

# WAYS OF PRONOUNCING [θ] AND [s] SOUNDS CORRECTLY

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**Abstract:** *This article provides explanations for pronouncing [θ] sound correctly, for various positions which [θ] sound and [s] sound might be mispronounced. Furthermore, it helps to prevent from mispronouncing [θ] sound giving examples where necessary.*

**Key words:** *[θ] sound, fricative, unvoiced sound, pronunciation*

For the speakers of many languages ( e.g French, German, Italian, Uzbek, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, etc.) there are not separate phonemes [θ] and [s] but only one which is usually more like the English [s]. So there is a danger that [s] will be used instead of [θ]. The difference between them is that [s] is made with the tip and blade of the tongue close to the centre of the alveolar ridge and makes a strong friction, whereas [θ] is made with the tongue tip near the upper teeth and makes much less friction.

Speaking about [θ] sound, this sound is friction sound. While pronouncing [θ] sound the soft palate is raised so that all the breath is forced to go through the mouth, and the tip of the tongue is close to the upper front teeth: this is the narrowing where the friction is made. The noise made by the friction for [θ] is not much great, much less than [s]. Confusing [θ] and [s] sound will scarcely ever lead

to misunderstanding because they rarely occur in words which are otherwise similar but if you do not make the difference properly it will be noticeable.

Some of the most common English words which contain [θ] are:

Martha [mɑ:θə], Bertha [bɜ:θə], Arthur [ɑ:θə], thank [θæŋk], think [θɪŋk], thin [θɪn], thing [θɪŋ], thirsty ['θɜ:sti], thousand ['θaʊ.z θənd], three [θri:], through [θru:], throw [θrəʊ], Thursday ['θɜ:z.deɪ], thought [θɔ:t], thirty ['θɜ:ti], healthy ['θɜ:ti], wealthy ['wel.θi], something ['sʌm.θɪŋ], anything ['en.i.θɪŋ], both [bəʊθ], bath [bɑ:θ], breath [breθ], cloth [klɒθ], earth [ɜ:θ], fourth [fɔ:θ], faith [feɪθ], month [mʌnt θ], health [helθ], north [nɔ:θ], south [saʊθ], path [pɑ:θ], worth [wɜ:θ], death [deθ], thrill [θrɪl].

Consonants [d], [t], [n], [l] are followed by [θ] in the words eights [eɪtθ], breadth [bredθ], tenth [tenθ] and health [helθ]. Normally, [d], [t], [n] and [l] are made with the tongue-tip on the alveolar ridge, but when followed by [θ] they are made with the tongue-tip touching the back of the upper teeth. It is then pulled away slightly to give the dental friction of [θ].

In the words fifth [fɪ f θ] and length [lenkθ] the tongue-tip is placed in position for [θ] during the previous consonant so that again there is no gap between them. There are only a few other words like these width [wɪtθ], hundredth ['hʌn.drətθ], ninth [naɪntθ], thirteenth [θɜ:'ti:ntθ], etc., wealth [welθ], strength [strenθ]. Practise them until you go smoothly from the first consonant to the [θ].

All of these words may then have a plural [s] added, like eights [eɪtθ], breadth [bredθ], the secret is a smooth but definite movement of the tongue-tip from the dental position of [θ] to to the alveolar position of [s].

Notice also the word twelfth [twelf θ], where [fθ] has [l] before it. Make sure that the [l] is properly formed, and then during the [l] raise the lower lip up to the upper

teeth for [f] and then go on to [θ]. This word also has the plural form twelfths. Once again move the tongue-tip smoothly but firmly from the [θ] to the [s] position.

Sometimes when you listen to English listening specifically for these words (and others containing [θ]) and try to fix the sounds in your mind.

As for [s] sound, this sound is a strong friction sound. To pronounce [s] the tip and blade of the tongue are very close to the alveolar ridge. There is a very considerable narrowing at this point, not near the teeth and not near the hard palate. And teeth are very close together. The friction for this sound is much greater than for [θ].

Try to make [s] sound, then keep your mouth in that position and draw air inwards; make small changes in the position of the tip and blade of the tongue until you can feel that the cold air is hitting the tongue at the very centre of alveolar ridge, not further forward and not further back.

Some of the very many common words containing [s] sound are: cyst [sɪst], besides [bɪ'saɪdɪz], Mrs ['mɪs.ɪz], same [seɪm], sing [seɪm], sit [sɪt], Saturday ['sæt.ə.deɪ], Sunday ['sʌn.deɪ], save [seɪv], see [si:], say [seɪ], second ['sek.ənd], seem [si:m], miss [mɪs], moss [mɒs], seal [si:l], second ['sek.ənd], mouth [maʊθ], pass [pɑ:s], sink [sɪŋk], sin [sɪn], safety ['seɪf.ti], soft [sɒft], advice [əd'vaɪs], piece [pi:s], nice [naɪs], force [fɔ:s], cats [kæts], takes [teɪks], -ness [-nəs], less [les], across [ə'krɒs].

Now try going from [s] to [θ]; this time gently slide the tongue forward towards the teeth until the noisy [s] is replaced by the quiet [θ]. Do this several times and be sure that both sounds are heard. Then practise these phrases:

Both sides – bəʊθ saɪdz

it's thick – ɪts θɪk

Wise thoughts – waɪz θɔːts

let's think – lets θɪŋk

A nice thing – eɪ naɪs θɪŋ

pass through – pɑːs θruː

Jack's thin – dʒæks θɪn

He's thirty – hiːz 'θɜːti

Yes, thanks – jes θæŋks

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