

PRONUNCIATION CHANGES WHEN LINKING CONSONANTS

English has combinations of sounds, which are peculiar to English, and for many speakers of other languages it is the clusters of consonants in English, especially those at the ends of words, which pose the greatest difficulty.

Linking final consonants to the beginning of the following word makes speech sound more natural. In rapid speech, however, sounds drop out, are run together, or reduced in length.

Joining sounds in English

Combinations of consonants in English either at the beginning or the end of a word, and especially when these involve the “th” sound, present challenges to students who are learning to speak English.

To develop an awareness of the consonant + vowel (C+V), or consonant cluster (C+C+V) aspect of the sound system of English, and to provide organized and systematic practice combining sounds for all students of English, it is a good idea to progress by starting with a vowel or combination of vowel sounds (diphthongs) and then add consonants either side.

Pronounce the groups of words in the following table and repeat one at a time across the rows, building up and adding consonants as you go. Make sure you pronounce consonant groups and clusters clearly and smoothly.

V	V	CV/VC	CVC	CCV/CCVC	CVCC	CCVCC
/ʌ/	Ugh?	huh? us	hut tub fuss	stub	shuts tubs fussed	stubbed
/a/	are	tar art	tart	star	tarts	starts
/e/			Len	glen	lend	blend
/ɜ/	err	were	worm turn learn	stir/stirs slur/slurs	turns learnt	sterns slurps
/ɪ/		ill	sill will	still swill	silks wilt	stilts quilts
/i/	E	me bee she eat	meet/meat reed beam she'll	tree	meets trees beams shield	streets shields

STUDY TIPS

It is critically important in the IELTS Speaking test to speak clearly and fluently to ensure what you say is understood without too much effort for the examiner.

Understanding rhythm and stress in English and what happens in fluent speech as a result of these features will help a speaker become more confident and competent when speaking.

V	V	CVVC	CVC	CCV/CCVC	CVCC	CCVCC
/ɔ/	or	paw ought	pores	spore/sport	ports	sports
/eə/	air	where/wear chair aired	where's chairs			
/ɪə/	ear	near	nears	sneer	nears	
/aɪ/	l	rye why lie I'm	right white wine lime	 climb	rites wines limes	Bright's climbs
/eɪ/	A Eh?	say way/weigh ray ache aim	sane wane rain/reign rake rate take wake lame	stain train bray great steak quake blame	Seine's Wayne's rains/reins rakes rates takes wakes lames	stains trains brakes grates steaks quakes blamed

A. Linking sounds

When speaking we tend to join words together in a continuous stream of speech. It is incorrect to separate and over-articulate every sound in every word. We need to develop a feel for the rhythm or pulse of the English language.

End sounds of a word are linked to the initial (front or first) sound of the following word in fluent speech. Joining sounds together is a feature of spoken language and is essential if we want to sound fluent when we speak.

Joining final consonants to initial vowels will actually help you pronounce the final consonant.

The familiar English nursery rhyme, "Pat-a-cake", will help you understand how linking operates in English. (NB: "Pat" means "tap" or "hit gently").

Pat a cake, pat a cake, baker's man.
Bake me a cake as fast as you can.
Pat it, and prick it and mark it with "T".
Put it in the oven for Tommy and me.

There are different types of linking illustrated in this Nursery Rhyme:

- 1. C + V** join final consonant with initial vowel
- | | | |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| pat a | cake as | fast as |
| pa-ta | ca-k-as | fas-tas |
| /pæ - tə/ | /keɪ - kəz/ | /fas - təz/ |

C. Linking C + C

Linking involving two consonants is straightforward when the two sounds involved are already possible sound combinations in English. The example “baker’s man” from the Nursery Rhyme is understandable because we have many words beginning with “sm” in English – “small”, “smell”, “smile”, “smelt” and so on.

As seen above, there are several possible consonant combinations in English in initial positions. They break down into basically C+ /l/, and C+ /r/, with the exception of combinations with /s/ - /spl-/, /spr-/, /str-/ and /skr-/, which are of course CC+ /l/ and CC+ /r/:

+ /l/	+ /r/	+ /w/
play, plight, plain, plant	prang, pray, preach, prawn	
black, blind, blank, bleak, blast	break, bring, breast, breath	
cling, clamp, clap, class, climb	crack, craft, crash, crawl	quick, quite, quiet
glass, glow, glove, globe	grass, grape, grow, ground	Gwendolen
	train, tram, trend, trick, trim, try	twin, tweak, twenty, twitch
	drink, drain, drive, drum, dry	
flame, float, flood, flour, floor	friend, frank, frame, fresh, from	
	throw, throat, throb, thrift, three	thwack
	shrink, shriek, shrub, shred, shrewd	
slang, slip, slump, slant, slide		swing, sweep, sweet, swear, sweat
splash, split, splice, spleen, splendid, splint	spray, spring, sprint, sprain, spread	
	stray, straight, string, stretch, stress, stream	
	screen, scrub, scratch, screw, scribble, scrap	squeeze, squint, squash

In English, /s/ also combines with other sounds at the beginning of a word:

/sk-/ skin, scalp, scald, scare

/sm-/ small, smell, smile

/sn-/ snail, sneak, sniff

/sp-/ spend, spit, spare

As seen above, there are many more possible consonant combinations at the end of words in English. However, the possible combinations are fixed for English. The English language has established its own possible and acceptable combinations.

Words, which have been introduced to English, can be easily and quickly discovered, because they break the rules of these patterns.

In English it is not possible to have the initial consonant combination of /vI/. So the name "Vlad" must be a foreign name. A word, "vroom" has been created, copying the sound of a car engine starting up. This is the only word in English with the combination /vI/ in initial position.

D. Linking C₁ + C₁ (both consonants are the same)

When the final consonant is identical with the following initial, there is no need to re-articulate or repeat the sound. It is only necessary to sustain it and carry it over onto the next word.

What's **s** **small**, **l** **long** and **d** **dry**?

I had a **co****ugh** for a week.

Did **D****avid** **d**o the work?

Come **i****n** **N****ovember** **w****ith** **T****heo** and **D****erek**.

However, when two consonants come together which are usually not found in consonant clusters in the English language, then something has to be sacrificed. Take for example "with 'T'" from "Pat it and prick it and mark it with 'T'".

In English we do not have "th" preceding a /t/. This is not a possible consonant combination in English. When speaking slowly it is possible to articulate "with" and then "T" making sure all sounds are clear and distinct. In fluent speech at native speaker speed, the final "th" would be approximated and would be blended into or disappear into the following /t/ - /wiðti/.

Because the place of articulation for /th/ and /t/ is close (tongue and teeth), the tongue easily glides from one position to the next.

For sounds which are quite distinct - /k/ and /f/ it will be noticed that they will be articulated more clearly.

Example:

Ask **F****red** to join us.

Make **P****hillip** feel at home.

E. /h/ sound in English

Sometimes initial /h/ (and /h/ in a middle position) is pronounced in English, and sometimes it isn't. Usually /h/ is pronounced, but there are some words in English where the /h/ is silent, or "unaspirated".

Unaspirated /h/	Aspirated /h/
honour, honest, dishonour, dishonest hour heir vehicle exhibit, exhibition, exhume, exhaust, exhilaration	hotel happy, happen, hippy, Hepatitis, hope, hype hunger, hungry, Hungary hand

In the table below, the sounds or words in the left column are repeated in the right column but a new word or words are made when /h/ is added at the beginning in initial position.

Practice saying the words in the column on the left, followed by the words in the right column. When saying the words in the right column, be sure to pronounce the initial /h/ sound.

For example: “and”, /ænd/ and “hand”, /hænd /; “air”, /ɛə/ and “hair”, /hɛə/.

No Initial /h/ sound	Initial /h/ sound
and, air	hand, hair
I, eye	high, height, hi
L	hell, hello, heaven
N	hen
M	hem
O	ho, hose, horse
8	hate
apt	happy, happen, hippie
eel	heel, he'll
ill	hill
all	hall
ail	hail
allow	hallow
ache	Hake
old	hold, hole, holy, wholly, hollow
ounce	hounds
opt	hopped
or, oar, ore, awe, ought	hoar, horse, hoarse, haughty

However, when we speak more quickly, sometimes the initial /h/ drops out, or is elided. This is especially so when the word beginning with /h/ is unstressed.

The **personal pronouns** *he, her, hers, his, him*, and the **auxiliary verbs** *have, has, had* are all usually unstressed. In fluent speech the initial /h/ is often dropped.