The **Building Blocks of** Speech (how to use the IPA!)



The International Phonetic Alphabet –

the notational standard for representing all human speech sounds.





You've likely seen IPA in dictionary entries.

For example, you may recognize the upside down ə, which is an IPA symbol that refers to the second vowel sound you hear in the word 'dict<u>io</u>nary.'



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Let's look at an example.

The word 'phonetics' in IPA would be written...

[fə.'nɛ.tɪks]

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The word 'linguistics' in IPA would be written...

[liŋ.'gwɪ.stɪks]

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Getting you from Point A to Point B

Understand the purpose of the IPA...

Learn how to use it!



Imagine you're a phonetician.

Your task is to come up with a way to categorize *all* human speech sounds into just 2 main categories. What would they be?





After some thought, you'd likely decide on consonants & vowels.

Which, as fate would have it, is *exactly* how the IPA is organized.



The building blocks of human speech sounds

Consonants

Speech sounds that are produced *through contact* between vocal articulators (tongue, teeth, lips).

EXAMPLES: t - s - p - b - k



Speech sounds that are produced by *avoiding contact* between vocal articulators.

EXAMPLES: a - e - i - o - u

There are *many* symbols to learn within the IPA.





You've likely seen IPA in dictionary entries.

For example, you may recognize the upside down ə,

which is an IPA symbol that refers to the second vowel sound in the word 'dict<u>io</u>nary.'



adv. TATOR diction /'dik (a)n/ ciation in speakin dictio from dico di dictionary /'dikf book listing (usu. explaining the wo giving correspond language. 2 refere

Let's look at an example.

The word 'phonetics' in IPA would be written...

[fə.'nɛ.tɪks]

	Bilabia	I Labic	dental	Der	ntal	Alveol	ar P	ostal	veolar	Retr	oflex	Pal	atal	Ve	lar	Uv	ular	Phar	vngeal	Gl	ottal
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Nasal	n	1	m			1	1			Ľ	n	-	n		n	-1	N		-	1	
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Tap or Flap		-	v			-					r		-	-	_						
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Let's consider another.

The word 'linguistics' in IPA would be written...

[liŋ.'gwɪ.stɪks]





Now, what is the Consonant Chart?

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d		t d	сӈ	k g	qG		2
Nasal	m	m		n		η	ŋ	ŋ	N		
Trill	В			r					R		
Tap or Flap		V		ſ		r					
Fricative	φβ	f v	θð	s z	∫ 3	şz	çj	хγ	Хκ	ħΥ	h fi
Lateral fricative				łţ							
Approximant		υ		ľ.		ŀ	j	щ			
Lateral approximant				1		l	λ	L			

Simply put, it is a table containing consonants that are organized by columns and rows.





The columns indicate a consonant's place of articulation,

which is the *place* in your mouth where your *articulators* (i.e. teeth, tongue, lips) need to touch to make that sound.





For example, 'bilabial' means 'both lips touching.'

It comes from the prefix 'bi-' meaning 'two' and the root 'labial' meaning 'lips.' This column includes sounds like '**b**at' – '**m**at' - '**p**at.'





A cool tip that you might not realize at first. As you move from

left to right along the chart, the place of articulation within the mouth moves from the front to the back. For example, bilabials require touching at the lips (the front) while glottals require touching near the throat (the back).





The rows indicate a consonant's manner of articulation,

which means the *manner* or characteristics of the airflow within your vocal tract. Let's look at a few examples to get a better sense for that that actually means.





Let's explore plosives. These are sounds that constrict your airflow completely. In layman's terms - it means your mouth is closed. Plosives include short bursts of sound like '**p**ie' - '**b**ye' - '**t**ie.'





Let's explore nasals! These consonants are similar to plosives, in that they don't allow the airstream to leave the mouth. But they're different from plosives in that they release the airstream -- through the nose! Thus, the word *nasal*. Examples include sounds like '**m**eat' and '**n**eat.'



	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retro	oflex	Pala	atal	Velar	Uvu	ılar	Phary	ngeal	Glo	ttal
Plosive	рb			t d		t	d	с	J	k g	q	G			?	
Nasal	m	m		n			η		ր	ŋ		Ν				
Trill	В			r								R				
Tap or Flap		V		ſ			r									
Fricative	φβ	f v	θð	S Z	<u>ر</u> 3	ş	Z	ç	į	хγ	χ	R	ħ	ſ	h	ĥ
Lateral fricative				łβ												
Approximant		υ		ľ.			Ł		j	щ						
Lateral approximant				1			l		λ	L						

Let's explore fricatives! Most people would describe these as "hissing" sounds. They can go on for as long as you can keep up your airstream, and they include sounds like '**f**an' - '**v**an' – '**s**ues' - '**sh**oes.'





What have we learned so far? The IPA's Consonant Chart is a table,

made up of a bunch of consonants. The columns indicate the place of articulation for the sound, and the rows indicate the manner of articulation. But there's one more factor left that we haven't mentioned -- and it has to do with the difference between sounds 'fan' and 'van.'





Think about it - what's the difference between 'fan' & 'van'?

It has everything to do with your vocal cords. For example, to make the [f] sound, your vocal cords don't vibrate. We call this a voiceless consonant. And to make the [v] sound, they *have* to vibrate. We call this a voiced consonant.



Now, how does the Vowel Map work?



The main thing you should know is that the **vowel chart is organized by the location of the tongue in the mouth.**



How the Vowel Map works



The higher up a vowel is on the map, the higher your tongue needs to be in your mouth to make that vowel sound.

For example, /i/ and /u/ require the tongue to be higher up in the mouth than, say ϵ / and ϵ /.



How the Vowel Map works



The further to the right the vowel is on the map, the further back your tongue needs to be in your mouth to produce that vowel sound.

For example, vowels like [i] and [e] require your tongue to be further at the front of your mouth, compared to vowels like [u] and [o].



Fun fact...



Not all languages have the same organization -- or even number -- of vowels within the Vowel Map.

After all, every language has its own way of dividing up the possible sounds of human speech. This goes for consonants as well as vowels.



To review...

Consonants and vowels are the building blocks of human speech sounds.

2. While the IPA includes many symbols for you to learn, the 2 most important features to start with are the Consonant Chart and the Vowel Map.

 Once you know how to use those 2 features of the IPA, you'll be reading and writing basic IPA in no time!

If you'd like some fun (and FREE!) materials...

Check out the goodies we've curated for you here, which allow you to explore more about phonetics!



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