

# Phonetics

First year

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## Lateral Consonant Sound

**Approximants:** consonant sounds produced by making a narrow passage between two organs of speech; but the passage is wider than that in fricatives so no friction is produced.

There are two types of approximants:

### 1- Retroflex

### 2- Semi-vowels

**Retroflex:** a consonant sound produced by having the tongue curved backwards near the roof of the mouth at the post-alveolar area. At that point, a narrow passage is made to produce the sound but with no friction.

- ❖ There is only one retroflex consonant, */r/*.
- ❖ It has the velum raised, so no air goes out of the nasal cavity and all goes out of the mouth.
- ❖ It is continuous.
- ❖ It is voiced.

**/r/:** consonant sound, approximant, retroflex, post-alveolar, voiced, lenis, weak, short; it does not occur in final position or before a consonant.

e.g.: **rule /ru:l/** , **barrel /bærəl/**

**Note:** There is not example for a final **/r/** because in RP, **/r/** is not pronounced.

However, the retroflex **/r/** is produced in certain contexts and not produced in others, depending on the following:

**1-** Produced before a vowel sound:

❖ In initial position.

e.g.: **road /rəʊd/**

❖ In medial position

e.g.: **borrow /bɒrəʊ/**

**2-** Not produced:

❖ before a consonant sound:

e.g.: **cart /kɑ:t/**

❖ in final position:

e.g.: **teacher /ti:tʃə/**

## Notes:

- The combinations **(er, or)** are produced as /ə/ when they occur at the end of a word:

e.g.: sailor /seɪlə/

mother /mʌðə/

- Some words have **(ar)** also produced as /ə/ in familiar words such as (**particular** /pə'tɪkələ/).
- Some words have **(ar)** produced as /ə/ at the beginning of the words as in (**particular** /pə'tɪkələ/).
- In most cases **(ar)** is pronounced as the long vowel /ɑ:/ as in (**art** /ɑ:t/).

**Semi-Vowels:** consonant sounds produced by making a narrow passage between two organs of speech, but with no friction.

- ❖ There are two semi-vowels /w, j/ in English.
- ❖ They are continuous.
- ❖ Both are voiced.
- ❖ Each has a different place of articulation.
- ❖ So both are similar in manner of articulation and voicing, but differ in place of articulation.

## Q) Why are these consonants called semi-vowels?

These consonants are called semi-vowels although they are consonants for the following reasons:

- ❖ **They are vowels by nature**, i.e. they are produced similar to vowels.
- ❖ They are in fact the final production of two of the vowels /u:, i:/.
- ❖ They have a shaping of lips similar to those in these two vowels during their production, with a **rounding shape** of the lips for /w/ and a **spreading shape** of lips for /j/.

However, these two sounds are **consonants** because they are consonants **by function**, i.e. they act as consonants, and the following are proofs (evidences) for those functions:

- ❖ They do not occur as the centre (nucleus) of the syllable as vowels do. They only occur in positions where consonants occur, which is initial and medial, as they tend to become part of a vowel when found in final positions.

e.g.: **weak** /wi:k/, **awake** /əweɪk/

- ❖ When using an indefinite article (**a, an**), they act similar to consonants by being preceded by (**a**) and **not by (an)** as in vowels.

e.g.: **a book** /ə bʊk/  
**an apple** /æn æpəl/  
**a watch** /ə wɒtʃ/  
**a yacht** /ə jɒt/

- ❖ When using the definite article (**the**), they act similar to consonants where they tend to have (the) produced as [ðə] and not produced as [ði] as in the case of preceding vowels.

e.g.: **the book** /ðə bʊk/

the apple /ðɪ æpəl/

the watch /ðə wɒtʃ/

the year /ðə jeə/

**/w/:** consonant sound, approximant, semi-vowel, bilabial, voiced, so is lenis (weak) and short. It is produced in initial and medial positions, but not found in final position where **(w)** is usually produced as a vowel sound.

e.g.: **went /went/** , **away /əweɪ/**

**/j/:** consonant sound, approximant, semi-vowel, palatal, voiced, so is lenis (weak) and short. It is produced in initial and medial positions, but not found in final position where **(y)** is usually produced as a vowel sound.

e.g.: **year /jeə/** , **beyond /bɪjɒnd/**