

How the Alphabet Made English

The English Language Delegation, on behalf of English native speakers, have chosen twenty-six letters and tasked the Alphabet Supervisor with organising them into an English language that can be both written and spoken in their desired way. The Alphabet Supervisor calls the group of nervous letters into the main hall:

There are 26 letters in the English alphabet.

OK. Is everybody here? **There should be twenty-six letters.**

[The English Alphabet](#)

OK. There's one missing. Oh, T. Could you be more punctual, in future, please? OK, we're here to make the English language. Not British English – what is that? What is British? Scots, Welsh, Irish? No, we're here to make English. Not American English or any other variant, but English – the language of the English people. That's our job today. And we're tasked with making standard English. So not any slang forms or odd dialects, but **standard English**. The gold standard by which all other Englishes must be judged. Please bear with me. I'm going to tell you how we're going to do it.

This course concerns standard English, as spoken in England.

If you are involved in making other languages too, please forget about them for now. We are only focusing on Standard English for the English people. English English if you like. Or, if you don't like.

You are twenty-six letters. We're not going to use all of you, I'm afraid. Some of you will have to go home. Sorry about that. **There are too many letters – and too many consonant letters**, that's for sure. I've been negotiating with the Head of the ELD, and they have chosen you letters to make both their written language and their spoken language. The problem is that they insist on two very different forms: a very beautiful, elegant written language that they can use to write poetry and long, important documents, but at the same time they want the same letters to create a spoken English which is absolutely like a baby language: BA BA BA BA, **with every syllable forced into a strict up and down stress pattern.**

There are 21 consonant letters in English, which is unequal compared to how many vowel letters there are (5).

English is a stress-timed language.

[Word Stress](#)

[Sentence Stress](#)

There are too many letters here, too many consonant letters and not enough vowel letters. **We've only got five vowel letters.** We have been given a very difficult hand. So, it can't be a phonetic language. The way it's written will be totally different to how it is spoken. How can we achieve both goals with the same letters? They propose making the spoken language by using four main actions:

The four actions of connected speech.

1. moving forward consonant sounds
2. changing consonant sounds
3. deleting consonant sounds
4. adding consonant sounds

[Unit 1.3](#)

I have spoken to the delegation at length, and I believe I know what they mean and how they want us to do this, but each letter will need to play their part. I'm going to talk to each group in turn, so please take a seat in the waiting room until I call you in.

Vowels:

A E I O U

Y is sometimes referred to as a vowel letter.

OK, can I speak to the five vowels first, please? **A, E, I, O, and U**. Yes, Y, can I help you? OK, sometimes you will be used to create a vowel sound, but so will other consonant letters. Can you wait outside for now, please. No – wait in the waiting room. You will have an important job to do. Don't worry. I will tell you later.

There are 23 vowel sounds and 25 consonant sounds in English.

OK – vowels. You are going to have the most wonderful range of sounds, but there aren't enough of you to make them. They have requested **twenty-three different vowel sounds**. Yes, twenty-three. I mean, five letters cannot represent twenty-three different sounds, without us being creative. Why do they need so many vowel sounds? I don't know. I asked them and they said they wanted to create a musical, melodic language; they want to sing; they want to rhyme words, but also have a spoken language which is like a baby babbling, and, at the same time, have a beautiful-looking, elegant written language that will be the envy of all the other languages in the world. So, they're very confused. And big-headed, really.

[The 48 Sounds of English \(PDF\)](#)

A digraph is a combination of two letters that represent one sound.

We can do it if we represent vowel sounds in other ways, so, **apart from being A, E, I, O, and U, you can be digraphs**, so two letters together. Like, **E on its own can be a short E sound** while two EEs together or EA will represent the long EE sound that they want in words like MEET and TEA. The same for single O and double OO. Do you get it? I'll send you a memo about it next week. **Vowel + R** will make a long sound. **Vowel + other consonant letters**, like G and H, will make a variety of sounds. Yes – G and H. OK, sorry. But what else can I do? We'll have **spelling rules**, like **VCV rule** – the first vowel is long when followed by a consonant and vowel letter, and **VCC rule** where the vowel is short because it's followed by two or more consonant letters. You'll get the hang of it! Chin up!

[How to Spell the 23 Vowel Sounds in English \(PDF\)](#)

Ways that vowel letters represent vowel sounds:

- one letter
- digraphs
- vowel + r
- vowel + other consonant(s)
- spelling rules

The goal in spoken English is to speak with only VC and friendly connections.

The sound spine is the sequence of stressed vowel sounds in a sentence. It helps us to understand the meaning of the sentence quickly, so it should be heard clearly.

In vowel to vowel (VV) connections, we add a consonant sound – R, W, or Y – to make it a VC connection.

The 4 friendly consonant sounds are: l, m, n, ng.

The schwa sound is a weak vowel sound found in unstressed syllables. Despite being very common, it has no dedicated letter. It is represented by the vowel letters and a few consonant letters, e.g. 'r' in '-er'.

The syllable connections in polysyllabic words are usually vc or friendly.

The friendly consonant letters represent the four friendly consonant sounds: l, m, n, ng.

In fact, your role is crucial. **What they want to do is have a vowel sound at the end of every syllable, meeting a consonant sound at the beginning of the next syllable. VC – vowel to consonant connections. Every time, without exception.** Yes, this is how they'll get the BA BA BA BA baby language. So, that's what we're aiming for, folks. The vowel sound on each stressed syllable is going to be the most important. OK, but don't let it go to your heads, OK? **Together this sequence of stressed vowel sounds makes up what they call the sound spine. That's the primary way that they want to get the meaning of the sentence – from this string of vowel sounds. Nothing should distract from it,** especially not consonant sounds, like T or D. Well, we'll come to *them* later. And H.

Er, **if the next sound after you is a vowel sound, we have to insert a consonant sound before it to make the VC connection – R, W, or Y.** I've chosen these letters to help, and we're scheduled to meet at the end of this session. There will also be times when **we have to use a friendly consonant sound at the end of a syllable,** instead of a vowel sound, but they're coming in next, after you.

OK, I've saved the craziest part until last. They are requesting one particular vowel sound that will appear in every sentence – in most words if I'm being truthful – and it's called **the schwa sound.** This sound will be used in most of the weak-stressed syllables. I pushed and pushed for a single letter dedicated to representing the schwa sound, but they said no. Emphatically. I fought and fought, but they just laughed perversely at the chaos that their decision will no doubt cause. **They said that you vowel letters could represent the schwa sound and there'd be no need for a dedicated letter.** Twenty-six is their maximum. So, you'll have to make it, for example: A in again, E in open, I in April, O in aeroplane, U in alum, and, yes, Y in vinyl. And so on! Yes, A? Do you have a question? **What about internal syllable connections in polysyllabic words?** Er, words with more than one syllable? Well, yes. That is a good question. Most of the time they will make sure that these connections are VC or friendly. Don't worry. There may be the odd exception, like the connection in PARTNER, but, they'll smooth it over. Here they will just delete T and add a glottal stop. More of which later.

Anyway, I feel like it's a big ask, but I believe in you, vowels, and I know you can do it! Please call in the **friendly consonant letters.** Er, **L, M, N, and G.** Thank you.

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[The Schwa Sound](#)

[How to Spell the 23 Vowel Sounds in English \(PDF\)](#)

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Friendly Consonants:

L M N G

n is the most frequently occurring friendly consonant sound.

ng is immovable, because it doesn't move forward in either cv or cc connections.

If there is a friendly consonant sound in a syllable, we can rest on it, instead of going back further to the vowel sound in the syllable.

A glottal stop occurs when we close the glottis in the voice box for a fraction of a second, creating a tiny pause in the flow of air. A glottal stop always replaces T in a cc connection if the preceding sound is a vowel or friendly consonant sound.

It's easy to pronounce any consonant sound after a friendly consonant sound.

Friendly consonant sounds move forward in cv connections, except NG, which remains.

Welcome back, guys. Er, N you are going to have to do a double shift. **You will represent the most common friendly consonant sound**, but also can you work with G in a digraph to create **the immovable friendly sound NG**? Thank you. You are the second most important group in the alphabet, after the vowels, in terms of making the spoken language of English. We need the VC connections between syllables to give us the baby language that they want, the BA BA BA BA, **but sometimes we won't need to get all the way back to the stressed vowel sound in the syllable – we can rest on one of you guys**. That's why you're crucial. I'm going to call you Friendly Consonants, because you will be so helpful.

The drill will go something like this. The word INSTANT meets a consonant sound, e.g. REPLAY and we delete the T but we are still one step away from the vowel sound – a schwa represented by A. We can't delete the N, because then we might lose the meaning of the word (INSTA). So, we rest on N and **employ a glottal stop instead of T**: INSTAN_ REPLAY. Now, it's good. No, I know T won't be happy. I'll speak to him later. Why you? Well, because **you make a neutral shape in the mouth. After pronouncing each of you, the speaker is ready to pronounce any consonant sound**. For example, HOMEWORK. After M in HOME the mouth is not engaged, and therefore is ready to immediately pronounce WORK – or any consonant sound. But if you have T before a consonant, the mouth is fully engaged. You won't distract from the stressed vowel sounds in the sound spine. Look, you'll get the hang of it. Have a look at this pamphlet for more information. **In CV connections – consonant to vowel – you will all move forward** – for example, IN A = I NA – except for NG, which will be immovable. OK? Got it? Any questions? OK, you can go. Thank you. Can you send in the voiced consonant group, please?

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Voiced Consonants:

B D G J V Z

If these voiced consonant sounds appear at the end of a syllable, they must move forward – in cv connections as themselves, but in cc connections each changes to its unvoiced partner.

OK, let me talk to **B, D, G** – you're already here, that's good, er, **J, V, and Z**. The problem is that you are too loud. You can't be at the end of a syllable – full stop! **You'll have to move forward, but in consonant-to-consonant connections we're going to have to team you**

[Unit 4.2](#)

The 8 voiced-
unvoiced consonant
pairs are:

- b – p
- d – t
- g – k
- j – ch
- th – tt
- v – f
- z – s
- zz – sh

th – tt follow this rule
too (p.10.) zz never
appears at the end of
a syllable, so it does
not apply.

In cc connections, T
is deleted and
usually replaced by a
glottal stop. Its
partner D can move
forward, changing to
T. But if D is in a
blend, e.g. 'nd', or
meets T or D, it will
be deleted.

Z is the least used
letter in written
English.

The voiced
consonant sound z
often appears at the
end of a syllable due
to:

- common
function words
- plural words
- possessive 's'
- contractions
with 'is' and
'has'
- present simple
third person

The sound is z in cv
connections, but
changes to s in cc
connections.
Confusingly, this
sound is always
written as 's' in these
cases.

up with the unvoiced consonant sounds, so that when you do move forward the listeners barely notice you. Look – bottom line – we can't have any consonant sounds distracting from the stressed vowel sounds. That's it. Sorry, but that is all! Your partners will be like this: **B will change to P, D to T, G to K, J to CH – a digraph that we will have to make with C and H – V will change to F, and Z to S.** In CV connections you can move forward as yourselves, but keep it down. They don't want to hear loud B and G and V all over the place. You know – they want to hear the vowel sounds on the stressed syllables clearly. That's all they want. Strong consonant sounds are right out. OK? Thank you.

D, can I have a word, please? Your partner is T, who is stomping around somewhere angrily, because of... Oh, I don't know! Er, we can't pronounce either of you at the end of a syllable. In CV connections you can both move forward, but **in CC T will be deleted every time, and often replaced by a glottal stop. You can move forward changing to T – and be audible, but a very, very light 't' – in most CC connections. But if you're in a blend you will be deleted, and if you meet T or another D you will also be deleted.** So, you're one of three main letters that will often be deleted. How do you feel about that? Well, no. There is nothing you can do about it, D.

A quick word with Z. They're in two minds about you, to be honest. They don't want to write words with Z, apart from odd words like BUZZ or ZIP, so **in written English they will rarely use you, making you the least common letter on the page.** OK – don't be down. **In spoken English you are going to be at the end of syllables a lot.** Why? I'll tell you why. They're going to use your sound to make **common function words** – like 'was', 'is', 'as', 'his', and 'because' – **plural words** and **possessive form – apostrophe S** – and in **contractions with IS and HAS**, which will be very common, and in **present simple third person**, for example, in GOES. In every verb. So that's a lot of work to do. **Each time you will move forward as Z in CV connections** – for example, GOES ON = GO ZON – **but move forward and change to S in CC connections.** For example, GOES WITH = GO SWITH. And so on. Now, you're going to have to work with S and get on with her, OK? All of the aforementioned uses of the Z sound will be spelt as S. Why? I don't know. Ask them yourself! It's another quirk. You have a really important role. Anyway, at least you seem chilled out about it. Which reminds me, they also want to use you in written English to represent sleep: ZZZ.

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Redundant Letters:

Q X C

Q is a redundant letter because KW can do the same job.

OK. Now, it's time to make tough decisions. Can I speak with **Q, X, and C** please? First, Q. Now, you are a very beautiful, elegant letter on the page – especially in your upper-case form, I mean – but it turns out we don't really need you to represent sounds. **We can write or say Q with K and W together, for example, QUEEN = KWEEN.** You are redundant. It's also bad news for U, to a lesser degree. Sorry, but... What can I say? You can go home. Go on – off you go.

X is a redundant letter because KS can do the same job.

X – it's the same story for you. While they agreed you are an iconic letter, you have no function either, in written or spoken English. **We can use KS to represent X in writing and speech, for example, FIX = FIKS.** Yes, I agree, it doesn't look as good, but you must understand we have far too many letters as it is – er, too many consonant letters, that is. Like Q, you don't serve any useful purpose in this alphabet, so, off you go. Goodbye. Go and join the Q. Ha ha.

C seems to be redundant because K (hard C) and S (soft C) can do the same job. However, we need C to make digraphs and blends, especially the digraph CH, which is the unvoiced partner of J. As such it is essential, making C invaluable.

Er, C – I can see you are feeling nervous. Now, er, the bad news is that, like Q and X, **we can also use other letters to create your look and sound: K for the hard C sound and S for the soft C.** And it is frankly ridiculous to have you doubling up with K in the digraph CK in BACK. It's like two Ks! You do the same ludicrous trick in words like SCISSORS, when you team up with S in a pointless digraph. Where is the sense in having two S sounds together? So, their first thought was to get rid of you too. I know that looks like a blow. But the good news is that we realised, unlike Q and X, **we do need you. Yes – you will actually make some useful digraphs and blends. Especially teaming up with H to make the CH digraph, which is so important as the unvoiced consonant pair partner for voiced consonant J.** If only for this, we would have to keep you. Well, we couldn't do it without you. So, you're on the team. OK? Go and take a seat in the waiting room with the others. And please also send in the unvoiced consonants.

[Unit 5.2](#)

Unvoiced Consonants:

F K P S

T is the most frequent letter in written English, but also the most difficult consonant sound to pronounce at the end of syllables, which causes problems.

OK, have we got everyone? **F, K, P, S**... where is **T**? Not here. Hmm. **T is one of the most important players. But the most difficult.** Er, at least I'm now talking with the most sensible group of letters in the alphabet. **The most dependable. You will move forward from the end**

[Unit 6.2](#)

Unvoiced consonant sounds are soft and subtle. They help us in the goal of emphasising the sound spine by reducing hard, loud consonant sounds.

The sound k is very light and soft when moving forward.

The sound p is almost inaudible when moving forward, but the listener will acknowledge it.

We can pronounce multiple consonant sounds at the beginning of a syllable with ease, but not at the end.

Overly prominent consonant sounds can enter the sound spine in error, distracting the listener from the stressed vowel sounds.

S is the third most frequent letter in written English.

v moves forward and changes to the unvoiced f in cc connections.

of the first syllable in a pair as yourselves, without changing, in both CV and CC connections. So that is fantastic. Thank you, guys. You make light sounds at the beginning of the second syllable in CC connections, barely audible, but the listener will know you are there. You don't draw attention to yourselves, unlike the noisy voiced consonant sounds. You're really awesome. You're going to do great work making VC connections sound really nice and professional, without loud crashing consonant clashes. For that I thank you, again. K will make just a really light k moving forward, for example in QUICK RUN = QUI CKRUN. P your moving forward sound will be almost inaudible – just a tiny p, like a goldfish pouting. But I know that you like to make gentle almost inaudible sounds, and you are most welcome in our spoken language. You know, at the beginning of words, and in blends, like CRISPS and CRASH, K will have a louder sound, for example. The English are quite happy to pronounce consonant letters at the START of a syllable, whether individually or in blends – even up to FOUR consonant letters together, like in the phrase 'crisps were' = CRI SPSWERE. But they will not accept consonants at the END of a syllable – except those neutral friendly consonants. In POWER, for example, P can be a bit more aggressive. But keep in mind our goal of glorifying the stressed vowel sounds. Consonants must know their place and keep their heads down – staying well out of the sound spine.

S – you are going to be very important in written English. I think, the third most frequent letter. Yes, that's right – the third. You will have a lot to do there. Talk to your partner Z and he will fill you in on your role. You know, you will do the written bit more and he'll take care of a lot more of the speaking part. That's what it means to have a partner, right? In CC connections you will have the chance to be heard – but only very, very lightly. OK? OK, all? Good group. Finally, F. You're not going to be used as frequently as other letters and sounds, but you will have an important role to play whenever they pronounce V next to another consonant. So that means anything after OF or HAVE, including everything with Present Perfect tense, which is a very popular tense with the English, believe you me. Working with your partner V, you're going to have a lot to do, changing that hard V into your very soft and quiet f sound. I know you can do it. I believe in you, F!

[Unit 4.2](#)

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Unvoiced Consonant:

T

Thanks, unvoiced consonants. Really positive. You can go. Oh, **T**. T. Thanks for coming. Look, it's good I can talk with you on your own, really. The others are just leaving. We need to talk about this problem. Er, the exception is – the problem with this alphabet is you! **They don't want to pronounce you at the end of a syllable when the next sound is another consonant. Yes, in CC connections.** Yes, I know that many of their most common words have T at the end, and that's fine in written English. You're going to be really popular. But they don't want to pronounce you. **It's too difficult for them to pronounce T and then make another consonant sound.** They are fully engaged with T. There'll be a gap – and **they don't want any gaps!** In any case, they're planning to use a glottal stop instead. It's the tiniest break – a quarter of a second, that's all. It gives the impression of T without them having to pronounce T. Sorry, but you will be substituted in CC connections. OK, calm down, T. What, are you threatening to quit? This alphabet needs you! **Look at your role in written English. You're going to be the most frequent letter.** You can't have everything! Don't be greedy, T. You can still be heard at the *beginning* of a syllable... **One of the most popular consonant blends will begin with T. You know, initial blend TR, and what about, er, TW...? It's better than nothing. Oh yes – final consonant blends CT, FT, LT, the list goes on.** But, yes, they won't pronounce you then – in CC connections. OK. I forgot. My bad. **But, what about the fact that you are part of important digraphs like, er, well, along with U you can make the CH sound in words like TUESDAY and TUNA.** That's one of the most important days of the week. And a popular fish. Er, there's a lot for you to do! You know, English people will delete you when you meet another consonant sound, and that's that! Nothing I can do, T. Oh no, now H is here.

T is difficult to pronounce in cc connections, so we delete it and usually add a glottal stop.

Fully pronouncing T next to another consonant sound creates a gap, which is anathema to connected speech.

T is the most frequent letter in written English.

The initial consonant blends with T are: TR and TW. The final consonant blends with T are: CT, FT, LT, NT, PT, ST, XT.

We use T to make digraphs, like TU, which is pronounced ch.

[Unit 6.2](#)

Unvoiced Consonant:

H

OK, **H**, I'm just finishing off with T. OK, T. Just calm down and wait in the waiting room. You have got a massive role to play in this alphabet... just not as much in speaking. Yes, I know it's embarrassing. Er, being deleted. H, I'm talking to T, not you. OK – he's gone. Finally. Yes, that's right, H – sometimes T will be deleted. They just can't

H is routinely deleted at the beginning of function words: him, her, his, as well as others like: he, has, had, at the discretion of the speaker.

Like T, pronouncing H creates a gap, especially when we're trying to run through weak-stressed syllables quickly to get to the next stressed vowel sound in the sound spine.

Some native speakers delete H at the start of every word beginning with H. This is incorrect in standard English.

For various reasons, there are 9 out of 25 consonant sounds that don't meet themselves in this way: j, ch, ng, r, w, y, zz, h, and hh.

manage it. And I want to talk to you, too. H – there are going to be times when you are deleted too. Yes. I'm talking about function words: HIM, HER, and HIS. And it may also happen with other short H function words, like HE, HAS and HAD. Maybe HAVE, although it is more likely to be contracted... Look, these are weak-stressed words and we don't really need to hear a strong H sound at the beginning of them. In phrases like I TOLD HIM, or I TOLD HER, they will naturally delete H to make I TOL DIM and I TOL DER. Yes, I know it sounds awful, but they want to get swiftly on to the next stressed vowel sound to decipher the meaning, by moving quickly over the unstressed function words. The sound spine is KING. How do you feel about that, H? They want to speak syllable by syllable, moving briskly and rhythmically with VC and friendly connections. It creates an unsightly gap, stopping to say H every time. Yes. And I might as well tell you more bad news. Some English people will delete you at the beginning of EVERY word! Like ELLO and ORSE and OPE. But this will not be the done thing in standard English, don't worry. Are other letters deleted, apart from you and T? Well, yes. D is deleted in a blend and when it meets T, and most consonant letters are deleted when they meet themselves. They're called duplicate sounds. For example: BIG GATE, QUICK COFFEE, DANCE SOLO, and so on. In each case the first sound is deleted. No, it won't happen a great deal, but most consonant letters will also know what it's like to be deleted. It's not just you. No, I'm not picking on you. So... T is waving to you from the waiting room door. Go and have a chat with him. My goodness! The stress! The prima donnas!

[Unit 6.4](#)

[Unit 6.5](#)

Voiced Consonants:

R W Y

Can I speak with R, W, and Y, please? I think we've nearly got it. I know it's a lot to deal with in one go, but... You know, we can make this alphabet work – for both written *and* spoken English. I know you can do it! Er... OK, thanks for coming. It seems unlikely, but you guys together have got a really important role to play here. As you may have heard, we're going to need only VC connections – and friendly – between syllables. In VC connections, be whatever vowel sound you represent. However, sometimes another vowel sound will follow the first vowel sound and we'll get a VV connection, which messes everything up, because it's hard for them to pronounce this and it

vv connections occur when a vowel sound at the end of the first syllable in a pair meets another vowel sound at the beginning of the next syllable. They create gaps in the flow of speech, which we must avoid.

[Unit 7.1](#)

[Unit 7.2](#)

Consonant letters, especially R, W, and Y, represent vowel sounds at the end of a syllable, e.g. '-er' and '-or' both represent schwa sounds. However, when they meet another vowel sound, they are activated and become consonant sounds.

Y represents a vowel sound in a limited number of words.

causes a gap. For example, DOCTOR IS. A schwa sound meets short I. They don't want any gaps, but to speak quickly and fluently like BA BA BA BA. So, in this case, although R is working to represent the vowel sound schwa at the end of DOCTOR, **when it meets another vowel sound it becomes ACTIVATED and will be pronounced as a consonant sound: DOCTOR IS = DOCTOR RIZ.** Now the connection is VC – as they wish it to be. Have you got that, R? It's the same for you too, W and Y. You'll do exactly the same. Sit silently at the end of a syllable when you're representing a vowel sound – it'll probably be a schwa sound – and then leap into action, becoming a consonant sound if you meet another vowel sound. You have a majorly invaluable role to play in making VC connections and avoiding gaps. I can't stress that enough! There are further examples, er... HOW IS becomes HOW WIZ – or they could always use a contraction, which would be better, in actual fact: HOW'S – while MY AIM becomes MY YAIM. You'll get the hang of it! Practice, practice! It goes without saying that if you are not busy spelling out a vowel sound, just be your normal consonant selves, right? **Yes, Y, it's true they want to use you as a vowel sound, for example in GYM, MYTH, and RHYTHM, but it's not going to be very often. OK?** At the end of a syllable, you will be the short ii sound, as in LOVELY, HAPPY, and BABY. You might be the vowel sound ai in a small group of words, like FLY and BYE. OK? But listen, R, W, and Y. I want to remind you that you're just helping out – like all the letters. Don't get big heads, please. You are not better than other consonant letters because you have this unusual role. Right?

OK, we have to hurry because they want to start using the language as soon as possible – and the Danish Language Delegation need the hall. Right. Let's get everybody back in here, please. All the letters. Let's get everybody back. Everybody here? Yes, OK, come on in, er, Q and X. I see you're still lurking about. Er, well, yes – you can join us. Look, I want to be fair with all of you. We started off with twenty-six letters and we're going to end with twenty-six. Yes. Er, I've had information... they want to keep Q and X. They find Q to be particularly shapely, especially as an upper-case letter, and they find X quite mysterious and – I don't know why – want to be able to use you to designate something unknown or forbidden. They have decided that you are both iconic letters – especially X. Sorry, Q. I'm just repeating what they told me. Personally, I would have got rid of both of you. Sorry. That's just my opinion, right? So, let's get on with the task at hand...

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The digraph TH represents two consonant sounds: one voiced – th – and one unvoiced – tt. They can be very difficult to pronounce for foreign speakers who do not have them in their L1, but they can be learned.

What are you saying, T? You have come to an agreement with H? You are going to get revenge for being so often deleted in spoken English? How? **By creating the digraph TH – two sounds, both voiced and unvoiced – which will be almost impossible for non-native speakers of English to pronounce?** OK, yes, you can do that. Fine. But native speakers won't have a problem with *any* digraphs, to be honest... It'll only make things difficult for foreign learners. But they're going to have it tough anyway, so... The thing we are trying to avoid is difficult connections and gaps. So, it seems a bit petty, but OK. It is hardly becoming of a letter that is going to be the MOST COMMON letter in the whole written language... Is it amusing for both of you, T and H? OK. Well, it's the first time I've seen either of you smiling today, so I'll let it go. OK, so TH will join both the voiced and unvoiced consonant groups. Have you got that? Thanks, guys.

Anyway, thank you all. Let's go out and create the very best written and spoken language in the whole world! You have all been chosen – and you all have an important job to do. (Less so, Q and X, but anyway, I digress...) I want to remind you that I believe in you, and I feel proud that the English people have chosen all of you with which to build their important, groundbreaking language. **Remember the absolute and utter all-importance of the sound spine** – and don't let the English people down!

Clear communication via the sound spine is the most important aim of spoken English.

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