

Talk a Lot

Clear Alphabet Dictionary

Problem Sound Connections – when Clear Alphabet Looks Awkward!

There are a few occasions when we need to stop and think twice about how to represent sounds using the Clear Alphabet. Here are a few examples of words and phrases like that in the dictionary. Problems can often occur thanks to difficult-to-pronounce cc sound connections, e.g. a hard (voiced) d sound meets an equally hard (voiced) k in the middle of “childcare” – and d loses! We have to move it forward and change it to the softer (unvoiced) t : Chail tkeir . This also gives us examples of assimilation – a sound changes to make the sound connection easier – e.g. in the above case d changes to t .

Can you find/think of any more items in each category?

1. Issues with cc sound connections:

a) hard (voiced) d changes to soft (unvoiced) t

childcare	Chail tkeir
childhood	Chail thuud
classified advert	kla s fai Ta tvert
goldfish	Geul tfish
hardback	Har tbak
head for	He Tfor
midwife	Mi twaif
podcast	Po tkarst
road sign	Reu tsain
Sherwood Forest	sher w Tfo rist
sidekick	Sai tkik
surround sound	s raun Tsaund
third conditional	thir tkn Di shnl
United Kingdom	yoo nai t Tking dm
United Nations	yoo nai t Tnei shnz
widescreen	Wai tskreen
wind farm	Win tfarm
windscreen	Win tskreen
word stress	Wer tstres

b) v (voiced) changes to f (unvoiced)

give back	Gi Fbak
have pierced	ha Fpiyst
of course	uh Fkors

c) g (voiced) changes to k (unvoiced)

drug trafficking	Dru ktra fking
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d) b (voiced) changes to p (unvoiced)

object	O pjekt
subtitles	Su ptai tlz
web server	We_ pser v
webcam	We_ pkam

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website We_ psait
e) j (voiced) changes to ch (unvoiced)

vegetable Ve cht bl

f) p moves forward (FCL)

hip-hop Hi phop
popcorn Po pkorn
update U pdeit
upgrade U pgreid

2. It can look awkward when several consonant sounds have to be “front-loaded” onto the beginning of a syllable:

a) Examples with 2 sounds:

English Channel ing gli Shcha nl
public toilet pu bli Ktoy lt

b) Examples with 3 sounds:

clothes shop Kleu thzshop
detached house d Ta chthaus
withdrawal wi Thdrorl

...but that's how native speakers of English really speak!

3. Foreign words in English:

a) Some words in English include foreign sounds that are rarely used in English, e.g. a sound from Welsh that is not common in English is: hh .

Llandudno hhlán Du tneu

English native speakers tend to shy away from making the guttural hh sound, and use l instead:

Llandudno lan Du tneu

b) We can't write some foreign words in the Clear Alphabet because the Clear Alphabet only includes the 48 sounds of English. Other languages have sounds which are not heard in Standard English pronunciation, e.g. the “rolling r” sound in Polish. There are even different sounds in American English which do not feature in British English, and therefore are not included in the Clear Alphabet.

4. When a glottal stop comes at the end of a syllable which occurs before another consonant sound, e.g.

partner Par_ n

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5. Just consonant sounds written together (with embedded schwa sound, which is invisible, just assumed). These syllables can look daunting!

picture	Pi kch
usual	Yoo zzwl
Oxford	O ksfđ
pregnancy	Pre gnn sii

n beside n can present a challenge at first glance!

6. Some words just look strange in the Clear Alphabet, for a variety of reasons:

singer	Sing uh	<i>a schwa sound on its own looks odd!</i>
theatre	Ttiy t	

any word with tt , or any unfamiliar ID, e.g. zz or iy – you just have to learn the Clear Alphabet identifiers (see p.17).

7. Very rarely, a combination of Clear Alphabet IDs can be ambiguous:

food hygiene	foo Thai jeen
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is th one single ID (one phoneme), representing th in “them”, or is it two separate IDs (two phonemes): t and h ? In this case, it is the latter. It is hoped that students will be able to make the correct choice thanks to their understanding of the actual word or phrase being studied. (An added complication here is that the syllable in question also looks exactly like an English word, the nationality “Thai”. Like any human system, the Clear Alphabet is not perfect!)