



Light L vs. Dark L

Learn how to pronounce the two American /l/ sounds with these tips:



Light L



Dark L

The Light L /l/

When /l/ is at the beginning of a word (like in *love* and *look*) or at the beginning of a syllable (like in *elongate* and *release*), it is called the light /l/. To make this sound, follow these steps:

- 1) Place the tip of your tongue behind your front teeth or at the bumpy ridge just behind your front teeth (called the alveolar ridge). Alternatively, the tongue tip can also come out past your front teeth.
- 2) The tongue should be in a narrow shape to allow the airflow to travel around the sides of the tongue.
- 3) The tongue retracts back into the mouth, and the back of the tongue drops low into the mouth. The light /l/ may feel like it is being made towards the front of the mouth.

The Dark L /ɫ/

When /l/ is at the end of a word (like in *ball* and *able*) or at the end of a syllable (like in *pillow* and *dollhouse*), it is called the dark /l/. The dark /l/ is usually the more difficult /l/ to pronounce correctly because of the tongue positioning.

- 1) The tongue tip is in a similar position as the light /l/, with the tip up behind the top front teeth, but the tongue does *not* pass the front teeth like the light /l/ can.
- 2) The tongue should be in a narrow shape to allow the airflow to travel around the sides of the tongue.
- 3) The tongue is pulled back into the mouth, and it should **lift up slightly towards the soft palate**. You should feel a bit of tension in your throat and tongue, and it may feel like the dark /l/ is made in the throat, not in the mouth. Remember - **do not round your lips** when you say the dark /l/.