



R

IPA Symbol: /ɹ/

How to Pronounce /ɹ/

Feel your tongue position: The whole tongue should be pulled back in the mouth, with the tongue tip curled back slightly into a bowl shape. The sides of your tongue should be up near the top side molars. The tongue tip should not touch any place on the roof of the mouth at any time.

Common Errors

Problem 1- Vowelization/deletion:

The most common issue with “R” is keeping the tongue relaxed and flat in the mouth. This results in a vowel-like sound. The tongue should be filled with tension pulled back with a cup shape on the tongue tip.

Problem 2- Flap/Trilling:

Another common issue with “R” is substituting it with a flap or trilled R instead. If your tongue tip quickly touches the roof of your mouth (the alveolar ridge) just behind your front tip teeth, then this is a trill or flap depending on how long the tongue tip vibrates there. To change this to a general American “R”, pull the tongue tip back and down so it does not touch the palate at all.

Problem 3- Substituting L

Another common issue with “R” is substituting it with an “L.” If your tongue tip touches the roof of your mouth (the alveolar ridge) just behind your front tip teeth, then this is likely a substitution you are making. To change this to a general American “R”, pull the tongue tip back and down so it does not touch the palate at all.

Spelling

No tricks in spelling here. If you see an “R” you say the “R.” You may also see spelling with “WR” at the beginning of words which are also pronounced as “R.”

Spelling Exceptions:

Here is the list of the very few exception words to be aware of:

The following “Rs” are not pronounced at all.

February /'fɛb ju ɛr i/

Surprise /sə 'pr aɪz/

Minimal Pairs

The term “minimal pair” refers to one change in sound that changes the entire meaning of a word. As you say the second “R” version, curl your tongue back into a bowl shape and pull with pressure to pull your tongue back in your mouth. If both words sound the same, the “R” was not correctly pronounced.

Flap/Trilled R vs. R Minimal Pairs:

puddle	parole	caddy	carry	bottle	barrel
heeding	hearing	betty	berry	boating	boring
feeding	fearing	woody	worry		
stating	staring	hoody	hurry		

L vs. R Minimal Pairs:

alive	arrive	late	rate	list	wrist
collect	correct	law	raw	load	road
lace	race	lay	ray	lobe	robe
lack	rack	lead	read	lock	rock
lake	rake	lice	rice	long	wrong
lamb	ram	lid	rid	lot	rot
lamp	ramp	light	right	loyal	royal
lane	rain	lime	rhyme	lung	rung
lap	wrap	link	rink	lush	rush
lash	rash	lip	rip	lust	rust

L Blend vs. R Blend Minimal Pairs

blue	brew	clown	crown	glow	grow
blues	bruise	flea	free	play	pray
blush	brush	fleas	freeze		
clash	crash	gland	grand		

W vs. R Minimal Pairs:

whack	rack	way/weigh	ray	which/witch	rich
wag	rag	weep	reap	wide	ride
wage	rage	wed	red	white	right
wail/whale	rail	weed	reed	wing	ring
wake	rake	week	reek	wink	rink
wait/weight	rate	went	rent	whip	rip
wave	rave	West	rest	wipe	ripe