

The external carotid artery arises from the bifurcation of the **common carotid artery**, as the lateral branch, at the level of the lower border of the third cervical vertebra and upper border of the thyroid cartilage. It curves anteriorly and subsequently postero-laterally to the parotid gland, where it divides into the superficial temporal and maxillary arteries. Initially antero-medial to the internal carotid artery, the external carotid ascends antero-laterally in the neck and places itself lateral to the pharynx, superior laryngeal nerve and ascending pharyngeal artery. Superior to digastric it is separated from the internal carotid artery by the styloid process, styloglossus, stylopharyngeus, glossopharyngeal nerve (IX cranial nerve) and the pharyngeal branch of the vagus nerve (X cranial nerve).

Branches

Throughout its course it gives off several branches, including the superior thyroid, ascending pharyngeal, lingual, facial, occipital and posterior auricular arteries.