

# What is Phonetics?



## A simple definition:

- a primary subfield within the field of linguistics
- the scientific study and description of speech sounds in language

## The basics:

- **The main object of study within phonetics is the speech stream**, which is composed of two main kinds of sounds: *vowels* (as in, a-e-i-o-u) and *consonants* (such as, b-d-g-s-l).
- **These sounds have their own standardized notation system** so that you can write them! It's called the IPA (*International Phonetic Alphabet*), and you've likely seen it in dictionary entries. For example, the word 'phonetics' in IPA is [fə.'nɛ.tɪks].

## What are the real world applications?

- **Language learning:** Language teachers and speech therapists use phonetic information to teach target speech sounds to their students and patients.
- **Forensic analysis:** Phonetic transcriptions and acoustic analyses of verbal exchanges are often used as evidence for police work and on trial.
- **Emerging technology:** Acoustic phonetic measurements are the basis for all the speech recognition software you interact with daily on your electronic devices.

## Fun facts:

- The name for an expert in (or person who studies) phonetics is a *phonetician*.
- All of the speech you will ever produce in English is composed of roughly 25 combinations of gestures from your articulators (A.K.A. your tongue, teeth, lips & vocal cords<sup>1</sup>).
- Movements of the tongue are among the fastest (and most precise) in the human body!

1. Ladefoged, P., & Johnson, K. (2006). A course in phonetics. Cenegage learning.

## To embark on your next language adventure...

Visit us at [Mangolanguages.com](https://Mangolanguages.com)! Want more engaging linguistics content like this? Subscribe to our YouTube channel and follow us on Instagram [@MangoLanguages!](https://www.instagram.com/MangoLanguages/)



Scan for more leaning content  
✓

