



## The American R Sound

The American R sound is tricky - but here are some tips to help you make a perfect R sound!

### How to make the R sound: Lips

First, your lips are slightly rounded and the corners come in, pushing your lips away from your teeth. Your lips should look like this:



Front view of the lips during the /r/ sound



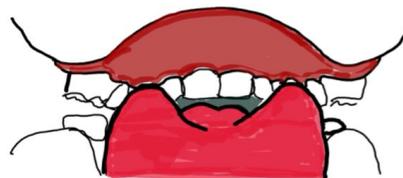
Side view of the lips during the /r/ sound

### How to make the R sound: Tongue

Second, your tongue is high in your mouth and pulled back, so that the sides of the tongue touch the inside of the upper molars. This placement is very important - if the sides of your tongue are not touching the inside of the upper molars, you won't produce a true /r/ sound. Rather, it might sound like an /l/ or /ɝ/.

To place your tongue into the right position, start by saying the vowel "eeee". Notice how your tongue is high in your mouth with the sides touching the inside of your back teeth. Now slide your tongue backwards along the inside of your upper teeth, making sure to keep the sides of your tongue touching the back molars the entire time. Essentially, you have just said the word "ear." "Eeeee + rrrrrr".

Here's a drawing of what the tongue should look like when saying the R sound. It is from the perspective of looking **out** of the mouth, *not* into the mouth. So imagine you peeled



tongue is pulled back  
sides of tongue brace against teeth  
tongue is tight



away the back of the person's head, and you were looking through their mouth from **behind their tongue**. (From this perspective, you cannot see the person's lips in the drawing.)

Notice how the tongue is wide and in a U-shape (not narrow or pointy) - this allows the sides of the tongue to push against the inside of the upper back teeth.

### Tongue tip: Up or down?

When I make the R sound, my tongue tip isn't up *or* down - it's neutral. But if you find that your tongue tip goes up or down, it doesn't really matter, just as long as **the tongue tip does not touch anything inside the mouth!** The tongue tip is not involved in making the R, so as long as it doesn't come into contact with anything else in the mouth, then it can be up, down, or neutral.

### How to make the R sound: Tension

The tongue should be tense when you say the R sound - but not *too* much tension! It's a delicate balance! Just remember that the R sound is not a lazy sound, so no floppy tongues! Your tongue should naturally tense up as you pull it up and back.

### R practice words

R is a special sound because it can be a consonant and a vowel. Here are practice words in each category.

Consonant R /r/

right	Rick	rock	arrange	arrest
rabbit	pirate	rather	rot	race



### Consonant R /ɹ/ and L // Minimal Pair Practice

/ɹ/	//
rock	lock
race	lace
rather	lather
rot	lot
Rick	lick

### Vocalic R: Central ER /ɜ, ə/; AR /ɑɹ/; AIR /ɛɹ/; IR /ɪɹ/; OR /ɔɹ/

/ɜ/	bird	heard	shirt	word	learn
/ə/	father	counter	never	December	computer
/ɑɹ/	are	heart	bar	park	shark
/ɛɹ/	air	where	bear	share	very
/ɪɹ/	ear	hear	deer	near	we're
/ɔɹ/	or	fork	shore	door	more

Thanks for reading! Make sure you watch the video that goes along with this resource ([The Top 5 Problematic Sounds In American English: The "R" Sound](#)), and contact me if you have any questions! Happy studying!

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