

# WHAT IS PHONETICS?

/wɒt ɪz fə'netiks/

**Phonetics** /fə'netiks/ is the study of speech sounds.

There are three main areas of phonetics:

- 1) **Articulatory phonetics** deals with the way in which speech sounds are produced. Sounds are usually classified according to the position of the lips and the tongue, how far open the mouth is, whether or not the **vocal cords** are vibrating etc.
- 2) **Acoustic phonetics** deals with the transmission of speech sounds through the air. When a speech sound is produced it causes minor air disturbances. (**sound waves**). Various instruments are used to measure the characteristics of these sound waves.
- 3) **Auditory phonetics** deals with how speech sounds are perceived by the listener.

This course will deal with **articulatory phonetics**, describing how sounds - in particular the phonemes of English - are produced.

## The International Phonetic Alphabet

The International Phonetic Alphabet is a system of symbols for representing the pronunciation of words in any language, according to the principles of the International Phonetic Association.

(The abbreviation IPA stands for the International Phonetic Alphabet or the International Phonetic Association).

Here is the homepage of the International Phonetic Association:

<http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/IPA/index.html>

Here is some information about the International Phonetic Alphabet in English:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Phonetic\\_Alphabet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Phonetic_Alphabet)

in Czech:

[http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mezinárodní\\_fonetická\\_abeceda](http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mezinárodní_fonetická_abeceda)

in German:

[http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internationales\\_Phonetisches\\_Alphabet](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internationales_Phonetisches_Alphabet)

in Spanish:

[http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfabeto\\_Fonético\\_Internacional](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfabeto_Fonético_Internacional)

in Russian:

[http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Международный\\_фонетический\\_алфавит](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Международный_фонетический_алфавит)

## Think about this

1. Which individual sounds (phonemes) exist in English but not in your mother tongue?
2. How does this information help the teacher of English?
3. Which phonemes exist in your mother tongue but not in English?
4. Of what use is this information?