



How to Teach the Z Sound

The /z/ sound uses the same mouth position as the /s/ sound, but the /z/ sound is voiced whereas the /s/ sound is unvoiced. This means that the passage of air through your mouth combines with the vibration of your vocal cords to create the sound. To position your mouth, place the tip of your tongue behind your teeth and very close to the roof of your mouth but not touching it. The sides of your tongue should rise to meet the roof on your mouth, leaving a passageway for air through the middle of your tongue. Keep your teeth closed, but part your lips slightly and pull back the corners, as though beginning to smile. When air and vocal vibrations pass through your mouth and teeth, you have the /z/ sound!

Verbal cues

When you practice a specific sound with your child, begin by pronouncing the sound slowly and clearly for your little one: “/z/, /z/, /z/” With a sound like /z/ that does not have an inherent end point, hold it for a few seconds and pause for several moments in between repetitions. This helps your child understand the single sound you will be working with, and provides a correct example for her to imitate. As your child masters the individual sound, move on to simple syllables by adding vowels to the /z/: “zoo, zoo, zoo,” “zee, zee, zee,” “za, za, za.” With time and practice, your little one will be able to move on to words and, eventually, sentences and conversation.

Visual Cues

Often accompanying a sound with a visual cue helps to ground the idea for a child and provides an association for them to remember the sound in the future. Similar to the visual cue for the /s/ sound, place your index fingers at the corner of your mouth when you make the /z/ sound and pull them back towards your ears as your mouth stretches to make the sound. Encourage your child to do the same each time he pronounces the sound. Practice with a mirror so your child can see his own facial movements as he makes the sound.

Tactile Cues

Like all voiced sounds, the throat vibrates along with the vocal cords when making the /z/ sound. Since this is what separates the /z/ sound from the /s/ sound, encourage your child to be aware of this. Place her hand on your throat as you say the sound so she can feel your vocal vibrations. Have her do the same to her own neck. Kids love this sensation and it reminds them that they are saying the sound correctly.