



# IIT Madras

## ONLINE DEGREE

**Basic English**  
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**Lecture – 42**  
**Phonetics of English- Part 2**

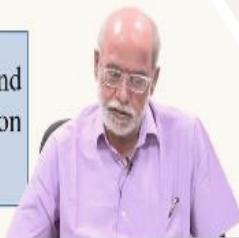
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## SOME CONSONANT SOUNDS

- Vowels are voiced sounds produced without obstruction.
- But almost all consonants are produced after some obstruction.

Only "w" as in "wet" and "y" as in "yet", and other words, are produced without obstruction and still called consonants.



Good afternoon. We will be talking about the production of some consonant sounds and a few overall general things. Mostly nearly almost all consonants are produced only after some obstruction. There are however these two sounds 'w' as in wet and 'y' as in yet in spelling 'w' as in wet and 'y' as in yet and some other words.

These two sounds are produced without obstruction, and they are still called consonants. There is some another reason for that. If you want to know more you can look up the books we have suggested, or we can tell you on a one-to-one session later.

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- All other consonants in all other languages are produced only after some kind of obstruction somewhere in the oral passage.
- Whereas all vowel sounds in all languages are voiced sounds, produced through the vibration of vocal chords, some consonants may also be voiceless, may be produced when vocal chords are wide apart, air from the lungs flows through the glottis freely without vibrating the vocal chords.



All other consonants in all other languages are produced only after or only through some obstruction somewhere in the oral passage. Consonants have another feature. Feature number one, consonants are produced with some obstruction that is why some people also called them obstruent where vowels are called continuants. Next, whereas all vowels sounds are voiced sounds, it is not true of all consonant sounds. Consonants sounds can be voiced; consonant sounds can be voiceless. Many consonants are produced when vocal cords are wide apart.

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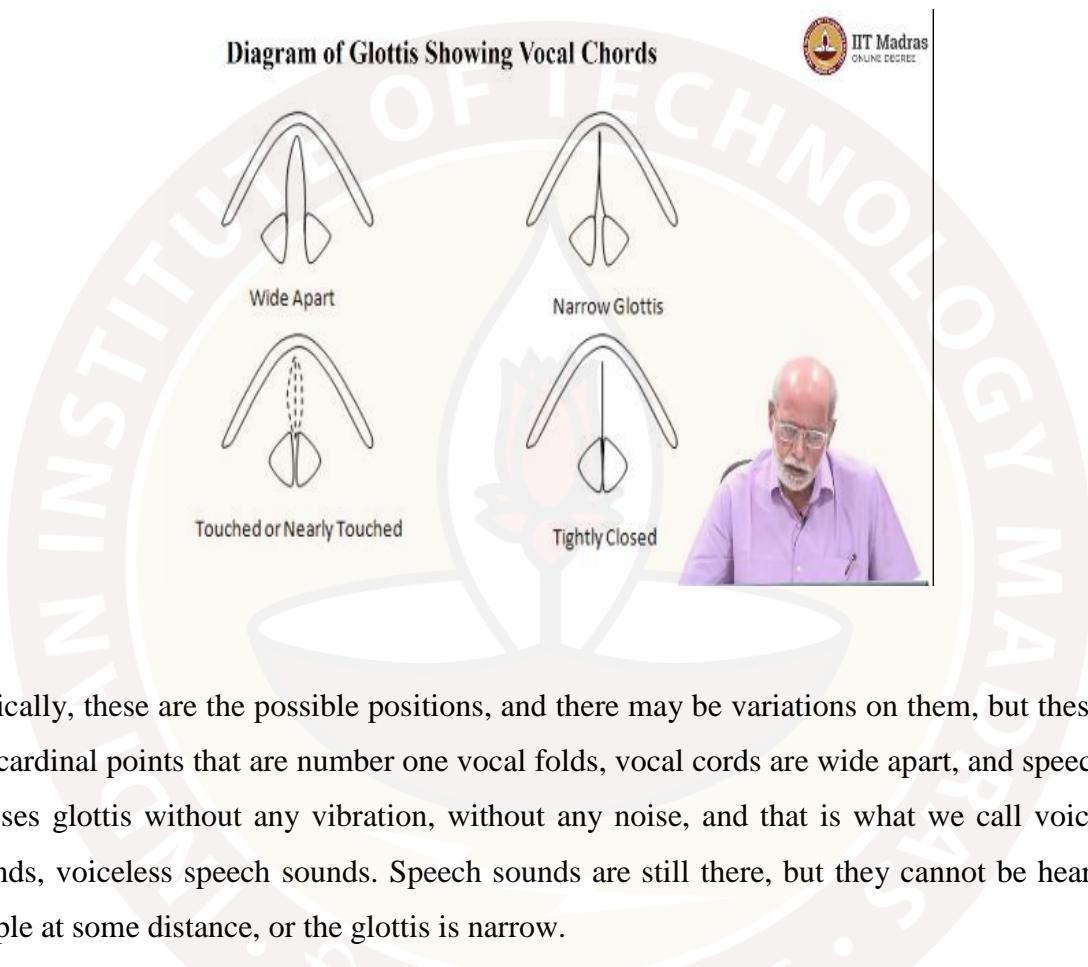
Diagram of Glottis Showing Vocal Chords



Let us look at this diagram of the vocal folds inside the box called the glottis. The glottis has a box like this something of this kind and vocal folds; you see two positions are shown here, of course, two extreme positions have been shown that is not always the case in real life. You

can also have midway not so wide open, not so tightly closed, but generally speaking, there are these two cardinal folds either vocal folds are firmly closed, no speech air can cross through them, either from mouth downward or from lungs upwards or vocal folds are wide open, and speech air can pass through them, lung air going upward or oral air from mouth coming downwards.

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Basically, these are the possible positions, and there may be variations on them, but these are the cardinal points that are number one vocal folds, vocal cords are wide apart, and speech air crosses glottis without any vibration, without any noise, and that is what we call voiceless sounds, voiceless speech sounds. Speech sounds are still there, but they cannot be heard by people at some distance, or the glottis is narrow.

Speech air gets in but produces friction, produces vibration. Similarly, touched or nearly touched speech air passing speech air barely touches it, tightly closed, nothing can cross. It is this position of narrow glottis where vocal cords are touched that is responsible for voice. It is this vibration that you and I hear when we hear anybody else.

Just now I am speaking, and you hear me because the vibration coming out of my mouth is carried to you by the wires before me. So that you can hear me if I went silent, if I spoke in state A, I have said I am still speaking, but because I am speaking with vocal cords in state A that is wide apart, there is no vibration and wires can carry nothing to you.

This is primarily responsible for all speech sounds, but consonants can be both voiced, they can be produced from a position where glottis is narrow and vocal folds are vibrating, or they can be produced from a position where vocal cords are wide apart, speech air flows through the glottis without producing any friction.

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## ACTIVITY



1. Learn to draw the diagram of a. Organs of Articulation Given in Unit 11, & b. Glottis Showing Different States of Vocal Chords.



Actually, it will be helpful if at this point in time, at this point in the course you could learn to draw a diagram of the organs of articulation. I showed you in the earlier unit and also learned to draw a diagram of the different positions of the glottis and also ask yourself what kind of sounds are produced in which position. Once you understand this, the rest of the story will be pretty easy, not difficult at all.

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For instance, "h" in "hip" and "s" in "sip" represent voiceless sounds, but "z" in "zip" is a voiced sound.



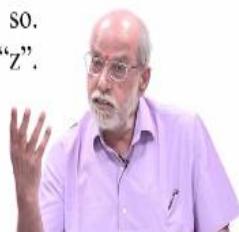
So, for instance, you can feel the difference between voiceless and voice sounds. So, as I say and as I do, take any of your fingers up to the glottis. Keep the finger here gently and in turn slowly without being in a hurry, gently produce number one first 'hhhh' next 'ssss' finally 'zzzzz' do you feel any difference, does your finger notice anything do it again 'hhhh', 'ssss', 'zzzzz' do you notice any difference.

Now if you add 'a', some people say 'hhaaa', no, or 'ssaaaa', no, then you are adding an a which is a voiced sound does not do that. Just produce air from your pharynx and say 'hhhhh', produce air from the tip of your tongue' ssssss' and produce voiced air from the tip of your tongue as I am doing now, keep your finger here and feel 'zzzzz'.

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## ACTIVITY

2. Watch me and do as I do and as I tell you to do. Gently keep a finger upon your glottis. Now in turn produce slowly sounds represented by "h", "s" & "z". Do you feel any difference? Generally, we add an "a" to the end of these sounds; do not do so. Produce only these sounds, "h", "s" & "z". Do you feel any difference?



What do you feel, do you feel any difference?

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- In the production of “h” and “s”, you feel no vibration under your finger; but you feel that vocal chords vibrate when you produce “z”.
- For more on speech sounds, see books recommended for this course.
- It is important for us to learn to distinguish between voiced and voiceless consonants so that we can pronounce words like “simple” and “symbol”, “temple” and “tumble”, “uncle” and “angle”, etc. correctly.



In the production of 'hhhh' and 'ssss' there is no vibration under your finger, it is as quite 'hhhh', 'ssss' you could as well keep your finger here or anywhere else, you will feel nothing, but in the production of 'z' if the finger is here, you feel vibration 'zzzz'. Actually, you can use your mobile phone, handset, any recording device and keep them here and you will notice the difference your recorder will catch that difference.

So, remember all vowels are voiced sounds, all consonants are not. Consonants can also be voiceless sounds, but some people, in some context, especially when speaking in English, make this mistake. If you want to know more about the speech production voiced, voiceless, other kinds of differences, devoiced, semi-voiced, look up the books that I have suggested, they have wonderful descriptions and knowledge always helps.

Coming back to a problem as a learner, some people sometimes because in English your voiceless sound coming immediately after voiced. In many words, in words like temple is voiceless, but comes immediately after which is voiced, comes immediately before another voiced sound 'l' temple or 'a'. So you know it is quite possible that a voiceless sound between two voiced sounds can get voiced.

Now if it gets voiced, then the distinction between one and another word, in the other word where the sound may be voiced is lost. So, some people lose this distinction between simple and symbol; they pronounce simple like they were speaking symbol or sometimes some

people pronounce symbol like they are speaking simple. We can overcome these problems by understanding this mechanism of how speech sounds are produced without a voice. So, for example, come to the next screen.

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## ACTIVITY



3. Speaking slowly, produce the first syllable "sim" of "simple" followed by a very short pause before you go to the second syllable "ple".
4. Some people render "b" in "symbol" as voiceless. They can also do this exercise, though a little differently. Speaking slowly, they can also produce the first syllable "sym", and after a very short pause, can produce "bol" as if they were beginning a new word. They can do this drill also with other words and overcome this problem in connected speech.



What you have to do is pretty simple, speaking slowly, do not be in a hurry, speaking slowly, say the first syllable, produce the first syllable of the word simple, just say 'sim' and take a brief pause and then say 'ple' as you would say in a new word. So once again follow me, 'simple', 'tem-ple', 'un-cle', you will soon get used to doing them in this manner. Similarly, some people do symbol like they were doing simple; they make both the sounds voiceless.

Now that is again another phase of the same problem. You again have to do the same thing with a little difference, say 'sim' and then say 'ple' as if you were speaking a new word. So this kind of careful practice, careful drill can help you overcome problems of this kind, and you will then be speaking in the standard variety of English very comfortably. You will be understood by people from anywhere without difficultly just as you will begin understanding them without any difficultly.

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5. Do this drill with similar words in similar pairs like a few given below, and you can overcome this problem.

Word with a Voiceless Consonant	with Voiced Consonant
uncle	angle
banking	banging
content	contend
hanker	hanger
intend	indent
simple	symbol
temple	tumble



For the sake of practice, I have given you some words, but you can make your own list. So slowly, these things are not done in a hurry. If you do not have time, do not do it, but whenever you do it leisurely, pleasurable, that is the trick, leisurely, pleasurely.

So you should say 'uncle', 'angle', 'banking', 'banging', 'content' like that you can go on. Slowly, carefully wherever you have doubts look up a dictionary, take a pause, wipe your lips and begin again. But do not overdo it, do not do too many the same day and do not miss any, do something every day, and you will acquire these distinctions, they are not difficult at all.

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6. You can add to this list from your memory or dictionary, and do the drill as advised above, and learn the pronunciation of these words.



You can make your own list as I have been saying. Frequently, the words that you hear frequently, words where people make mistakes; other words will follow the pattern. Once you relearn, other words will automatically reorganize themselves in the lexicon of your mind, in the dictionary of her mind, and you will have no difficulty at all.

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- Many students of English have difficulty producing sounds like “v” in “van” and “w” in “wan”. Sometimes they pronounce “v” like it were “bh”, or something closer to “w”, confusing their listeners.
- They are both voiced sounds, but “v” as in “van”, “ever”, “move”, etc. is produced from the lower lip coming close to upper teeth.



There is another group of sounds which can be difficult for, which can be, not necessarily are, but which can be difficult for some learners. Say, for example, English has lots of sounds which are produced not with total obstruction, but with friction between two organs of

articulation. Say, for example, sounds like 'vvvv' as in van or 'www' as in wan. Now if you mark in a sound like 'vvvv' as in van lot of people make a mistake.

They do not produce van, they either say bhan bringing both their lips together or they have kept both their lips so wide apart that it almost sounds like wan. So how did you come? I took a wan. Now so the listener who is not from your community of speakers, your speech community might get confused, they might think you are talking about 'wan' when you are talking about 'van', or they might think you are talking about 'ban' when you are talking about 'van'.

So you know when you say 'van' others hear it as 'wan'. So, therefore it is very important that you should learn to produce both of these sounds clearly, in particular in words where you have 'vvvv' in the beginning as a van in the middle as in ever or at the end as in move. A lot of people, a lot of very proficient speakers of English failed to produce the 'vvvv' if it occurs at the end of a word, in the word-final position.

Rather than say move they say 'mov' rather than say five they say 'fiv', rather than say give they say 'giv' that causes confusion to your listeners from another speech community. Therefore, it is important that you should learn how to pronounce them and it is pretty simple how this sound is produced, all you have to do is to take your lower lip, God has given us two lips the upper lip and the lower lip.

Take the lower lip close to, but do not touch, close to the upper teeth and say 'vvvv', do not touch, do not bite, do not say 'vvh' that is not English, it is close to, but not touching. Speech air still flows but flows through friction; there is audible friction. So you have, and then you should say van, ever, move, five, give, with some practice you can learn it. Lower lip going to the upper teeth.

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- "W", as in "wan", is produced with lips rounded like you do in the production of "u" in "put", "pull", "push", etc. In words like "quest", "queen", "quick", you should round your lips before you begin pronouncing them. You will produce "w" sound in these words quite correctly.



But in the production of 'w', so easy you do not have to do much. Just round your lips like you do when say 'u' as in two, when you say 'u' as in put, push, pull a number of words where you have 'u'. Bring your lips into that position as if you are going to say 'u' and then let your lips go. You will say 'www', and from the same position you can say wet, wan, wax, where, why, not difficult at all.

And actually in words such as which are spelt 'qu' you again have a 'w' in pronunciation. This q and u together make a sound cluster of sounds where the first sound is 'k' and the second is 'w'. How you can produce this, pretty simple once again, take your lips, keep your lips in the shape of 'u' that means rounded slightly protruding forward in this manner and then being with 'ka'.

Keep your lips in position for 'u' and begin with 'k', so you can say queen, quick, quack, qualm, quality, quantity, queen, queer, it is pretty simple all you have to do is these things are organs of articulation. They are tools; they are meant for us to use them in a particular manner. So once we pay attention to the manner in which they are used to produce a particular kind of sounds, we can learn to use them in that manner and get those sounds that we desire, not difficult at all, there is no magic there.

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## ACTIVITY



7. Look at the following pairs of words and produce them slowly and carefully as advised above.

Words with "v"	Words with "W"
van	wan
vet	wet
vest	west
veil	wail
very	weary
every	dwell
liver	quell
never	quit



Here is the list of words you can practice alternatively taking lower lip to the upper teeth close to, but not touching, you can say 'van', but rounding your lips, you can say 'wan', vet, wet, vest, west, veil, wail. Do the rest of it is pretty simple. You can make your own list once again.

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river	queen
live	quick
give	question
love	quality
move	quantity
prove	query
weave	qualm



8. You can add to this list and do the drill in the manner suggested above.



And the sound in various position river, queen, live or live and quick, weave and qualm. You can make your own list add. You easily have 100 words combining this sound in different positions that we use every day. It is these words that give us accent, confidence when we speak English as a non-native language because we have learned this language to be understood not just by our family and friends, but also by strangers.

And it is therefore very important that we speak in a manner such that strangers, also those who have not seen us, those who have not heard us before should also understand us without difficulty.

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- English has many sounds, more than many Indian Asian languages, that are produced with friction, though not with total obstruction. Just as we saw for "v" in "vet" above, one organ of articulation, like lower lip, comes so close to the other, such as upper teeth in this case, that even though there is no complete closure, there is audible friction. So, for instance, "s" as in "sip" and "z" as "zip" are produced by the tip of the tongue coming close to but not touching the alveolar ridge, the line behind and above the upper teeth.



English has lots of sounds that are produced with friction, 'nine', you have 'f' 'v', you have to 's' 'z', you have 'f' 'd', 'f' as in think, 'd' as in this, then you have 's' 'z' as I said, then you have 'sh' as in rush or ship, 'zha' as in pleasure, as in measure. Then you have 'hhh' so you have 9, four pairs, 'f' 'v', 's' 'z', 'f' 'd' and then 'hhh' pharynx that friction.

If you pay attention to the manner in which they are produced, you will learn them in no time, and you will get them right. So for example if you cannot produce 'z' take the tip of your tongue, front of your tongue, behind the upper teeth to the ridge what is called the alveolar ridge, do not touch, go close and say 'ssss' turn voice on and say 'zzzz'. If you have difficulty saying 'ssh' in English 'sh' in ship, draw your tongue backwards a little, then the front of the tongue rises towards the hard palate.

And you produce 'sh' as in ship, you produce 'zh' as in pleasure, as in measure, not difficult because you are not used to it, it may sound strange to yourself in the beginning, but please believe me this is the standard sound. This is how we can teach ourselves, and this is how we can help our friends and family.

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- All the other different sounds are produced by organs of articulation by moving from one position to another. If you have difficulty with any English sound, look up the *Better Spoken English*. It has lists of frequently used and mispronounced words of English. It also says how it can be, and it tells you how you can pronounce them right.



So all the other sounds can be learned in this manner, you can make a list of words where these sounds are frequently heard, do the drill and learn them right. In the book Better Spoken English, as I said a moment ago on the basis of my research with students, I have compiled those lists where students make mistakes even when they occur in frequently used words.

Do the practice with them, you not only get those words right, but you can also get other words on a similar pattern right. You can make your own list; you can make your own list of words frequently used, but mispronounced in this respect. You can look up a dictionary, or you can do so from memory. There also are other books which can help you understand this mechanism and make this list.

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- For still more and greater details you can see the following books:
- Balasubramanian, T : *A Textbook of English Phonetics for Indian Students*
- Gimson, A C: *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English*
- Kreidler, Charles W : *The Pronunciation of English*
- O'Connor, J D : *Better English Pronunciation*



Some books I have mentioned here, they are easily available, they do not cost a lot, and they are designed for us learners, adult learners of English. Say, for example, the book by Professor Balasubramanian – A Text Book of English Phonetics for Indian Students, look at other books, each is better than the other, they are all good.

You can have copies of them all or going to the nearby library, and you can look them up. You can also buy your own copies, they are not very expensive either, and they give you enough practice, enough explanation and enough confidence to acquire the correct pronunciation of English in no time.

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## CONCLUSION

1. Anyone who can speak one language can also speak another language equally well. All they have to do is set their mind to it. We only have to pay attention and to follow the same specific manner to produce the same sound or sounds, almost as we learn to drive a car. Actually, learning to speak another language is simpler, just as many who have learnt speaking another language tell us.



Finally, anyone who knows speaking can learn to speak another language because the trick is the same. Just as you know mother tongue in other languages also, you use some tools to produce some sounds, you should pay attention to how that tool is used, what is the manner, what is the movement, once you recognize that, you can follow the same process, same procedure, same movement and get those sounds. So it is simple; all you have to do is to pay attention and set your mind to it.

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2. Nobody else can learn it for you. Only you can teach yourself, and, thus, learn to speak a language. Enthusiasm can help you learn any language.
3. This course does not pretend to teach you how to speak English, but it seeks to become a guide. .



The second is these things cannot be taught; nobody else can learn for you. It is a skill, no matter who loves you how much, your family, your friends, your teachers, no matter how much they love you, they cannot learn it for you just as they cannot learn walking for you, eating for you, you have to do it for yourself, you make mistakes in the beginning, but if you are determined if you pay attention.

Moreover, if you are enthusiastic, you wish to learn it, and you enjoy learning it, you will learn it, nobody can stop you from learning what you send your mind to. And finally this course, this module of the course as we have done here you may have noticed, we are not trying to teach you how to speak, we are just a guide, there may be better ways, but as far as we are concerned these are simple principles following which you can learn to speak comfortably and quickly.

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Thank You



Good luck, enjoy practicing and enjoy learning and become the great speaker that you are destined to become. Thanks for your attention.

