

Phonetic Variation Exercises

CONSONANTS

1. Many English speakers say [r] with the tongue tip curled up in a “retroflex” position. There are also many English speakers who produce a “bunched” [r] with the body of the tongue pulled up to the roof of the mouth.

Looking straight ahead say the word *fur* and insert a toothpick horizontally between your teeth until it touches your tongue. Try to hold the toothpick in a level position so that the tip is not pointed up or down.

If you feel the toothpick touch the top of your tongue you are producing a bunched [r]. If you feel the toothpick touch the bottom of your tongue you are producing a retroflex [r].

Do the same test with two other words that contain [r]. Write the words and the result for each word.

Ask a friend to do the same test with the same words. Write the results for your friend. Be sure to include information on where each of you grew up.

2. The English consonants [θ] and [ð] are unusual in that they are the only consonants with an interdental place of articulation (produced with the tongue tip protruding between the front teeth). A sizeable number of English speakers produce [θ] and [ð] with a dental articulation (produced with the tongue tip touching the back of the upper teeth).

Make a list of three words that contain [θ] and three words that contain [ð]. Use a mirror to check whether you produce [θ] and [ð] with your tongue tip protruding between your front teeth. Be careful to watch how you say [θ] and [ð] in each word and not the other consonants, e.g. [t]. Write the words and the result for each word.

Ask a friend to do the same test with the same words. Write the results for your friend. Be sure to include information on where each of you grew up.

3. Write how you produce the first <s> in the following words. Do you say this consonant as a voiceless fricative [s] or a voiced fricative [z]?

- a. absurd
- b. chrysanthemum
- c. disgusting
- d. opposite
- e. transport

VOWELS

4. Use the IPA to transcribe how you say the following words. Try to say the words with a casual pronunciation the way that you say them at home.

- a. cot
- b. exit
- c. caught
- d. often
- e. human
- f. hem
- g. him
- h. bull
- i. bowl
- j. gull
- k. goal
- l. full
- m. hill

- n. heel
- o. fell
- p. fail
- q. been
- r. caramel
- s. coupon
- t. crayon
- u. creek
- v. lawyer
- w. pajamas
- x. pecan
- y. really
- z. garage

VOWELS

1. Use the IPA to transcribe how you say the underlined vowel in the following words. Try to say the words with a casual pronunciation the way that you say them at home.

- a. bit, bin, bill
- b. bet, Ben, bell
- c. bat, ban, bag
- d. but, bun, bus
- e. robot
- f. bought, ball, boss

2. Use the IPA to transcribe how you say the underlined vowel in the following words. Try to say the words with a casual pronunciation the way that you say them at home.

- a. goose, root, cool
- b. foot, soot, full
- c. goat, ghost, goal
- d. mouth, mouse
- e. might, mice, mile
- f. mate, mace, mail
- g. boil, moist

3. Use the IPA to transcribe how you say the underlined vowel in the following words. Try to say the words with a casual pronunciation the way that you say them at home. If you say these vowels differently, transcribe both of your pronunciations.

- a. economic
- b. either
- c. assumption
- d. research
- e. insurance