare, fare, hair, share, spare, square,
where

Phrase List

Bare hair
Care Bear

Share fare
A spare airfare
Spare pear

Sentence List

I don't care where the hair is.
The bear took the stairs.
Don't compare your affairs.
Share where you dare.
Clair and Blaire say their prayers.

The diphthong "poor"

This diphthong is always short in words, such as "cure."

Word List

Assure, contour, cure, insure, lure, mature, obscure,
premature, secure, sure, tour

Phrase List

Your tour
Demure couture
Impure cure
Procure maturity
Alluring brochure

Sentence List

Insecurities are immature.
The entrepreneur was assured.
The lure of the tour was obscure.
The assurance of insurance is alluring.
Procure the brochure.

The diphthong “ore”

This diphthong is always short in words, such as “four.”

Word List

Bore, core, door, four, gore, lore, more, or, pour, roar, store,
torn, whore, worn

Phrase List

Store floor
George forswore
Worn door
Boring encore
More gore

Sentence List

The folklore was worn and boring.
The door of the store is on the ground floor.
The carnivore ate the boar.
More albacore are born.
The corps of the war were torn.

The diphthong “car”

This diphthong is always short in words, such as “start.”

Word List

Are, bar, car, far, heart, jar, Mars, par, radar, star, tar

Phrase List

Bizarre memoir
Star guitarist
Jaguar car
Far radar
Departed star

Sentence List

Art comes from the heart.

The car was stuck in the tar.

Mars is charted with radar.

The bar is in a bazaar in Myanmar.

The star was seen from afar.

Consonants

There are six categories or groups of consonant sounds. I prefer to study the twenty-five consonant sounds in these groups, because once the definitions are understood, it becomes infinitely easier to produce the sounds with accuracy. It always helps to know the “how” and “why.” Unlike vowel sounds, which are always voiced, consonant sounds can be either voiced or voiceless. Place your forefinger in the middle of your throat, and release an “s” sound over the tip of your tongue. You feel no vibration, right? This is a voiceless consonant. Now release a “z” sound. You should feel vibration. This is a voiced consonant. We are not only going to address consonant sounds in the six categories, but also by whether they are voiced or voiceless. As you’ve seen with certain vowel sounds, the voiced or voiceless consonant sounds that follow the vowel play a huge part in the length of a syllable and in the overall rhythm of speech. Finally, consonant sounds can appear in three positions in a word: in the initial position, the medial position, and the final position. Why didn’t they teach us this in grade school? Oh well, it’s never too late!

Stop Plosives

The breath or voice is stopped and then rapidly released or erupted.

Voiceless “p,” “t,” and “k”

Word List—Initial, Medial, and Final Positions

P: The “p” sound is made with both lips touching.

INITIAL—pea, pit, pen, panoramic, purple, puppy, Paul, palm

MEDIAL—peeping, Tippy, temper, dapper, slurpy, trouper, topple

FINAL—deep, rip, step, stamp, burp, cup, soup, cop

T: The “t” sound is made with the tip of the tongue touching the gum ridge.

INITIAL—team, Tim, ten, Tanner, turn, tongue, tooth, took, tall, Tom

MEDIAL—meeting, committee, better, chatter, dirty, stutter, shooter, putting, daughter, hotter

FINAL—feet, bit, get, fact, Burt, cut, root, foot, fault, hot

K: The “k” sound is made with the back of the tongue touching the hard palate.

INITIAL—keep, kid, kettle, Kansas, curse, cut, cool, could, call, calm

MEDIAL—seeking, picking, Becker, anchor, lurking, lucky, hooker, walking, mocking

FINAL—Greek, sick, check, bank, work, tuck, shook, talk, dock

Voiced “b,” “d,” and “g”

Word List—Initial, Medial, and Final Positions

B: The “b” sound is made with both lips touching.

INITIAL—beef, bitter, better, basket, burly, bump, boot, book, ball, balm

MEDIAL—Sheba, dribble, Debbie, gamble, auburn, ebony, abrupt,
rubric, subdued, cobalt, LeBron

FINAL—hajib, ad-lib, ebb, cab, superb, tub, tube, kabob

D: The “d” sound is made with the tip of the tongue touching the gum ridge.

INITIAL—deed, did, dead, dad, dirt, duck, do, daughter, Don

MEDIAL—indeed, riddle, bedding, Daddy, girdle, sudden, Judy, woody,
audit, oddest

FINAL—seed, build, led, add, curd, dud, brood, could, laud, blond

G: The “g” sound is made with the back of the tongue touching the hard palate.

INITIAL—greed, grid, get, gasoline, girl, gut, goose, good, gall, gone

MEDIAL—eager, giggle, forget, aghast, yogurt, seagull, kangaroo,
sugar, jogging

FINAL—league, king, beg, brag, iceberg, plug, catalog

Fricatives

The five voiceless fricatives and six voiced fricatives are released through a narrow opening in the mouth, resulting in friction.

Voiceless fricatives “f,” “th,” “s,” “sh,” and “h”

Word List—Initial, Medial, and Final Positions

F: The “f” sound is made with the lower lip close to but not touching the upper teeth.

INITIAL—flea, fill, fret, fat, fern, fudge, food, foot, falter, father

MEDIAL—leafy, sniffle, Geffen, taffy, Murphy, muffin, goofy, awful, offer

FINAL—grief, cliff, chef, chaff, turf, tough, aloof, cough, off

Th: The “th” sound is made with the blade of the tongue close to but not touching the upper teeth.

INITIAL—think, thin, thread, thanks, Thursday, thump, through, thought

MEDIAL—lethal, tither, healthy, panther, author

FINAL—teeth, filth, breath, wrath, girth, cometh, youth, cloth

S: The “s” sound is made with the tip of the tongue pointing toward but not touching the back of the upper teeth.

INITIAL—seat, sill, set, sat, stir, scuttle, scoot, Saul, psalm

MEDIAL—ceasing, fiscal, pencil, passive, reimbursement, cussing, ensuing, installed, unstoppable

FINAL—crease, bliss, press, grass, curse, suss, loose, looks, walrus, Wass

Sh: The “sh” sound is made with the blade of the tongue raised toward but not touching the gum ridge.

INITIAL—sheep, shrill, shell, shanty, shirk, shut, shoe, shook, shawl, shah

MEDIAL—leashing, dishes, dashing, Gershwin, rushed, mushroom, cushion, bushes

FINAL—leash, fish, fresh, lash, mesh, flush, swoosh, wash

H: The “h” sound is made with an open throat. This voiceless version of the sound only appears in the initial position of a word.

INITIAL—heed, hill, help, hat, hurt, huff, hoot, hooper, hall, hah

Voiced fricatives “v,” “th,” “z,” “zh,” “r,” and “h”

Word List—Initial, Medial, and Final Positions

V: The “v” sound is made with the lower lip close to but not touching the upper teeth.

INITIAL—veal, villain, vet, vat, verb, vulgar, voodoo, vault, Von

MEDIAL—reveal, evict, invent, evacuate, Lavern, improvement, movement, Nevada

FINAL—leave, live, Kev, Irv, love, improve, evolve, improv

Th: The “th” sound is made with the blade of the tongue close to but not touching the upper teeth.

INITIAL—these, this, them, than, that

MEDIAL—either, leather, tether, gather, worthy, druthers, other, father

FINAL—breathe, seethe, teethe, bathe, loathe

Z: The “z” sound is made with the tip of the tongue pointing toward but not touching the back of the upper teeth.

INITIAL—zebra, zippy, Zelda, zap, zoo, zoom, Zorro

MEDIAL—easy, business, present, pizzazz, Thursday, puzzle, cousin, kazoo, loser, causes

FINAL—sneeze, fizz, legs, razz, burns, fuzz, choose, dogs

Zh: The “zh” sound is made with the blade of the tongue raised toward but not touching the gum ridge.

INITIAL—genre, Zsa Zsa, Jacques

MEDIAL—seizure, visually, treasury, aversion, collusion, Hoosier, camouflaging

FINAL—massage, mirage, beige, Baton Rouge, luge, collage

R: The “r” sound is made with the tip of the tongue pointing toward but not touching the gum ridge. This sound never appears in the final position; “r” at the end of a word is either the strong or weak vowel (“stir”).

INITIAL—read, riddle, red, rat, rupture, room, rook, raw, Ron

MEDIAL—lyric, ferret, parrot, walrus, syrup, kangaroo, enthrall

H: The “h” sound is made with an open throat. This voiced version of the sound only appears in the medial position of a word when it’s preceded and followed by a vowel sound.

MEDIAL—behest, rehearse, behavior, Ohio, manhole, behoove, mahogany, unhallowed

Affricates

The two affricates are sounds that are a combination of a stop plosive and a fricative, closely blended to create one single phonetic sound. One is voiceless, and the other is voiced.

Voiceless “ch”

Word List—Initial, Medial, and Final Positions

Ch: The “ch” sound is made with the blade of the tongue touching the gum ridge.

INITIAL—cheese, chin, chess, chastity, church, Chuck, choo choo, chalk, charm

MEDIAL—teaching, enchilada, fetching, matching, purchase, picture, clutching, moocher

FINAL—each, itch, wrench, attach, lurch, much, hooch, Butch, crotch

Voiced “j”

Word List—Initial, Medial, and Final Positions

J: The “j” sound is made with the blade of the tongue touching the gum ridge.

INITIAL—jeep, Jill, jet, jazz, jersey, jump, Jewish, jaw, jolly

MEDIAL—Regina, digit, abject, magic, clergy, pudgy, pajama

FINAL—siege, village, edge, badge, surge, courage, huge, hodge

Nasals

The three nasals are the only voiced sounds that are released through the nose.

Voiced “m,” “n,” and “ng”

Word List—Initial, Medial, and Final Positions

M: The “m” sound is made with both lips touching.

INITIAL—meat, mill, metal, mat, Murphy, Muppet, move, mall, mom

MEDIAL—Beamer, limit, hemp, lament, squirming, pumpkin, gloomy, calming

FINAL—dream, Tim, gem, jam, affirm, come, room, balm

N: The “n” sound is made with the tip of the tongue touching the gum ridge.

INITIAL—neat, nil, net, gnat, nerd, nut, noon, nook, naughty, nod

MEDIAL—greener, grinning, planet, canal, burner, peanut, canoe, anon

FINAL—seen, pin, again, fan, churn, sun, spoon, pawn

Ng: The “ng” sound is made with the back of the tongue touching the hard palate. This sound does not appear in the initial position of a word in spoken English.

MEDIAL—bringing, finger, Bengal, hanger, younger, jungle, bungalow, mongoose, longer, stronger

FINAL—billing, yelling, batting, whirling, cutting, chewing, looking, walking, wrong

Lateral

The lateral “l” is the only sound in spoken English that’s released on both sides of the tongue. It is voiced, and the tip of the tongue remains on the gum ridge while the sound is made.

Voiced “l”

Word List—Initial, Medial, and Final Positions

L: The “l” sound is made with the tip of the tongue touching the gum ridge.

INITIAL—lean, little, letting, lateral, learn, love, loop, loose, llama

MEDIAL—feeling, pillow, welling, family, Hurley, bludgeon, flew, flawless, wallet

FINAL—steal, pencil, fell, pal, unfurl, cull, fool, bull, ball, doll

Glides

The two voiced glides in General American Speech (there is a third but it's primarily used in Classical American Stage Speech) begin in a shape of articulation and then swiftly glide to the shape of the vowel or diphthong sound that follows. They never appear in the final position of a word.

Voiced “w” and “y”

Word List—Initial and Medial Positions

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W: The “w” sound is made with both lips coming together but not touching.

INITIAL—weep, willow, wet, whirl, wonder, woot, wolves, wallow,
wonton

MEDIAL—queen, quill, frequent, quack, quirk

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Y: The “y” sound is made with the tip of the tongue relaxed behind the lower front teeth and the middle of the tongue arched high toward the hard palate.

INITIAL—yield, yip, yet, yammer, yearn, yuppie, unique, yawn,
Yugoslavia

MEDIAL—million, tortilla, papaya, lawyer, royal, Sawyer

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