

Chapter Two

VOWELS IN DETAIL

This chapter will give you more detailed knowledge of the most problematic vowel sounds for non-native speakers. You will learn to clearly distinguish between certain sounds that may have seemed very similar to you in the past, and you will learn the common spelling exceptions for some vowel sounds within frequently used words. Memorizing these exceptions will significantly improve your accent.

Review of /I/ and /i/ Sounds

"Real riches are the riches possessed inside."

B. C. Forbes

The /I/ sound is easy to identify because it is almost always spelled with the letter *i* as in *big*. The /i/ sound is most commonly spelled with two vowels such as *ee* or *ea*, as in *meet*, or *team*. Remember to relax your tongue and lips for the /I/ sound and to make them tense for the /i/ sound.



Warning: Dangerous Mistake

Confusing /I/ and /i/ may cause embarrassment or can even be offensive.

Do you mean?

/i/

sheet

beach

piece

Or?

/I/

shit

bitch

piss

Practice Dialogues

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. a. Is <u>it</u> <u>difficult</u> ? | b. No, <u>it's</u> unbelievably <u>easy</u> . |
| 2. a. I <u>feel</u> <u>ill</u> . | b. <u>Drink</u> some <u>green</u> <u>tea</u> . |
| 3. a. <u>Please</u> <u>meet</u> me for <u>dinner</u> . | b. I <u>will</u> <u>be</u> there at <u>six</u> . |
| 4. a. Is <u>it</u> <u>expensive</u> ? | b. No, <u>it</u> <u>isn't</u> . It's <u>really</u> <u>cheap</u> . |
| 5. a. I <u>need</u> a <u>refill</u> of <u>these</u> <u>pills</u> . | b. <u>Speak</u> <u>with</u> your <u>physician</u> . |
| 6. a. Is <u>he</u> <u>still</u> <u>really</u> <u>sick</u> ? | b. No, <u>he's</u> just <u>feeling</u> a <u>little</u> <u>weak</u> . |
| 7. a. <u>This</u> <u>is</u> completely <u>different</u> . | b. But <u>it</u> <u>is</u> <u>interesting</u> , <u>isn't</u> <u>it</u> ? |

Practice Paragraph

CD 1
Track
70

Guilty or Innocent?

Let's be realistic. It's not that difficult to see that he's guilty. He steals, drinks, and cheats. He has cheated his victims, and he needs to be in prison. He did these terrible things, yet he insists that he's innocent. Who is he kidding? In the beginning, many people did believe that he was innocent. But now we have the evidence that we need. Even though he won't admit his guilt, I foresee him being in prison for at least fifteen years. Don't you agree with me?

CD 1
Track
71



Advice from a Successful Student

"When you leave phone messages for people, there's often the option of listening to your message before you send it. I always listen to the message, and if I think my accent is too strong, I record the message again, sometimes several times, until I am satisfied with the way my speech sounds."

Sonja Sokolova, Russia

CD 1
Track
72

Review of /ɛ/ and /æ/ Sounds

Remember that for the /æ/ sound the jaw is more open, and the tongue is down at the floor of your mouth. For the /ɛ/ sound, the jaw is just slightly down.

Sentence Pairs for Practice

/ɛ/

1. Don't think about the **pest**.
2. He gave me a **letter**.
3. **Send** it carefully.
4. The **men** helped me.
5. I need a new **pen**.
6. Do you need to **beg**?

/æ/

1. Don't think about the **past**.
2. He gave me a **ladder**.
3. **Sand** it carefully.
4. The **man** helped me.
5. I need a new **pan**.
6. Do you need a **bag**?

Word Pairs in Sentences

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. This bed is bad . | 4. I guess I need gas . |
| 2. Dan is in the den . | 5. They laughed after he left . |
| 3. She said that she was sad . | 6. I bet that's a bat . |

CD 1
Track
73

Practice Sentences

1. Every member of my family is left handed.
2. My best friend Frank is a successful dentist.
3. Kenny's bad headache lasted several days.

CD 1
Track
74

4. Glen drank ten glasses of fresh lemonade.
5. Everyone was happy that he was elected president.
6. Don't forget to thank Dan for his generous present.

CD 1
Track
75

Voicemail Message for Practice

You have reached Ellen Edwards. I am sorry I can't answer right now. I am away from my desk. Please leave a message and I will get back to you as soon as I can.

Practice Paragraph

A Trip to France

Next January I'm planning to visit my friends in France. Last time I went there I was only ten or eleven. I would love to go back again. I am taking a class called "French for Travelers." We are memorizing vocabulary and learning the present and past tenses. I want my French to get better and I am practicing every chance I get. I rented a French film and I felt so bad because I didn't understand a word they said. I guess I will have to make extra effort. I want to learn the language and have a better accent so that people can understand me when I am asking for directions and ordering in restaurants.

CD 1
Track
76

Review of /ə/, /ɑ/, /ɔ/, and /ou/ Sounds

These sounds are frequently confused. Non-native speakers sometimes do not clearly distinguish the difference between *cup*, *cop*, *cap*, and *cope*.

/ə/	/ɑ/ /ɔ/	/ou/
Remember, the sound /ə/ as in <i>fun</i> or <i>cup</i> is a neutral vowel, meaning that everything in your mouth is relaxed and the lips are just very slightly open.	In contrast to the /ə/, the /ɑ/ as in <i>father</i> and /ɔ/ as in <i>saw</i> , require the mouth to be open. The sounds /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ are very similar, except that for the /ɔ/, the lips are a bit more oval in shape and the tongue is slightly tense. However, in many parts of the United States, the /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ are pronounced the same way. For example, many Americans pronounce <i>hot</i> and <i>tall</i> with the same vowel sound.	For the /ou/ sound, as in <i>boat</i> , the lips are rounded and tense.



Warning: Dangerous Mistake

Confusing /ə/, /ɑ/, /ɔ/, and /ou/ may cause embarrassment or can even be offensive.

Do you mean?

Or?

/ə/

/ɔ/

Doug

dog

Also, mispronouncing words like *coke*, *focus*, *fork*, and *folk* can cause you to say an inappropriate or offensive word.

Practice Dialogue

Coffee Tomorrow

John: Hi Nicole. Can you talk?

Nicole: Oh, hi John. Can you hold on? I'm on another call. I'm talking to my boss.

John: No problem. I'll wait 'til you're done.

Nicole: Okay, now I can talk. I am sorry it took so long. What's going on?

John: Nothing much. I just wanted to know if we can meet for lunch or coffee tomorrow.

Nicole: That sounds like fun. I've been working nonstop and I'd love to get out of the office.

The Problematic O

Trouble is only opportunity in work clothes.

Henry Kaiser

Words spelled with the letter *o* can cause many frustrations for students of the American accent. You have already learned that the pronunciation of a vowel does not necessarily correspond to the spelling of the vowel. This is especially true of the letter *o*. The letters *o* in the words *job*, *love*, and *only* are all pronounced differently.

CD 1
Track
77

CD 1
Track
78

Chapter Three

CONSONANTS

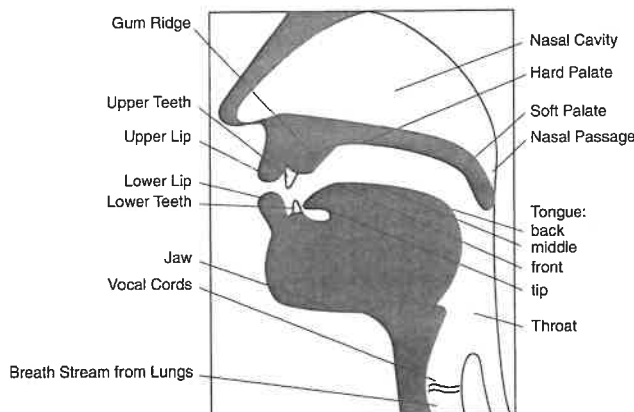
This chapter will teach you how to form all of the consonant sounds of American English. You can either study this chapter first to get an in-depth understanding of how consonants are formed, or you can just skip to the next chapter ("Problematic Consonants") and begin practicing the most difficult sounds for non-native speakers. Make sure that you also refer to the "Native Language Guide" at the end of the book, which will tell you which specific consonant sounds you need to focus on in this chapter and in the following one.

Forming American Consonants

When you are learning another accent, it is very helpful to know how the instruments of the mouth work together to produce sound. One reason that you have an accent when you are speaking English is that you are likely not moving your tongue and lips in the same way as a native speaker.

A consonant is a sound that is made when the airflow is blocked by either your lips or your tongue. The different places where this block may occur are called "points of articulation." The point of articulation is, therefore, a point of contact of one part of your mouth with another part. For example, when you produce the sound /p/ (which is spelled with the letter p) your lips come together and close shut. So, the points of contact here are your two lips. The sound /b/ (which is spelled with a letter b) is also produced by your lips touching, as is the sound /m/.

Sometimes the points of contact, or points of articulation, occur when the tip of your tongue touches directly behind the upper teeth, a part of your mouth called the gum ridge. The sounds that are produced at this point are /t/, /d/, /n/, and /l/. Another point of contact occurs when the back part of your tongue touches the back part of your mouth, near the throat, as in /g/ and /k/. You don't necessarily need to learn the formal names of the different parts of your mouth, but you should develop an awareness of where the points of contact are. Studying the illustration below will help you do this.



Voiceless and Voiced Consonants

One way that we categorize consonants is by determining whether they are “voiceless” or “voiced.” It’s important to know the difference between these types because the length of a vowel that precedes a consonant is determined by whether the consonant that follows it is voiceless or voiced. You will learn more about this later in the chapter. Also, knowing whether a sound is voiceless or voiced will help to correctly pronounce letters such as *-ed* and *-s* at the ends of words. You will learn about this in detail in the next chapter.

First, let’s learn how to distinguish between a voiced and a voiceless consonant. Place your fingers in the front, middle part of your neck. Now say /z/ as in the word *zoo*. Now, let’s make it longer: *zzzzzzzzzz*. You should feel a vibration in your vocal cords. This is how you know that the /z/ sound is voiced. Now let’s try this with the /s/ sound as in the word *sat*. Say /s/. Now let’s prolong it: *ssssssss*. This time there was no vibration in your vocal cords, so this consonant is considered unvoiced. That’s all there is to it. The tongue and lip positions of the /z/ and /s/ are identical. The only difference between them is vibration or no vibration. Look at the other consonant pairs that are produced exactly the same way, except for the vibration in the vocal cords.

Voiceless and Voiced Consonant Pairs

Voiceless Consonants (vocal cords do not vibrate)	Voiced Consonants (vocal cords vibrate)	How to Produce the Sound
/p/ pet rope	/b/ bet robe	Lips start fully together, then part quickly to produce a small release of air.
/t/ ten seat	/d/ den seed	Tip of the tongue is slightly tense as it firmly touches and then releases the gum ridge.
/k/ class back	/g/ glass bag	Back of tongue presses up against soft palate (back of mouth) and releases.
/f/ fault leaf	/v/ vault leave	Lower lips lightly touch upper teeth; vibration occurs on the lips from the flow of air created.
/θ/ thank breath	/ð/ this breathe	Tip of the tongue touches back of front teeth or edges of front teeth. Air flows out between tongue and teeth.
/s/ sink price	/z/ zinc prize	Sides of tongue touch middle and back upper teeth. Tip of tongue is lowered a bit. Air flows out of middle part of the tongue.
/ʃ/ pressure wish	/ʒ/ pleasure massage	Tip of tongue is down, sides of tongue are against upper teeth on sides of mouth. Air flows out through middle of tongue.
/tʃ/ choke rich	/dʒ/ joke ridge	Tip of tongue is down, sides of tongue are against upper teeth on the side of mouth. Tip of tongue quickly touches gum ridge and then releases.

More Voiced Consonants

Now let's go through the rest of the consonant sounds of English. These consonants are all voiced, but they have no voiceless pair. Make sure that you feel the vibration in your vocal cords as you say them.

/m/	mom from lemon	Lips together. Air flows out of the nose.
/n/	non fun any	Tip of tongue touches gum ridge, and the sides of the tongue touch upper teeth; air any flows out of the nose.
/ŋ/	going spring king	Back of the tongue touches the soft palate; air flows out of the nose.
/l/	love will yellow	Tip of tongue touches upper gum ridge. Tongue is tense. Air comes out on the sides of the tongue, at the corners of the mouth.
/r/	red four card	There are two ways to produce this sound: 1: Tip of tongue curls a bit and then is pulled back slightly. 2: Tip of tongue is down; center of the tongue touches hard palate.
/w/	win lower quiet	Rounded lips as for the vowel /u/ in <i>moon</i> . Air flows out through the lips. Tongue is in position for the vowel sound that follows the /w/.
/y/	yes mayor young	Tip of tongue touches lower front teeth. Front of tongue is raised near the hard palate.

The Consonant /h/

This final consonant sound is voiceless and does not have a "voiced pair" that it corresponds to.

/h/	happy behave who	Vocal cords are tense and restricted, back of tongue is pushed against the throat to create friction as the air flows out from the back of the mouth.
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Vowel Length and Voiced and Voiceless Consonants

Vowels are **longer** when followed by a **voiced consonant**. They are **shorter** when followed by a **voiceless consonant**. Even short vowels like /i/, /ε/, /ə/, and /ʊ/ are prolonged when followed by a voiced consonant.



Warning: Common Mistake

When you lengthen a vowel, make sure that you do not change the sound of the vowel. For example, when you say *hid* make sure that it doesn't sound like *heed*.

CD 2
Track
15

Word Pairs for Practice

voiceless	voiced	voiceless	voiced
/s/	/z/	/t/	/d/
1. advice	advise	4. mate	made
2. ice	eyes	5. hat	had
3. niece	knees	6. bet	bed
/f/	/v/	/k/	/g/
7. half	have	10. back	bag
8. life	live	11. dock	dog
9. belief	believe	12. duck	Doug

CD 2
Track
16

Practice Sentences

voiceless

1. My wallet is in the **back**.
2. I saw five **bucks** on the floor.
3. He has blue **ice**.
4. I heard about the **lice**.

voiced

- My wallet is in the **bag**.
I saw five **bugs** on the floor.
He has blue **eyes**.
I heard about the **lies**.

CD 2
Track
17

Word Pairs in Sentences

1. He told me **lies** about the **lice**.
2. His **eyes** are **ice** cold.
3. There was a **buzz** in the **bus**.
4. The **dog** is on the **dock**.