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The Consonant Clusters

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A consonant cluster is defined as a group or sequence of consonants that appear together in a syllable without a vowel between them (intrasyllabic). (cf. eg, Jones 1976). For example, /sp/ and /ts/ in the word „spots“ or /spr/ in the word „spring“.

The Consonant Clusters in English So as to give a complete picture of initial (onset) and final (coda) clusters in English, the following sources have been compared : Heinz J. Giegerich (1992) who analyses consonant clusters in terms of generative phonology, Peter Roach (2002) whose analysis of possible phoneme combinations is based on more traditional structural approach, San Duanmu (2009) who supplements Giegerich's and Roach's descriptions of the phonotactic possibilities of English with the aspects of Optimality Theory and gives the reliable statistical data, and one internet source (<http://www.btml>) which offers the practical list of some consonant clusters in English.

The word, i.e. the syllable in English can begin with a vowel, with one, two or three consonants. No word in English begins with 193 more than three consonants (roach 2002 : 71), thus the maximum number of segments in the word-initial consonant cluster is three.

At the beginning of English words (syllables), in many cases, the first element is /s/ and the second consonant is approximant /l, r, w, j/ (cf. Roach 2002 : 73 ; Duanmu 2009 : 160).

1. Initial CC Clusters in English : Starting with oral plosive /p/ as first member followed by /r, l, j, w, f, s / as second members. pr - prei = pray
prey - prais = praise - prinses = princes pl - plei = play - plæn = plan -
pleit = plate pj - pjʊə = pure - pju:tətiv = putative - pjʊərifai = purify pw
- pwebləʊ pf - pfennig = pfennig ps - psi = psai 194 Starting with oral
plosive /b/ as first member followed by /r, l, j / as second members. br -
brɑ:s, bred = brass, bread bl - blʌd, blɒk = blood, block bj - bju:ti =
beauty Starting with oral plosive /t/ as first member followed by / r, w, j /
as second members. tr - trail, treid = trail, trade tw - twin, twais = twin,
twice tj - tju:n, tju:tə = tune, tutor Starting with oral plosive /d/ as first
member followed by / r, j, w / as second members. dr - dra:ft, drill =
draft, dril dj - dju:, dju:ti = due/dew, duty dw - dwel, dwindle = dwell,
dwindle Starting with oral plosive /k/ as first member followed by / r, l,
w, j, n, v / as second members. kr - krɒs, krai = cross, cry kl - kleim, kla:s
= claim, class kw - kwæk = quack 195 kj - kju:pɪd, kjʊə = cupid, cure kn
- kneset = Knesset kv - kvɑ:s (kvæs), kvetʃ = kvas,kvetch Starting with
oral plosive /g/ as first member followed by / r, l, w / as second members.

gr - grɑ:s, grʌnt = grass grant gl - glæd, glɑ:s = glade, glass gw - gwen, gwendə = Gwen, Gwenda Starting with nasal plosive /n/ as first member followed by / j, j / as second members. nj - nju:, nju:z = new, news mj - mju:, mju:t = mew, mute Starting with fricative /f/ as first member followed by / l, r, j / as second members. fl - flæt, flə: = flat, flaw fr - freʃ, fri:z = fresh, freez fj - fju:, fjʊəri = few, fury 196 Starting with fricative /v/ as first member followed by / j / as second member. vj - vju:, vjetnæm = view, vietnam Starting with fricative /θ/ as first member followed by / r, w, j / as second members. θr - θri:, θril = three, thrill θw - θwə:t = thwart θj - θju:li:, θju:sididi:z Starting with fricative /s/ as first member followed by / t, p, k, l, w, n, m, t, j, r / as second members. st - step, stif = step, stiff sp - spɒt, spin = spot, spin sk - skɒf, sku:l = scoff, school sl - sli:t, sli:p = sleet, sleep sw - swet, swi:p = sweat, sweep sn - sneil, snəʊ = snail, snow sm - smɑ:t, smiθ = smart, smith st - stəʊv, sti:l = stove, steel sj - sju:t = suit sr - srɪnʌgə = srinagar 197 Starting with fricative /z/ as first member followed by / l / as second member. zl - zlɒti = zloty Starting with fricative /h/ as first member followed by / j / as second member. hj = hju:mid, hju:mən = humid, human Starting with affricate :

The number of the initial three consonant clusters in English is quite limited, there are nine of them, all starting with / s / as first member followed by / pl, pr, pj, tr, tj, kl, kr, kw, kj / as second members. spl - splæʃ = splash spli:n = spleen spr - sprɪŋ = spring sprain = sprain spj - spjʊəriəs = spurious str - strein = strein straik = strike stj - stju:pid = stupid stju:drəʊ = studio skl - sklərəʊsɪs = sclerosis 198 skr - skri:n = screen skri:m = scream skw - skwɒʃ = skweə skj - skjʊə = skua In Duanmu's view, the initial /s/ can be excluded and onset clusters either form a complex sound (they are produced with different articulator, cf. Duanmu 2009; 43 - 44) or they are predictable by morphology as real or potential affixes. The word (syllable) in English can end with a vowel, with one, two, three or four consonants (Roach 2002; 73).

The maximum number of consonants in the final consonant cluster is four. There are 55 final two-consonant clusters in English. They usually end with /s, z, t, d, o/ which represent separate morphs (Roach 2002 : 73); / s, z / are the sound forms of ending -(e)s, and /t, d/ stand for the ending -(e)d

