

ENGLISH CONSONANTS

The consonant is a speech sound that is produced either with a partial or complete obstruction to the airflow at a definite position in the mouth. English consonants can be classified, according to the manner of articulation, into five types: friction /f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ/, stop /p, b, t, d, k, g, tʃ, dʒ/, nasal /m, n, ŋ/, gliding /j, w, r/ and lateral /l/ consonants. The English consonants can be classified in terms of the following criteria:

1. Manner of articulation.
2. Place of articulation and the articulators used to produce a particular consonant.
3. State of the soft palate.
4. Activity of the vocal cords.
5. Strength.
6. Length.
7. Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasal consonants.
8. Aspiration.
9. Devoicing.

Notes:

1. Place of articulation refers to the POSITION OR POINT where a particular sound is articulated. 😊
2. Manner of articulation is the WAY THE FLOW OF AIR IS OBSTRUCTED OR MODIFIED to produce a particular sound. 😊

Friction (Fricative) Consonants

The friction consonant is a speech sound that is produced by pushing the air through a narrow opening (narrowing) formed between the organs of speech (articulators). For all friction consonants, THE SOFT PALATE IS RAISED so that all the breath escapes through the mouth. There are nine fricative consonants.

1. Articulation of /f/ versus /v/

For these sounds, the bottom of the lower lip is close to the edge of the upper front teeth to form the narrowing through which the air escapes with slight friction. The tongue does not directly contribute to the articulation of /f/ and /v/, but it takes the appropriate shape necessary for forming the following vowel sound. Look at the examples in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/f/	/v/
Manner of articulation	Friction	Friction
Place of articulation and articulators	Labio-dental (The narrowing is formed between the bottom of lower lip and edge of the upper front teeth).	Labio-dental (The narrowing is formed the bottom of lower lip and edge of the upper front teeth).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Strong	Weak
Length	Long	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It shortens the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It lengthens the preceding vowel and/or nasals

2. Articulation of /θ/ versus /ð/

They are made by making a narrowing between the tongue-tip and the edge of the upper front teeth. When the air is pushed through this narrow opening, it causes a friction noise greater than that produced for /f/ and /v/. Look at the example in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/θ/	/ð/
Manner of articulation	Friction	Friction
Place of articulation and articulators	Dental (The narrowing is formed between the tongue-tip and edge of the upper front teeth).	Dental (The narrowing is formed between the tongue-tip and edge of the upper front teeth).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Strong	Weak
Length	Long	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It shortens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.

3. Articulation of /s/ versus /z/

For /s/ and /z/, the tip and blade of the tongue are very close to the alveolar ridge to form the necessary narrowing. The upper and lower teeth are also very close together. The fricative energy for these sounds is greater than that for /f, v, θ, ð/. Look at the examples in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/s/	/z/
Manner of articulation	Friction	Friction
Place of articulation and articulators	Alveolar (The narrowing is formed between the tip and blade of the tongue and the alveolar ridge).	Alveolar (The narrowing is formed between the tip and blade of the tongue and the alveolar ridge).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Strong	Weak
Length	Long	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It shortens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.

4. Articulation of /ʃ/ versus /ʒ/

For /ʃ/ and /ʒ/, the tongue tip comes close to the back of the alveolar ridge where the narrowing is formed. The front of the tongue tends to be higher during the production of /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ rather than that of /s/ and /z/. The lips are very slightly rounded. /ʒ/-sound never occurs in word-initial position, but it may occur in word-medial or word-final position. Look at the examples in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/ʃ/	/ʒ/
Manner of articulation	Friction	Friction
Place of articulation and articulators	Post-alveolar (The narrowing is formed between the tip of the tongue and back of alveolar ridge).	Post-alveolar (The narrowing is formed between the tip of the tongue and back of alveolar ridge).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Strong	Weak
Length	Long	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It shortens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.

5. Articulation of /h/

The narrowing is formed between the vocal cords in the larynx so that the air passes between them and produces audible friction. Then, the flow of air escapes out of the mouth which is already prepared to produce the following vowel sound. /h/-sound does not make very much friction noise; yet, it should be pronounced wherever it is necessary to do so. Thus, /h/ pronunciation must not be left out, for two reasons. First, it differentiates words in terms of meaning, for example hi /haɪ/ and I /aɪ/. Second, English native speakers consider leaving out /h/ pronunciation as uncultivated behaviour.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/h/
Manner of articulation	Friction
Place of articulation and articulators	Glottal (The narrow opening is formed between the vocal cords).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).
Strength	Strong
Length	Long

Stop (Plosive) Consonants

A stop consonant is a speech sound articulated by completely stopping the flow of air behind the articulators, and then releasing it with a slight explosion. For all stop consonants, THE SOFT PALATE IS RAISED so that all the air escapes through the mouth. There are four pairs of stop consonants.

1. Articulation of /p/ versus /b/

For these sounds, the two lips are firmly closed and the air-flow is trapped behind them for a short time. When the lips are suddenly opened, the air-flow rushes out with a slight explosion or popping noise. Look at the examples in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/p/	/b/
Manner of articulation	Stop	Stop
Place of articulation and articulators	Bilabial (Both lips are firmly closed).	Bilabial (Both lips are firmly closed).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Strong	Weak
Length	Long	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It shortens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.
Aspiration & Devoicing	It is aspirated and devoices the following sound.	It is unaspirated and doesn't devoice the following sound.

2. Articulation of /t/ versus /d/

They are articulated by firmly pressing the tongue-tip against the middle of the alveolar ridge, and the air-flow is trapped behind this obstruction. The sides of the tongue are against the sides of the palate so that no air-flow escapes over the sides of the tongue. When the tongue-tip is suddenly lowered from the alveolar ridge, the air-flow rushes out with a slight explosion or popping noise. Look at the examples in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/t/	/d/
Manner of articulation	Stop	Stop
Place of articulation and articulators	Alveolar (The tongue-tip is firmly pressed against the middle of the alveolar ridge).	Alveolar (The tongue-tip is firmly pressed against the middle of the alveolar ridge).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Strong	Weak
Length	Long	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It shortens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.
Aspiration & Devoicing	It is aspirated and devoices the following sound.	It is unaspirated and doesn't devoice the following sound.

3. Articulation of /k/ versus /g/

They are articulated by firmly pressing the back of the tongue against the soft palate. The air-flow is trapped behind the obstruction for a short time. When the back of the tongue is suddenly lowered from the soft palate, the air flow rushes out with a slight explosion or popping noise. Look at the examples in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/k/	/g/
Manner of articulation	Stop	Stop
Place of articulation and articulators	Velar (The back of the tongue is firmly pressed against the soft palate).	Velar (The back of the tongue is firmly pressed against the soft palate).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Strong	Weak
Length	Long	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It shortens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.
Aspiration & Devoicing	It is aspirated and devoices the following sound.	It is unaspirated and doesn't devoice the following sound.

4. Articulation of /tʃ/ versus /dʒ/

For these sounds, the tongue-tip is tightly pressed against the back of the alveolar ridge, and the breath is trapped for a short time. When the tongue-tip is lowered from the alveolar ridge, the whole tongue becomes in the position for /ʃ/ and /ʒ/. As a result, a slight friction could be heard; yet, the friction energy for /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ is less than that for /ʃ/ and /ʒ/. Look at the example in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/tʃ/	/dʒ/
Manner of articulation	Stop	Stop
Place of articulation and articulators	Post-alveolar (The tongue-tip is tightly pressed against the back of the alveolar ridge).	Post-alveolar (The tongue-tip is tightly pressed against the back of the alveolar ridge).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Strong	Weak
Length	Long	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It shortens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.
Aspiration & Devoicing	It is unaspirated and DOES NOT devoice the following sound.	It is unaspirated and DOES NOT devoice the following sound.

Note:

Aspiration is the period of breath that follows a voiceless stop consonant occurring in word-initial and word-final positions. Aspirated stop consonants include /p, t, k, tʃ/. The aspirated consonants are phonetically transcribed by using [h] on the upper right, for example pool [p^hu:l]. Aspirated consonants affect the following sound (a following consonant or vowel) and makes lose its voicing feature either partially or completely. That is, a consonant or a vowel occurring after a voiceless aspirated stop consonant is either partially or fully devoiced. A devoiced sound is phonetically transcribed by placing this symbol [̥] below, for example, play [p̥leɪ]. ☺

Nasal Consonants

A nasal consonant is a speech sound produced by obstructing the flow of air at a definite point in the mouth; yet, the air escapes through the nose because the soft palate is lowered. For all nasal consonants, the soft palate is lowered. The nasal consonants are as follows:

1. **/m/**: It is articulated by firmly closing the two lips. The soft palate is lowered so that all the air is expelled out of the nose. Look at the examples in your textbook.
2. **/n/**: It is articulated by pressing the tongue-tip against the alveolar ridge. Look at the examples in your textbook
3. **/ŋ/**: It is articulated by pressing the back of the tongue against the soft palate. Look at the examples in your text.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/m/	/n/	/ŋ/
Manner of articulation	Nasal	Nasal	Nasal
Place of articulation and articulators	Bilabial (The two lips are closed).	Alveolar (The tongue-tip is pressed against the alveolar ridge).	Velar (The back of the tongue is pressed against the soft palate).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is lowered.	The soft palate is lowered.	The soft palate is lowered.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are vibrating (voiced).	They are vibrating (voiced).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Weak	Weak	Weak
Length	Short	Short	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel	It lengthens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.

Note:

1. Both the preceding vowel and the adjacent nasal consonant /m/, /n/, or /ŋ/ are affected by the voicing feature of the following consonant. Consequently, they tend to be shorter before voiceless consonants, but they tend to be longer, for example, sent /sent/ and send /send/. More examples are on page 50. ☺
2. /n/ is often syllabic, that is, it occupies the centre of the syllable which is usually occupied by a vowel (/ŋ/=ə+n/), for example: lesson /lesən/ ⇔ /lesŋ/. Look at the example on page 51. ☺
3. /ŋ/ **DOES NOT** occur at the beginning of words in English, but it occurs between vowels, where it is more difficult to pronounce than in word-final position. The difficulty is to avoid inserting /g/ after /ŋ/, and pronouncing it as /ŋg/ instead of /ŋ/. In RP accent, /ŋ/ is or is not followed by /g/ in certain positions as follows:
 1. /ŋ/ before a following vowel is pronounced with /g/ in one-syllable words, for example: finger /fɪŋgə/, anger /æŋgə/.
 2. If a word is formed from a verb, /ŋ/ is not followed by /g/, for example: singer /sɪŋə/, hanging /hæŋŋ/.
 3. If a word is derived from an adjective, /ŋ/ is pronounced with /g/, for example: strong /strɒŋ/ ⇒ /strɒŋgə/, long /lɒŋ/ ⇒ longer /lɒŋgə/.
4. Before a following consonant, /ŋ/ **IS NOT** pronounced with /g/, for example: sings /sɪŋz/, banged /bæŋd/.

Lateral Consonant

A lateral consonant is a speech sound for which the soft palate is raised, and the flow of air is expelled out of the mouth over the sides of the tongue. In English, the only lateral consonant is /l/. It is articulated by making a firm contact between the tongue-tip and the alveolar ridge. Additionally, the sides of the tongue-blade are pressed against the alveolar ridge to obstruct the centre of the mouth. The sides of the remainder of the tongue are not touching the sides of the palate. The air is expelled laterally, that is, it is pushed over the sides of the tongue. Look at the examples in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/l/
Manner of articulation	Lateral
Place of articulation and articulators	Alveolar (The tongue-tip is pressed against the alveolar ridge and the sides of the tongue-blade are in firm contact with the alveolar ridge).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Weak
Length	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel	It lengthens the preceding vowel.
Devoicing	It is devoiced when occurring after /p, t, k/ and it is released with a slight friction.

Phonologically, The /l/-phoneme has two distinct sounds: clear (light) and dark (heavy) /l/-sounds. In RP pronunciation, the two sounds occur in different positions as follows:

1. Clear /l/ is pronounced before vowels and between vowels, for example: low /ləʊ/, alive /ə'laɪv/.
2. Dark /l/ is pronounced before consonants and in word-final position, for example: fold /fəʊld/, feel /fi:l/.
3. Light /l/ is pronounced in a word-final position when it is followed by another word beginning with a vowel, for example: feel it /fi:l It/.
4. Dark /l/ is pronounced in a word-final position when it is followed by another word beginning with a consonant, for example: fall down /fɔ:l daʊn/.

Additionally, /l/ is syllabic and it occurs in a position which is more usually occupied by the vowel /ə/.

That is, syllabic /l/ = /ə+l/. English native speakers immediately pronounce /l/ after a consonant without inserting a vowel in between. For example: puzzle /pʌzəl/ is pronounced as /pʌzɫ/. However, syllabic /l/ should immediately be pronounced after stop consonants /p, b, t, d, k, g/. Look at the examples in your textbook on page 56.

Gliding Consonants

A gliding consonant is articulated by making a quick, smooth and non-friction glide (movement) towards the following vowel. For the three English gliding consonants /j, w, r/, the soft palate is raised.

1. /j/: It is articulated by making a quick glide from the area where the vowel /i:/ or /ɪ/ are made to any other vowel. That is, the tongue area in which formerly mentioned vowels are formed approach the palate, but does not make a narrowing, so that no friction is formed. However, when /j/ occurs after /p, t, k/, it loses its voicing feature either partially or completely; and it is released with a very slight friction. In RP accent, /j/ is pronounced after /t, d, n/, for example: tune /tju:n/, due /dju:/, new /nju:/. After /l, s, θ/, you may or may not pronounce /j/. However, it is better to pronounce /j/ after all of these sounds: /t, d, n, l, s, θ/.

2. /w/: It is articulated by making a quick glide from the area where the vowel /u:/ or /ʊ/ to the following vowel sound; and the lips must noticeably be rounded. When /w/-sound occurs after /p, t, k/, it loses its voicing feature either partially or completely and is released with a very slight friction.

3. /r/: It is articulated by the tongue which is curved up so that the tongue-tip points to the hard palate at the back of the alveolar ridge. The tongue-tip does not closely approach the hard palate in order not to form a narrowing. Regarding the remainder of the tongue, the tongue-front is low, whereas the tongue-back is high. For /r/, the lips are considerably rounded, especially when /r/ occurs at word-initial position. When /r/ occurs after /p, t, k/, it loses its voicing feature either partially or completely and is released with a very slight friction. In RP accent, /r/ is pronounced in certain word positions, and it is not in other ones, as follows:

1. /r/ is pronounced before and between vowels, for example: read /ri:d/, arrive /ə'raɪv/.
2. /r/ is NOT pronounced before consonants, for example: farm /fɑ:m/.
3. /r/ is not pronounced in word-final position, for example: car /kɑ:/.
4. /r/ in word-final position is not pronounced if it is followed by another word beginning with a consonant, for example: four cars /fɔ: kɑ;z/.
5. /r/ in word-final position is pronounced if it is followed by another word beginning with a vowel, and it

is called a linking /r/, for example: four ice-creams /fɔːr ɪskri:mz/.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/j/	/w/	/r/
Manner of articulation	Gliding	Gliding	Gliding
Place of articulation and articulators	Palatal (The tongue and the palate).	Bilabial (The two lips are rounded).	Post-alveolar (the tongue-tip is pointing to the hard palate).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are vibrating (voiced).	They are vibrating (voiced).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Weak	Weak	Weak
Length	Short	Short	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel	It only occurs before a vowel.	It only occurs before a vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.
Devoicing	It is devoiced after /p, t, k/ and is released with a very slight friction.	It is devoiced after /p, t, k/ and is released with a very slight friction.	It is devoiced after /p, t, k/ and is released with a very slight friction.