

Lesson 6

Predicting the Sound of TH

Timing: This lesson is best used after treating the /θ/ and /ð/ articulatory targets.

English spelling uses the same two letters, **th**, for two different sounds, the voiceless /θ/ and the voiced /ð/. The problem is to know when **th** refers to /θ/ and when it refers to /ð/. Fortunately, the distinction is almost perfectly predictable.

The easiest way to learn to recognize the consonant value of **th** is to focus on the con-cor patterns for the voiced /ð/; all other instances of **th** signal voiceless /θ/. The /ð/ predictions are exclusively for Anglo-Saxon words. The "elsewhere" rule for /θ/ encompasses the /θ/ words of Anglo-Saxon origin and all Greek-origin borrowing. There are three con-cor patterns for /ð/ and one for /θ/. These patterns make correct predictions for 96% of all **th** words if used in the order presented. The few exceptions to these patterns should be learned carefully.

A. TH in Function Words: $thV^f = /ð/$

Function words are words other than main nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. So, function words are articles, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions. In most **th** function words, the **th** is at the beginning.

The **th** in function words is pronounced as /ð/ when **th** is followed by a vowel letter. We use a raised *f* to denote function word in the con-cor pattern. All other instances of **th** at the beginning of words are pronounced as /θ/ and are represented by the pattern $th_{EW} = /θ/$, where **ew** means 'elsewhere'. Study these examples.

$thV^f = /ð/$

<i>the</i>	<i>this</i>	<i>therefore</i>
<i>they</i>	<i>than</i>	<i>although</i>

$th_{EW} = /θ/$

<i>thumb</i>	<i>thimble</i>	<i>three</i>
<i>theft</i>	<i>thatch</i>	<i>threat</i>



The **th** of *-thing* in these compound function words is /θ/:
anything everything nothing something
 These proper names are pronounced with -t-, not with /θ/:
Esther Mathilda Thai(land) Thames Thomas

- a. Write out the con-cor pattern for the **th** in each word.
 b. Read each item aloud.

E.g. three topics	<u>th_{EW}</u> = _____	/ θ /	10. one thief	_____	/ /
E.g. these topics	<u>th^V</u> = _____	/ ð /	11. their jewels	_____	/ /
1. thermal socks	_____	/ /	12. nothing else	_____	/ /
2. thereupon	_____	/ /	13. thatched roof	_____	/ /
3. a thorough ad	_____	/ /	14. that roof	_____	/ /
4. something nice	_____	/ /	15. those rats!	_____	/ /
5. thoughtfully	_____	/ /	16. throne room	_____	/ /
6. thus he spoke	_____	/ /	17. know thyself	_____	/ /
7. Thursday noon	_____	/ /	18. thyroid gland	_____	/ /
8. it went thud	_____	/ /	19. these notes	_____	/ /
9. Mr. Thomas	_____	/ /	20. good thesis	_____	/ /

B. TH before ER: **thern** = /ð/

In this section, you will meet a set of clues that you can use to predict /ð/ in the middle of words. To predict /ð/, you must first identify the letters **ther**. Then, you must notice what comes after the letters **ther**. Is it **n**? Is it the end of a word? Is it a Basic Weak ending? (Remember that neutral endings are omitted.) Let us look at these possibilities.

/ð/ is the prediction if the letter **n** follows immediately after **ther**. The con-cor pattern is simply **thern** = /ð/. Look at the examples of this pattern below.

Instead of **n**, the **ther** may be followed by the end of the word (#) or by a Basic Weak ending (+B). The prediction is still /ð/. In the con-cor pattern, these two position markers (# and +B) are collapsed into a single marker, a raised dot (·): **ther·** = /ð/. Words that do not fit the **thern** and **ther·** patterns are examples of the elsewhere case, predicting /θ/.

thern = /ð/	ther· = /ð/	th_{EW} = /θ/
northern southerners	brotherly withering	thermal author



These common words are spoken with /θ/, not with /ð/:
panther, ether, Luther
 These words are pronounced with /ð/, not with /θ/:
brethren, fathom, rhythm, rhythmic

- a. Write out the con-cor pattern for the **th** in each word.
For an exception, write X and its pronunciation.
b. Read each item aloud.

E.g. to lengthen	<u>th_{EW}</u> = _____	/ θ /	11. his father's	_____	/ /
E.g. smothered	<u>ther</u> = _____	/ ð /	12. two fathoms	_____	/ /
1. no farther	_____	/ /	13. northern lights	_____	/ /
2. good therapy	_____	/ /	14. Northwest Air	_____	/ /
3. rhythmic	_____	/ /	15. therefore	_____	/ /
4. southern cross	_____	/ /	16. isotherm	_____	/ /
5. thousands	_____	/ /	17. leathern	_____	/ /
6. even though	_____	/ /	18. leathery purse	_____	/ /
7. Lutherans	_____	/ /	19. a lethal dose	_____	/ /
8. blithering	_____	/ /	20. black panthers	_____	/ /
9. athletic skill	_____	/ /	21. than you	_____	/ /
10. King Arthur	_____	/ /	22. thank you	_____	/ /

C. TH before a Basic Weak Ending: V/rth+B = /ð/

A second set of clues will also help you predict /ð/ in the middle of words. These clues are letters before and after the **th**. Before **th**, a vowel letter or **r** (V/r) must appear. In addition, the **th** itself must occur before a Basic Weak ending, such as *-able, -e#, -ed, -en, -(i)er, -(i)est, -ing, -ish_{adj}, -or, -y_{adj}*. As noted, neutral endings are omitted. If the **th** in the middle of a word does not fit the **thern/** or the **V/rth+B** pattern, it will predict /θ/: **th_{EW}** = /θ/. Study the examples below.

Vth+B = /ð/	rth+B = /ð/	th_{EW} = /θ/
bathing soothingly	farthest burthen	breathless teeth



These words require /θ/, not /ð/: *sleuthed/ing, unearthed/ing, berthed/ing, pithy*.
These words are spoken with /ð/, not with /θ/: *to mouth, smooth*

Note: The **th** patterns have been presented in their order of application. Use this order to evaluate words. Ask: Does the word fit the **thV^f** pattern? If not, ask: Does the word fit the **thern** patterns? If not, ask: Does the word fit the +B patterns? If not, it fits the **th_{EW}** = /θ/ pattern.

- a. Write out the con-cor pattern for the **th** in each word.
For an exception, write X and its pronunciation.
b. Read each item aloud.

E.g. some cloth	<u>th_{EW} =</u>	- θ -	19. thermos bottle	_____	- -
E.g. my clothing	<u>Vth+B =</u>	- ð -	20. heathen act	_____	- -
1. a clothier	_____	- -	21. so heathery	_____	- -
2. great worth	_____	- -	22. not healthy	_____	- -
3. very worthy	_____	- -	23. both arms	_____	- -
4. a lathe	_____	- -	24. quit bothering	_____	- -
5. unearthed	_____	- -	25. underneath	_____	- -
6. over there	_____	- -	26. nether region	_____	- -
7. therapist	_____	- -	27. a farthing	_____	- -
8. to tithe	_____	- -	28. then we go	_____	- -
9. absinthe	_____	- -	29. to strengthen	_____	- -
10. a cithern	_____	- -	30. mouthing at us	_____	- -
11. furthest one	_____	- -	31. his mouth	_____	- -
12. it soothed him	_____	- -	32. to mouth	_____	- -
13. a soothsayer	_____	- -	33. motherly care	_____	- -
14. so smooth	_____	- -	34. seething	_____	- -
15. another one	_____	- -	35. my broth	_____	- -
16. an author	_____	- -	36. by brothers	_____	- -
17. this afternoon	_____	- -	37. to loathe	_____	- -
18. a thin watch	_____	- -	38. through a hole	_____	- -

Answer Key

p. 2 1. th_{EW} = /θ/; 2. thVⁱ = /ð/; 3. th_{EW} = /θ/; 4. X, /θ/; 5. th_{EW} = /θ/; 6. thVⁱ = /ð/; 7. th_{EW} = /θ/;
8. th_{EW} = /θ/; 9. X, -t-; 10. th_{EW} = /θ/.

p. 3 1. ther = /ð/; 2. th_{EW} = /θ/; 3. X, /ð/; 4. thern = /ð/; 5. th_{EW} = /θ/; 6. thVⁱ = /ð/; 7. th_{EW} = /θ/;
8. ther = /ð/; 9. th_{EW} = /θ/; 10. th_{EW} = /θ/; 11. ther = /ð/.

p. 4 1. Vth+B = /ð/; 2. th_{EW} = /θ/; 3. rth+B = /ð/; 4. Vth+B = /ð/; 5. X, /θ/; 6. thVⁱ = /ð/; 7. th_{EW} = /θ/;
8. Vth+B = /ð/; 9. th_{EW} = /θ/; 10. thern = /ð/; 11. rth+B = /ð/; 12. Vth+B = /ð/; 13. th_{EW} = /θ/;
14. X, /ð/; 15. thVⁱ = /ð/; 16. th_{EW} = /θ/; 17. thVⁱ = /ð/; 18. th_{EW} = /θ/; 19. th_{EW} = /θ/.