

MMMMM... COMPARE THE CONSONANTS!

Take a look at the “phonetic inventory” of sounds in the target accent and compare them to those of your own.

THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (revised to 2005)

CONSONANTS (PULMONIC)

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	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d		ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ		n		ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	ɴ		
Trill	ʙ			r					ʀ		
Tap or Flap		ⱱ		ɾ		ɽ					
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative				ɬ ɮ							
Approximant		ʋ		ɹ		ɻ	j	ɰ			
Lateral approximant				l		ɭ	ʎ	ʟ			

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a voiced consonant. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

So, if you’re an English speaker looking to master a French accent, you’ll notice that some consonants sound different. For example, French does not have the “th” sound—and English has two, the voiceless/unvoiced [θ] sound as in *thin* and the voiced [ð] sound as in *then*.

So French speakers learning English can benefit by taking note of this difference and seek materials to practice this key pair of sounds. And folks learning to master a French-sounding English (perhaps for a film role), should note that these “th” sounds can be substituted with a different but similar sound—like [s] as in *sin* or [z] as in *zen* or even [f] as in *fin* or [v] as in *Venn*.

You’ll also notice that French has two r-sounds [ʀ] —a *voiced, uvular fricative* and [χ]—a *voiceless* version, which we do not encounter in English. To try it



out, create friction in the back of your throat (perhaps like an angry cat sound) for the voiceless one, and add the resonance of your vibrating vocal cords for the voiced variety. So if you are attempting to pronounce the word “red” or “three” with a French accent or aiming for an authentic French enunciation of *Moulin Rouge* or *trois*, you’d want to perfect these particular sounds.

FOR A DEEPER DIVE, GOOGLE IT!

A good way to start exploring these differences is right at your fingertips on the Internet. So, if you are a French speaker learning English, try Googling something like “compare French and English phonetics.” The search results will show useful sites where they show diagrams that compare and contrast the phonetic (or phonological) inventories of the two languages.

		Labial	Dental/ Alveolar	Post- alveolar	Palatal	Velar/ Uvular
Nasal		m	n		ɲ	(ŋ)
Plosive	voiceless	p	t			k
	voiced	b	d			g
Fricative	voiceless	f	s	ʃ		
	voiced	v	z	ʒ		ʁ
Approximant	plain		l		j	
	labial				ç	w

Wikipedia is also a great source for this information. They will likely break the information into consonants and vowels. Look at the consonants first. What to zero in on are **the deltas**—what sounds exist in *your own* dialect but not the *target* dialect? And conversely, what sounds exist in the *target* dialect but NOT *your* dialect?

For fun, try learning to navigate this interactive [International Phonetic Alphabet \(IPA\) Chart](#) to help you see and hear some of the patterns and view which neighboring sounds might make logical sound substitutes.

BONUS TIP

Create “minimal pairs” (words that sound the same EXCEPT that key sound) to practice the contrast—*thin vs. sin*, and *then vs. zen*. Practice them over and over to develop the muscle memory that will help keep them separated!

Now, make your own fun sentences with these words to take it a step further. Short practical sentences are helpful. That said, goofy sentences can be very memorable and just as helpful!

Examples:

Short and sweet: Thanks for the thoughtful present.

So goofy it’s catchy: The zookeeper thinks this crazy sentence sounds silly.

