

The names used in most languages for the letters of the Latin alphabet and for the sounds these represent are marked by a lack of distinctiveness that often makes them fail their purpose. Various auxiliary “spelling alphabets” are used in such cases. Phoneticians use descriptive expressions such as “a voiceless palato-alveolar fricative”, but shorter and more immediately intelligible names such as the equivalent [øf:] (which can be distinguished from [ɪs:], [ʒs:] and [øh:].)) would often be more convenient.

Vowels that can form a syllable on their own can be said to name themselves, and they are distinctive enough if produced correctly. Non-peripheral vowels, which in many languages are not able to stand alone, can be terminated with a glottal stop.

Consonant names can be obtained with a minimum of arbitrariness by exploiting the coarticulatory and perceptual effects of consonants on vowels, as shown in the table above. These names reflect the following rules:

1. Pronounce each consonant with a schwa-like vowel with a basic quality between [ʌ] and [ə], but allow all coarticulatory and perceptual effects of the consonant on the vowel to be fully manifested. Exaggerate these effects for alveolars (also for palato-alveolars, but not for dentals) by fronting their vowels (hypercoarticulation).
2. The basic syllable pattern is CV, but for nasals, trills (also flaps), laterals and voiceless fricatives, the chosen structure is VC, as in the corresponding Latin letter names. For voiced plosives and affricates, the structure is V'CV:, but for voiced fricatives it is 'V:CV.
3. Realize the non-place features of the consonants clearly.

In addition to the basic principles, described more fully in [1], two additional points have been considered here:

1. Since voiced obstruents, except for implosives, tend to lose their voicing in initial as well as in final position, they have been provided with an initial as well as a final vowel. The vowel that precedes a voiced obstruent is always longer than the vowel (if any) that precedes its voiceless mate. This reflects a well-known coarticulatory effect.
2. A more open vowel quality is chosen not only for alveolar r-sounds and retroflex consonants, but also for laterals, cf. [2].

References:

[1] Hartmut Traunmüller (1999) “Distinctive names for speech sounds and letters obtained with hyper-coarticulated vowels” *Proceedings of the XIVth ICPhS*: 1125 - 1128. [pdf-version](#)

[2] Per Lindblad and Sture Lundqvist (2003) “[l] tends to be velarized, apical as opposed to laminal, and produced with a low jaw, and these features are connected” *Proceedings of the XVth ICPhS*: 1899 - 1902.