



English Consonants

Classification

Things to know!

- Received Pronunciation (standard British English) – we should speak this one!
- General American (standard American English)



English consonants are categorized as to:

- articulation place and active organ
- occlusion type
- noise formation
- noise-forming occlusions number
- vocal cords work
- pronunciation force.

Articulation place and active organ

Depending on what active or passive speech organs articulate a speech sound, consonants may be:

- **Labial Consonants**
- **Lingual Consonants**
- **Glottal Consonant**

Labial Consonants

- **bilabial** articulated with both lips – [w], [m], [p], [b]
- **labiodental** articulated with the lower lip and upper teeth – [f], [v].

Lingual Consonants

-Forelingual consonants:

- **interdental (predorsal dental)** – [θ], [ð]
(the tongue's front surface forms a partial occlusion with the upper teeth);
 - **apical alveolar** – [t], [d], [n], [l], [s], [z], [ʃ], [ʒ], [tʃ], [dʒ]
(the front edge rises to the alveolar ridge);
 - **cacuminal post-alveolar** – [r]
(the front edge is raised and a little bent to the alveolar back slope).
 - In **mediolingual** consonants an occlusion is formed by raising the middle part to the hard palate. Such is articulating the only English **dorsal palatal** [j] sound.
- Backlingual** consonants are articulated by raising the back part to the soft palate – [k], [g], [ŋ]. These are **dorsal velar** sounds.

Glottal Consonant

- The only English glottal [h] sound forms in the glottis. Exhaled air goes via the narrowed glottis with a slight friction noise, the vocal cords don't vibrate, speech organs in super-glottal cavities shape to pronounce a vowel after the glottal consonant.
- What is a glottis?
- What is a glottal stop?

Occlusive/Constrictive Consonants

By noise-forming occlusion type, consonants may be occlusive articulated with a full occlusion in the mouth cavity and constrictive articulated with a partial occlusion in the mouth cavity.

- Occlusive consonants – [p], [b], [t], [d], [k], [g], [m], [n], [ŋ], [tʃ], [dʒ].
- Constrictive consonants – [f], [v], [θ], [ð], [s], [z], [ʃ], [ʒ], [h], [w], [l], [r], [j].

Non-Sonorous Consonants

Both occlusive and constrictive consonants may be non-sonorous and sonants.

Occlusive non-sonorous consonants divide into **plosives** and **affricates**.

- In pronouncing plosive consonants the full occlusion opens, air leaves the mouth cavity producing plosive noise – [p], [b], [t], [d], [k], [g].
- Affricates are sounds with an occlusive start closely blending with a fricative indent. Speech organ opening to form a full occlusion happens smoothly with sounds articulated by 1 effort – [tʃ], [dʒ].

Fricative Consonants

- In articulating constrictive non-sonorous (fricative) consonants, air blows from the narrow glottis creating friction noise. The glottis can shape flat as in [f], [v] or rounded as in [s], [z].

- **Fricative consonants –**

- [f], [v], [θ], [ð], [s], [z], [ʃ], [ʒ], [h].

Nasal Consonants

- Occlusive sonants are nasal. In the mouth cavity a full occlusion forms, the soft palate lowers and air leaves the nasal cavity. Nasal sonants – [m], [n], [ŋ].

Oral Sonants

Constrictive sonants are oral.

- They may be **medial** (the tongue's sides rise and touch side teeth, air blows along its central part) – [w], [r], [j] and
- **lateral** (the front edge rises to the alveoli and touches them, the sides lower, air leaves via side passages – [l]).

Fortis/Lenis Consonants

according to the force of articulation

- English voiceless consonants are pronounced energetically and named fortis (strong). [p, t, k, f, θ, s, ʃ, tʃ, h]
- Voiced consonants are accompanied with weak muscular tension and named lenis (weak). [b, d, g, v, ð, z, ʒ, dʒ]

The Consonants of English

The following diagram gives an overview of the consonants of English for both Received Pronunciation (standard British English) and General American (standard American English).

| | Bilabial | Labio-dental | Dental | Alveolar | Palato-alveolar (Post-alveolar) | Palatal | Velar | Glottal |
|--------------------------------------|----------|--------------|--------|----------|---------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|
| <i>Unvoiced (-V) Voiced (+V)</i> | -V +V | -V +V | -V +V | -V +V | -V +V | -V +V | -V +V | -V +V |
| Stops (Plosives) | p b | | | t d | | | k g | |
| Fricatives | | f v | θ ð | s z | ʃ ʒ | | | h |
| Affricates | | | | | tʃ dʒ | | | |
| Nasals | m | | | n | | | ŋ | |
| Lateral (approximant) | | | | l | | | | |
| Approximant | w | | | r | | j | w | |

The Consonants of RP (Received Pronunciation) & GA (General American)