

Pronunciation Lesson 1

In this lesson, you will learn the following new sounds:

Initials	b, p, d, t, g, k, f, s
Finals	aa, e, i, o, u
Tones	Tone 1 (high level), Tone 2 (mid rising)

1 ~ How to Learn a Sound

Follow these two steps to learn each sound:

Step 1

Listen to the sound.

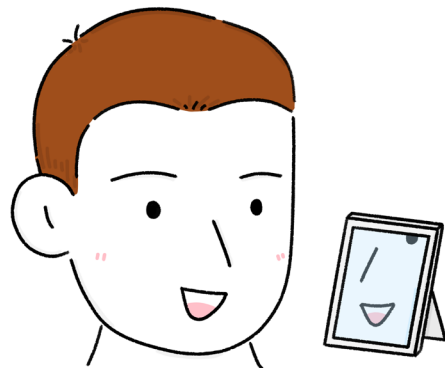
Don't rush to say the sound aloud in this step. Just listen carefully and pay attention to how the sound actually sounds like.



Step 2

Practice saying the sound aloud.

You will see pictures which show the tongue position and lip shape for the sound. Move your tongue and lips accordingly. Use a mirror to check your mouth shape if needed.





2 ~ The Final aa

The final aa is formed by the vowel aa alone. Note that although the final aa is written down as two a's, it is one single sound.

 **Step 1**  01 Listen to the final aa.

aa - aa - aa - aa - aa

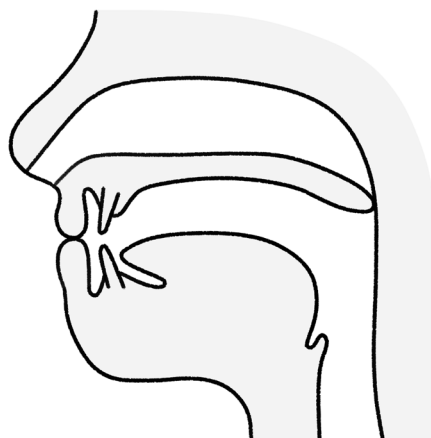
 **Step 2**  02 Listen and repeat. Pay attention to your mouth shape. Use a mirror to check it if needed.

aa - aa - aa - aa - aa

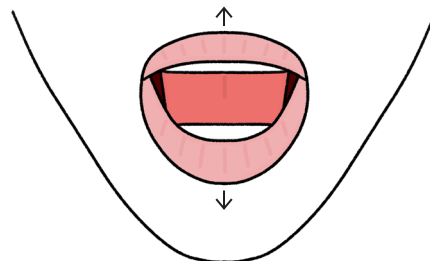
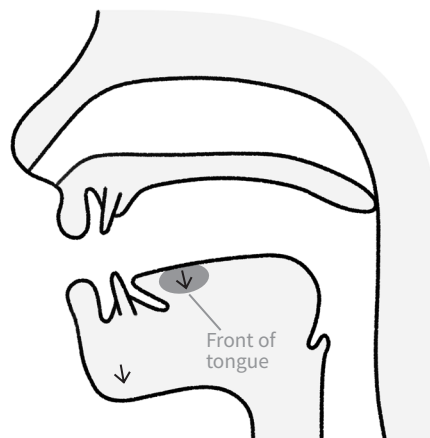
Tongue Position: Open your mouth widely by lowering your lower jaw. Lower the front of your tongue.

Lip Shape: Relax your lips. Avoid rounding or spreading them.

Rest Position



Final aa



💡 TIPS!


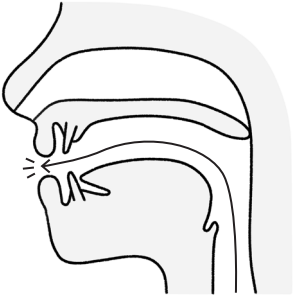
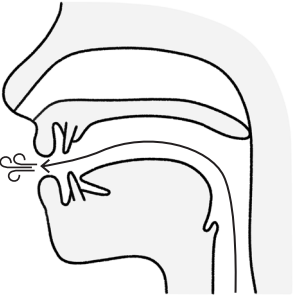
Cantonese Sound	IPA	Similar English Sound
Final aa	[a:]	<i>a</i> as in <i>spa</i>


3 ~ Initial Pairs


Cantonese has the following five initial pairs.

b p	d t	g k	z c	gw kw
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Each initial pair consists of two initials which are produced with exactly the same parts of our mouth. The two initials only differ in whether it is unaspirated or aspirated.

Unaspirated	Aspirated 
 <p>When we say an unaspirated initial, only a small amount of air is emitted from our mouth.</p>	 <p>When we say an aspirated initial, a large amount of air is emitted from our mouth. The air creates a noticeable sound of breathing out.</p>

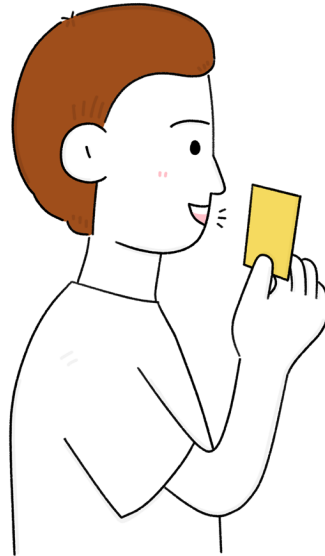
 **03** Listen to the initial pairs. In each pair, the first initial is unaspirated, and the second initial is aspirated.

Unaspirated	Aspirated 
b	p
d	t
g	k
z	c
gw	kw

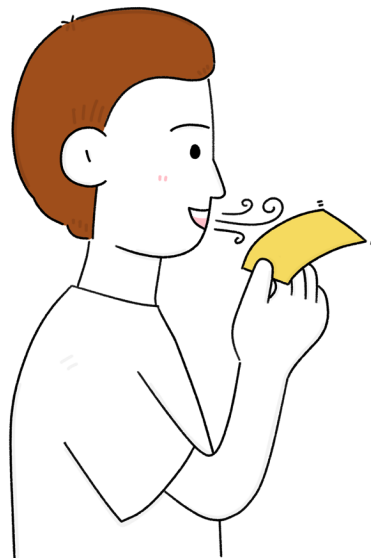
💡 TIPS!

You can check whether you say an unaspirated or aspirated initial correctly using the following trick. Place a small piece of paper closely in front of your mouth and then say the initial.

When an unaspirated initial is produced, the air emitted can barely move the paper.



When an aspirated initial is produced, the air emitted should be strong enough to move the paper.



4 ~ The Initial Pair b and p

Cantonese Sound	Aspiration
Initial b	Unaspirated
Initial p	Aspirated ㄆ

The Initial b



Step 1

04 Listen to the initial b.

b - b - b - b - b



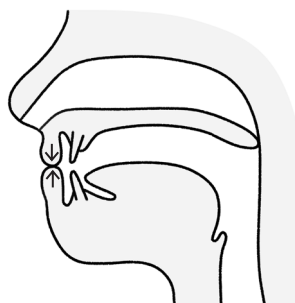
Step 2

05 Listen and repeat.

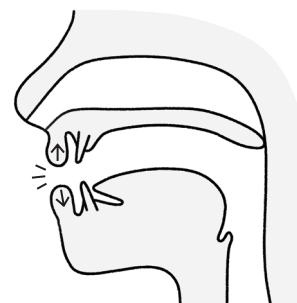
b - b - b - b - b



Open your mouth a little.



Move your two lips toward each other quickly until your mouth is completely closed.



Immediately open your mouth. Avoid blowing out a large amount of air.

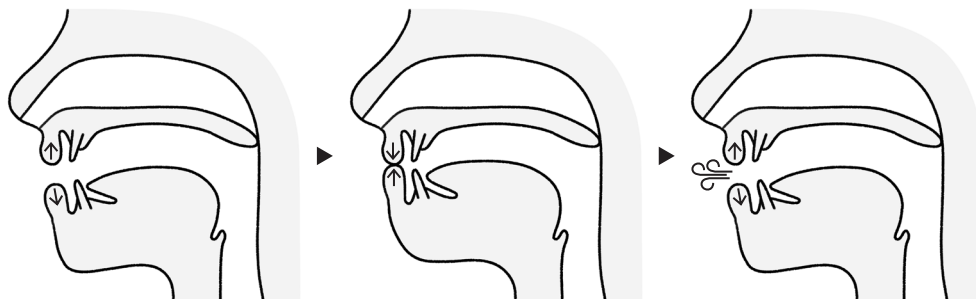
The Initial p

 **Step 1**  06 Listen to the initial p.

p - p - p - p - p

 **Step 2**  07 Listen and repeat.



p - p - p - p - p



Open your mouth a little.

Move your two lips toward each other quickly until your mouth is completely closed.

Immediately open your mouth. Blow out a large amount of air to create a noticeable sound of breathing out.

 **Practice**  08 Practice saying the initials b and p with the final aa. Listen and repeat. Ignore the tone for now.

1. b - aa - baa1 - baa1 - baa1
2. p - aa - paa1 - paa1 - paa1
3. baa1 paa1 - baa1 paa1 - baa1 paa1

 **TIPS!**

Cantonese Sound	IPA	Similar English sound
Initial b	[p]	<i>b</i> as in <i><u>b</u>ig</i>
Initial p	[p ^h]	<i>p</i> as in <i><u>p</u>ig</i>

5 ~ The Initial Pair d and t

Cantonese Sound	Aspiration
Initial d	Unaspirated
Initial t	Aspirated ㄨㄛ

The Initial d



Step 1

09 Listen to the initial d.

d - d - d - d - d



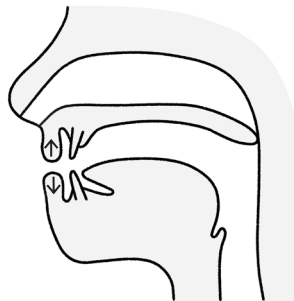
Step 2

10 Listen and repeat.

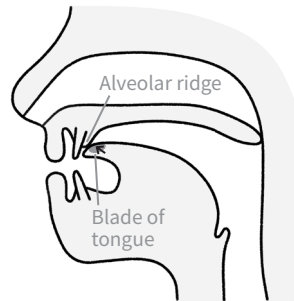
d - d - d - d - d

Blade of tongue
The flat part just behind your tongue tip

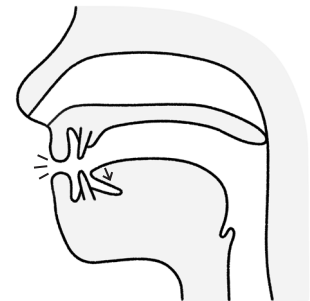
Alveolar ridge
The small ridge just behind your upper front teeth



Open your mouth a little.



Raise the blade of your tongue quickly to your alveolar ridge until they are in contact.




Immediately lower the blade of your tongue. Avoid blowing out a large amount of air.

The Initial t




Step 1

 11 Listen to the initial t.

t - t - t - t - t



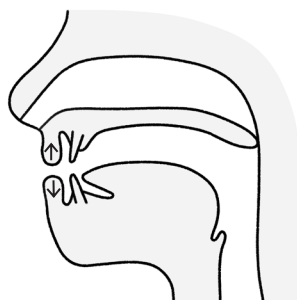
Step 2

 12 Listen and repeat.

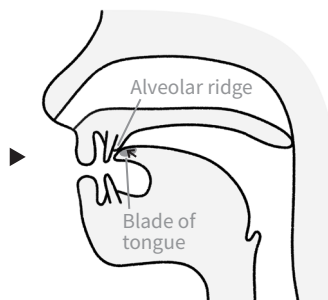
t - t - t - t - t

Blade of tongue
The flat part just behind your tongue tip

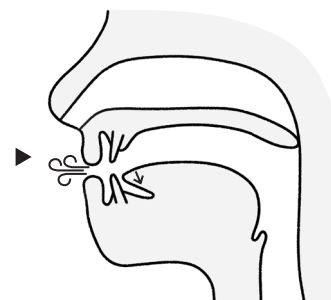
Alveolar ridge
The small ridge just behind your upper front teeth



Open your mouth a little.



Raise the blade of your tongue quickly to your alveolar ridge until they are in contact.



Immediately lower the blade of your tongue. Blow out a large amount of air to create a noticeable sound of breathing out.



Practice

 13 Practice saying the initials d and t with the final aa. Listen and repeat.

1. d - aa - daa1 - daa1 - daa1
2. t - aa - taa1 - taa1 - taa1
3. daa1 taa1 - daa1 taa1 - daa1 taa1

TIPS!

Cantonese Sound	IPA	Similar English sound
Initial d	[t]	d as in <u>do</u>
Initial t	[t ^h]	t as in <u>to</u>

6 ~ The Initial Pair g and k

Cantonese Sound	Aspiration
Initial g	Unaspirated
Initial k	Aspirated ㄏ

The Initial g

 **Step 1**  14 Listen to the initial g.

g - g - g - g - g

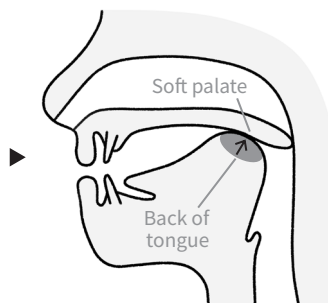
 **Step 2**  15 Listen and repeat.

g - g - g - g - g

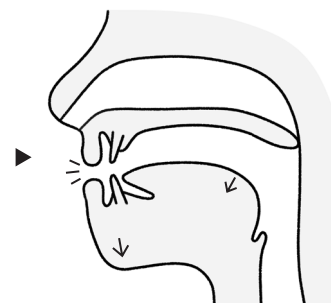
Soft palate
The back of the roof
of your mouth



Open your mouth a little.



Raise the back of your tongue to your soft palate quickly. You will feel your whole tongue move backward.



Immediately lower the back of your tongue by lowering your lower jaw a little. Avoid blowing out a large amount of air.

The Initial k

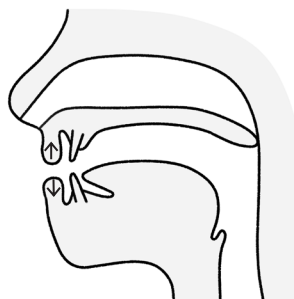
 **Step 1**  16 Listen to the initial k.

k - k - k - k - k

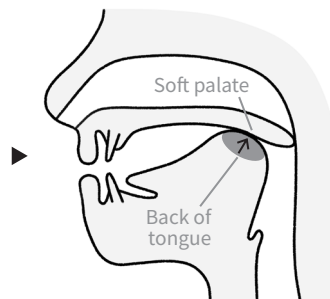
 **Step 2**  17 Listen and repeat.

k - k - k - k - k

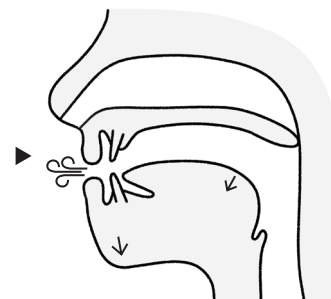
Soft palate
The back of the roof
of your mouth



Open your mouth a little.



Raise the back of your tongue to your soft palate quickly. You will feel your whole tongue move backward.



Immediately lower the back of your tongue by lowering your lower jaw a little. Blow out a large amount of air to create a noticeable sound of breathing out.

 **Practice**  18 Practice saying the initials g and k with the final aa. Listen and repeat.

1. g - aa - gaa1 - gaa1 - gaa1
2. k - aa - kaa1 - kaa1 - kaa1
3. gaa1 kaa1 - gaa1 kaa1 - gaa1 kaa1



 **TIPS!**

Cantonese Sound	IPA	Similar English sound
Initial g	[k]	<i>g</i> as in <i>get</i>
Initial k	[kʰ]	<i>k</i> as in <i>kettle</i>

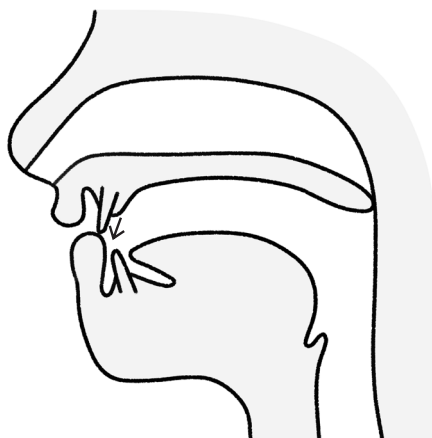
7 ~ The Initial f

 **Step 1**  19 Listen to the initial f.



f – f – f – f – f

 **Step 2**  20 Listen and repeat.

f – f – f – f – f



Put your upper front teeth on your lower lip. Blow out air between your teeth and your lip.

 **Practice**  21 Practice saying the initial f with the final aa. Listen and repeat.

f – aa – faa1 – faa1 – faa1

 TIPS!

Cantonese Sound	IPA	Similar English Sound
Initial f	[f]	f as in <i>fish</i>

Cantonese doesn't have the initial v.

8 ~ The Initial s



Step 1

🔊 22 Listen to the initial s.

s - s - s - s - s



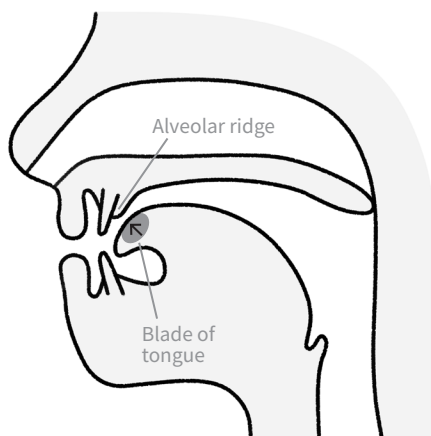
Step 2

🔊 23 Listen and repeat.

s - s - s - s - s

Blade of tongue
The flat part just behind your tongue tip

Alveolar ridge
The small ridge just behind your upper front teeth



Put the blade of your tongue below your alveolar ridge. Leave a narrow gap between them. Blow out air through the narrow gap between the blade of your tongue and your alveolar ridge. You will create a hissing noise.



Practice

🔊 24 Practice saying the initial s with the final aa. Listen and repeat.

s - aa - saa1 - saa1 - saa1

💡 TIPS!

Cantonese Sound	IPA	Similar English Sound
Initial s	[s]	s as in <u>sea</u>

Cantonese doesn't have the initial z.

9 ~ The Final e

The final e is formed by the vowel e alone.



Step 1

🔊 25 Listen to the final e.

e - e - e - e - e



Step 2

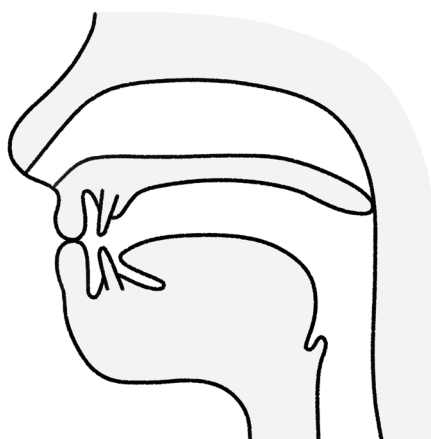
🔊 26 Listen and repeat. Pay attention to your mouth shape. Use a mirror to check it if needed.

e - e - e - e - e

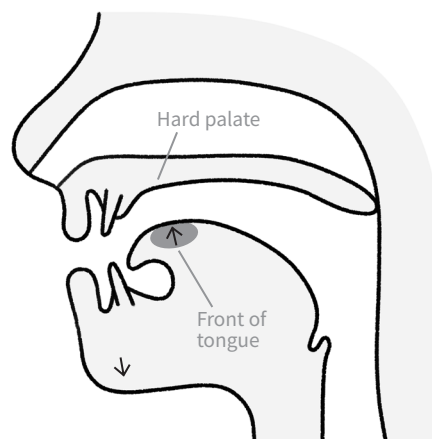
Tongue Position: Open your mouth a little by lowering your lower jaw a little.
Raise the front of your tongue toward your hard palate a little.

Lip Shape: Spread your lips a little.

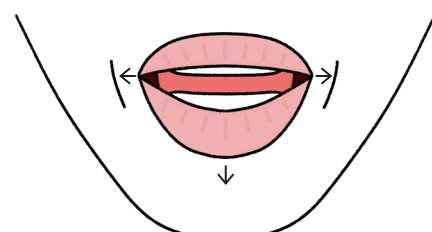
Rest Position



Final e



Hard palate
The part of your upper jaw just behind your alveolar ridge





Practice 27 Practice saying the syllables with the final e. Listen and repeat.

1. b – e – be1 – be1 – be1
2. p – e – pe1 – pe1 – pe1
3. d – e – de1 – de1 – de1
4. f – e – fe1 – fe1 – fe1
5. s – e – se1 – se1 – se1

 TIPS!



Cantonese Sound	IPA	Similar English Sound
Final e	[ɛ:]	e as in <i>get</i>

10 ~ The Final i

The final i is formed by the vowel i alone.

 **Step 1**  28 Listen to the final i.

i - i - i - i - i

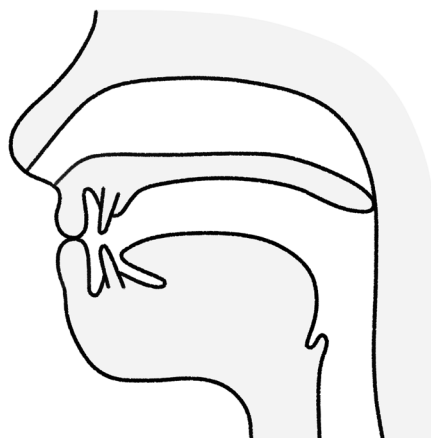
 **Step 2**  29 Listen and repeat. Pay attention to your mouth shape. Use a mirror to check it if needed.

i - i - i - i - i

Tongue Position: Raise the front of your tongue toward your hard palate until they are almost in contact. You will feel the left and right sides of your tongue touch your upper teeth.

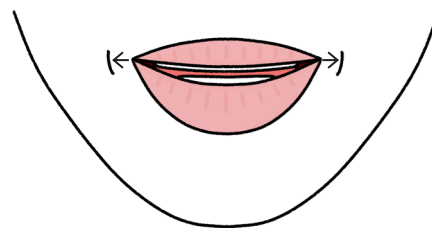
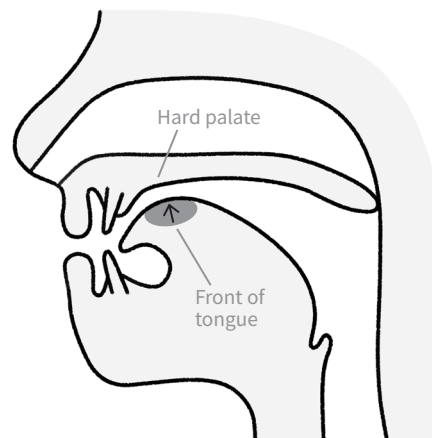
Lip Shape: Spread your lips.

Rest Position



Hard palate
The part of your upper jaw just behind your alveolar ridge

Final i





Practice  30 Practice saying the syllables with the final i. Listen and repeat.

1. d – i – di1 – di1 – di1
2. s – i – si1 – si1 – si1

 TIPS!



Cantonese Sound	IPA	Similar English Sound
Final i	[i:]	<i>i</i> as in <i>ski</i>

11 ~ The Final o

The final o is formed by the vowel o alone.

 **Step 1**  31 Listen to the final o.

o - o - o - o - o

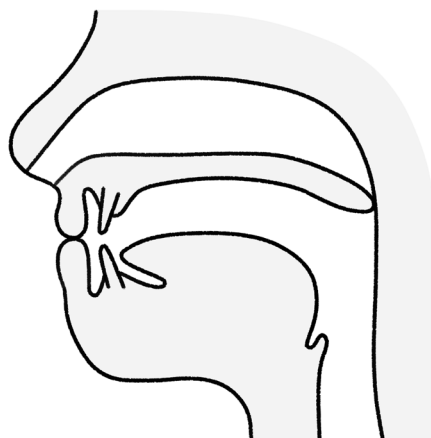
 **Step 2**  32 Listen and repeat. Pay attention to your mouth shape. Use a mirror to check it if needed.

o - o - o - o - o

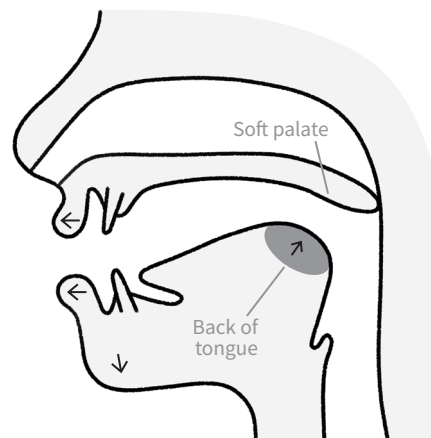
Tongue Position: Open your mouth a little by lowering your lower jaw a little.
Raise the back of your tongue toward your soft palate a little.
You will feel your whole tongue move backward a little.

Lip Shape: Round your lips a little. Your lips will move forward a little.

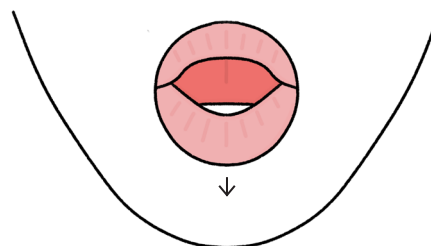
Rest Position



Final o



Soft palate
The back of the roof
of your mouth





Practice



33

Practice saying the syllables with the final o. Listen and repeat.


1. b - o - bo1 - bo1 - bo1
2. p - o - po1 - po1 - po1
3. t - o - to1 - to1 - to1
4. g - o - go1 - go1 - go1
5. s - o - so1 - so1 - so1

TIPS!



Cantonese Sound	IPA	Similar English Sound
Final o	[ɔ:]	o as in <i>off</i>

12 ~ The Final u

The final u is formed by the vowel u alone.

 **Step 1**  34 Listen to the final u.

u - u - u - u - u

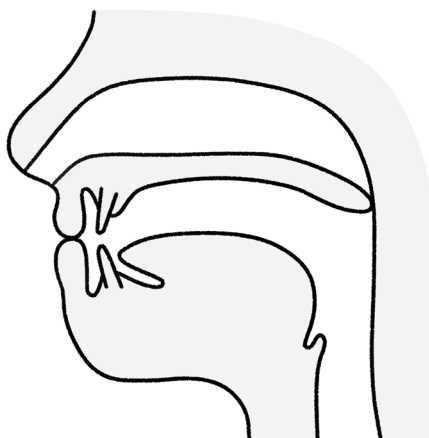
 **Step 2**  35 Listen and repeat. Pay attention to your mouth shape. Use a mirror to check it if needed.

u - u - u - u - u

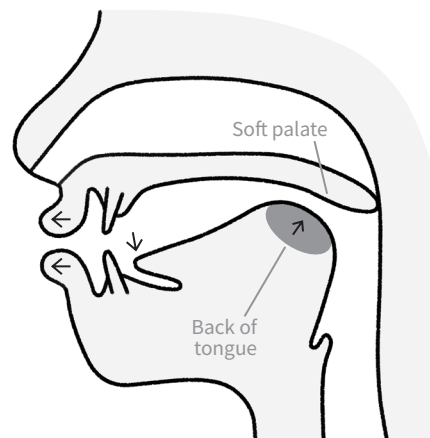
Tongue Position: Lower the tip of your tongue and raise the back of your tongue toward your soft palate. You will feel your whole tongue move backward.

Lip Shape: Round your lips tightly. Your lips will move forward.

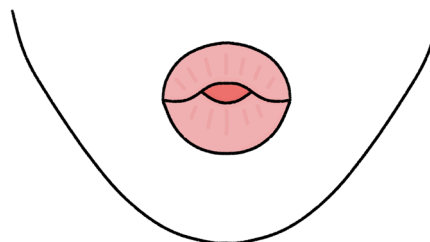
Rest Position



Final u



Soft palate
The back of the roof
of your mouth





Practice 36 Practice saying the syllables with the final u. Listen and repeat.

1. g – u – gu1 – gu1 – gu1
2. k – u – ku1 – ku1 – ku1
3. f – u – fu1 – fu1 – fu1


 TIPS!

Cantonese Sound	IPA	Similar English Sound
Final u	[u:]	<i>u</i> as in <i>Lucy</i>

13 ~ Tones

Tone and Word Meaning

Cantonese is a tone language. Tone here refers to the pitch applied to a syllable. Tone can change word meaning. That is, if we change the tone of a syllable, we change the word meaning of that syllable. For example, if we say the syllable si with a high tone, it means ‘poem’. If we say the same syllable si with a low tone instead, it means ‘matter’.

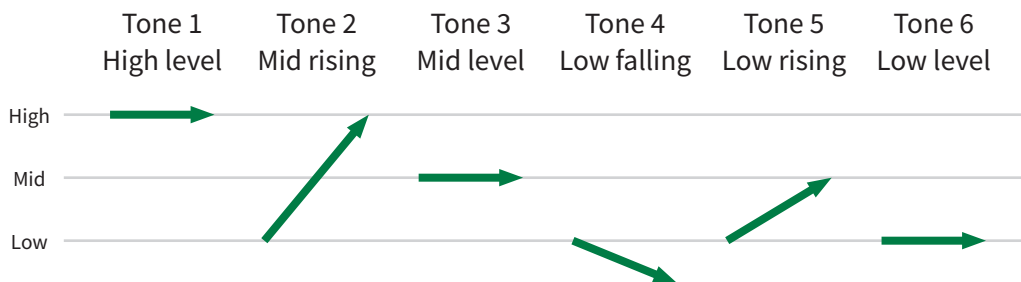
 37 Listen to the example of the syllable si in high and low tones.

Cantonese Tones

We can represent tones visually like the staff in music. The top, middle and bottom gray lines below represent the high, middle and low pitches respectively.

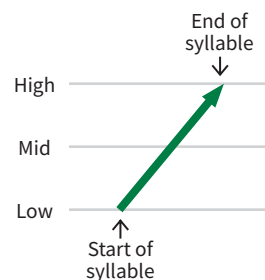


Cantonese has six tones. Each tone is represented visually below.



 38 Listen to the tones applied to the syllable si as an example.

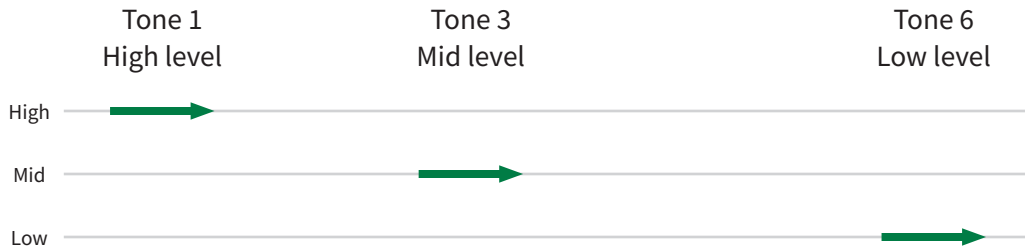
Notice that each green line shows the pitch of a tone from the start to the end of a syllable. For example, Tone 2 goes up from the low pitch at the start of the syllable to the high pitch at the end of the syllable.



Categories of Tones

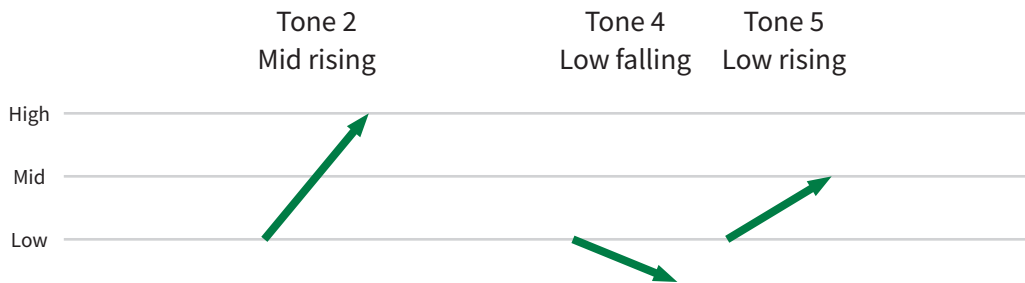
We can divide the tones into two categories: level tones and contour tones.

For level tones, the pitch remains steady throughout the whole syllable. It doesn't rise or fall.



39 Listen to the level tones applied to the syllable si.

For contour tones, the pitch rises or falls in the syllable.



40 Listen to the contour tones applied to the syllable si.

Remembering Tones

Throughout this pronunciation guide, you will be trained to remember the tones using the set of syllables below. It consists of the syllable si in all the six tones, from Tone 1 to Tone 6. It will be a useful tool that you can use to recall different tones.

si1 – si2 – si3 – si4 – si5 – si6

41 Listen to the set of syllables.

14 ~ Tone 1 (High Level)

Tone 1 is the high level tone. The pitch remains at the high pitch throughout the whole syllable.

Tone Number	Tone 1
Tone Name	High level
Diagram	High —————→ Mid ————— Low —————



Step 1

42 Listen to the syllable si in Tone 1. Pay attention to the pitch.

si1 – si1 – si1 – si1 – si1



Step 2

43 Practice saying Tone 1 with the syllable si. Listen and repeat.

si1 – si1 – si1 – si1 – si1

TIPS!

The pitch of si1 is similar to the pitch of the syllable *sea* in the English word seafood.

44 Listen.

seafood sea si1 – seafood sea si1 – seafood sea si1




Practice

45 Practice saying Tone 1 with other syllables. Listen and repeat.

1. paa1 – paa1 – paa1
2. be1 – be1 – be1
3. di1 – di1 – di1
4. to1 – to1 – to1
5. ku1 – ku1 – ku1

15 ~ Tone 2 (Mid Rising)

Tone 2 is the mid rising tone. The pitch goes up from the low pitch to the high pitch in the syllable.

Tone Number	Tone 2
Tone Name	Mid rising
Diagram	



Step 1

 46 Listen to the syllable si2 in Tone 2. Pay attention to the pitch.

si2 – si2 – si2 – si2 – si2



Step 2

 47 Practice saying Tone 2 with the syllable si. Listen and repeat.

si2 – si2 – si2 – si2 – si2

TIPS!


The pitch of si2 is similar to the pitch of the word *sea* in a question like *Do they live in the sea?*

 48 Listen.

Do they live in the sea? sea? si2 – Do they live in the sea? sea? si2 –
Do they live in the sea? sea? si2





Practice

 49 Practice saying Tone 2 with other syllables. Listen and repeat.

1. daa2 – daa2 – daa2
2. ge2 – ge2 – ge2
3. si2 – si2 – si2
4. po2 – po2 – po2
5. fu2 – fu2 – fu2


16 ~ Tone 1 to Tone 2

We have learned the first two tones. Let's revise them together.

Tone Number	Tone 1	Tone 2
Tone Name	High level	Mid rising
Diagram		



Step 1

 50 Listen to the syllable si in Tone 1 and Tone 2 together. Pay attention to the pitch. The pitch of Tone 1 remains steady, whereas Tone 2 has a noticeable rise in the pitch.

si1 si2 – si1 si2 – si1 si2 – si1 si2 – si1 si2




Step 2

 51 Practice saying the syllable si in Tone 1 and Tone 2. Listen and repeat.

si1 si2 – si1 si2 – si1 si2 – si1 si2 – si1 si2



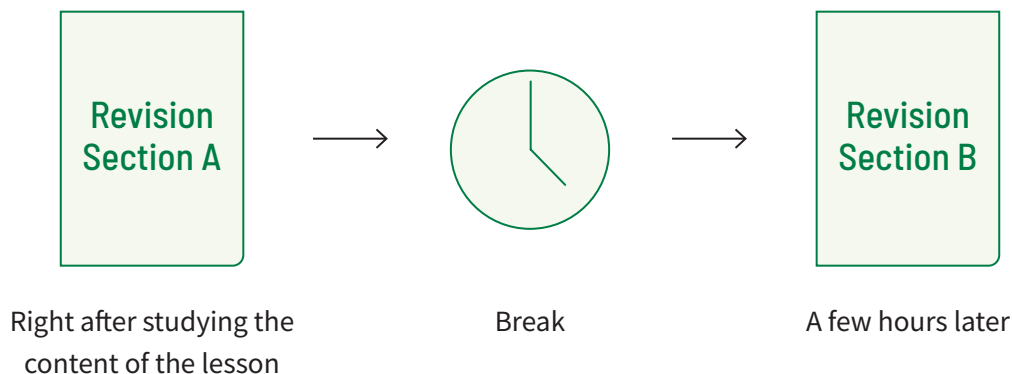
Practice


 52 Practice saying Tone 1 and Tone 2 with other syllables. Listen and repeat.

1. paa1 paa2 – paa1 paa2 – paa1 paa2
2. de1 de2 – de1 de2 – de1 de2
3. go1 go2 – go1 go2 – go1 go2
4. fu1 fu2 – fu1 fu2 – fu1 fu2

17 ~ How to Complete the Revision Sections


1. Each pronunciation lesson ends with two revision sections. Complete each revision section at the suggested time below.



 **TIPS!** Don't complete both revision sections at once. Take a break between two revision sections. It can help you remember the content better.

2. In some questions, you will be asked to recall something. Try to recall it yourself first. Don't look for answers from the book right away.

In some other questions, you will be asked to say some syllables or words aloud and then compare your pronunciation to the recording. Make sure that you recall and say the syllables or words yourself *before* listening to the recording. Pause the recording to get enough time to recall if needed.

 **TIPS!** Recalling the content actively can help you remember the content better.

3. The answers to some questions are shown in their subsequent questions. Cover the subsequent questions to avoid seeing the answers accidentally.



18 ~ Revision Section A



① Recall the initials you have learned in this lesson. Write them below.

Initials	b	p	d	t	g	k	f	s
----------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

② Recall the finals you have learned in this lesson. Write them below.

Finals	aa	e	i	o	u
--------	----	---	---	---	---

③ Recall the tones you have learned in this lesson. Write the tone numbers and tone names and draw the tones.

Tone Number	Tone 1	Tone 2
Tone Name	High level	Mid rising
Diagram		
	High	
	Mid	
	Low	


Instructions for Questions ④ to ⑥

Follow the steps below to complete each question.

Step 1: Say the sound, syllable or word aloud yourself.

Step 2: Listen to the recording and compare your pronunciation to the recording.


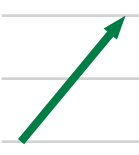
Step 3: Follow the recording and say the sound, syllable or word again.


④  53 Say the sounds below.

Initials	1. b	2. p	3. d	4. t	5. g	6. k	7. f	8. s
----------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------


Finals	1. aa	2. e	3. i	4. o	5. u
--------	-------	------	------	------	------

⑤  54 Say the syllable si with the tones below.

Tone Number	Tone 1	Tone 2
Tone Name	High level	Mid rising
Diagram		

⑥  55 Say the syllables below.

- | | | | |
|--------|---------|----------|---------|
| 1. pe1 | 2. si2 | 3. fu2 | 4. to1 |
| 5. di1 | 6. bo1 | 7. de2 | 8. kaa1 |
| 9. fo2 | 10. ke2 | 11. saa1 | 12. gu2 |

 56 If you find this question challenging, practice with the additional recording. In the additional recording, you will hear:

Initial	Final	Syllable	Syllable in Tones	Answer
p	e	pe	pe1	pe1
s	i	si	si1 si2	si2

What we are trying to do here is to say the syllable from Tone 1 to Tone 6 until we arrive at the tone we need. It is a useful skill that you can use to find out how a syllable sounds like in a particular tone.



19 ~ Revision Section B



① Recall the initials you have learned in this lesson. Write them below.

Initials	b	p	d	t	g	k	f	s
----------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

② Recall the finals you have learned in this lesson. Write them below.

Finals	aa	e	i	o	u
--------	----	---	---	---	---

③ Recall the tones you have learned in this lesson. Write the tone numbers and tone names and draw the tones.

Tone Number	Tone 1	Tone 2
Tone Name	High level	Mid rising
Diagram		
	High	
	Mid	
	Low	


Instructions for Questions ④ to ⑦

Follow the steps below to complete each question.

Step 1: Say the sound, syllable or word aloud yourself.

Step 2: Listen to the recording and compare your pronunciation to the recording.



Step 3: Follow the recording and say the sound, syllable or word again.

④  57 Say the sounds below.

Initials	1. b	2. p	3. d	4. t	5. g	6. k	7. f	8. s
----------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------

Finals	1. aa	2. e	3. i	4. o	5. u
--------	-------	------	------	------	------

⑤ 🔊 58 Say the syllable si with the tones below.

Tone Number	Tone 1	Tone 2
Tone Name	High level	Mid rising
Diagram		

⑥ 🔊 59 Say the syllables below.

- | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. gaa2 | 2. be1 | 3. si1 | 4. fo1 |
| 5. paa2 | 6. se2 | 7. ku1 | 8. go2 |
| 9. taa1 | 10. fu1 | 11. do1 | 12. ge2 |

🔊 60 If you find this question challenging, practice with the additional recording. In the additional recording, you will hear:

Initial	Final	Syllable	Syllable in Tones	Answer
g	- aa	- gaa	- gaa1 gaa2	- gaa2
b	- e	- be	- be1	- be1

⑦ 🔊 61 Say the words below.

1. 花 faa1 *flower*
2. 波 bo1 *ball*
3. 屎 si2 *poo*
4. 菇 gu1 *mushroom*
5. 梳 so1 *comb*
6. 巴士 baa1 si2 *bus*

- ⑧ In a Cantonese song, the lines of the lyrics usually rhyme with each other. The last syllables of the lines usually have the same final, either for the whole song or the same verse.

Listen to the following songs. In each song, the last syllable in each line of the lyrics has the same final. What is the final used in each song?



Song	Singer	Composer(s)	Lyricist	Final
1. 囍帖街 hei2 tip2 gaa1	謝安琪 ze6 on1 kei4	Eric Kwok	黃偉文 wong4 wai5 man4	Final aa
2. 你好嗎 lei5 hou2 maa1	方皓玟 fong1 hou6 man4	徐繼宗 ceoi4 gai3 zung1	林夕 lam4 zik6	Final o
3. 靜靜 zing6 zing6	Serrini	Serrini, Ka Shun	Serrini	Final i

Examples for the last words in the lines of the lyrics:

Song 1: 吧 baa6, 家 gaa1, 下 haa6

Song 2: 過 go3, 臥 ngo6, 磨 mo4

Note that there is an exception in the last line of the second last verse (3:53). The line ends with the word 光 gwong1. The final of the word is ong instead of o.

Song 3: 時 si4, 事 si6, 遲 ci4