



FREE RESOURCE · PRONUNCIATION

The ng sound /ŋ/

The ng sound /ŋ/ is a single nasal consonant, as at the end of sing, long and thing. The back of your tongue touches the soft palate and the air goes through your nose. You do not say a separate g at the end of these words, but a few words in the middle, such as finger, do have /ŋg/.

What to know

One sound, not two

The letters ng usually stand for one consonant sound: /ŋ/. It is the last sound in sing, song, thing, long and morning. There is no /g/ sound after it. If you say 'sing-g' with a clear g, the word sounds foreign to a British listener, and the extra sound makes your speech less smooth.

- *sing · thing*
- *long · morning*
- *think · bank*

How to make /ŋ/

Say the sound at the back of the mouth. The back of the tongue lifts and touches the soft palate, at the same place as for /k/ and /g/. The air does not come out of the mouth. It goes through your nose, and your voice is on.

- Tongue tip: relaxed, not touching the ridge behind the top teeth.
- Back of the tongue: raised, touching the soft palate.
- Air: through the nose.
- Voice: on.

The rule for adding a g sound

In the middle of a word, the rule depends on the word. In most words that are made from a base word plus an ending, you say only /ŋ/. In some other words, you say /ŋ/ and then /g/. Learn the groups.

- Only /ŋ/ at the end of a word: sing, thing, long, morning, king.
- Only /ŋ/ before an ending like -er, -ing, -ed: singer, singing, hanger, banging.
- /ŋg/ in the middle of a word that is not made with an ending: finger, angry, hungry, English, single, anger.
- /ŋg/ in the comparative and superlative forms of long, strong and young: longer, stronger, youngest.

Common mistakes

The first mistake is saying /n/ instead of /ŋ/. Listeners hear 'sin' for sing, 'thin' for thing and 'runnin' for running. This matters most in the -ing ending, which you will use very often: working, studying, living, going.

How to check yourself

Use three quick tests. First, the nose test: hold your nose while you say sing. The final sound should stop or feel blocked, because the air was going through your nose. If it carries on, the air is leaving through your mouth, so you may be adding a g. Second, the mirror test: for /ŋ/ your lips do not move at the end of the word, and your tongue tip does not lift. Third, the recording test: record the phrase 'I'm working and studying' and listen for the endings. Every -ing should end on the same soft nasal sound, with no g and no n.

How to make the sound

1. Lift the back of your tongue so it touches the soft palate, at the back of your mouth.
2. Let the air go through your nose with your voice on, and hold the sound for one count.
3. Release the tongue without a /g/: the word ends on the nasal sound alone.
4. For finger or angry, release into a clear /g/ after the nasal sound.

Exercises

1. In which word do you say /ŋ/ and then a clear /g/?
 - a. hanging
 - b. finger
 - c. singer
2. Where does the back of the tongue touch to make /ŋ/?
 - a. the ridge behind the top teeth
 - b. the soft palate
 - c. the lower lip
3. The letters ng are said /ŋ/ only, with no /g/, in _____.
 - a. singer
 - b. angry
 - c. finger
4. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) The word (2) bringing (3) ends with (4) an /n/ sound.
5. Write the word that is the opposite of *short* and ends with /ŋ/.
6. How many separate consonant sounds are there at the end of *sing*?
 - a. One: /ŋ/
 - b. Two: /n/ and /g/
 - c. Two: /ŋ/ and /g/
7. In the word *think*, which sound does the letter n have?
 - a. /n/
 - b. /ŋ/
 - c. /m/

Listening items (3) are online only and are not included in this list.

Practise online, free: hear every example and check your answers at www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/ng-sound/practice/

IELTS tip. In the Speaking test, the -ing ending appears in almost every answer: living, working, studying, watching, going. If it becomes /n/ every time, your speech can sound less clear. Pick a Part 2 answer, underline each -ing word and read it aloud with the back of the tongue up to check the nasal sound.

FOR TEACHERS · PRONUNCIATION

The ng sound /ŋ/

AIM	Learners will produce /ŋ/ at the end of words and in -ing endings without /n/ or an added /g/, and will know the main cases where /ŋg/ is used.
TIME	20 minutes
LEVEL	B1 to B2 (IELTS 5 to 6.5)
MATERIALS	This worksheet, one copy per learner; the free online practice for the audio

Warm-up

Ask learners to hum with their mouth closed and feel where the sound comes from. Then ask them to say sing and hold the final sound.

Lesson steps

1. Show the position of the tongue with a diagram. Contrast /n/, /ŋ/ and /g/ and have learners touch the throat and the nose.
2. Minimal pairs: sin/sing, thin/thing, ban/bang. Learners listen, point and then say them.
3. Sort words into /ŋ/ only and /ŋg/: singer, finger, hanger, angry, strong, stronger, English, long, longer.
4. Sentence practice with -ing endings in a Part 1 style answer, with a partner checking each ending.

Extension

Mark the -ing words in a short article and read it aloud, listening for the nasal sound each time.

Answer key

1. b) finger. Finger is /'fɪŋgə/ with /ŋ/ and /g/. Singer and hanging are made from a base word plus an ending, so they have /ŋ/ only.
2. b) the soft palate. /ŋ/ is made at the back of the mouth, with the back of the tongue touching the soft palate.
3. a) singer. Singer is sing + er, so there is no /g/. Finger and angry have /ŋg/.
4. Part 4: *an /n/ sound.* → **an /ŋ/ sound.** The ending -ing is said with /ŋ/ at the end. Saying /n/ is a common mistake, and adding /g/ is another.
5. long. Long is /lɒŋ/ and ends in the single nasal /ŋ/.
6. a) One: /ŋ/. The letters n and g together stand for one sound, /ŋ/. The g is not pronounced separately.
7. b) /ŋ/. Before k the letter n is said /ŋ/, because the tongue is already at the back of the mouth for the k.

Questions learners often ask

Do I say the g in sing? No. In sing, the letters ng stand for one sound, /ŋ/. A separate g sound at the end is a common learner mistake.

Why is there a g in finger but not in singer? Singer is made from sing plus the ending -er, so it keeps the same /ŋ/. Finger is not made that way, and the word has /ŋ/ followed by /g/.

How is the n in think pronounced? It is pronounced /ŋ/, because the tongue is ready for the k at the back of the mouth. The word has /ŋ/ and then /k/.

Does it matter if I say running with n instead of ng? In casual English, some speakers do say 'runnin', but in IELTS a clear /ŋ/ is safer because it is the standard form and is clearer to the listener.

Sources

- Roach, P. (2009). English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course (4th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Cruttenden, A. (2014). Gimson's Pronunciation of English (8th ed.). Routledge.

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