

Nasal consonants

There are three phonemes in English which are represented by nasal consonants, /m, n, ŋ/. In all nasal consonants the soft palate is lowered

/m/ and /n/

All languages have consonants which are similar to /m/ and /n/ in English. The position of the speech organs for these sounds is shown in Figures 20 and 21.

NOTICE

- 1 The soft palate is lowered for both /m/ and /n/.
- 2 For /m/ the mouth is blocked by closing the two lips, for /n/ by pressing the tip of the tongue against the alveolar ridge, and the sides of the tongue against the sides of the palate.
- 3 Both sounds are voiced in English, as they are in other languages, and the voiced air passes out through the nose.

hɪm	him	læm	lamb	ru:m	room	geɪm	game
lɪmp	limp	læmp	lamp	lʌmp	lump	geɪmz	games
wʌn	one	tɪn	tin	su:n	soon	maɪn	mine
læmz	send	læmz	send	læmp	sent	læmp	sent

/ŋ/

This is the third English nasal consonant and the only one likely to cause trouble, because many languages do not have a consonant formed like /ŋ/. The position of the speech organs for /ŋ/ is shown in Figure 22.

NOTICE

- 1 The soft palate is lowered and all the air passes out through the nose.
- 2 The mouth is blocked by the back of the tongue pressed against the soft palate.
- 3 The sound is voiced.

sɪŋə	singer	lɒŋ əgeɪ	long ago
hæŋ ʌp	hang up	rɒŋ əgeɪn	wrong again
sɪŋɪŋ	singing	hæŋɪŋ	hanging
bɪŋ ɪt	bring it	əməŋ ʌðəz	among others
lɒŋɪŋ	longing	bæŋɪŋ	bang

Lateral consonant

One English consonant /l/ – is formed laterally, that is, instead of the breath passing down the centre of the mouth, it passes round the sides of an obstruction set up in the centre. The position of the organs of speech for /l/ as in *live* is shown in Figure 23.

NOTICE

- 1 The soft palate is raised.
- 2 The tongue-tip (and the sides of the tongue-blade which cannot be seen in the diagram) are in firm contact with the alveolar ridge, obstructing the centre of the mouth.
- 3 The sides of the remainder of the tongue are not in contact with the sides of the palate, so air can pass between the sides of the tongue and the palate, round the central obstruction formed by the tip and blade of the tongue and so out of the mouth.

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- 4 The sound is voiced and there is no friction (except when it is immediately after /p/ or /k/ – see pp. 40 and 45).

fɪ:lɪŋ feeling
feləʊ fellow
fu:lɪʃ foolish

hɒlədeɪ holiday
bɪli:v believe
əlaʊ allow

Gliding consonants

There are three consonants which consist of a quick, smooth, non-friction glide towards a following vowel sound, the consonants /j, w, r/.

/j/

This consonant is a quick glide from the position of the vowel /i:/ or /ɪ/ to any other vowel. We usually transcribe the word *yes* as *jes*, but we might easily transcribe it *i:es* or *ɪes*, on the understanding that the /i:/ or /ɪ/ is very short and that we move smoothly and quickly to the following /e/. Try the following words in that way, and be sure that there is no friction in the /j/-glide:

jɑ:d	yard	jet	yet
jɒt	yacht	ju:	you
jɔ:	your		

The same is true in the following words where /j/ is not initial; make a quick, weak /i:/-sound before the following vowel:

bju:tɪ	beauty	dju:	due	fju:	few	vju:	view
vælju:	value	nju:	new	mju:zɪk	music		

/w/

This consonant consists of a quick glide from the vowel /u:/ or /ʊ/ to whatever vowel follows. It is much more difficult than /j/ because many languages do not have an independent /w/. But it is not difficult to learn to say. Start with /u:/ or /ʊ/ and follow this immediately by the vowel /ɔ:/ this is the word *wɔ:* *war*. The /w/ part must be short and weak, as with /j/, but the lips must be rounded quite firmly even English people move their lips noticeably for /w/!

Try these words in the same way, beginning each with a very short weak /u:/ or /ʊ/ with the lips well rounded:

wɒtʃ	watch	wɪn	win	weə	where
wet	wet	wi:	we	wʊd	wood
wʌɪt	white	wert	wait	wʊl	wool

When /w/ follows a consonant it is made in the same way; but the lips are rounded ready for /w/ before the previous consonant is finished. So in *swi:t* *sweet* the lips gradually become rounded during the /s/, and when it ends they are firmly rounded ready for /w/. This is true for all the following words; try them:

swi:t	sweet	swɪm	swim	swet	sweat
sweə	swear	dwelɪŋ	dwelling		

Consonants sequences

Some languages (e.g. Russian, German) have many consonant sequences, and speakers of these languages will not have any difficulty in pronouncing most of the English ones. But other languages do not have sequences of consonants at all, or only very few and very short ones (e.g. Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Swahili, Yoruba, Tamil), and speakers of these languages (in which two consonants are usually separated by a vowel) may have difficulty in stringing together two, three or four consonants with no vowel between them. This chapter is to help you, if you have this kind of difficulty.

Initial sequences

At the beginning of English words there may be either two or three consonants in sequence.

Sequences of two consonants initially

These are of two main kinds:

- 1 /s/ followed by one of /p, t, k, f, m, n, l, w, j/, e.g. in *spy, stay, sky, sphere, small, snow, sleep, swear, suit*.
- 2 One of /p, t, k, b, d, g, f, θ, ʃ, v, m, n, h/ followed by one of /l, r, w, j/. Not all of these sequences are found (e.g. /pw, dl/ do not occur). The full list is:

/p/	followed by / , r, j/	play, pray, pure
/t/	/r, w, j/	try, twice, tune
/k/	/ , r, w, j/	climb, cry, quite, cure
/b/	/l, r, j/	blow, bread, beauty
/d/	/r, w, j/	dress, dwell (rare), duty
/g/	/l, r/	glass, green
/f/	/l, r, j/	fly, from, few
/θ/	/r, w/	throw, thwart (rare)
/ʃ/	/r/	shriek
/v/	/j/	view
/m/	/j/	music
/n/	/j/	new
/h/	/j/	huge

Sequences of three consonants initially

These are /spr, str, skr, spj, stj, skj, spl, skw/ and are a combination of the /sp/ type of sequence and the /pr/ type. The /s/ at the beginning is cut off by the following stop, and during the stop the following consonant is fully prepared. Try the following examples very slowly at first; cut off the /s/ by the tongue or lips and, whilst holding this stop, get the third consonant ready, then release the stop straight into the third consonant:

spred	spread	stju:pid	stupid
streit	straight	skjuə	skewer
skru:	screw	splendɪd	splendid
spjuəriəs	spurious	skweə	square

The sequence /spj/ is rare.

Final sequences

Sequences of consonants at the ends of words are more varied than at the beginning mainly because /s/ or /z/ have to be added to most nouns to give their plural forms, as in kæts *cats*, dɒgz *dogs*, fæktz *facts*, fi:ldz *fields*, etc., and /t/ or /d/ have to be added to most verbs to form their past tense, as in wɪʃt *wished*, reɪzd *raised*, rɪskt *risked*, plʌndʒd *plunged*, etc. Also /θ/ is used to form nouns like streŋθ *strength* and bredθ *breadth* and numerals like fɪfθ *fifth* (and all these can have plurals – streŋθs, bredθs, fɪfθs!).

ccc+v+cccc (Students) /stju:dnts/