

The Making of Sounds

Vowels are like liquids, and consonants are like solids.

What? You may ask; well, think about it like this:

Can you hold water in your hand? No, of course not! Why? Well, water moves; it is not in a shape that allows us to hold it. Also, there are spaces between our fingers so the water (that continues moving) does not have a place to stop and be still.

Can you hold a small box in your hand? Absolutely! Why? That's because a box is a specific shape and it doesn't move.

Explanation

We produce sounds by placing all the parts of our mouth area in a particular place and then we move air and voice through the spaces.

In the case of consonants, different mouth parts touch one or more other mouth parts. When two or more mouth parts touch, we create a specific shape. And in that split second before we move air and voice through the space, the shape formed by the touching parts does not move.

In the case of vowels, mouth parts don't really touch. Instead, vowel sounds are created by making small changes in the shape and movement of different mouth parts. For example, we open the back of the throat to produce the /a/ sound in the word "father", and we make lips into a tight circle to produce the /u/ sound in the word "boot".

Therefore, it is easy to hold our mouth parts in a very specific shape to produce consonant sounds (they are like solids). But it is not so easy to figure out how to make vowel sounds (they are like liquids).

Try it Yourself

Make the sound /b/ as in the word "boy". As you set your mouth parts for the sound /b/, try to move your tongue. You can only do it until you release your air and voice to say the word – "boy". But try to move your tongue *as you say the word* and you will realize that you can produce a lot of different vowel sounds!

Try saying the words below and notice how the vowel sound is just floating around in your mouth – the vowel sounds do not attach (or stop) anywhere on any of your mouth parts.

Hot	Hat	Heat
Hurt	Hoot	Height
Hate	Hit	Hoyt