Summary English Consonants

The standard English consonant system is traditionally considered to comprise 17 obstruents (6 plosives, 2 affricates and 9 fricatives) and 7 sonorants (3 nasals, 2 liquids and 2 semivowel glides).

With the exception of the fricative /h/, the obstruents are usually classified in pairs as "voiceless and "voiced", although the presence or absence of periodicity in the signal resulting from laryngeal vibration is not a reliable feature distinguishing the two classes. They are better considered "fortis" (strong) and "lenis" (weak), with duration and intensity of the noise component signalling the distinction (1).

The six plosives are /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/ and /g/: (Examples with sound at: http://www.udl.es/usuaris/m0163949/sdbplo.htm)

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<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Transcription</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/p/ (Voiceless)</td>
<td>Pin</td>
<td>[pin]</td>
<td>Bilabial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/b/ (Voiced)</td>
<td>Bin</td>
<td>[bin]</td>
<td>Bilabial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/t/ (Voiceless)</td>
<td>Toy</td>
<td>[toi]</td>
<td>Alveolar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/d/ (Voiced)</td>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>[dɔɡ]</td>
<td>Alveolar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/k/ (Voiceless)</td>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>[kaind]</td>
<td>Velar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/g/ (Voiced)</td>
<td>give</td>
<td>[giv]</td>
<td>Velar</td>
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The two phonemic affricates are /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ (Examples with sound: http://www.udl.es/usuaris/m0163949/sdbfri.htm)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voiceless /tʃ/</td>
<td>church</td>
<td>[tʃe:tʃ]</td>
<td>Palato-Alveolar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced /dʒ/</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>[dʒe:dʒ]</td>
<td>Palato-Alveolar</td>
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Fricatives

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voiceless F</td>
<td>Fine</td>
<td>[fain]</td>
<td>Labiodental</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voiced V</td>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>[vɛ:b]</td>
<td>Labiodental</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voiceless θ</td>
<td>thought</td>
<td>[θə:t]</td>
<td>Dental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced ð</td>
<td>they</td>
<td>[ðeɪ]</td>
<td>Dental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/sampa/english.htm
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<tr>
<td>Voiceless</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>say</td>
<td>[sei]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>zoo</td>
<td>[zu:]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voiceless</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>ship</td>
<td>[ʃɪp]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voiced</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
<td>measure</td>
<td>[meʒə]</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voiceless</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>half</td>
<td>[ha:f]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced</td>
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The sonorants are three nasals /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/ (Examples and sounds at: [http://www.udl.es/usuaris/m0163949/sdbnas.htm](http://www.udl.es/usuaris/m0163949/sdbnas.htm), two liquids /r/ and /l/, and two sonorant glides /w/ and /j/:

### Nasals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Place of Articulation</th>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>[mʌðə]</td>
<td>Nasals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>[nɔz]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ŋ</td>
<td>thing</td>
<td>[θɪŋ]</td>
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### Liquids

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Wrong</td>
<td>[rɔŋ]</td>
<td>Liquids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>light</td>
<td>[lait]</td>
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Semivowels glides

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>[wɜ:k]</td>
<td>Semivowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>[ju:ˈnɪvəsəliti]</td>
<td></td>
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1. PLOSIVES

Also known as “Stops” or “Occlusives”. They are formed by a temporary blocking off the air, then explode rapidly (hence the name plosive).
To produce /p/ first close your lips hard. Push air forward in your mouth, then open your lips quickly. Do not use your voice because it is a voiceless sound. Spanish speakers may fail to aspirate this sound, causing confusion with /b/. To produce /b/ use your voice.

In the case of /b/ Spanish speakers may pronounce it close to /v/ in some positions.

SPELLING:

The sound /p/ is written with the letter ‘p’:

Paper [paɪpə], people [piːpl], pupil [pjuːp(ə)l], happy [hæpi], supper [ˈsʌpər]

Sometimes English speakers do not pronounce “p”:

e.g. cupboard [kʌbɔd], receipt [riˈsiːtʃ], empty [ˈempti], jumped [ˈdʒʌmpt]

The sound /b/ is written with the letter ‘b’:

Big [bɪg], baby [ˈbeibi], about [əˈbaʊt],

English people do not pronounce the sound /b/ when it is followed by “t”

e.g. debt /det/, doubt /daut/, subtle /ˈsʌtəl/

Or when it is in final position following an ‘m’

e.g. lamb [læm], comb [kəm], bomb [bɒm], plumber [ˈplʌmər].

Examples:

Practice: butcher [ˈbʌtʃər], picture [ˈpɪktʃər], footballer [ˈfʊtlər], potatoes [ˈpeɪtəʊzi], pipe [paɪp] bottle of beer [ˈbɒtl əv biə], bread and butter [bred ən ˈbʌtər].

/ t / Sound Production.

Step 1. Put the front of your tongue behind your top teeth. Push air forward in your mouth.
Step 2  Then move your tongue away, releasing the air.

At the end of words Spanish speakers may confuse the sounds / t / and /d/

**Spelling**

The sound /t/ is written with the letter ‘t’.

e.g. time [taim], late [leit], little [litl], dirty [də:ti], pretty [priti], quiet [kwaiət], quite [kwait], telephone [telfən].

In some proper names ‘th’ is pronounced /t/:

Thames [temz], Thomas [ təməs]

/t/ is no usually pronounced between /s/ and /l/: castle [ka:sl]

We can also find some very well known words where the sound /t/ is not pronounced:

Christmas [krisməs], ballet [bælei(i)], mortgage [mə:ɡidʒ]

2. AFFRICATES

- /tʃ/ //dʒ/

Sound consisting of a stop consonant followed by a fricative; they are also called affricative. They have got two elements, the first one is plosive and the second one is fricative. That is to say, you begin pronouncing as if it was a plosive, then relax your mouth and when you open gradually your mouth there is friction.

There is a similar sound in Spanish, usually written with the letters “ch”.

Examples: Cheap [tʃi:p], child [tʃaɪld], match [ mæ tʃ], chalk [tʃə:k]

Other spellings:

- tch: watch [wɔ:tʃ], butcher [bʊtʃ]
- ture: picture [pɪktʃə],
- t: question [ kwestʃən]

Other important words:

cherry [tʃəri], lunch [lʌntʃ], chocolate [tʃəklət], children [tʃaɪldn], chicken [tʃɪkən], teacher [ti: tʃə], chair [tʃeər ], catch [kætʃ], nature [neitʃə], creature [kri:tʃə], Neptune [nepətʃu:n] / [neptju:n], rich [rɪtʃ], reach [ri:tʃ].
There is no similar independent sound in Spanish. We can speak of a similar sound when we pronounce “y” emphatically (e.g. yo, ya). Once you have understood and pronounced /tʃ/ use your voice to make /dʒ/.

This sound is usually written with the letters:

- j: joke [dʒəʊ k], jam [dʒæm].
- g/e: German [dʒɛ:m], gentleman [dʒentlmən], vegetables [vedʒtəblz], oranges ['ɔrindʒz], cabbage [kæbidʒ].
- dj: adjust [əˈdʒʌst].
- di: soldier [ˈsəuldər] (rarely [ˈsəuldʒər]).

3. FRICATIVES.

Consonants produced by the friction of the breath through a narrow opening between two of the mouth-organs. Also called spirant.

We can define fricatives as:

Labiodental: /f/ y /v/.
Linguointerdental: /θ/ y /ð/.
Linguoalveolar: /s/ y /z/.
Palatoalveolar: /ʃ/ y /ʒ/.

There are also two special sounds:

/ r / (no corresponding voiceless sound)
/ h / (no corresponding voiced sound)

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<td>H</td>
<td>half</td>
<td>[haːf]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced</td>
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Examples: fine, view, think, this, see, easy, sheep, pleasure [plezə]

LABIODENTAL.

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<td>Voiceless</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Fine</td>
<td>[fain]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>[vɛ:b]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOUND PRODUCTION:

/f/ and /v/ Touch your top teeth with your bottom lip. Blow out air between your lip and
your teeth (for /f/) for /v/ voice it.

/ f / Most students do not have difficulty with /f/. It may appear in initial (fish [fɪʃ], find
[fain], ... ), medial (laughing [laːfiŋ], coffee [kəfi], ... ) and final position (tough [tʌf],
staff [staːf], off[ɔf]/ odl-fashioned and in compounds [ə:f], stiff [stif], ...)

SPELLING / f /:

-f: fine [fain], few [fju:], off (not of)
off: offer,[ɔufe]
ph: physics [fiziks], phonetics [fəʊ'netiks].
gh: laugh /laːf/ (just for this word)

/ v / We do not have this sound in Spanish because we usually replace it with /b/. It is
helpful the contrast of the sound in isolation, beginning with /f/ for example: fino/vino;
faca / vaca

SPELLING / v /

The sound /v/ is usually written with the letter ‘v’.
e.g. visitor [vɪzɪtə], heavy [hevi], seven [sevn], eleven [ɪˈlevn], seventeen
[sevn’tiːn], seventy [sevnti]

Other spellings:

-ve: give [gɪv], have [hæv] [hæv], five [faɪv], twelve [twelv].
-f: of [əv] but “a bowl of fruit” [ə bɔːl əf fruːt]

DENTALS.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voiceless</td>
<td>θ</td>
<td>thought</td>
<td>[θə:t]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced</td>
<td>ð</td>
<td>they</td>
<td>[ðei]</td>
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</table>

/ ð / There is no similar independent sound in Spanish, although we can find a similar
phoneme between vowels, e.g. lado, dedo. We should try do discriminate
between /d/ and / ð/: the day, they did that, etc. To produce this sound put the tip
of your tongue between your teeth, touching your top teeth. Blow out air between
your top teeth and your tongue and use your voice.

The sound /ð/ is always written with the letters “th”:

with [wið], mother [mʌðə], brother[brʌðə], father [faːðə], feather [feðə], that [ðæt]
[ðət], this [ðɪs] , another [əˈnʌðə], weather [weðə]
If the letters ‘th’ are at the end of a word the corresponding sound is voiceless: “bath”[ba:θ].

‘With’ as it is a very frequently used word it is pronounced [wið].

It may appear in initial (then [ðen], this, that, ...), medial (brother, other [ʌðe], father, ) or final position (with, bathe [beɪð], ...)

/θ/ It is very similar to the Spanish sound represented by ‘z’ or ‘ce’, ‘ci’. To produce this sound follow the same procedure as in /ð/ but do not use your voice.

This sound is always written with the letters ‘th’

Mouth [maʊθ], month [mʌnθ], thirsty [θɜːsti], three [θriː], north [nɔːθ], south [saʊθ], through [θruː], throw [θruː], think [θɪŋk].

ALVEOLAR.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voiceless</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>say</td>
<td>[sei]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>zoo</td>
<td>[zuː]</td>
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</table>

/s/ y /z/

/s/ We can find a similar sound in Spanish and although most students can pronounce it they tend to say [espuːn] instead of [spuːn].

Spelling: The sound /s/ is usually written with the letter ‘s’:

‘s’: Class, lesson, student [stjuːdnt], ...
‘s’: bicycle [baisikl], exersize [ɛksəsaiz], ...
‘se’: house [haus], horse [hɔːs].
‘ce’: policeman [pəˈliːsmen], face [feis], ...
‘x’ (pronounced /ks/: six [siks], box [bɔks], exercise.

But ‘example’ [ɪɡˈzæmpl].

/z/ There is no similar independent sound in Spanish, although when ‘s’ precedes a voiced consonant (e.g. mismo, rasgo, ...) we can see it is very similar although with some differences. Remember to use your voice to produce this sound. We may find this sound in English in initial (zip [zip], zoo [zuː], zebra [ziˈbre]), medial (busy [bizi], crazy [kreizi]) and final position (lose [luːz], loose [luːs], wise [waɪz], days [deɪz]).

Nota: Both /z/ and /s/ are very important in English because they represent the plural
morphemes, the Saxon genitive and the third person singular present tense.

Spelling:

The sound /z/ is usually written with the letter ‘s’: is, trees [triːz], birds [beːdz], ...

Other important spellings:

- -z/ze: zoo, size [saɪz]
- -se: please [pliːz], these [ðiːz], exercise [əksəsaɪz], nose [neʊz], because [biːkəʊz], whose [huːz], noise [noɪz], lose [luːz].
- -z (pronounced /ɡz/): example.

**PALATOALVEOLAR.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voiceless</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>ship</td>
<td>[ʃɪp]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
<td>measure</td>
<td>[meʒə]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

/ʃ/ It doesn’t exist in Spanish. In some parts of Andalucia and Extremadura it is used instead of “ch”, for example “muchacho”. Pronounce first /s/ then put your tongue up and back a little to make /ʃ/.

It may appear in initial (ship [ʃɪp], shut [ʃət], shave [ʃəiv], ...), medial (fishes [fiʃiz], fashion [fæʃən], dishes [diʃiz], ... ) or final position (wash [wɔʃ], crash [kræʃ], rush [rʌʃ], ...).

This sound is usually written with the letters ‘sh’:

ship [ʃɪp], shop [ʃəp], finish [fɪnʃ]

Other spellings

Russia [rʌʃə], Russian [rʌʃən], sugar [ʃʊɡə], Scotish [skɔtiʃ], Irish [aiəɾiʃ], Swedish [swiːdiʃ], Danish [deiniʃ], Polish [peulɪʃ], French [frentʃ], Spain [spæniʃ], Spanish [spæniʃ]Turkey [teːki], Turkish [teːkiʃ]

/ʒ/ There is no similar sound in Spanish. To produce it follow the same steps as for /ʃ/ and use your voice because it is a voiced sound.

This sound is not found in initial position (except for some French words). It is found in medial (leisure [leʒə], treasure[treʒə], ...) and final position: garage [ɡæraːʒ] [ɡæˈraːʒ], treasure [trɛʒə], ...

The sound /ʒ/ is usually written with the letters ‘s’ or ‘ge’:
Usual [juːzʊəl], pleasure [pleʒə], television ['telɪvɪʃn]

/ʃ/ and /ʒ/ are very productive in the pronunciation of the endings in -tion and -sion:

/ʃɛn /: nation [neɪʃn], reduction [riˈdʌkʃn], creation [kriˈeɪʃn], motion [məʊʃn].
/ʒɛn /: vision [viʒn], explosion [ɪkˈsploʊʒn], decision [dɪˈsiʒn], exclusion [ɪkˈskluʒn]

LIQUIDS.

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<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Wrong</td>
<td>[rɔŋ]</td>
<td>Liquids</td>
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<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>light</td>
<td>[laɪt]</td>
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</table>

/ r / Most students have difficulty with this sound and nearly all pronounce ‘r’ when it should be silent.

To produce this sound turn the tip of your tongue up and slightly back. Do not touch the roof of your mouth; the sides of your tongue should touch your back teeth.

The sound / r / is written with the letter ‘r’.

Tomorrow [teˈmɔːrəʊ], carry [kæri], lorry [ˈlɒri], narrow [ˈnærəʊ]

In some varieties of English (American, Scottish) the letter ‘r’ is always pronounced. Words ending in ‘er’ usually end with the sound /ər/, if the following word begins with a vowel the /r/ is pronounced:

e.g. His mother and father [ hɪz (ɪz) mʌðə ən faːðə]

Look at the following examples where we can find silent ‘r’:

fourteen [ˈfɔːtɪn], arm [aːm], thirty [ˈθɜːti], yesterday [ˈjestəʊdi], forty [ˈfɔːti] dark [daːk]
worse [weːs], exercise [ɪkˈsesaɪz], north [nɔːθ], party [paːti], hers [hɑːz], forget [fəˈget]
important [ɪmˈpɔːrnt] Thursday [ˈθɜːzdi] understand [ ʌndəˈstænd], world [wɜːld]
worse [wɜːs] Saturday [ˈsætəʊdi], fork [fɔːk], carpet [kaːpɪt]

Laterals: l
Production:
Air is obstructed by the tongue and the sides of the tongue are left low so that air can escape over its sides. When you say /l/, you should be able to feel the air flowing over the sides of the tongue, indicating that it is a lateral sound.

/l/ is divided into two distinct sounds: the dark /l/ and the light /l/. If you say /ˈlɪtl/, you should be able to hear the difference between the first and the second /l/.
In both the light and dark /l/, the tip of the tongue is in contact with the alveolar ridge. The difference between the two stems from the position of the back of the tongue. In the light /l/, the back of the tongue is in a more forward position. In the dark /l/, the back of the tongue is further back in the mouth. /l/ is usually voiced, but if it comes after a voiceless plosive, such as /p/ or /k/, then /l/ is devoiced. Try saying /play/ and /clip/.

English people pronounce clear “l” when it is in front of a vowel or a /j/.

* e.g. Least, let, lamb [læm], led, live, …

Dark “l” always follows a vowel or when it is syllabic. E.g. tall, nail, milk, bottle [bɔtʃ], …

/h/ Sound Production: Push a lot of air out very quickly. Do not touch the roof of your mouth with your tongue.

This consonant is different from the Spanish /x/ (jota); Spanish /x/ is velar.

This sound may be found only in initial (him[hɪm], her[hə:], home [həʊm]…) and medial position (behind [bɪ'haɪnd], somehow [sʌmhaʊ], ahead [ə'hed]

This sound is usually written with the letter /h/

hello [heːlu], whose [huːz], hospital [həʊspɪtəl], hurt [həːt], unhappy [ʌn'æpi]

**NASALS:**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>[maðə]</td>
<td>Nasals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>[nəʊz]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>η</td>
<td>thing</td>
<td>[θɪŋ]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English people produce three nasals: /m/ (bilabial); /n/ (alveolar) y / η/ (velar).

* e.g. mine [main], new [nju:], coming [kʌmiŋ]

/m/ It is very similar to the Spanish /m/ pronounced in “mano”. To produce this sound close your lips and use your voice.

**Spelling:** The sound /m/ is written with the letters:

‘m’  
family [fæmili], farm [faːm], me [mi:], man [mæn], …

‘mə’  
name [nəim], home [həʊm], time, game [geim], same, …

‘mm’  
summer [sʌmə], swimming [swimɪŋ], …

/n/ Similar to the Spanish /n/ in “nena”. To produce this sound touch the roof of your mouth with the tip of your tongue. Use your voice.
Spelling: This sound is usually written with the letter ‘n’: name, number [nʌmbə], policeman, moon, pen, minute, begin, ...

Other spellings:
‘kn’: knife, know...
‘nn’: funny, Jenny, sunny, beginner, thinner, ...
‘ne’: one, nine, nineteen, ninety, aeroplane, telephone, sunshine.

Syllabic ‘n’:
‘en’: listen, eleven, haven’t, seven, seventeen, seventy, student, garden, present, often.
‘on’: lesson, person.[ lesn]
‘an’: important
‘ion’: television.

/ŋ/ Similar to the Spanish sound found in ‘manco’. To produce it touch the back of the roof of your mouth with the back of your tongue and use your voice.

Spelling: this sound is usually written with the letters ‘ng’: evening, morning, ring, long, young, reading, singing, bring, ceiling, nothing, spring, strong, angry, hungry, finger, England, English, stronger.

Other spellings:
‘n’: drink, ink, pink, think, sink, angry, thank you, bank.
/ŋ/ is always preceded by a vowel and it is not used in initial position.

Look at the contrasts in these minimal pairs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Son</th>
<th>sung</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ban</td>
<td>bang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinner</td>
<td>singer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run</td>
<td>rung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wins</td>
<td>wings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clan</td>
<td>clang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Place of Articulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>[wʌ:k]</td>
<td>Semivowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>[juːˈniːvəˈsɪtɪ]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

/w/ This sound is very close the English sound /uː/. To produce it make your lips round and hard for w. /w/ is a short sound. It is a semivowel.

This sound is usually written with the letter ‘w’:
twelve, twenty, warm, watch, weather, wet, wind, window, woman, with, word.
Other spellings:

‘wh’: what, when, where, which, white, why.
‘qu’ (pronounced kw): quarter [kwoːtə], question, quiet, square, quick, queen.
‘o’: one, once.

Sometimes the letter ‘u’ is represented by /w/ in: persuade [pəˈswɛid], suave [swa:v], suite [swi:t] or when it is followed by /l/ or /j/:

equal [ iːkwəl], colloquial [kəˈləʊkwɪəl].

But, look at the following examples when ‘w’ is not pronounced:

wreck, wring, wrench, sword, answer, boatswain [bəʊsən], Harwich [hærɪtʃ/dʒ], Berwick [berɪk], Greenwich [grɪːnɪtʃ] BUT, Ipswich [ɪpswɪtʃ], who, whom, whole, whose, whoop, whore, ...

/j/ This semi-vowel is called ‘yot’. This sound is very close to /iː/. Very quickly move your tongue to make the next sound. Do not touch the roof of your mouth with your tongue. We tend to pronounce it very close to /dʒ/. Remember that the tongue position for this sound is initially the same as /iː/.

Spelling:

This sound is usually written with the letters ‘y’ or ‘u’:

yes, you, yellow, year, young, yesterday.
Music, student, pupil, January, usually.
New.

In the middle of a word it is frequently written ‘i’ or ‘e’:

odious, tedious, behaviour, companion, hideous, simultaneous.

/j/ is not used after: /tʃ/ (chew [tʃuː]), /dʒ/ (jewel, juice, June ), /r/ (rude, rule, crude, grew, true ) /l/ preceded by a consonant: blue, flew, clue, plural.

Sometimes /j/ is used in front of /uː/, words written with: u, ue, ui, ew, eu.