# The consonant sounds

Consonants are sounds for which the airflow is obstructed as it leaves the mouth. This means that you have to make **strong movements** to produce each of these sounds. So to make a consonant sound, you need to know which of the **articulators** make the obstruction. (See page 8 for a reminder of what the fixed and mobile articulators are.) Sometimes two mobile articulators touch each other (like for the sound 'b' – **b**ee), and for other sounds one of the mobile articulators moves and touches one of the fixed articulators (like for the sound 'd' – **d**o).

The amount of obstruction varies but all of them require you to obstruct the airflow, unlike vowel sounds. This means that some consonant sounds can be extended for a long time, while others are short sharp sounds. Try making sounds like 'm' (**m**e), 'w' (**w**e), 's' (**s**o), 'f' (**f**ar), and notice how they can all be held on, while 'p' (**p**ea), 't' (**t**ea) and 'k' (**k**ey) are all short and can't be extended.

## Different types of consonant sounds

We can divide the consonants of RP into six groups based on how they are made. Knowing which group the sounds fall into in English will help you to tell the difference between two sounds which might sound more similar in your first language than they should in English.

- **Explosive sounds (known as 'plosives')**

  These sounds start with a complete blockage which is then suddenly released. These sounds are:

  /p/ (**p**et) /t/ (**t**o) /k/ (**c**ot)
  /b/ (**b**et) /d/ (**d**o) /g/ (**g**ot)

- **Friction sounds (known as 'fricatives')**

  For these sounds there is less of an obstruction so a stream of air is able to escape through a small space. These sounds are:

  /f/ (**f**ish) /ʒ/ (trea**s**ure) /s/ (**s**oon)
  /v/ (**v**et) /θ/ (**th**in) /z/ (**z**oom)
  /ʃ/ (**sh**ine) /ð/ (**th**en) /h/ (**h**ello)

- **Combination sounds (known as 'affricates')**

  These are consonants that start as an explosive sound then become a friction sound. The blockage is complete at the start but is then released slowly. These sounds are:

  /tʃ/ (**ch**oke) /dʒ/ (**j**oke)

- **Sounds made through the nose (known as 'nasals')**

  These are the consonants where the sound comes entirely out of the nose with no breath leaving through the mouth. These sounds are:

  /n/ (**n**o) /m/ (**m**e) /ŋ/ (si**ng**)

- **Side sounds (known as 'laterals')**

  These are sounds where the sound is released round the sides of the tongue.

  /l/ (**l**ove) /ɬ/ (hi**ll**)

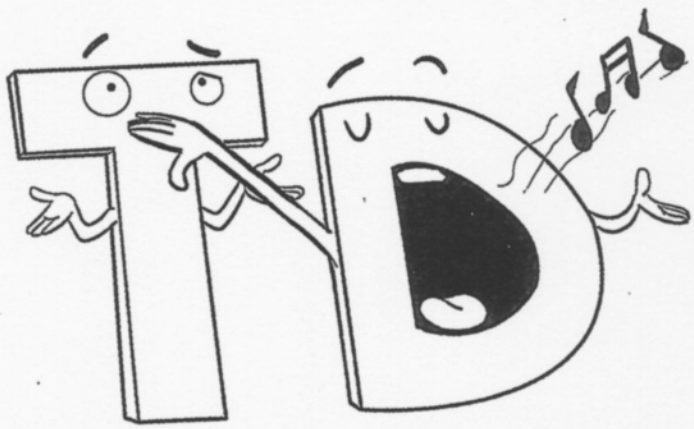
- **Open sounds (known as 'approximants')**

  These sounds don't have an obvious contact point, but the articulators almost create a blockage by getting very close to each other but not quite touching. This is the least obstruction it's possible to make while still being a consonant sound. These sounds are:

  /ɹ/ (**r**ed) /j/ (**y**es) /w/ (**w**eek)

## Voiced and voiceless sounds

Some consonant sounds are **voiced** (e.g. /b/ and /z/), and some are **voiceless** (e.g. /p/ and /s/). For voiced consonants the vocal folds (in your larynx) vibrate, and for voiceless sounds there is no vibration.



Some consonant sounds exist in 'voiced and voiceless pairs' (e.g. /t/ and /d/ are a pair). This means you do exactly the same thing with your mouth for both sounds, but just add or remove voicing in the larynx. (For more explanation of this, turn back to page 7.) We cover the identical voiced/voiceless pairs of sounds in the same units. So a sound like /n/ (**n**o), which has no voiceless partner, has a unit to itself. But a pair of sounds like /t/ and /d/ (**t**o/**d**o), which are voiced/voiceless partners, are both covered in the same unit.

## Making the sound

To make each consonant sound, you need to know:

- Where in the mouth the airflow is obstructed.
- How much of an obstruction is made to the airflow.
- Whether the sound is voiced or voiceless.

If you get these three things right, you will produce the right sound. So let's get started!

Ashton & Shepherd 2012: 14-15

# Consonants

## Making English sounds

Use your voice for some consonant sounds:
/b/ /d/ /g/ /v/ /z/ /w/ /r/ /l/ /m/ /n/ /ŋ/ (ring) /dʒ/ (jam) /j/ (yes) /ʒ/ (vision) /ð/ (the feather)

Don't use your voice for some consonant sounds:
/p/ /t/ /k/ /f/ /s/ /ʃ/ (shoe) /tʃ/ (cherry) /θ/ (thin)

**VOICE**
These are 'voiced'.

**NO VOICE**
These are 'unvoiced'.

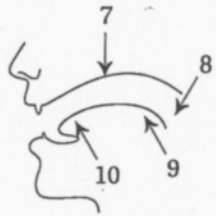
1 Are these consonants voiced or unvoiced? Write (v.) or (unv.).

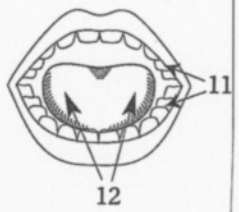
1 /p/ _____
2 /t/ _____
3 /z/ _____
4 /k/ _____
5 /g/ _____
6 /f/ _____
7 /v/ _____
8 /ð/ _____
9 /θ/ _____
10 /ŋ/ _____
11 /ʃ/ _____

2 Match these words with the numbers in the pictures.

a) the nose b) the back of the tongue c) the top teeth
d) the top lip e) the roof of the mouth f) the sides of the tongue
g) the throat h) the front of the tongue i) the tip of the tongue
j) the side teeth k) the bottom teeth l) the bottom lip






3 Match the pictures (1–7) in A with the words (a–g) in B.

A


1


2


3


4


5


6


7

B

a) Close your lips.
b) Open your lips.
c) Close your lips hard.
d) Touch your side teeth with the sides of your tongue.
e) Touch the front of the roof of you mouth with the front of your tongue.
f) Touch the back of the roof of you mouth with the back of your tongue.
g) Push air forward in your mouth.

Baker 2006 : 79 - 80

## How are English consonant sounds made?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| air being stopped, then ... released suddenly: /p/ /b/ /t/ /d/ /k/ /g/ | air moving between two parts of the mouth (or throat) which are close to each other: /f/ /v/ /s/ /z/ /h/ /θ/ /ð/ /ʒ/ /ʃ/ | air coming through the nose: /m/ /n/ /ŋ/ |
| **stops or plosives** | **fricatives** | **nasals** |
| air being released more slowly: /tʃ/ /dʒ/ | air moving between two not so close parts: /w/ /r/ /j/ | air coming round the sides of the tongue: /l/ |
| **affricates** | **approximants** | **lateral** |