

THE BASIC SOUNDS OF ENGLISH

1. STOPS

A stop consonant is produced with a complete closure of airflow in the vocal tract; the air pressure has built up behind the closure; the air rushes out with an explosive sound when released.

The term *plosive* is also used for *oral stops*.

ORAL STOPS: e.g., [b] [t] (= plosives)

NASAL STOPS: e.g., [m] [n] (= nasals)

There are three phases of stop articulation:

i. **CLOSING PHASE** (approach or shutting phase)

The articulators are moving from an open state to a closed state;

ii. **CLOSURE PHASE** (= occlusion)

Blockage of the airflow in the oral tract;

iii. **RELEASE PHASE**

Sudden reopening; it may be accompanied by a burst of air.

ORAL STOPS IN ENGLISH

a. **BILABIAL STOPS:** The blockage is made with the two lips.

spot [p] voiceless

baby [b] voiced

- b. **ALVEOLAR STOPS:** The blade (or the tip) of the tongue makes a closure with the alveolar ridge; the sides of the tongue are along the upper teeth.

lamino-alveolar stops

or

apico-alveolar stops

Check your
pronunciation!

stake [t] voiceless

deep [d] voiced

- c. **VELAR STOPS:** The closure is between the back of the tongue (= dorsum) and the velum.

dorso-velar stops

scar [k] voiceless

goose [g] voiced

2. NASALS (= nasal stops)

The air is stopped in the oral tract, but the velum is lowered so that the airflow can go through the nasal tract.
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All nasals are voiced.

NASALS IN ENGLISH

- a. **BILABIAL NASAL:**

made [m]

- b. **ALVEOLAR NASAL:**

need [n]

- c. **VELAR NASAL:**

wrong[ŋ]

3. FRICATIVES

Fricatives are articulated by close approximation of two articulators so that the airstream is partially obstructed and turbulent airflow is produced.

FRICATIVES IN ENGLISH

- a. **DENTAL FRICATIVES:** The narrow passage is formed with the tip of the tongue and the teeth.

The tip of the tongue may be placed between the teeth:

INTERDENTAL FRICATIVES;



more common!

or, it may be placed behind the upper teeth.

Check your pronunciation!

<u>th</u> ink	[θ]	voiceless
<u>th</u> ere	[ð]	voiced

- b. **LABIODENTAL FRICATIVES:** The narrow passage is formed with the lower lip and the upper teeth.

<u>f</u> eel	[f]	voiceless
<u>v</u> eal	[v]	voiced

- c. **ALVEOLAR FRICATIVES:** The constriction is made with the blade of the tongue close to the alveolar ridge.

<u>s</u> eal	[s]	voiceless
<u>z</u> eal	[z]	voiced

- d. **PALATO-ALVEOLAR (= postalveolar) FRICATIVES:** The constriction is made with the blade of the tongue close to where the alveolar ridge ends and the palate begins.

<u>short</u>	[ʃ]	voiceless
mea <u>sure</u>	[ʒ]	voiced

[š] and [ž]: North-American symbols

4. AFFRICATES

Affricates are speech sounds that are analyzable as the sequence of a stop followed immediately by a homorganic (=same place of articulation) fricative.

closure: characteristic for stops
 release: characteristic for fricatives

AFFRICATES IN ENGLISH:

- a. **PALATO-ALVEOLAR (= postalveolar) AFFRICATES:** an alveolar stop is released into a palato-alveolar fricative (= both the stop and the fricative are articulated close to a mid-point).

<u>ch</u> urch	[tʃ]	voiceless
ju <u>d</u> ging	[dʒ]	voiced

[č] and [ǰ]: North-American symbols

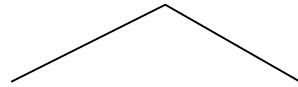
5. APPROXIMANTS

Approximants are speech sounds formed with a wider articulatory channel than the fricatives. The articulators approach one another but without the tract being narrowed to such an extent that a turbulent airstream is produced.

Characteristics of

- a. vowels: the airflow is not blocked or constricted
- b. consonants: may not stand alone in syllables

APPROXIMANTS



glides (= semivowels)

liquids

APPROXIMANTS IN ENGLISH:

- a. **GLIDES** (or semivowels): speech sounds that are produced with an articulation like that of a vowel, but move quickly to another articulation.

Momentary articulation!



The articulation is a momentary gesture: it cannot be prolonged.

- a1. **PALATAL GLIDE**: The dorsum of the tongue is raised toward the palate; the lips are slightly spread.
The tongue position is almost identical to the position for the articulation of the vowel in *beat*.

yes, you

[j]

voiced

- a2. **LABIOVELAR (or labial-velar) GLIDE**: The dorsum of the tongue is raised toward the velum and the lips are simultaneously rounded.

The position of the tongue and the lips is almost identical to the position for the articulation of the vowel in *lute*.

weather, what

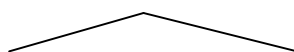
[w]

voiced

- b. **LIQUIDS** are approximants with a continuous flow of air through the oral cavity:

maintainable articulation!

LIQUIDS



lateral approximants

rhotic (r-like) approximants

- b1. **LATERAL APPROXIMANTS:** The obstruction of the airstream is at a point along the centre of the oral tract; the air passes over the *sides* of the tongue.

ALVEOLAR LATERAL APPROXIMANT:

The blade (or the tip) of the tongue makes contact with the alveolar ridge; the air passes over the sides of the tongue.

leave, lift [l] voiced

- b2. **RHOTIC APPROXIMANTS**

rhotic: r-like speech sounds

(But not all r-like sounds are approximants -- see later)

read, arrow [ɹ] voiced

North American [ɹ] : (bunched) rhotic alveolar approximant

- the tongue is raised toward the end of the alveolar ridge;
- the tongue is bunched while the tip of the tongue is pointing down;
- the radix (= tongue root) is retracted into the pharynx.

NOTE: [ɹ] is the symbol for the *alveolar rhotic approximant*

But: The rhotic approximant may be articulated at the postalveolar region and for some speakers it may be retroflex (tongue tip is curled back).

Check your pronunciation!

