



12 Ways to Shape "er" from Other Speech Sounds

Teaching a child to correctly pronounce the "er" sound can be both rewarding and challenging.

Why is it so rewarding?

- The /r/ sound is one of the most frequently used sounds in English. Remediation of this sound will significantly increase the intelligibility of the child's speech.
- It is the only consonant that significantly alters the sounds of the preceding vowels.

Why is it so challenging?

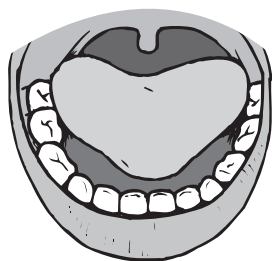
- The /r/ phoneme is a later-developing sound, usually acquired by age six.
- The child's oral-motor skills need to be fully developed to produce the /r/ sound. Production of the sound requires simultaneous positioning of the jaw, lips, and different parts of the tongue.
- There are multiple ways to correctly produce /r/, and none of them are easy to see for imitation.
- It is difficult for a child to feel his tongue shape and position while saying "er."
- The tongue position for /r/ varies depending on the phonetic context, especially for the post-vocalic /r/ sounds.

Using placement techniques based on other phonemes the child produces correctly may be an efficient means of changing atypical "er" productions to acceptable productions. Have the child try each of these techniques in front of a mirror. Suggest adjustments in tongue, jaw, or lip position or tension as needed. Some children may use a retroflexed "er," and others may use a bunched "er." (See the pictures on page 111.) Once the child produces an accurate "er," see if he can repeat "er" correctly 10 times. To encourage stability in the "er" production, have the child sing "er" sounds to the tune of a song, prolong the sound, repeat it several times quickly, and say it from different parts of the speech therapy room. Here are some placement techniques to try with children.

1. **Shape "er" from the student's error.** Watch the student try to say "er." Suggest needed adjustments in jaw position, tongue position, lip placement, or tension.
2. **Shape "er" from "eee."** "Say 'eee.' Feel the sides of your tongue touching the inside of your molars. Push your tongue against your molars. Drag your tongue backward as you stretch out the 'eee' sound. Lightly touch your tongue tip to the bumpy ridges on the roof of your mouth. Hold that position and say 'oo' as in *book*."
3. **Shape "er" from "l."** "Say 'lll.' Slowly pull your tongue back, feeling the bumpy ridges on the roof of your mouth. Listen to how the sound changes."
 - Variation #1: "Say 'lll.' I will slowly move this tongue depressor between your front teeth. Don't let me touch your tongue! You'll need to move your tongue backward. See what it sounds like now."
 - Variation #2: "Say 'lll.' I will slowly lower your bottom jaw by holding your chin. Keep your tongue tip touching the roof of your mouth as I do this. (The tongue tip will move backward to keep touching the palate.) Glue it to that spot! I will close your jaw again. See what it sounds like now."



4. **Shape "er" from "g" (or "k").** "Say 'g-g-g-g-g' really fast. Now, stretch out the 'g' sound like this: 'gggggg.' Feel the back of your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Make your tongue strong. Lift your tongue tip so it touches the roof of your mouth. Say 'oo' as in *book*."
5. **Shape "er" from "zh" (or "sh").** "Say a long 'zh' sound. Feel the sides of your tongue along your molars. Slowly slide your tongue backward, keeping the sides pressed against your molars. Say 'oo' as in *book*."
6. **Shape "er" from voiced "th."** "Say a long 'th' sound. Feel your tongue sticking out between your teeth. Say 'th' again and quickly pull your tongue tip back and up to the roof of your mouth. Close your jaw once your tongue is in and keep your voice going. See what it sounds like."
7. **Shape "er" from "n."** "Say 'nnnn.' Feel the sides of your tongue against your molars. Slowly pull your tongue backward, keeping the sides of your tongue against your molars. Say 'oo' as in *book*."
8. **Shape "er" from "z."** "Say 'zzz.' Slowly pull your tongue back while you say 'zzz.' It will sound funny. Keep the back sides of your tongue against your molars. Say 'oo' as in *book*."
9. **Shape "er" from "d."** "Say 'd-d-d-d-d' quickly without moving your jaw. Pull your tongue tip backward, and say 'd-d-d-d-d' quickly again. Keep your tongue tip up like you are about to say 'd' and close your jaw so your teeth almost touch. Feel how your tongue bunches up in the back of your mouth. Make your tongue strong. Say 'oo' as in *book*."
10. **Shape "er" from "oo."** "Say 'oo' as in *book*. Slowly move your tongue back and up. Make your tongue strong. See what that sounds like."
11. **Shape "er" from "y."** "Say 'y' very slowly. Feel the back of your tongue touch your molars. Slide your tongue backward along your molars. See what that sounds like."
12. **Shape "er" from "ah."** "Say 'ah.' Feel how open your mouth is. What did you do with your jaw? Your tongue? Feel how relaxed your tongue is and how it is low in your mouth. Now do the opposite. Pull your tongue up and back and make it tight. See what that sounds like."



Front View of "er"



Retroflexed "er"



Bunched "er"