

The L sound (light and dark L) /l/

Printable practice pack · free from onlinetonguetwister.com

English has two L sounds. Light L before a vowel (like, yellow) is bright and forward. Dark L after a vowel (milk, world, feel) pulls the back of the tongue up and sounds almost like 'oo'.

Who this helps: Speakers of Japanese, Korean, Mandarin and Portuguese, and children who substitute /w/ or /j/ for /l/.

How to make the sound

- 1 Press the tongue tip firmly on the ridge just behind the top front teeth.
- 2 Leave the sides of the tongue open — the air escapes around the sides, not over the tip.
- 3 Keep the voice on the whole time: llllll.
- 4 For dark L, keep the tip in place but lift the back of the tongue as if saying 'oo'.
- 5 Practise holding the L for two seconds before releasing into the next sound.

Common mistakes

- Substituting /r/: 'light' becomes 'right'.
- Substituting /w/: 'love' becomes 'wove' — very common in young children.
- Dropping dark L entirely: 'milk' becomes 'miwk', 'people' becomes 'peopo'.
- Adding a vowel after final L: 'call' becoming 'call-uh'.

A ten-minute daily routine

- 1 **Warm up (1 min).** Hum, then stretch the jaw and lips. Cold mouths slur.
- 2 **Isolate (2 min).** Make the target sound on its own, held long, ten times.
- 3 **Words (3 min).** Work one block of the word list on page 2, slowly, from the respelling.
- 4 **Contrast (2 min).** Run the minimal pairs on page 3 and listen for the difference.
- 5 **Speed (2 min).** Finish with a twister from page 4 — slow first, then fast.

Tip: record yourself on a phone before and after a week of practice. People rarely hear their own errors live, but almost always hear them in a recording. The microphone practice mode at onlinetonguetwister.com transcribes what you actually said and scores it against the target.

Word list

Word · IPA · say it (CAPITALS = stressed syllable)

Light L — start of word

light	/laɪt/	LITE
little	/'lɪt̬.əl/	LIT-uhl
love	/lʌv/	LUV
language	/'læŋ.gwɪdʒ/	LANG-gwij
literally	/'lɪt̬.ə.ə.li/	LIT-ur-uh-lee
lawyer	/'lɔɪ.jə/	LOY-yur
leisure	/'liː.ʒə/	LEE-zhur
lieutenant	/luː'ten.ənt/	loo-TEN-uhnt

Light L — middle

yellow	/'jɛl.oʊ/	YEL-oh
believe	/'br'iː.v/	bih-LEEVE
salary	/'sæl.ə.i/	SAL-ur-ee
jewelry	/'dʒuː.əl.ri/	JOO-uhl-ree
million	/'mɪl.jən/	MIL-yuhn
colleague	/'kɑː.liːg/	KAH-leeg
delicious	/'dɪ'lɪʃ.əs/	dih-LISH-uhs
reliable	/'rɪ'laɪ.ə.bəl/	rih-LY-uh-buhl

Dark L — after a vowel

milk	/mɪlk/	MILK
world	/wɜːrld/	WURLD
help	/hɛlp/	HELP
field	/fiːld/	FEELD
bulb	/bʌlb/	BULB
twelfth	/twɛlfθ/	TWELFTH
film	/fɪlm/	FILM
health	/hɛlθ/	HEALTH
gold	/ɡoʊld/	GOHLD
wolf	/wʊlf/	WULF

Final L and -le endings

people	/'piː.pəl/	PEE-puhl
available	/ə'veɪ.lə.bəl/	uh-VAY-luh-buhl
vulnerable	/'vʌl.nə.ə.bəl/	VUL-nur-uh-buhl
comfortable	/'kʌmf.tə.bəl/	KUMF-tur-buhl
terrible	/'tɛr.ə.bəl/	TAIR-uh-buhl
normally	/'nɔːr.mə.li/	NOR-muh-lee
actually	/'æk.tʃu.ə.li/	AK-choo-uh-lee
usually	/'juː.ʒu.ə.li/	YOO-zhoo-uh-lee
careful	/'kɛr.fəl/	KAIR-fuhl
beautiful	/'bjʊː.t̬ə.fəl/	BYOO-tuh-fuhl

Minimal pairs

Say each pair aloud. If they sound identical, slow down and exaggerate.

A	B	What to listen for
light	right	tip touches vs tip free
lock	rock	the standard /l/-/r/ test
collect	correct	mid-word contrast
led	wed	/l/ vs /w/ substitution
fill	fear	dark L vs r-coloured vowel
goal	go	final dark L must be heard

Sentence ladders

Build up: single word, then phrase, then full sentence. Three times each.

1	little
2	a little lamb
3	Little Lily lets her little lamb loose.

1	milk
2	cold milk
3	Well-chilled milk filled twelve small bottles.

1	world
2	the whole world
3	The world's most reliable lawyer felt well.

1	people
2	lovely people
3	Eleven lovely people were available and willing.

Twisters for this sound

Slow and clear first. Speed is the last step, never the first.

Larry's lemony lentil loaf left Leah low.

MEDIUM · sound focus: l

A rarely real rural rule ruled the royal realm.

HARD · sound focus: r/l

Yelling yellow yoyos yield yellow yarns yearly.

MEDIUM · sound focus: y/l/r

Lulu loves licked lemon lime lamb loins lately.

MEDIUM · sound focus: l

Red lorry, yellow lorry, red lorry, yellow lorry.

HARD · sound focus: l/r

Really leery rilly reeds reel in the rolling rills.

MEDIUM · sound focus: r/l

Five-day tracker

Practice task	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Read the word list aloud					
Minimal pairs, 3× each					
Sentence ladders					
Twisters, slow					
Twisters, fast					
Record yourself and listen back					

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