

Subject, followed by Verb, followed by Object. Look over each of the sentences in the outline section to confirm this (and to confirm each of the points below).

2. There are no articles like “a” or “the” in Khmer.

3. Modifiers (adjectives, adverbs, words showing possession) *follow* the word they’re modifying...this is the opposite of English.

4. Indefinite articles in Khmer (the equivalents of “which” or “what” in English) occur at the end of a sentence or phrase, whereas in English they occur at the beginning.

If you can’t understand any of the above points clearly from looking at the grammatical outlines of the phrases in Tracks Two to Four, make sure you ask your teacher for clarification.

Introduction to the Khmer Alphabet

The 33 Khmer Consonants

The Khmer alphabet was developed, in the early Common Era (A.D.), from a South Indian script. So the Khmer alphabet, even though Khmer is not related to any Indian languages in its spoken form, ended up being arranged like all Indian alphabets. That is, the Khmer consonants are arranged according to their point of articulation (technically, according to the point of articulation of the stop and nasal consonants). That is, in the traditional arrangement of these alphabets, you get what amounts to a “map of your mouth”. It’s really quite brilliant, and besides being a very elegant and rational system, it actually gives you a key to how the various consonants are pronounced.

Point of articulation means this: where your tongue touches inside your mouth in order to produce a given consonant sound. In the arrangement of the Khmer consonants (as with its Indian predecessors), we start in the back of the mouth,

way back in that soft area located a bit before the area where your mouth becomes your throat. That spot is called your *velum*, and thus the first row of consonants are *velar consonants*. Below you'll find a list of all of the Khmer consonants. The velars (the first row in the chart) are in grey:

ក ខ គ ឃ ង

ច ឆ ជ ឈ ញ

ដ ប ត ព ណ

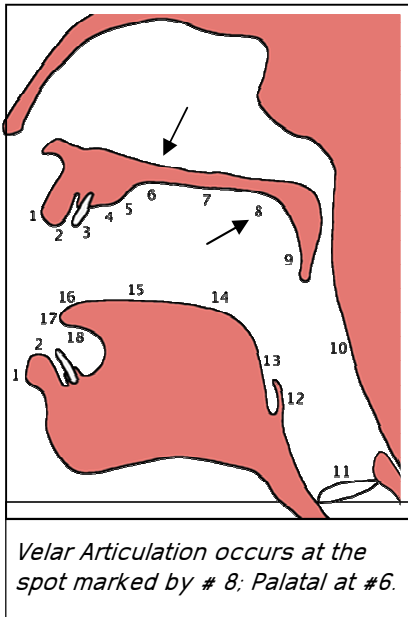
ភ ថ ទ ង ន

ប ផ ព ភ ម

យ រ ល វ ស ហ ឡ រ

Every one of the consonants in that first row is produced by touching your tongue to your velum. To find out what this sounds like, and feels like, go to **Multimedia Lesson One** on your Course DVD. Don't listen to the entire consonant chart audio, but rather click on the first row so you can just listen to that, and do it several times without trying to say the consonants yourself. When you have a good

sense of what they sound like, then try repeating the consonants after the voice on the audio. Concentrate on touching your tongue to your velum in order to make the sounds, way back in your mouth (but not too far). It's the spot indicated



ក ខ គ ឃ ង



by # 8 in the diagram on the left. After you've pronounced the first row in its entirety several times, click on each individual consonant in the row in turn so you can focus on listening to (and pronouncing) each consonant in isolation. Again, pay careful attention to the point of articulation that produces each sound.

In row two we find the *palatal consonants*, and their place of articulation is your *soft palate*, the area indicated by # 6 in the chart above. Go again to the consonant chart in **Multimedia Lesson One** and click on the second row, and listen to and pronounce it just like you did with the first row:

ច ឆ ជ ឈ ញ

Continuing our tour of the mouth, we now move forward to the *dental* rows of consonants. That's right, they're articulated by touching your tongue against the

back of your teeth, the point indicated by #3 in the chart on the next page. You know the drill, click on the next two rows (the third and fourth) on your Multimedia consonant chart. Both rows represent dental consonant sounds.

We do need to point out something about two members of the top dental row, however: the first consonant, ឆ, and the third consonant, ឡ, are articulated in a slightly different place on the teeth than the rest of the consonants in rows three and four. The tongue still touches on the teeth, but higher up for these two (which are also *voiced*; see page 48 for an explanation of that) than for the rest of the dentals, where the tongue touches more on the lower part of your top set of teeth. See the chart on the next page.

Previously (hundreds of years ago), the third row of consonants and the fourth row were most likely articulated at different places. The third row today, except for the first consonant in the row, is used mainly for spelling Sanskrit and Pali loanwords in Khmer. In those languages, a place of consonant articulation exists which does not exist in Khmer, called *alveolar* (# 4 in the mouth diagram below). Previously, Khmer speakers probably pronounced the third row consonants with alveolar articulation. But over time, these consonants came to be pronounced in accordance with the Khmer sound system (which does not include alveolar consonants), and the borrowed Sanskrit pronunciation was discarded.