

Nasal Consonants

A nasal consonant is a speech sound produced by obstructing the flow of air at a definite point in the mouth; yet, the air escapes through the nose because the soft palate is lowered. For all nasal consonants, the soft palate is lowered. The nasal consonants are as follows:

1. **/m/**: It is articulated by firmly closing the two lips. The soft palate is lowered so that all the air is expelled out of the nose. Look at the examples in your textbook.
2. **/n/**: It is articulated by pressing the tongue-tip against the alveolar ridge. Look at the examples in your textbook
3. **/ŋ/**: It is articulated by pressing the back of the tongue against the soft palate. Look at the examples in your text.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/m/	/n/	/ŋ/
Manner of articulation	Nasal	Nasal	Nasal
Place of articulation and articulators	Bilabial (The two lips are closed).	Alveolar (The tongue-tip is pressed against the alveolar ridge).	Velar (The back of the tongue is pressed against the soft palate).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is lowered.	The soft palate is lowered.	The soft palate is lowered.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are vibrating (voiced).	They are vibrating (voiced).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Weak	Weak	Weak
Length	Short	Short	Short

Effect on the preceding vowel	It lengthens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.
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Note:

1. Both the preceding vowel and the adjacent nasal consonant /m/, /n/, or /ŋ/ are affected by the voicing feature of the following consonant. Consequently, they tend to be shorter before voiceless consonants, but they tend to be longer, for example, sent /sent/ and send /send/. More examples are on page 50. ☺

2. /n/ is often syllabic, that is, it occupies the centre of the syllable which is usually occupied by a vowel

(/ŋ/= /ə+n/), for example: lesson /lesən/ ⇔ /lesŋ/. Look at the example on page 51. ☺

3. /ŋ/ **DOES NOT** occur at the beginning of words in English, but it occurs between vowels, where it is more difficult to pronounce than in word-final position. The difficulty is to avoid inserting /g/ after /ŋ/, and pronouncing it as /ŋg/ instead of /ŋ/. In RP accent, /ŋ/ is or is not followed by /g/ in certain positions as follows:

1. /ŋ/ before a following vowel is pronounced with /g/ in one-syllable words, for example: finger /fɪŋgə/, anger /æŋgə/.
2. If a word is formed from a verb, /ŋ/ is not followed by /g/, for example: singer /sɪŋə/, hanging /hæŋŋ/.
3. If a word is derived from an adjective, /ŋ/ is pronounced with /g/, for example: strong /strɒŋ/ ⇒ /strɒŋgə/, long /lɒŋ/ ⇒ longer /lɒŋgə/.
4. Before a following consonant, /ŋ/ **IS NOT** pronounced with /g/, for example: sings /sɪŋz/, banged /bæŋd/.

