

ENGLISH PLOSIVES

Practical Phonetics · Modern RP · University worksheet | Name: _____ Date: _____

01 QUICK THEORY | How do plosives work?

A plosive (stop) is produced by completely blocking the airflow in the vocal tract, building up air pressure, and then releasing it. English has six oral plosives: /p, b, t, d, k, g/.

Place of articulation	Voiceless	Voiced	Articulators
Bilabial	/p/	/b/	Both lips
Alveolar	/t/	/d/	Tongue tip/blade + alveolar ridge
Velar	/k/	/g/	Back of tongue + soft palate

Modern RP pronunciation notes: /p, t, k/ are normally aspirated at the start of a stressed syllable (e.g. pin, ten, key), but are typically unaspirated after /s/ (e.g. spin, stay, sky). /b, d, g/ are voiced phonemes, although actual voicing varies by context. Final /p, t, k/ may be released weakly or not audibly.

02 SOUND DRILL | Listen → repeat → contrast

A. Isolated sounds. Repeat each sound three times. For /p, t, k/, feel the burst of air; for /b, d, g/, notice the reduced aspiration.

/p/ - /b/ /p/ /p/ /p/ → /b/ /b/ /b/

/t/ - /d/ /t/ /t/ /t/ → /d/ /d/ /d/

/k/ - /g/ /k/ /k/ /k/ → /g/ /g/ /g/

B. Minimal-pair drill. Say each pair slowly, then at a natural pace. Partner: identify the word you hear.

pin - bin | pat - bat | cap - cab

ten - den | tie - die | bet - bed

coat - goat | came - game | back - bag

C. Aspiration check. Hold a thin strip of paper in front of your mouth. Compare the first consonant in each pair: pin - spin / top - stop / key - ski. Which word causes more movement? _____

03 CONTROLLED PRACTICE | From words to phrases

Repeat each row with clear articulation, then link the words naturally:

/p, b/ paper → big paper → a big paper bag

/t, d/ tidy → tidy desk → a tidy desk today

/k, g/ cookie → good cookie → a good chocolate cookie

ENGLISH PLOSIVES / PRACTICE

Speak clearly first. Increase speed only when accuracy is stable.

04 TONGUE TWISTERS | Accuracy → rhythm → speed

1. /p/ and /b/ — bilabial contrast

Peter packed a purple paper parcel.

Betty bought a big blue bag.

2. /t/ and /d/ — alveolar contrast

Ten tiny turtles tiptoed to town.

Daisy did the dishes during dinner.

3. /k/ and /g/ — velar contrast

Kate cooked crisp carrot cakes.

Gary gave Grace a green glass.

4. Mixed challenge — all six plosives

Big Peter took Kate's good blue cup.

Six quick ducks picked big golden pumpkins.

Practice protocol: (1) underline the target plosives; (2) read slowly twice; (3) repeat at a natural pace; (4) try three fluent repetitions. Mark where aspiration is expected.

05 PARTNER CHALLENGE | Listen and diagnose

Student A chooses one sentence above and reads it aloud. Student B listens for the following features. Swap roles.

- ☐ Clear closure and release where appropriate
- ☐ Correct place of articulation
- ☐ /p, t, k/ aspiration in stressed syllable onset
- ☐ Natural rhythm without extra vowels

Feedback: One strength: _____

One point to improve: _____

06 EXIT TICKET | Reflect

1. Which plosive pair is most difficult for you, and why?

2. Explain why /p/ in pin sounds different from /p/ in spin.

3. Your personal pronunciation goal for next time:

Teacher tip: In many varieties of English, including Modern RP, /t/ can also undergo glottal reinforcement in some positions; this worksheet focuses on the basic oral plosive targets.