

## International Phonetic Alphabet School

DAY 3: R

FRIDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> OF JANUARY

with Ayca Ekim

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Let's take a closer look at the consonants in the International Phonetic Alphabet.

**A consonant is made when two parts of your mouth create an obstruction for your breath on its way out.** One part is active and one is passive.

Here are your mouth, throat, and nasal cavity in profile. The places of air obstruction here have names. BILABIAL: the upper lip is passive, the lower lip is active /b/. LABIODENTAL: the upper teeth are passive, the lower lip is active /f/. ALVEOLAR: deals with a little ridge just behind your front teeth. When this alveolar ridge is passive and the tip of your tongue touches it, you can make a sound like /d/ or /t/. POST-ALVEOLAR: the passive bit is just behind the alveolar ridge, your tongue tip is active /ʃ/. PALATAL: your soft palate is passive and the middle of your tongue is active /j/. VELAR: the back of your soft palate is passive. The middle of your tongue is active /k/. UVULAR: the little thing in the back of your throat is passive. The back of your tongue is active /x/.

We need to consider not only the place of obstruction but also the manner. PLOSIVE: air escapes in little puffs /p/. FRICATIVE: air escapes through a small opening /s/.

APPROXIMANT: air escapes through a slightly bigger opening /g/. TRILL: the active and the passive part of your mouth trill together /B/. TAP OR FLAP: the active and the passive places touch briefly, just once /r/.

**The IPA consonant chart identifies a vowel by combining a place and a manner of obstruction.** An alveolar approximant sounds like /ɹ/. A uvular approximant sounds like /ʁ/. An alveolar trill sounds like /r/. An alveolar tap sounds like /ɾ/.

The orthographic transcription of these four vowels is usually an R. Languages that have been canonized to serve as so-called national languages, still have regional and social varieties when spoken. **The pronunciation of R is a marker of difference in many languages, including all types of spoken English.** In rhotic Englishes, every R is pronounced. So a word like 'writer' can sound like /ˌraɪtəɹ/, /ˌraɪtər/, /ˌwaɪtəʁ/ and so on. In non-rhotic Englishes, the R is not pronounced after a vowel at the end of a word, resulting in /ˌraɪtə/ or /ˌwaɪda/.

**Today, try to identify the use of R in your own and other people's spoken English.** Pay special attention to how consistent that use is. **People who alternate between the manner and of production, or between rhotic and a non-rhotic English, tend to be multilinguals.** What else do they have in common?

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