

The Dirty Half-Dozen

The hardest English sounds of all • Incorrect items are in red text

Z vs. S	th	j vs. y
<p>To your mouth, there is no difference whatsoever between, for example, <i>sing</i> and <i>zing</i>; the only difference is in your voice box (larynx) in your throat. Say <i>sing</i> and <i>zing</i> with your fingers on both sides of your voice box and you'll feel the difference. With <i>sing</i>, you're just blowing air through your teeth to make the s sound, so s is an "unvoiced" (<i>tonlös</i>) sound. With <i>zing</i>, you're still blowing air through your teeth, but your voice box is vibrating as well; z is a "voiced" (<i>tonande</i>) sound. Compare:</p> <p>zoo vs. sue zip vs. sip zap vs. sap zag vs. sag advise vs. advice devise vs. device</p>	<p>Even some native speakers mispronounce <i>th</i> sounds as <i>d</i>, <i>f</i>, <i>z</i> or <i>s</i> (for example, "happy <i>birf</i>day"). We have two <i>th</i> sounds in English, voiced and unvoiced—the same difference as with <i>z</i> and <i>s</i>. Examples of voiced <i>th</i> are <i>this</i>, <i>that</i>, <i>those</i>. Examples of unvoiced are <i>thin</i>, <i>thought</i>, <i>through</i>. One way to learn how to make <i>th</i> sounds is to put your index finger in front of your lips, then say words containing <i>th</i>. Be sure to lick your finger with every <i>th</i>. Most English speakers don't stick out their tongues quite this far when they say <i>th</i>, but at least you'll be getting the idea.</p>	<p><i>J</i> in English is almost always pronounced with a kind of hard <i>d</i> sound at the beginning; only rarely do we say <i>j</i> the way it's pronounced in Swedish (one example is <i>fjord</i>, a loanword from Norwegian). For the Swedish <i>j</i> sound, English generally uses <i>y</i>. Compare:</p> <p>joke vs. yoke or yolk jam vs. yam gel or jell vs. yell jack vs. yak Jew vs. you or ewe Jell-O vs. yellow jet vs. yet Joe vs. yo!</p>
V vs. W	g	ch vs. sh
<p>Always be sure to distinguish between <i>v</i> and <i>w</i> when speaking English. For example, <i>MTV</i> is not pronounced "emm tee wee"; <i>violence</i> is not pronounced "w<i>iolence</i>." Compare:</p> <p>veal vs. wheel vine vs. wine vet vs. wet vault vs. Walt vow vs. wow ville vs. will vile vs. while</p>	<p><i>G</i> can be a very tricky letter because it has different pronunciations. <i>Goal</i>, <i>great</i> and <i>gift</i> begin with a hard <i>g</i>, like in Swedish <i>gata</i>. <i>George</i>, <i>gentle</i>, <i>gypsy</i> and <i>gymnasium</i> begin with a hard English <i>j</i> sound. Finally, many people pronounce the <i>g</i> in <i>barrage</i>, <i>massage</i>, and the second <i>g</i> in <i>garage</i> like <i>zh</i>, the voiced version of <i>sh</i>.</p>	<p>Be sure to pronounce the <i>ch</i> with a hard <i>t</i> sound at the beginning—like <i>tsch</i>. Compare:</p> <p>chair vs. share chip vs. ship chop vs. shop chew vs. shoe choose vs. shoes chin vs. shin chill vs. shill chuck vs. shuck chore vs. shore cheap vs. sheep cheat vs. sheet</p>

The only way to get better with these most difficult of sounds is to . . .

- ❖ **slow down** while you're reading or speaking, and
- ❖ **concentrate** on saying the sounds correctly.

Try practicing at home by reading aloud to yourself when nobody's around, or practice by reading and talking with a native speaker.