**English Pronunciation Pod 30** - How to Pronounce Words that End in **Voiced Consonants**: This podcast teaches you how to pronounce words that end in voiced consonants with a standard American accent.

In this week's podcast, we're going to learn an interesting rule of English pronunciation which can greatly improve your ability to be understood by native speakers.

Last week, we learned the difference between voiced and voiceless consonants.

**The focus of this week’s podcast is:**

* **Learning how voiced and voiceless consonants affect the vowels which they come after.**

As we discussed in last week’s podcast, some consonants are *voiced*. They involve our vocal chords. We can feel our vocal chords vibrating when we pronounce them.

For example: /z/ or /v/.

Other consonants are *voiceless*. They do not involve the vibration of our vocal chords.

For example: /s/ or / f/

**Exercise: Hearing the Difference-**

Let's Listen to the difference between "safe and "save".  
Safe ends with a voiceless consonant /f/. Save ends with a voiced consonant /v./ As we discussed in last week’s podcast, /f/ and /v/ are a *voiceless and voiced pair*.  
That means that /f/ and /v/ have the same lip and teeth position.  
The position of our mouth is exactly the same for both sounds. The only difference is the difference in voicing- /f/ being voiceless and /v/ being voiced.

**There's a More Subtle Difference:**

One of the main differences between the words "safe" and "save" is the difference in voicing.  
But that's not the only difference. There is another more subtle difference.   
A difference which is a little more difficult to notice.

**Exercise : Listen while paying attention to the length of the vowel in each word.**

safe ... save

Which word had the longer vowel? Both words contain the same vowel /eI/ but perhaps you noticed that the vowel in the second word is *longer*.  
This is because "save" ends with voiced consonant /v/.

**Rule: When a stressed syllable ends in a voiced consonant, we make the vowel before it *longer.*  
To put it simply, voiced consonants lengthen the vowels which they come after.  
If the syllable ends in a voiced consonant, the vowel within that syllable will be longer.**

For example: back ... bag

Both of these words are identical except for the final consonant. Back ends in voiceless /k/. Bag ends in /g/, a voiced consonant.

As a result, according to our rule, the vowel in "bag" will be longer.

*The longer vowel acts as a signal to our listener as to which word we are saying.*

This rule can be very useful when you have a sentence such as "I want that back."

If you're trying to say "back", you want to make the vowel short. If you're trying to say "bag" you want to make the vowel longer.

**How this Improves your Pronunciation**

Speaking this way, will greatly improve your ability to be understood by native speakers because a native speaker is not really listening to the final sound. On an unconscious level, the native speaker is actually listening to the vowel length. When an American hears a long vowel- they're going to think "bag". But if they hear a short vowel, they're going to think "back".

In fact, Americans often have problems pronouncing final voiced consonants.   
You may have noticed this, listening to native speakers, that it's often hard to tell the difference between their final /t/ and /d,/ /s/ and z/ /k/ and /g/.   
Sometimes American drop final voiced sounds altogether and replace them with something known as *the glottal stop* which will be discussed in future podcasts.

It's interesting to note that even Americans, native speakers, can have problems pronouncing final voiced sounds properly. But there is a solution! If you make the vowel longer, it will be clear to your listener as to which word you're saying. It will be clear to your listener that the word is ending in a final voiced sound. So there will be no confusion as to whether you said "safe" or "save", "back" or "bag".

**Exercise: Hearing and Saying the Difference:**

You will hear two sentences. The sentences are exactly the same except for one word.   
The only difference between the two words will be their endings.   
The first sentence will have a word with a *voiceless* consonant at the end and the second sentence will have a word with a *voiced* consonant at the end.  
Pay careful attention to the difference in voicing and the difference in vowel length. Remember that the words that end in voiced consonants will have longer vowels.  
Please listen and repeat.

**Voiceless Final Consonant                       Voiced Final Consonant**   
                                                                                     (longer vowel)

Do want to make the **bet**?                        Do you want to make the **bed?**

I found twenty **bucks** on the street.                 I found twenty **bugs** on the street.

Looks into my **ice** when we toast.              Look into my **eyes** when we toast.

Do you have any **plants**?                                    Do you have any **plans**?

Oh no, she's going to **sink!**                                    Oh no, she's going to **sing!**

 Don't eat that **crap!** (junk food, sh\*t,)                        Don't eat that **crab!**

Wow! Your teeth are so **white**!                              Wow, Your teeth are so **wide**!

**Use the Same "Tricks" and Methods as Native Speakers**

As you can hear, lengthening the vowel before a voiced consonant can greatly improve the clarity of your speech. It will make it much clearer to the listener what word you're saying.  
In fact, I would say that lengthening the vowel is a more reliable and easier method than voicing the consonant. Again even native speakers have problems voicing these consonants. But by keeping the vowel long, they make it clear to their listener what word they're saying.