

Making Speech Sounds

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The following list of sounds and directions for obtaining accurate articulation are basically in developmental sequence, with younger, easier sounds listed first to later developing more difficult sounds at the end. A first step in articulation training is to check that a child accurately hears the target sound. E.g., do they hear the difference between the initial sounds in *key* and *tea*? Using visual aids helps with this step. When a child asks for *tea* when wanting a *key*, hand them a cup of tea vs. a key. Remain playful, emphasize the two sounds a couple times, then move on. Because we cannot see our own mouths, sharing a mirror side-by-side with a child can help with accuracy. For sounds that emit a puff of air, such as /p/, /t/, and /f/, make the sound into a feather or tissue and see the airflow. Additionally, they can feel their vocal cords vibrating when they compare voiced and unvoiced sounds. Voiced sounds require more airflow for vibration of the vocal cords. Gently place one hand on the throat as you produce the targeted voiced and unvoiced sound pairs below.

/h/ Sound

The /h/ sound is an open-mouthed production with no constriction present. Children should be able to make this sound at a very early age.

/w/ Sound

The /w/ sound is made by rounding the lips and blowing air through the constriction. The lips may barely touch, otherwise it becomes /b/ or /p/ sounds.

“y” Sound

The “y” sound is produced by pulling the lips back in a smile sound and blowing air through the opened mouth. Making an *eee* → *uh* sound may help. The tongue’s slightly curled edges touch the molars on both sides.

/p/ and /b/ Sounds

The /b/ and /p/ sounds are made by closing the lips and bursting forth with a blast of air. The only difference is that /p/ is unvoiced, while the /b/ is voiced.

/m/ Sound

The /m/ sound is made by placing the lips together and humming. Minimal air will pass into the nasal cavity producing a slight tickling sensation in the nose. /m/ is a voiced sound.

/n/ and /ng/ Sounds

The /n/ sound is made by placing the tongue tip behind the top front teeth and passing a continuous stream of air over the tongue. The /ng/ sound is made by humping the tongue centrally near the roof of the mouth and passing air over it. A bit of air may go into the nasal cavity for both sounds, which may tickle.

/t/ and /d/ Sounds

The /t/ and /d/ sounds are made by tapping the tongue tip behind the top front teeth. The /t/ sound is unvoiced, while /d/ is voiced.

/k/ and /g/ Sounds

The /k/ and /g/ sounds are made by humping the tongue up in the back of the mouth and pushing air through the constriction. /g/ is voiced and /k/ is unvoiced.

/s/ and /z/ Sounds

The /s/ and /z/ sounds are made by parting the lips, gently clenching the teeth and passing air through the constriction. The tongue edges curl slightly upward behind the teeth. The /s/ sound is unvoiced, while the /z/ sound is voiced.

/f/ and /v/ Sounds

The /f/ and /v/ sounds are made by biting the lower lip and pushing air through this constriction. The /v/ sound is voiced, while /f/ is unvoiced.

“sh” Sound

The “sh” sound is produced by rounding the lips and blowing air through the constriction. It sometimes helps to model the sound while giving the 'hush' sign (finger on rounded lips).

“th” Sound

The “th” sound is produced by slightly sticking out the tongue between the upper and lower teeth. Air is passed over the tongue to produce the sound. There is an unvoiced “th” as in “bath” and a voiced “th” as in “bathe.”

// Sound

The // sound is widely varied among speakers. It is dependent on what precedes or succeeds it in a word production. It is produced by placing the tongue tip on the roof just behind the top front teeth, though some people produce the sound accurately with a protruding tongue tip touching the upper lip. A stream of air is passed through the constriction.

Of special note: Because of the variety in how this sound is produced, including dependence on its surrounding sounds, it may take longer to perfect.

“r” Sound

The /r/ sound is widely varied amongst speakers. It is dependent on what precedes or succeeds it in a word production. The tongue tip is usually curled toward the roof of the mouth to make this sound.

Of special note: To produce “r,” the tongue makes no contact anywhere inside the mouth, therefore we rely totally on kinesthetic and proprioceptive feedback (i.e., we need to rely on feel vs. sight). Research has found that the tongue has the most rapid rate of growth between the ages of 5.5 - 7.5 years. During this rapid growth time, the feedback received may literally change from week to week. Therefore, this makes it a difficult sound to teach at earlier ages.

Blends (E.g., gr, sp, fl, tr, kl, sm)

Breaking apart blends into their individual components is helpful. For example, if the difficulty is with “st” blend, first elongate /s/, then add /t/ and the rest of a word. Try “s-s-s-t-t-t-op”. Do this repeatedly. If the difficulty is with “gr” blend, first make /g/ quickly, then elongate the “r” sound to produce “g-r-r-r-eeen.” The goal is to gradually decrease the space between the sounds until they can be made in rapid succession together.

Keep in mind: In blends, the mouth needs to move instantaneously from one sound posture to the next. It's a lot of work to ask a young child still trying to figure out how their mouth works. It can be tricky when they are not physically ready.

Always provide accurate models.

Have patience. Avoid pressure. Try not to request repeats too soon.

Remember sounds are affected by dialects throughout the country.

*Practice is key. The more practice through playful,
relaxed means, the faster the corrections will be learned.*

