

Plosives or Stops

The **Plosives** are consonants produced by completely blocking the airflow. The articulation of plosives involves three stages:

- 1) a direct contact between the active and the passive articulators forming a complete obstruction to the airflow;
- 2) the compression of air behind the obstruction; and
- 3) the release of the compressed air causing an explosion.

The plosives can be **bilabial**, **alveolar**, and **velar**. There are six plosives in English. They are:

bilabial [p] and [b],
alveolar [t] and [d], and
velar [k] and [g].

The plosives are briefly discussed below.

Bilabial plosives

The bilabial plosives [p] and [b] are produced with both lips pressed together. The active articulator is the lower lip; the passive articulator is the upper lip. The soft palate is raised and the air coming into the mouth stops for some time and then breaks the obstruction with a slight explosion. The vocal cords vibrate in the case of [b], and therefore it is called a voiced sound. The phonemes [p] and [b] can occur initially, medially and finally, as in the following examples:

[p] pin /pɪn/, paper /ˈpeɪpə(r)/, pipe /paɪp/
[b] bin /bɪn/, above /əˈbʌv/, hub /hʌb/

Alveolar plosives

The alveolar plosives [t] and [d] are produced with the tip of the tongue firmly pressed against the alveolar ridge. The active articulator is the tip of the tongue and the passive articulator is the alveolar ridge. The tip of the tongue makes a firm contact with the alveolar ridge. The air is trapped for a short time and then breaks the obstruction with a slight explosion. The vocal cords vibrate while articulating [d]. The phonemes [t] and [d] can occur initially, medially and finally, as in the following examples:

[t] time /taɪm/, better /ˈbetə(r)/, cut /kʌt/
[d] date /deɪt/, madam /ˈmædəm/, mad /mæd/

Velar plosives

The velar plosives [k] and [g] are articulated with the back of the tongue making a firm contact with the soft palate. The active articulator is the back of the tongue and the passive articulator is the soft palate. The air is trapped for a short time and then breaks the obstruction with a slight explosion. While [k] is a voiceless sound, [g] is voiced. The plosives [k] and [g] can occur initially, medially and finally, as in the following examples:

[k] kind /kaɪnd/, second /sekənd/, take /teɪk/
[g] game /geɪm/, luggage /ˈlʌɡɪdʒ/, mug /mʌɡ/