Patchwork SPEECH

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FOR SLPS AND EDUCATORS

Elicitation Strategies

Placement cues, shaping routes and error patterns for all 45 sounds and blends on Patchwork Speech, plus the cue taxonomy and treatment framework that applies to every one of them.



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Elicitation Strategies

How to get each sound out in the first place: placement steps, a shaping route from a sound the child already has, the tactile check that tells you it is right, and what the common errors mean.



The practice ladder

Speech practice climbs. Each step is harder than the one below it, and the jump that trips most people up is the one from single words to real talking. Work at the step where the child is right now - not the one you wish they were on.

1. **Just the sound** "ssss"
   The sound on its own, with no word attached. If the child cannot make it here yet, this is the whole job for now.

2. **The sound in syllables** "sa, so, see"
   The sound glued to a vowel. Nonsense syllables are useful precisely because they carry no meaning - nothing to get in the way.

3. **Words that start with it** "sun, soap, sock"
   The easiest place in a word, because the child gets to set up their mouth before they begin.

4. **Words with it anywhere** "bus, pencil, castle"
   Middle and end are harder - the sound has to be produced while the rest of the word is already moving.

5. **Short phrases** "my sock, big bus"
   Two or three words together. This is the first step where the child has to think about something other than the sound.

6. **Whole sentences** "I put my sock on."
   A full sentence of their own. Expect the sound to slip here even though it was perfect in single words - that is normal, not backwards.

7. **Reading and telling** "a paragraph, a story about their day"
   Longer stretches of talking, with the sound coming up over and over. Reading aloud is useful because the words are already chosen.

8. **All the time** "in the car, at dinner, with friends"
   Real conversation with nobody reminding them. This is the goal, and the only step that actually counts as finished.



TWO RULES

Two rules. Do not skip a step because the child is bored - go back one instead. And if the sound falls apart when you move up, that is information, not failure: drop down a rung, get a few easy wins, and try again in a day or two.

Cues

AUDITORY

Model the sound slowly and repeatedly without demanding a response - auditory bombardment. Exaggerate it, lengthen it, and contrast it out loud with what the child is currently saying so they hear the difference before they have to make it.

VISUAL

A mirror so the child can watch their own lips, teeth and tongue. Watch your mouth first, then theirs. For sounds you cannot see, a drawing or a hand-shape standing in for the tongue works better than a description.

TACTILE

Something the child can feel. The child's own hand held a few inches from their mouth is the cheapest and best one - they feel the puff of air on /p/, /t/ and /k/, and the buzz on their throat for voiced sounds. After that: a strip of tissue or thin paper in front of the lips, which visibly jumps when the air hits it; a tongue depressor or clean finger touching the spot the tongue should hit; a straw at the midline for a centered airstream. For the lip sounds, a smear of chapstick or lip balm on both lips and a quick rub together gives the child an unmistakable sense of where their lips are and how it feels when they meet - far more effective than asking them to close their lips, which they cannot see.

GESTURAL

A consistent hand signal for the sound or for what the mouth must do - a snapping hand for a stop, a flat sliding hand for a long fricative, a hand pulling back for /r/. Use the same gesture every time so it becomes a cue rather than a mime.

Shaping and phonetic placement

Two approaches, usually combined. Phonetic placement tells the child where to put things. Shaping starts from a sound they already own and nudges it toward the target - holding /t/ and releasing the air into /s/, or starting from "ee" and pulling the tongue back for /r/. Shaping is usually faster than placement instructions, because the child is already succeeding at something.

Find a context that already works

Before working on placement, probe for a context where the sound already comes out right - a particular vowel, a particular position, a cluster, even a single word. Correct productions are rarely evenly distributed. Build out from what works rather than starting from zero. If nothing works in isolation, try it inside a nonsense syllable, where the child has no habit to fight.



BEFORE YOU DRILL HARDER

If a sound has not responded to several weeks of consistent work, stop and reconsider the target rather than drilling harder. There could be structural reasons a sound will not stabilize, and those need looking at before more practice will help.

Sources

ASHA Practice Portal — Speech Sound Disorders: Articulation and Phonology

Treatment framework, cue taxonomy, and named treatment approaches.

ASHA Practice Portal — Orofacial Myofunctional Disorders

Why a resting tongue posture or open bite may need addressing before sibilant therapy.

Boyce (2015), Articulatory Phonetics for Residual Speech Sound Disorders: A Focus on /r/

Bunched versus retroflex /r/, the obligatory pharyngeal constriction, and /r/ error patterns.

Shriberg (1978), Utilization of the "Straw Technique" for Correction of the Lateral Lisp (LSHSS)

A straw at the midline as a tactile cue for lateral /s/.

Early sounds

8 sounds

P P Sound

/p/ Bilabial stop By age 2-3

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Press both lips together and hold, building up a little air behind them.
2. Release the lips suddenly so the air pops out. No voice at all.
3. Add a vowel straight after the pop: "puh", "pah", "pie".

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Most children already blow kisses or spit raspberries. Both use the same lip closure - start there and add the sharp release. If the lips will not meet at all, put a little chapstick or lip balm on and have the child rub their lips together: the balm makes the contact something they can feel and taste, and the rubbing itself is the lip closure you are after.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

Start with the hand, because it needs no props: have the child say "puh" straight into their own palm held a few inches from the mouth, and feel the puff land. Do it yourself first so they know what they are feeling for. Then move to a strip of tissue or a thin piece of paper held in front of the lips - a true /p/ makes it jump, and /b/ barely moves it. The paper turns an invisible sound into something the child can see and aim at, which is why it works better than any amount of explaining.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"big" for "pig" — Prevocalic voicing
The voice starts too early. Normal until about 3. Put their hand on your throat: /p/ is quiet, /b/ buzzes.

"ig" for "pig" — Initial consonant deletion
Not a typical pattern at any age - worth an evaluation.

"cu—" for "cup" — Final consonant deletion
Common before 3;3. Exaggerate and hold the ending.

B B Sound

/b/ Bilabial stop By age 2-3

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Lips together, voice already humming.
2. Pop the lips apart while the voice keeps going.
3. Add a vowel: "buh", "bah", "bee".

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Start from a hum with the lips closed - /m/ - then pop the lips open. The buzz is already running, which is the hard half. Chapstick on the lips, rubbed together, is a quick way to get the closure if the lips keep drifting apart.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

A hand on the throat should buzz through the whole sound. A hand in front of the mouth should feel almost no air puff.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"pig" for "big" — Devoicing
Usually at the ends of words first ("cub" as "cup"). Stretch the ending and keep the hum going.

"mall" for "ball" — Nasalization
Air is escaping through the nose. Pinch the nostrils gently for a second - the sound should change.

T — T Sound

/t/ Alveolar stop By age 3-4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Lift the tongue tip up behind the top front teeth, onto the bumpy ridge.
2. Seal it there and build up a little air.
3. Release the tip sharply. No voice.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Ask for a clicking "tsk tsk" of disapproval, or the tick of a clock. Both land the tongue tip in the right place.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

Have the child touch the ridge behind their top teeth with a clean finger first, then put the tongue tip on the same spot.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"key" for "tea" — Backing
Not a typical developmental pattern - refer. The tongue is going back instead of to the tip.

"den" for "ten" — Prevocalic voicing
Resolves by 3. Contrast with a hand on the throat.

"wa-er, with a catch in the throat" for "water" — Glottal replacement
A glottal stop standing in for /t/ between vowels or at the start of a word is not typical - refer. (A glottal stop before a syllabic N, as in "button" or "kitten", is the normal American pronunciation.)

D D Sound

/d/ Alveolar stop By age 2-3

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Tongue tip up behind the top front teeth, voice already on.
2. Release the tip while the voice keeps going.
3. Add a vowel: "duh", "dah", "dee".

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Start from /n/ - the tongue is already in place and the voice is already on. Then stop humming through the nose and let the tip release forward.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

Throat buzzes. Pinch the nose briefly: /d/ should be unaffected, /n/ will stop.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"go" for "dough" — Backing
Refer at any age.

"ten" for "den" — Devoicing
Common at the ends of words. "Bed" becoming "bet" is the classic.

"nough" for "dough" — Nasalization
Air escaping through the nose.

H H Sound

/h/ Glottal fricative By age 2-3

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Open the mouth and relax the tongue completely - it does nothing for this sound.
2. Push a small puff of warm air out from the throat.
3. Add a vowel right behind the puff.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Fog up a mirror or a window, or pant like a dog. That warm breath IS the sound - then attach a vowel to it.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

A hand in front of the mouth should feel warm air, not cool. Cool air usually means the sound has been made further forward.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"at" for "hat" — Deletion
The most common /h/ error - the sound is simply skipped. Exaggerate and lengthen it.

"kat" for "hat" — Substitution with /k/
The tongue is making a contact it does not need to make.

M M Sound

/m/ Bilabial nasal By age 2-3

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Close the lips gently - not pressed.
2. Turn the voice on and let it come out through the nose.
3. Hold it. The lips stay shut the whole time.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Almost every child has this already as "mmm, yummy." Use food. For a child whose lips do not close on their own, chapstick or lip balm rubbed between the lips gives them the feel of the closed position before you ask for any sound at all.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

A finger on the side of the nose should vibrate. If there is no vibration, the air is going out of the mouth instead.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"bore" for "more" — Denasalization
The sound is coming out of the mouth. Often just blocked nose - check for congestion before treating it.

"nore" for "more" — Substitution with /n/
Right nasal airflow, wrong place. Cue lips closed.

N N Sound

/n/ Alveolar nasal By age 2-3

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Lift the tongue tip up behind the top front teeth and seal it.
2. Turn the voice on and let it come out through the nose.
3. Lips stay open - this is the visible difference from /m/.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Hold an /m/, then open the lips while keeping the hum going through the nose. The tongue will come up on its own to keep the seal.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

Nose vibrates, lips open. Pinch the nose and the sound should stop completely.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"doe" for "no" — Denasalization
Check for congestion first.

"moe" for "no" — Substitution with /m/
Lips are closing when they should stay open. Mirror.

"ng" for "no" — Backing
The tongue is arching at the back instead of tipping up.

W W Sound

/w/ Labiovelar glide By age 2-3

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Round the lips into a tight small circle.
2. Pull the back of the tongue up and back.
3. Glide straight into the vowel - /w/ is a movement, not a hold.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Start from a long "oo" and slide into the vowel: "oo-oo-water". The lips are already rounded.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

Exaggerate the lip round in a mirror - "make a fish face." The round is the whole sound.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"vater" for "water" — Substitution with /v/
The lip is touching the teeth when it should not.

"ater" for "water" — Deletion
Common in young children; exaggerate the glide.

Middle sounds

5 sounds

K K Sound

/k/ Velar stop By age 3-4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Open the mouth. Keep the tongue TIP down and relaxed behind the bottom teeth.
2. Hump the back of the tongue up until it touches the soft palate at the back.
3. Build up air behind it, then release. No voice.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

A quiet cough is almost a /k/. So is the "ck" at the end of "back" if the child has it - work backward from a final /k/ they can already do.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

Lay the child on their back, or tip the head back. Gravity pulls the tongue body backward and makes the contact easier to find. Holding the tongue tip down with a depressor or a popsicle stick stops it fronting.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"tea" for "key" — Velar fronting
The most common /k/ error. Should resolve by 3;6. The tongue tip is doing the work instead of the back.

"guh" for "cup" — Prevocalic voicing
Right place, voice on too early.

"a throaty catch" for "cup" — Glottal replacement
Made in the throat rather than at the soft palate. Not typical - refer.

G G Sound

/g/ Velar stop By age 3-4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Tongue tip down and relaxed, back of the tongue humped up to the soft palate.
2. Voice already humming.
3. Release the back of the tongue while the hum continues.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Gargling, or a "hungry monster" growl, both pull the tongue body back with the voice on. So does starting from /ng/ and releasing it.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

Throat buzzes, tongue tip stays down. Watch the tip in a mirror - if it rises, the sound will front to /d/.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"dough" for "go" — Velar fronting
Resolves by 3;6. Same fix as /k/: tip down, back up.

"coat" for "goat" — Devoicing
Especially at the ends of words - "bag" becoming "back".

"ng" for "go" — Nasalization
The soft palate is not sealing. The sound comes out as /ng/.

F F Sound

/f/ Labiodental fricative By age 3-4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Tuck the bottom lip lightly under the top front teeth - lightly, not bitten.
2. Blow a steady stream of air out over the lip.
3. Keep it going for three or four seconds before adding a vowel.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

This is one of the most visible sounds in English, so a mirror does most of the work. Ask for "an angry bunny" or the sound of a tire going down.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

A hand in front of the mouth feels a continuous stream, not a puff. The sound should be holdable - if it stops immediately, they have substituted a stop.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"pan" for "fan" — Stopping
The most common /f/ error. Show them in a mirror that /f/ keeps the lips apart and the air flowing, while /p/ snaps shut. Resolves by 3.

"van" for "fan" — Voicing
Right placement, voice on. Hand on the throat.

"thin" for "fin" — Interdental substitution
The tongue is coming forward instead of the lip coming up. Very visible in a mirror.

NG Sound

/ng/ Velar nasal By age 3-4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Hump the back of the tongue up to the soft palate, as for /g/.
2. Keep it there - do not release - and hum through the nose.
3. The tongue tip stays down the whole time.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Start from /g/ and simply never let go. Or use the end of "sing" and hold it out.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

Nose vibrates and the sound can be held indefinitely. If it pops, the contact was released and you got /g/.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"rinning" for "ringing" — Fronting

The tongue tip is doing the work. Cue "make it in your throat, not on your teeth."

"ring-g" for "ring" — Release

A /g/ is being added at the end. Ask them to hold the hum and stop without popping.

Y Sound

/j/ Palatal glide By age 3-4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Raise the middle of the tongue toward the roof of the mouth.
2. Spread the lips into a wide smile.
3. Glide into the vowel.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Start from a long "ee" and let it slide into the word: "ee-ee-yellow".

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

Lips spread, not rounded. Watching for the smile in a mirror separates /j/ from /w/.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"wellow" for "yellow" — Substitution with /w/

Lips rounding instead of spreading. The mirror is the fix.

"lellow" for "yellow" — Substitution with /l/

The tongue tip is rising instead of the tongue body.

Later sounds

12 sounds

V V Sound

/v/ Labiodental fricative By age 4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Bottom lip under the top teeth, exactly as for /f/.
2. Turn the voice on so the lip tickles and buzzes.
3. Hold the buzz, then add a vowel.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Hold /f/ for three seconds, then "turn the motor on" without moving the mouth at all. That flip is the fastest route to /v/.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

The lip itself should tickle. A hand on the throat buzzes, and a hand at the mouth feels much less air than /f/.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"ban" for "van" — Stopping
Resolves by 3;6.

"fan" for "van" — Devoicing
Common word-finally - "leave" becoming "leaf".

"wan" for "van" — Gliding
The lip is not making contact with the teeth at all.

S S Sound

/s/ Alveolar fricative By age 4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Close the teeth gently, almost together.
2. Point the tongue tip up behind the top front teeth, OR down behind the bottom teeth - both produce a correct /s/, so use whichever the child finds.
3. Seal the sides of the tongue against the upper back teeth so air cannot escape sideways.
4. Blow a thin stream straight down the middle groove.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

The "long T" is the standard route: hold /t/ with the tongue tip up, then release the air slowly instead of popping it, and keep it going. Hissing like a snake or a leaking tire also gets there.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

For a lateral lisp, place a straw at the midline just outside the lips and ask the child to direct the air down the straw - the airstream has to be central to make the straw whistle. A strip of paper held vertically at the midline does the same job.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"thun" for "sun" — Interdental lisp
The tongue is between the teeth. Very visible - use a mirror and cue "teeth closed like a fence."

"a slushy, wet hiss" for "sun" — Lateral lisp
Air is escaping over the sides of the tongue instead of down the middle. Not a developmental pattern and unlikely to resolve on its own - worth an evaluation.

"tun" for "sun" — Stopping
Resolves by 3.

"shun" for "sun" — Palatal substitution
The tongue is too far back. Contrast /s/ and SH directly.

Z Sound

/z/ Alveolar fricative By age 4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Everything as for /s/: teeth close, tongue grooved, sides sealed.
2. Turn the voice on so the hiss becomes a buzz.
3. Hold the buzz continuously - it should not be choppy.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Hold a good /s/ and switch the voice on without moving anything. If /s/ is not clean yet, fix /s/ first - /z/ will inherit whatever /s/ is doing wrong.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

A hand on the throat buzzes. A bumblebee is the usual image.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"soo" for "zoo" — Devoicing
Very common word-finally, and it costs plurals and possessives - "bees" becoming "beece".

"doo" for "zoo" — Stopping
Resolves by 3;6.

"a slushy buzz" for "zoo" — Lateral distortion
Same fix as a lateral /s/ - central airflow.

SH SH Sound

/sh/ Postalveolar fricative By age 4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Pull the tongue back slightly from the /s/ position, making a wider, flatter channel.
2. Round and push the lips forward, as if about to whistle.
3. Blow a broad, hushed stream of air.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Most children already do this as "be quiet, shhh." That is the sound - the work is moving it into words. You can also start from a good /s/ and slowly slide the tongue backward while rounding the lips; the /s/ turns into SH on the way.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

The lips are the visible cue: SH has rounded lips, /s/ does not. In a mirror, watch for the round.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"sue" for "shoe" — **Palatal fronting**
The tongue is too far forward. Should resolve by 4. Cue the lip round.

"two" for "shoe" — **Stopping**
Resolves by 4;6.

"a slushy SH" for "shoe" — **Lateral distortion**
Often travels with a lateral /s/ - fix the airflow, not the placement.

CH CH Sound

/ch/ Postalveolar affricate By age 4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Start with the tongue tip up behind the teeth, as for /t/, and stop the air completely.
2. Round the lips.
3. Release the stopped air straight into a SH - not into a vowel.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Say "t ... sh, t ... sh" with a gap, then shrink the gap until the two collide into one sound. Keep the lips rounded the whole time. A train is the usual image.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

It should feel like one movement, not two. If you can hear a vowel in the middle ("tuh-shoe"), the gap has not closed.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"tip" for "chip" — Stopping
The SH half is missing. Resolves by 4;6.

"ship" for "chip" — Deaffrication
The /t/ half is missing - it has become a pure fricative.

"jip" for "chip" — Voicing
Right sound, voice on. Contrast cheap/jeep with a hand on the throat.

ZH ZH Sound

/zh/ Postalveolar fricative By age 5

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Make a SH and hold it - tongue pulled back, lips rounded.
2. Without moving anything, turn the voice on.
3. Keep the buzz going.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Straight from SH. This is the only reliable route, and it works almost every time because the placement is identical.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

Throat buzzes while the lips stay rounded.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"measshure with an SH" for "measure" — Devoicing
By far the most common ZH error.

"meajure" for "measure" — Affrication
A /d/ is being added at the front, turning ZH into J.

TH Voiceless TH Sound

/th/ Interdental fricative By age 6

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Stick the tongue tip out just barely between the teeth - a sliver, not a full stick-out.
2. Blow air gently over the top of the tongue.
3. No voice. It should be a quiet leak, not a hiss.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Bite very gently on the tongue tip, then blow. The bite guarantees the placement; ease off it over a few sessions.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

The child should see a sliver of tongue in the mirror and feel the air on top of it. Both checks together are what makes this sound easy to teach.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"sumb" for "thumb" — Substitution with /s/
The tongue has retracted behind the teeth. The mirror is the fix.

"fumb" for "thumb" — Substitution with /f/
The lip is doing the work instead of the tongue. Also very visible.

"tumb" for "thumb" — Stopping
Resolves by 5.

TH Voiced TH Sound

/th/ Interdental fricative By age 5

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Tongue tip just between the teeth, exactly as for voiceless TH.
2. Turn the voice on so the tongue tickles.
3. Hold it, then add a vowel.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Hold a voiceless TH and switch the voice on. Nothing else changes.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

The tongue tip itself should buzz. Ask the child whether they can feel it tickling.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"da" for "the" — Stopping
Very common, and high-impact: "the, this, that, they" are among the most frequent words in English.

"va" for "the" — Substitution with /v/
The lip is substituting for the tongue.

"za" for "the" — Substitution with /z/
The tongue has retracted behind the teeth.

J J Sound

/j/ Postalveolar affricate By age 4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Tongue tip up behind the teeth, air stopped, voice ready.
2. Round the lips.
3. Release into a voiced, buzzy ZH.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Say "d ... zh" and close the gap, or take a good CH and switch the voice on without moving anything.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

Throat buzzes from the very start of the sound, not partway through.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"dam" for "jam" — Stopping
Resolves by 4;6.

"cham" for "jam" — Devoicing
Common word-finally - "bridge" becoming "britch".

"yam" for "jam" — Gliding
No contact is being made at all.

L L Sound

/l/ Alveolar liquid By age 4

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Press the tongue tip up behind the top front teeth and hold it there.
2. Let the sides of the tongue drop so the voice flows around them.
3. Hum. The mouth stays open and the tip stays up.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Have the child bite very gently on the tip of their tongue and hum. The sound that comes out is nearly a perfect /l/ - then release the bite and keep the tip up.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

The tip should be visible in a mirror, touching behind the top teeth. If the tongue is flat and the lips round, you are getting /w/.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"wion" for "lion" — Gliding
The most common /l/ error. Resolves by 5. The bite-and-hum trick is the fastest route out of it.

"yion" for "lion" — Gliding to /j/
Tongue body rising instead of the tip.

"bawl" for "ball" — Vowelization
A final /l/ collapsing into a vowel. Hold the ending for three seconds with the tip glued up.

R R Sound

/r/ Alveolar/palatal liquid By age 5

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. There are two correct tongue shapes, and speakers vary along a continuum between them. Pick whichever the child stumbles into first.
2. Bunched: hump the back and middle of the tongue up toward the middle of the palate, with the tip lower than the dorsum.
3. Retroflex: raise the tongue TIP up and back toward the front of the palate, with the dorsum lower than the tip.
4. Both require a second constriction that is easy to miss: the tongue ROOT pulls back toward the pharyngeal wall. Without that retraction the sound will not be /r/, whichever shape the front of the tongue makes.
5. Pull the sides of the tongue tight against the upper back teeth.

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Two cues from the research are worth trying before anything else. "Make a boat shape with your tongue" encourages a midline groove and the pharyngeal narrowing at the same time. "Say ah, then raise your tongue tip without moving the rest of your tongue" works because the vowel already contains the pharyngeal constriction, so the child only has to add the front half. Starting from "ee" and pulling the tongue back also works well.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

The tongue tip must NOT touch the roof of the mouth. Light lip rounding is normal for /r/ - what turns it into /w/ is the tongue not doing its job (no tongue-root pull-back, sides not braced). The cheeks should feel tight. Cheeks should feel tight.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"wabbit" for "rabbit" — Gliding to /w/
The commonest error. It is a tongue problem, not a lip problem: the tongue root is not pulling back. Work the tongue shape first; do not try to fix it by un-rounding the lips.

"labbit" for "rabbit" — Substitution with /l/
The tongue tip is making contact when it should stay free.

"a gurgling, throaty R" for "rabbit" — Uvular R
The tongue is moving backward as one unit instead of separating the front from the root. Work on separating tip and root movement - the "say ah, then lift just the tip" cue targets exactly this.

"a vowel-ish "uh"" for "car" — Vowelization
See the Vocalic R page - postvocalic /r/ is a different target.

R Vocalic R

/er/ /ar/ /awr/ /er/ /ir/ /air/ R-controlled vowels By age 5-7

PLACEMENT, STEP BY STEP

1. Same tongue shape as consonant /r/ - bunched or retroflex, with the tongue root pulled back.
2. The difference is that the shape has to be HELD. There is no vowel afterwards to glide into.
3. Each of the six r-controlled vowels starts from a different jaw and lip position, which is why a child can nail "car" and still miss "chair."

SHAPE IT FROM A SOUND THEY ALREADY HAVE

Probe all six r-families before choosing a target - AR, OR, AIR, EAR, ER, IRE. Most children already have one or two that are close to correct. Get one stable, then generalize outward from it rather than starting from the hardest.

HOW IT SHOULD FEEL

Same checks as consonant /r/: tip free, lips unrounded, cheeks tight. Holding the sound for three seconds is the test - vocalic R fails by collapsing early.

IF YOU HEAR THIS INSTEAD

"cah" for "car" — Vowelization
The R is dropped and only the vowel is left. Check the dialect spoken at home first - in some dialects this is not an error at all.

"buhd" for "bird" — Vowelization of ER
The most common vocalic R error, because -er endings are everywhere.

"chayuh" for "chair" — Diphthongization
The word is being split into two syllables. Cue one smooth sound.

L blends

5 sounds

BL Blend

/bl/ Stop + liquid cluster By age 5

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

Once both components are stable in isolation, the work is the gap. Say the two sounds with a deliberate pause, then shrink the pause a little each time until they collide. This is faster than asking a child to "say it all together," which gives them nothing to change.

CL Blend

/kl/ Stop + liquid cluster By age 5

EPENTHESIS

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FL Blend

/fl/ Fricative + liquid cluster By age 5

EPENTHESIS

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TRANSITION

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GL GL Blend

/gl/ Stop + liquid cluster By age 5

EPENTHESIS

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TRANSITION

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PL PL Blend

/pl/ Stop + liquid cluster By age 5

EPENTHESIS

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R blends

7 sounds

BR Blend

/br/ Stop + liquid cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

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TRANSITION

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CR Blend

/kr/ Stop + liquid cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

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TRANSITION

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DR Blend

/dr/ Stop + liquid cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

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FR FR Blend

/fr/ Fricative + liquid cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

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GR GR Blend

/gr/ Stop + liquid cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

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PR PR Blend

/pr/ Stop + liquid cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

Once both components are stable in isolation, the work is the gap. Say the two sounds with a deliberate pause, then shrink the pause a little each time until they collide. This is faster than asking a child to "say it all together," which gives them nothing to change.

TR TR Blend

/tr/ Stop + liquid cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

Once both components are stable in isolation, the work is the gap. Say the two sounds with a deliberate pause, then shrink the pause a little each time until they collide. This is faster than asking a child to "say it all together," which gives them nothing to change.

S blends

7 sounds

SL Blend

/sl/ Fricative + liquid cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

Once both components are stable in isolation, the work is the gap. Say the two sounds with a deliberate pause, then shrink the pause a little each time until they collide. This is faster than asking a child to "say it all together," which gives them nothing to change.

SM Blend

/sm/ Fricative + nasal cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

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SN Blend

/sn/ Fricative + nasal cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

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SP SP Blend

/sp/ Fricative + stop cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

Once both components are stable in isolation, the work is the gap. Say the two sounds with a deliberate pause, then shrink the pause a little each time until they collide. This is faster than asking a child to "say it all together," which gives them nothing to change.

ST ST Blend

/st/ Fricative + stop cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

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SW SW Blend

/sw/ Fricative + glide cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

Once both components are stable in isolation, the work is the gap. Say the two sounds with a deliberate pause, then shrink the pause a little each time until they collide. This is faster than asking a child to "say it all together," which gives them nothing to change.

SK Blend

/sk/ Fricative + stop cluster By age 5-7

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

Once both components are stable in isolation, the work is the gap. Say the two sounds with a deliberate pause, then shrink the pause a little each time until they collide. This is faster than asking a child to "say it all together," which gives them nothing to change.

Other blends

1 sounds

TW TW Blend

/tw/ Stop + glide cluster By age 5

EPENTHESIS

The other common error is an inserted vowel: "buh-lue" for "blue". Practice holding the second sound first, then adding the first one in front of it, rather than the other way round.

TRANSITION

Once both components are stable in isolation, the work is the gap. Say the two sounds with a deliberate pause, then shrink the pause a little each time until they collide. This is faster than asking a child to "say it all together," which gives them nothing to change.