Flowchart for Discovering the Distribution of Sounds

Start Here.

List the phonetic environments in which the sounds in question appear.

Do the sounds occur in the same environment?

Yes

The sounds are in overlapping distribution.

No

The sounds are in complementary distribution.

Prediction is possible.

No prediction is possible.

Do the words have the same meaning?

No

The sounds are in contrastive distribution.

Yes

The words form a minimal pair.

The sounds are in free variation.

The sounds are allophones of different phonemes.

Use this flowchart to learn the distribution of a pair of sounds. Work through each step, giving the requested information, answering the question posed or taking note of the conclusions provided. Steps in a diamond shape involve answering a “yes-no” question. Steps in a rectangle indicate what you can conclude about the sounds in question.