

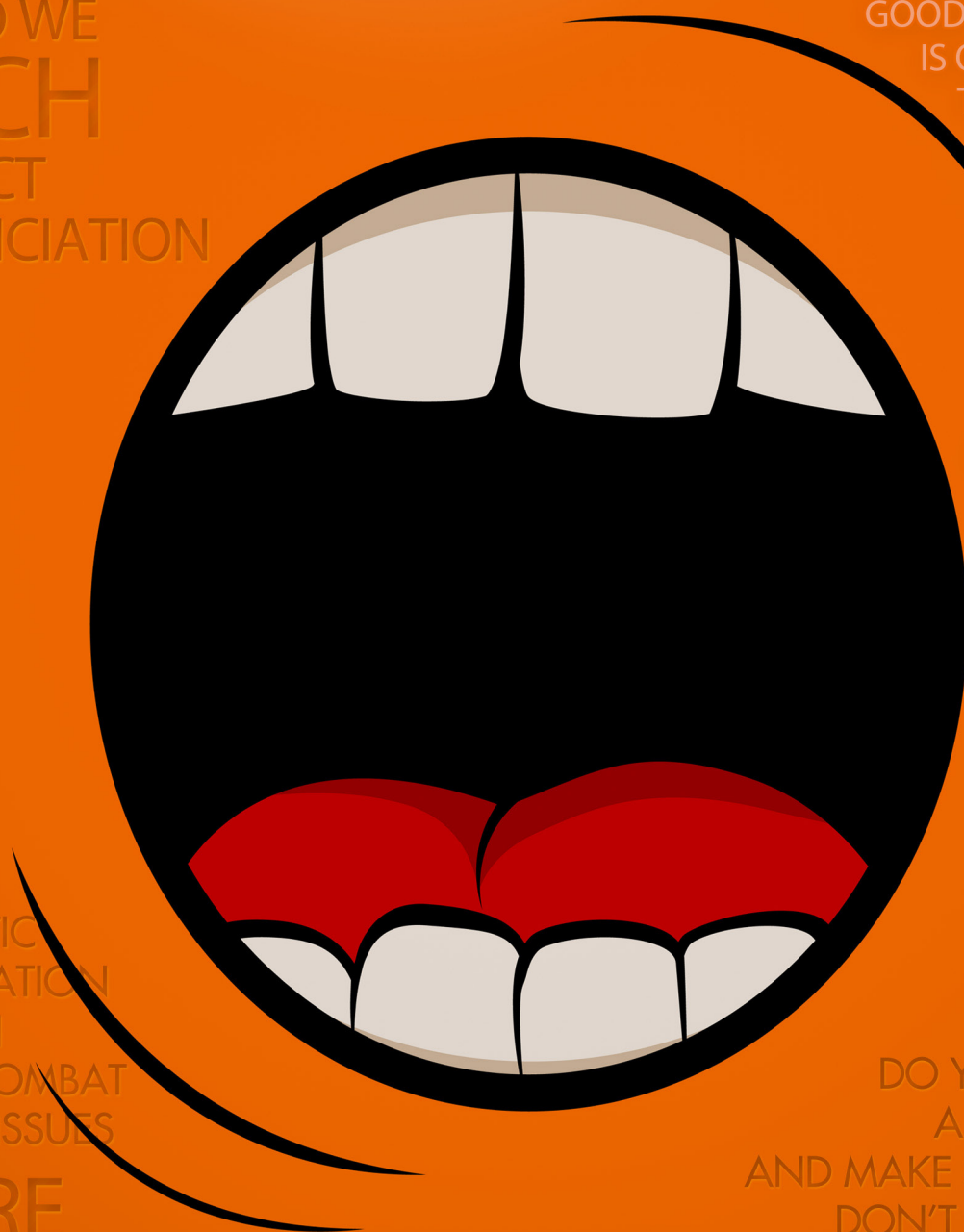
# HOW TO TEACH PRONUNCIATION

## LIKE A PRO

32 TOP SECRETS EVERY PRONUNCIATION TEACHER SHOULD KNOW

HOW DO WE  
**TEACH**  
A PERFECT  
PRONUNCIATION  
CLASS?

GOOD PRONUNCIATION  
IS OFTEN A MYSTERY  
TO ESL STUDENTS.  
WHY IS IT THAT  
SOME WORDS  
WITH A SIMILAR  
SPELLING  
SOUND  
THE SAME  
BUT OTHERS  
ARE COMPLETELY  
DIFFERENT?



TARGET  
PROBLEMATIC  
PRONUNCIATION  
AND LEARN  
HOW TO COMBAT  
COMMON ISSUES

**BEFORE**  
THEY MATERIALIZE

DO YOUR STUDENTS  
A GREAT SERVICE  
AND MAKE SURE THAT YOU  
DON'T FORGET ABOUT

**PRONUNCIATION**



IT TAKES A LOT MORE THAN SIMPLE CORRECTION TO IMPROVE YOUR STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION

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# How To Teach Pronunciation:

## 3 Essential Elements

**HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT YOU NEED TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL PRONUNCIATION LESSON? DO YOU EVER QUESTION WHETHER WHAT YOU ARE TEACHING IS MEETING ALL OF YOUR STUDENTS' NEEDS? IT'S TIME TO PUT YOUR MIND AT REST.**

Make sure you have these 3 parts in every pronunciation lesson, and you are sure to see success or, shall we say, hear it.

### 3 KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL PRONUNCIATION LESSON

#### 1 IMITATION

The first step in any successful pronunciation lesson is to give your students the opportunity to imitate. Most often, you will be the model that your students will copy, but you can also use other sources. Use a recording from television, radio or the internet for variety. And you can always bring in a guest speaker to expose your students to a different style of speech. This can be especially helpful as English teachers tend to overpronounce rather than giving authentic samples of native speaker pronunciation. Someone not used to speaking with second language learners may be able to expose them to more realistic pronunciation.

When giving a model for your students, you should focus on one pronunciation issue at a time, and choose that based on the frequency of errors you see in your students. Trying to address too many problems concurrently will frustrate and discourage your students. By focusing on one pronunciation issue, you will see more pronounced improvement in your students in a shorter period of time.

#### 2 EXPLANATION

After having your students imitate either you or your pronunciation source, you should explain to them the biological process of making that

sound. This doesn't have to be as intimidating as it may seem. The first step is to give everyone the same foundation. Reviewing the parts of the mouth can help your students clearly understand how to make appropriate English sounds. Print off and give your students a diagram of the mouth. Review the obvious terms for lips, teeth and tongue. Then point out the alveolar ridge (the curved part between your teeth and your palate), the hard palate (the front most part of the palate) and the soft palate (the soft area on the roof of your mouth). This way, when you are trying to explain the difference between /th/ and /s/, you can simply tell your students that /th/ is pronounced with the tongue between the teeth and /s/ is pronounced with the tongue behind the teeth, /d/ is pronounced with the tip of the tongue against the alveolar ridge. This biological explanation of sound production will be especially helpful when teaching adults as they often like a clear and straightforward description when it comes to pronunciation. It may seem strange at first, but eventually you will think nothing of pointing out areas in your mouth where certain sounds should be made.

#### 3 PRACTICE

After imitating the sound and learning the correct biology for producing it, now is the time to practice the use of that sound or sound pattern. You can use minimal pairs (pairs of words which differ in only one sound like mop and pop or pop and pep) to highlight one sound or phoneme that you are teaching. If you want to add a little fun to pronunciation class, try tongue twisters. There is no end to the tongue twisters you can find or write, and not even native speakers are good at them, so the pressure is off your students to perform flawlessly. For a real challenge try reading Dr. Seuss' Fox in Socks. You can also teach the natural rhythm of English through songs and poetry. Try reading a limerick with your class, or have them write their own.

**THERE ARE MANY OTHER SOURCES YOU CAN USE FOR PRONUNCIATION DRILLS (TRY ONE OF THE MANY WORKSHEETS AVAILABLE ON BUSYTEACHER.ORG FOR IDEAS).**

Whatever practice you decide to give your students, as long as it follows imitation and explanation, you will have given your students all they need to achieve successful pronunciation.



# Top 10 Ways to Teach Vowel Pronunciation in English

Every ESL student should have a pronunciation element to his language studies. Sometimes, though, a student may need more than one strategy for tackling English pronunciation. By making sure you use variety in your pronunciation lessons, your students will be more successful with English pronunciation and gain the confidence that comes with it.

## HOW TO TEACH VOWEL PRONUNCIATION IN ENGLISH

### 1 LISTEN AND REPEAT

This will be the first and most common method of teaching sound specific pronunciation in English. You say the target sound and have your students repeat it after you. If you are teaching a long word with multiple syllables, start with the final syllable of the word and have your class repeat it. Then add the penultimate syllable and say the two together having your class repeat after you. Work backwards in this manner until your students are able to pronounce the entire word correctly.

### 2 ISOLATION

When working on a specific sound, it may help your students to isolate that particular sound from any others. Instead of presenting a certain sound as part of a complete word in English, you can simply pronounce the sound itself repeatedly. When you do, your students can say it along with you repeatedly, focusing on the small nuances in the correct pronunciation and also engraining the sound pattern into their minds. This is especially helpful when you have several students struggling with a specific sound delineation.

### 3 MINIMAL PAIRS

Minimal pairs are a great way to focus pronunciation on just one sound. If you are not familiar with linguistics, a minimal pair is two words that vary in only one sound. For example, rat and rate are minimal pairs because only the vowel sound differs between the two words. Additional minimal pairs are pin and pen, dim and dime, and bat and pat. You can use minimal pairs to help your students with their pronunciation by focusing on one particular sound. In addition to the pronunciation benefits, your

students will also expand their vocabularies when you teach minimal pairs.

### 4 RECORD AND REPLAY

At times, your students may think they are using correct pronunciation when in fact they are saying something quite different. By using a device to record what your students are actually saying, you have empirical data to play back for each person. Encourage him to listen to what he actually said rather than what he thinks he said. You may also want him to compare a recording of a native speaker against his recording of himself.

### 5 USE A MIRROR

Giving your students a chance to view their own physical movements while they are working on their pronunciation can be of great value. You can always encourage your students to look at your mouth and face as you pronounce certain sounds, but they will also benefit from seeing what movements they are making as they speak. Sometimes, becoming aware of the physical movements involved in pronunciation is all your students will need to correct pronunciation issues of which they are unaware.

### 6 PHONETICS

When your students are facing a pronunciation challenge, it could be that English spelling is adding to the mystery of the spoken word. Instead of spelling new vocabulary out on the white board, try using phonetic symbols to represent the sounds. If you were to use phonetic symbols, the word seat would be written /si:t/ and eat would be written /i:t/. You can find a list of the phonetic symbols on several websites or in introductory linguistics books. Once you teach your students the International Phonetic Alphabet, you can use those symbols any time you introduce new vocabulary to your students.

### 7 SHOW A VOWEL DIAGRAM

If you are using phonetic symbols to help you teach vowel pronunciation, a diagram of where each English vowel sound is produced can be eye opening for your students. Print copies to distribute in class or show your students where

they can find this diagram online. When students know which area of the mouth in which they should be making their sounds, they may have an easier time distinguishing between similar sounds because they are produced in different areas of the mouth.

### 8 SING

Surprisingly enough, singing can be a good way for your ESL students to practice their vowel pronunciation. Because singing requires a person to maintain vowel sounds over more than just a moment, it can give your students a chance to focus in on the target sound and adjust what sound she is making.

### 9 TONGUE TWISTERS

Though tongue twisters are probably more popular for practicing consonant pronunciation, they are still a valuable resource for vowel practice. Not only are they a challenge to your students' pronunciation abilities, they add an element of fun to the classroom that can help your students relax and therefore free them to be more daring in their attempts at English.

### 10 TARGET LANGUAGE SPECIFIC SOUNDS

Some pronunciation patterns are found consistently in students with the same native language. Being aware of these patterns is helpful in addressing problems your students may not even know they have. You can find practice exercises to target specific pronunciation patterns, or you can write your own to target the specific needs of your class. Either way, making students aware of pronunciation patterns of speakers of their native language can be the biggest help in eliminating the mispronunciations.

**WHETHER YOU ARE TEACHING CONVERSATION OR GRAMMAR, PRONUNCIATION WILL ALWAYS COME INTO PLAY IN ANY ESL CLASS. BY USING VARIOUS METHODS TO AID YOUR STUDENTS, THEIR PRONUNCIATION WILL BE MORE ACCURATE AND THEIR ATTITUDES WILL BE MORE POSITIVE.** Always remind your students that learning English takes time and acquiring pronunciation is a process. Encourage them that being aware of problems in pronunciation is the first half of correcting them!

# Say What? 3 Tips for Perfecting Pronunciation

**PRONUNCIATION IS AN IMMENSE ISSUE FOR EVERY LANGUAGE LEARNER NO MATTER THEIR AGE OR THEIR LEVEL.**

It is a constant issue that students struggle with, and it is imperative to have focused practice on pronunciation at every stage of the game. Follow these three tips for perfecting pronunciation, and you'll see wide strides of improvement.

## TRY THESE 3 TIPS FOR PERFECTING PRONUNCIATION

### 1 LISTENING DRILLS

Poor pronunciation can be a serious problem because it can negatively disturb understanding. Students by no means have to have native-speaker perfect pronunciation, but it is important for them to be understandable. Many students will request pronunciation help, and it really can provide a great confidence boost.

Pronunciation is so very closely related to hearing that listening is a vital part of developing this area. Listening to a tape, CD or video, or using your own voice as a model are all outstanding ways for students to get varied exposure to different pronunciation and accents. There are many ways to create drills that are engaging as well as entertaining. Don't be afraid to try out different drills or warmers to see which ones your students really take to. One example is something of a dictation and listening exercise where students pick out whether what you are saying is the same or different. Create a list of minimal pairs such as: hit/heat, fit/feet, grit/green, etc. Read out one pair to the students and have them say it back to you. Then tell them to spell the word they heard, and write it on the board. Was it the same or different from the one you read? Go through this with multiple pairs and repetition. You can also have them just write down what they heard in their notebooks and then go over the answers. Move the pace along quickly

for more challenge and even have the students try leading the activity themselves. You can do many variations of this to get students not just speaking, but listening for subtle differences as well.

Rhyming games can be a fun type of drill to do which incorporate both speaking and listening. It could be as simple as starting out with one word and the next student has to say a word that rhymes with it. It goes around the room until there are no more possible rhymes. You could choose to try and focus on certain vowel sounds, combinations or just let the students begin randomly. An example might be: blue-flu-glue-do-crew-shoe-moo and so on. You can write the chain on the board as you go or make it a memory game and see if students can remember all the words that were stated.

Odd one out is another drill-type listening exercise that can be done frequently with minimal prep time. Devise a list of groups of words with the same consonant cluster for example: shoe, cheap, sheep, ship, and read them aloud to students. Students can then repeat what they heard and decide which word is out of place. You can choose any sound to focus on and mix and match in your groups of words. Make it even more challenging by not telling the student what the difference is, and have them determine that as they listen and repeat.

### 2 READING ALOUD

Reading aloud is another great way to get lots of solid pronunciation practice. You can use recorded excerpts from the book, have students do the reading or do it yourself. There are many ways to vary this so it doesn't just become you reading to the group all the time. You can play a recording and ask the students to count how many times they hear a certain vowel combination or consonant cluster. Follow that up with giving the students an opportunity to read the same passage aloud. You

could also focus on intonation, and have each student read a sentence or paragraph using different kinds of intonations. You could have them read angrily, happily, sadly, etc. This way they are working on the different ways inflection affects meaning.

If you choose, you can isolate specific problem areas for learners and focus on them in chunks rather than just reading a lot of varied texts. For example, if students stumble a lot over particular sounds like th or sh, devise reading activities that focus on these sounds and use the readings to show all the different ways those sounds could be produced utilizing particular combinations. Past tense verbs with -ed is a good example. When does the ending sound like -ed, -t, -d at the end of the word? You can even create your own readings if you have specific problem areas you want to focus on.

### 3 TONGUE TWISTERS

Tongue twisters are the tried and true ESL teacher's good friend. They are not only fun and silly - they are worthwhile and can be used at every level to challenge students! There are many of them out there for practicing the notoriously difficult sounds, but you can also feel free to create your own to suit your students' needs. Encourage them to first repeat them all together as a group, and then speed up the pace to make it even more challenging. If students are getting into it, you can ask volunteers to recite one or more of the tongue twisters as fast as they can. This can be quite comical as well as impressive!

**DO YOU STUDENTS A GREAT SERVICE AND MAKE SURE THAT YOU DON'T FORGET ABOUT PRONUNCIATION.**

There are lots of resources to help you if you want to introduce phonics, the phonetic table, or simply get some great ideas for other activities you can do. Listen carefully to the students and stay in tune with the challenges students face with pronunciation.

# How To Teach "R" and "L" Sounds

## HOW TO TEACH R AND L

### 1 I BEGIN BY DEMONSTRATING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO SOUNDS.

First I introduce the 'r' sound. I make a growling noise like a dog and point to the letter r that I have written on the board. All my students are Japanese and familiar with the problem in imitating this sound.

I ask the students to copy me and show them the sound comes from within the throat with the tongue back. Facial expression like a dog for emphasis and 'fun.'

### 2 NEXT THE 'L' SOUND.

This is a high la la la sound. Tongue to the front and touching the front teeth and rising into the roof of the mouth. Pointing to the letter l on the board I ask the students to repeat.

I swap from l to r and back asking the students to copy and checking pronunciation. I point upwards to emphasize the rising l sound.

### 3 THE DRILL PHASE.

Practicing minimal pairs of words written on the board e.g. frame/flame, crime/climb, right/light, etc. Drill again.

### 4 THEN PRACTICING THE TARGET SOUNDS IN PHRASES AND SHORT SENTENCES.

Window frame, hot flame, Police! It's a crime, climb the hill, turn right, turn on the light.

These examples are illustrated by miming actions and students read from prepared handouts.

### 5 THE CHECKING PHASE.

I target sounds and students say which word they hear by saying R or L sound. Crown/lip/lake/clown/rip/rake/lap/rap etc.

I repeat after the students make their first choice pointing at the tongue's position i.e. throat or teeth/roof of mouth and miming the words.

### 6 FINALLY DEMONSTRATION BY WAY OF A COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY.

The students try to make as many fun sentences as they can with the R and L words already practiced.

I pre-teach with a few examples on the board. "I met a clown wearing a crown. He was near a lake holding a rake.

# Overcoming the Barrier: 9 Great Tips for Teaching Phonemics

## CAN YOUR STUDENTS REPEAT THE DIFFERENCE IN PRONUNCIATION BETWEEN "LIVE" AND "LEAVE"? SOME CAN'T.

For ESL students, particularly for adult learners, pronunciation is a big hurdle to overcome. It is especially discouraging when they discover that though pronunciation can be improved greatly, they will never lose their foreign accent completely. English phonemes also prove to be particularly tricky as there is often no connection between the sound and the way it is spelled (unlike other languages where the phoneme and its spelling are a closer match). Here are some tips to help your students overcome the pronunciation barrier:

## HOW TO OVERCOME THE PRONUNCIATION BARRIER: 9 GREAT TIPS FOR TEACHING PHONEMICS

### 1 ONE PHONEME AT A TIME

While "improving pronunciation" as a goal might seem unattainable, helping your students improve their pronunciation one phoneme at a time is much more doable. Instead of taking up most of class time practicing pronunciation, practice a different phoneme every day, or every week.

### 2 PRACTICE THE SCHWA

The schwa sound is the neutral vowel sound that typically occurs in unstressed syllables, for example in words like choc(o)late, sep(a)rate, cam(e)ra, elab(o)rate, etc. There are languages that pronounce these syllables differently and students might be tempted to pronounce them as they do in their native tongue (this is usually the case with Spanish speakers, where the central o in "chocolate" is pronounced clearly). Teach students to be aware of the schwa sound and learn to identify it as it will be tremendously useful in improving their pronunciation.

### 3 SAME SPELLING DIFFERENT SOUNDS

Students should learn that the same consonant combination may have different sounds, for example the ch in chicken and character. The sound [k] in character, in fact, may be spelled with a k, ck, c, ch or que. The th combination is another example: it is pronounced [ð] in this, that, these, those, but it is pronounced [θ] in thin, thank, think, theory, for example. The gh combination is yet another example, as it pronounced as a g (ghost) or f (rough). Practice each of these combos and others one at a time.

### 4 SAME SOUND, DIFFERENT SPELLINGS

Teach students to identify different ways to spell the same sound. Examples of these are the ai sound in mine, buy, pie, rye. Homophones are the perfect example of this: buy and by, pair and pear, cell and sell, etc. There are lots of games and activities you can do with your class with homophones.

### 5 EXPLAIN THE MAGIC -E RULE

Show students how the addition of an -e at the end of a word changes its pronunciation: bit - bite, dim - dime, pin - pine. See what happens in this set of words: cut - cute, hug - huge, and so on.

### 6 PAIR EM' UP

Students will remember some contrasts much more easily if you present them in pairs: live - leave, three - tree, slip - sleep, and so on. These pairs include words that students often mispronounce, quite simply because in some cases they won't even hear the difference, much less be able to reproduce it. The more you practice them in class, the better the chances for improvement. Introduce a few pairs at a time and practice till all students can hear the difference and

reproduce it. Don't forget to lighten it up with humor every now and then. It is not unlikely for teachers who have Spanish speaking students to hear a student say he drinks orange "shoes" in the morning. In that case reply, "You drink shoes? Really? I believe you will obtain more vitamin C from orange juice!" Teach students to laugh at their own pronunciation mistakes.

### 7 USE VISUALS

It's hard for students to simply imagine the difference in spelling, not to mention remember all the different phonetic symbols, so try to use visual aids like consonants flashcards or IPA flashcards. Use them for introduction and practice, and make sure students become familiar with the symbols.

### 8 PLAY GAMES

Don't forget to play games with them. Remember that pronunciation is very hard and very frustrating for lots of ESL students. Games will certainly lighten up a difficult lesson. Some great options are Bingo or Four in a Row.

### 9 TEACH THEM TO USE THE DICTIONARY

You won't always be around to tell a student how a word is pronounced. Teach them where to find the pronunciation for a word in the dictionary. The best tool in this case is a dictionary app with sound, so that the student can hear the pronunciation with a simple click. These tools help students become more independent and more responsible for improving their pronunciation.

### AS A GENERAL RECOMMENDATION, TELL STUDENTS TO LISTEN TO AS MUCH AS THEY CAN IN ENGLISH, WHETHER IT IS MOVIES, TV SHOWS OR SONGS.

Ask them to try to identify the different phonemes in different words they hear. Give them the right tools and they will make great strides towards improving their pronunciation!



# Pronunciation 101: 7 Things Students Need to Hear You Say

Bad pronunciation is bad news for ESL students. It negatively affects comprehension and so, negatively impacts on communication. The problem is compounded by the fact that good pronunciation is often a mystery to ESL students. Why is it that some words with a similar spelling sound the same but others are completely different? Why are some words pronounced exactly the same in their native language but others are not? Mysteries are not good. Here are some of the things you need to explain to your ESL students to take the mystery out of English pronunciation.

## 7 THINGS YOU NEED TO EXPLAIN TO YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION:

### 1 REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

The goal of pronunciation practice is to pronounce correctly, not sound like a native English speaker. Only children who are exposed to a second language for extended periods of time are able to eliminate their foreign accent because their brains are still flexible enough to do so. There is such a thing as accent reduction, but a foreign accent in an adult will never be completely eliminated. Furthermore, an accent is a part of who you are, a part of a student's cultural heritage. Students should accept this and strive to improve pronunciation instead.

### 2 STRESSED VS. SYLLABIC

It is tremendously useful for students to understand that English, unlike other languages, is a stressed language. This means that in a sentence some words are stressed more than others. In syllabic languages, like Spanish for example, it makes more sense to focus on pronouncing each word, syllable by syllable. But if we were to do this in English we'd sound like robots. Try saying, "Your book is on the table" by pronouncing each

word – doesn't sound like fluent, human speech, does it? It is vital for students to understand that making the effort to pronounce every single word does not lead to good pronunciation.

How many times has a student asked you how to pronounce an article like *the* or *a*? They need to understand that articles and other non-stressed words are not clearly pronounced but rather "swallowed". This is why two separate words like *is* or *on* are not pronounced separately in the above example, but combined to sound like one "ison".

### 3 LINKING SOUNDS

Related to the previous point, and the fact that pronouncing each word separately is a bad idea, is that quite often two sounds are linked to sound like one word (sometimes even more than two words are linked). This is often the case with the verb *is* when it's followed by an article or preposition that starts with a vowel (an, a, on, at). "He's an architect" sounds like "He – za – narchitect". This happens when a word ending with a consonant is followed by a word starting with a vowel. Something similar happens when we ask, "What did you do?" (sounds like *wha diju do?*) In this case, the two sounds are combined to form a new mixed sound.

### 4 SILENT LETTERS

Just like there are words in a sentence that are not clearly pronounced or stressed, a single word may have consonants that are not pronounced, either. ESL students are often unaware of this. Words they often mispronounce are those that end in a "b", like *bomb*, *dumb*, or *comb*. Others have trouble with the silent "g" in *foreign*, *sign* or *champagne*. Be sure to clarify in which cases letters are silent.

### 5 SOUNDS THAT DISAPPEAR

There are words that have consonant sounds that are not exactly si-

lent, but simply disappear. This is the case with the "d" in *and* (often pronounced *an*) and the "t" in *it* or *but*. In "I went there last night" we wouldn't pronounce the final "t" in *went*, *last* or *night*.

### 6 SPELLING VS. PRONUNCIATION

Students must understand that quite often the spelling of a word is no indication of how it should be pronounced (and by the same token the pronunciation of a word is no indication of how it is spelled). The "th" for example sounds like a "d" in *then* or *than*, but completely different in *thing*, *three* or *thousand*. Students must learn to distinguish between letters and sounds, i.e., same letters may have different sounds depending on the letters that follow it or precede it.

### 7 UNDERSTANDING THE SCHWA

The schwa sound is one of those little mysteries that ESL students often hear about but never truly grasp. The schwa, whose phonemic symbol looks like an upside down "e" ([ə]), is an unstressed, weak sound that occurs in many English words. In the phrase "a story about a girl" the three "a"s are schwa sounds. The same happens with the "e" in *the* or the "o" in *to*. ESL students who master the schwa are well on their way to improved pronunciation.

**THERE IS NO MYSTERY TO CORRECT ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION – NOT WHEN YOU EXPLAIN THESE BASIC CONCEPTS TO YOUR STUDENTS. ONCE YOU DO, THEY WILL BE BETTER ARMED TO UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE AND THE ONE THEY ARE TRYING TO LEARN.**



# 7 Worst Pronunciation Mistakes Students Make Around the World

Proper English pronunciation can be a big problem for some ESL learners and more difficult for some students than for others. A student's native language determines, for the most part, the degree of difficulty and the types of difficulties students will have. In my experience, ESL students whose native language is Chinese or Japanese have a much harder time than those whose native language is Spanish, Portuguese or French. But despite the differences between countries, there are certain mistakes that are the most common among ESL students all over the world. Here, you'll see not only what they are, but also how to help your students overcome them.

## HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 PRONOUNCING THE "TH"

The "th" is one of the hardest consonant sounds to pronounce. It can be pronounced in three different ways: as a "d" (/ð/) as in this, that, these, those, they or them, as the voiceless /θ/ in three, thing, thought, or as a /t/ as in Thai or Thames. The pronunciation of the /θ/ is especially difficult for some - students often say tree instead of three.

How to fix it: Go over the difference between the three types of pronunciation. Don't forget to mention that the third one is the least common. As for the difficulty in pronouncing the /θ/, show students how to place their tongues between their teeth and force air out to make the right sound.

### 2 PRONOUNCING THE SCHWA

The schwa ([ə]) is a sound that is typical in unstressed syllables, for instance in long words like mem(o)ry, choc(o)late or shorter ones like th(e) or t(o). The usual mistake is for students to pronounce the word syllable by syllable: me-mo-ry.

How to fix it: Introduce the schwa to

students and give them plenty of examples. Remind them of the fact that English is a stressed, not a syllabic language, and that unstressed syllables or words in English often have this sound.

### 3 CONFUSING THE "L" AND THE "R"

The "r" and "l" sounds are the stereotypical mistake Japanese students make – they say lice instead of rice. But it is also a difficulty that occurs in other Asian languages.

How to fix it: The problem usually lies in the position of the tongue. To eliminate the confusion first focus on practicing one sound – the "r" –, then the "l". In both cases, show them and contrast the position of the tongue and teeth.

### 4 PRONOUNCING THE SHORT "I"

The short "i" or [i] as pronounced in words like live, sit, fit, hit usually poses a problem as students may be inclined to pronounce them as leave, seat, feet, or heat.

How to fix it: Give them plenty of practice with these confusing word pairs: live-leave, sit-seat, fit-feet, hit-heat, etc. First say each and ask them if they can hear the difference. Next, repeat each set and have your students repeat. Be sure to either write the words on the board so they can see the difference in spelling or show them word cards. The more practice you give them, the better they'll pronounce these words.

### 5 CONFUSING THE "W" AND THE "V"

This is a typical pronunciation problem in some European nations. Some students have a hard time pronouncing the "w" sound. Water is pronounced as vater, west is pronounced as vest, and so on.

How to fix it: If you have students who have a hard time pronouncing the "w" show them how to round their mouths into an "o" and then unround them to produce the right sound, like this (bit.ly/YmKeNk).

### 6 PRONOUNCING THE MAGIC "E"

Some students may have a hard time noticing the difference between words like not and note or bit and bite. They may be tempted to split them into syllables: no-te and bi-te.

How to fix it: Once again this is a problem that can be fixed by practicing word pairs. Help them notice that note is different from not in that it has the extra "e" but it's still not pronounced. The effect of the magic "e" is that it changes the pronunciation of the word.

### 7 PRONOUNCING SILENT CONSONANTS

This is one of the problems I have personally encountered the most with native Spanish speakers. They sometimes tend to pronounce consonants that are silent, like the "d" in Wednesday or the "g" in foreign.

How to fix it: In my experience, fixing this problem is as easy as writing down the word on the board and crossing the silent letter out. It is very important for you to not only verbally correct the pronunciation and have them repeat, but also write it down. As many times as you have to.

**AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, SOME OF THESE MISTAKES ARE MADE MORE OFTEN BY SOME STUDENTS THAN OTHERS DEPENDING ON THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN. ONCE YOU IDENTIFY THE MISTAKES THEY MAKE OFTEN, IT IS VITAL FOR YOU TO ADDRESS THEM AND HELP THEM WORK TO IMPROVE THEM.**

Write it down. Have them repeat. Work with word pairs. Soon enough they'll be making fewer mistakes.

# 7 Little-Known Factors that Could Affect Students' Pronunciation

Proper pronunciation is vital to your ESL students' success. Pronunciation plays a very important role in communication – for your students to communicate effectively, they must speak clearly and make themselves understood. Sometimes simply using the right vocabulary and structures is not enough. Now, why is it that some students do better at acquiring the proper pronunciation than others? Here are the factors that could possibly answer this question.

## 7 FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT YOUR STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION:

### 1 STUDENTS' AGES

As an ESL teacher you've probably already noticed the difference between teaching young learners and adults. The younger your students are, the easier it is for them to acquire an accurate pronunciation – and it becomes increasingly difficult as they age as the brain's original plasticity diminishes, and it becomes more rigid. Now that said, this does not mean adult students should give up trying to improve their pronunciation. It just means they have to work harder. If you teach adult ESL learners, be ready to plan and devote some of your class time to targeted pronunciation practice.

### 2 LEARNERS' ATTITUDES

Research and studies consistently show that ESL students with a positive attitude towards learning English learn faster. By the same token, students who are genuinely open-minded and interested in improving their pronunciation often do improve it. It is truly amazing what the right attitude can do.

On the other hand, students who have prejudices or a natural dislike for English will be less successful than those with a positive attitude and open mind. If you have students who are openly negative or complain about the English language, try to have a nice long chat to address these issues. Before you can help students overcome their pronunciation barriers, you'll need to help them overcome these others barriers first.

### 3 STUDENT MOTIVATION

Out of these first three internal factors, motivation is the one that can really make a difference. Highly motivated students will in all likelihood have a better pronunciation. What motivates students to speak better? Most simply want to fit in - they don't want to be discriminated against because they have a "funny" accent. Others, like adult learners, really need to speak clearly and effectively for professional business communication. If you have students who seem to lack motivation, use their passions to help them find it.

### 4 NATIVE LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE

Students from different nationalities have varying degrees of difficulty learning proper pronunciation. The difficulty depends on how different their native language is from English. For example, English is a stressed language, Spanish is a syllabic language, Chinese is a tonal language. Phonemes are different in each, as well as the way the mouth, teeth and tongue are used. Your students may have difficulty articulating some sounds because they simply do not exist in their native language, sounds like the "th".

First, you'll need to assess your students' difficulties and formulate a plan to overcome them. Identify the pronunciation problems. Is it a problem with stress? Some phonemes more than others? With Japanese students you may have to practice the "l" and the "r". Whatever their difficulties are be sure to tailor your pronunciation exercises to help your students overcome them.

### 5 EXPOSURE TO ENGLISH

It will come as no surprise that ESL students who live in English-speaking environment acquire better pronunciation faster because they are immersed in the language. But not all ESL students are immersed in an English-speaking environment. The degree to which they are exposed to English on a daily basis will determine how fast they'll be able to improve their pronunciation. So, children who go to bilingual,

English-speaking schools should have a better pronunciation than those who study English only a couple of times a week. If you have students who don't have enough exposure to the English language, encourage them to increase it, either by listening to authentic audio or hanging out with English-speaking locals.

### 6 NOT EXPLICITLY TAUGHT

One of the factors that may be affecting your students' ability to acquire proper pronunciation is quite simply that it is not being explicitly taught in the classroom. This is one of the things that ESL classes often lack and one of the things that makes a world of difference in the acquisition of pronunciation. Do you correct their pronunciation mistakes as they speak, or do you give them specific pronunciation exercises that target certain phonemes, word pairs or verb endings? Be sure to devote some class time specifically to pronunciation practice.

### 7 NATIVE VS. NON-NATIVE INPUT

Students' pronunciation largely depends on the pronunciation they hear on a daily basis. If they are immersed in a community where most of the individuals speak English with a non-native accent, this will surely influence their own pronunciation. Moreover, if the teacher has a non-native accent, it will affect students' pronunciation as well.

**OF COURSE, YOU CAN TEACH ENGLISH IF YOUR ACCENT IS NOT NATIVE PERFECT. BUT IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO STRIVE TO IMPROVE YOUR PRONUNCIATION AS MUCH AS YOU CAN. IT IS ALSO VITAL FOR YOU TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO SEEK OUT NATIVE INPUT, EITHER BY JOINING ACTIVITIES OR GROUPS WITH ENGLISH SPEAKERS OR SPENDING SOME TIME IN AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRY.**

Students must be proactive in their hopes to secure the right English pronunciation, but teachers are the coaches in this endeavor. These are the two sides of the pronunciation coin – partners working together to achieve a common goal. One can't achieve it without the other.

# 4 Keys to Teaching Your Students Perfect Pronunciation

## ONE CHALLENGE EVERY ESL TEACHER FACES IS TEACHING HIS OR HER STUDENTS CORRECT PRONUNCIATION.

The sounds a person instinctively makes have been a part of their brains since they were less than a year old, so it is no surprise that both children and adults have trouble with pronunciation when they study English as a second language. The good news is that you have tools at your disposal, some closer than your finger tips, that can move them closer to perfect English pronunciation. Here are some keys to teaching pronunciation to internationals that I have found the most valuable throughout my years of teaching.

## HOW TO TEACH YOUR STUDENTS PERFECT PRONUNCIATION

### 1 OPEN YOUR MOUTH

An ESL teacher does more than impart knowledge found in a book. An ESL teacher is often a model for culture and society. Your students watch you closely and ask questions about appropriate behavior for their interactions with native speakers. But your students' observations of you should become even more personal when it comes to modeling pronunciation. Letting your students look at and into your mouth can make the difference as they learn English pronunciation. Because your students' native languages may not include all the sounds that make up the English language, their bodies may struggle to say particular words even when their brains understand what they should sound like. For your students' trouble sounds, move your mouth slowly. Describe to your students what muscles you are using and where your lips, teeth and tongue are positioned. Let them look at you up close even though it may feel very strange the first few times you open up to your students. When they see your mouth and how it moves, they will better understand how they have to move their own.

### 2 MIRROR, MIRROR...

Once your students have looked into your mouth and heard you describe the specific movements that a particular sound involves, it is their turn. If they cannot see their own mouths, though, how will they know if they are getting it right? Investing in a classroom set of handheld mirrors is a move that will pay for itself several times over during your ESL teaching career. When your students see their own mouths as they pronounce English sounds, some mistakes may stand out in the looking glass. Students will be able to see if their mouths are correct when they make troublesome pairs like 'l' and 'r' or short and long 'i' sounds. I have found that some students just do not have an ear for pronunciation, but when they can see their bodies in the mirror and have a visual of their errors, they are able to achieve excellent English pronunciation. Keeping a set available to your students is easy and may make a huge difference in how some students speak.

### 3 PRESS THE RED BUTTON

I may date myself by saying I first used tape recorders in my early pronunciation classes, but even though technology has advanced, letting your students listen to themselves remains an important tool for the ESL teacher. We all sound differently in our heads than we do to the people around us, don't we? ESL students are no exception. Not only can they mishear the tonal qualities of their voices as we all do, but they can also mishear the accuracy of their pronunciation. Though tape recorders may be a thing of the past, today's technology makes it even easier for students to get empirical feedback on their spoken English. Give your class one to three sentences to dictate that test for a particular pronunciation pattern. Then, have pairs work together to record one another as they speak these sentences aloud. Most students will probably have tools on their cell phones which will enable them to keep and then view a recording of themselves saying the test sentences. Don't stop there, though, with your movie

making. Give your students a chance to record you, up close and personal, saying those same sentences. Then, have them watch your recording and then their own. By comparing their own pronunciation to yours in the test sentences, listening to and watching themselves, they will be able to note the points at which their pronunciation differs from yours. This is a good activity to do on a regular basis – weekly or monthly depending on the length of your class. That way, students can also compare their latter recordings to their earlier ones and see evidence of their improvement overall.

### 4 RELEASE YOUR INNER LINGUIST

Perhaps it is because I approach English instruction from a linguistics vantage point, but I have always found that my students take well to learning the phonetic alphabet. If you are familiar with the phonetic alphabet, you know it is a system of writing based entirely on the sounds in words. This one alphabet is used to transcribe any spoken language. That may seem like a complicated way of spelling words, but it's really more than that. English spelling may theoretically be based on the sounds in words, but often one letter will make two, three or more sounds. And alternately, one sound may be spelled a handful of different ways. When your students know and use the phonetic alphabet, it gives them another empirical tool for learning and perfecting their English pronunciation. Then any time you introduce new words into their vocabulary with their phonetic spelling, if they have mastered the phonetic alphabet they will have no trouble pronouncing these new words.

## YOU CAN USE MANY TECHNIQUES TO HELP YOUR STUDENTS PERFECT THEIR PRONUNCIATION. THESE FOUR ESSENTIAL KEYS HELP YOUR STUDENTS FOCUS ON THE SCIENCE OF SPEAKING.

When your students have the tools to understand that science including ways to construct and evaluate language, they are sure to be successful in their English pronunciation.



# How to Teach Pronunciation & Accent Reduction: 7 Best Practices

Most ESL teachers who have been teaching for some time are comfortable being assigned a reading/writing class or one that focuses on speaking and listening. Sometimes, however, we may be assigned to teach a pronunciation class or a class with a heavy focus on pronunciation or accent reduction. This may throw us into a panic. How do we teach a pronunciation class? What materials and/or texts are available? We may have unfavorable memories of rhymes and tongue-twisters. Am I supposed to do that for a class period with adult students? There is no need to panic. Because there is a demand for accent reduction, there has evolved a set of best practices for helping your students with their pronunciation.

## 7 PRINCIPLES FOR TEACHING PRONUNCIATION/ACCENT REDUCTION

### 1 IN THE BEGINNING, ASSESS

Tape each student reading aloud a passage from a book, for example. Many pronunciation books have such a passage that covers all vowel and consonant sounds as well as question and statement intonation in English. Look for patterns in student response: what are the common problems students seem to have? Sentence or word stress? Intonation? “R” sounds? You will in all likelihood find common areas of concern, which will suggest your syllabus for the term.

### 2 FIND THE RIGHT CORE TEXT

Even when I heavily supplement a text, I find it helpful to have a “core” text to rely on and structure the curriculum. Once you’ve assessed your students, you can then decide on your textbook. For example, if you have a class of students with many concerns related to reducing structure words, using correct question intonation, and connecting words in speech, this suggests a text that focuses on stress and intonation. If it’s not possible to order such a text at your site, searching the web will yield useful materials at ESL websites - in addition, many of the larger publisher websites such as Cambridge University Press have sample chapters of books that may be downloaded and copied legally and without charge.

### 3 FOCUS ON THE BIG ISSUES

Rather than getting bogged down on the “b/v” distinction, for example, it’s more productive to work on sentence and question intonation. Almost all students are affected by issues such as intonation and stressing content words in English while reducing structure or grammar words, while relatively few are affected by the “b/v” distinction. In addition, comprehensibility is usually more affected by faulty stress and intonation patterns, such as giving all syllables in a sentence equal stress, than by not pronouncing the “r” sound as a native English speaker would.

### 4 INTRODUCE A POINT THEN WORK IN SMALL GROUPS

Developing native-like pronunciation requires practice and more practice. Therefore, limited time should be spent on teacher lecture and more on student work in small groups, where there is a chance for each student to practice for an extended time. Therefore, the teacher should just introduce a point, such as the raised intonation in English at the end of yes/no questions, and then students can practice in groups: Students asking each other “Do you like the university?” “Do you have pets?” “Do you have a brother or sister?” and other such yes/no questions can offer some conversational practice as well as practicing the correct intonation of yes/no questions.

### 5 INCLUDE A VARIETY OF SENSES

Using mirrors, rubber bands, and kazooos get students involved. Too often, English class does not include many different senses, focused mostly on a series of texts for reading and writing. But pronunciation class offers a chance to include different modalities of learning, such as tactile: stretching rubber bands to the length of syllables when spoken so that students involve their sense of touch and sight as well and get a real visual of what a lengthened or shortened syllable is. Kazooos, a small flute-like instrument which students can speak into and hear the “music” of their speech, can be purchased fairly cheaply at a toy store. They offer the opportunity to focus on the intonation of a sentence when speaking into it as that is what the kazoo emphasizes.

Finally, small hand mirrors give each student a chance to clearly see how they are (or are not) rounding their lips for the beginning “r” sound, for example.

### 6 INCLUDE VARIED MATERIALS

Pronunciation class also offers the chance to be creative. The syllabus is generally more flexible, allowing for some supplementing and varying of materials. For example, simple poems like Frost’s “Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening,” not only teach students stress and intonation, but also introduce a valuable piece of American literature. Well-known short stories by Hemingway, Chopin, and Poe can also teach American literature as well as pronunciation when students read them aloud in groups. Popular music lyrics are also great for teaching intonation and stress patterns as the words are already put to a beat that often matches American English in the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Film clips with analysis of the pronunciation of the actors can also be enjoyable as well as instructive: e.g., “Is the lead actor American? How do you know? What region of the United States does he probably come from? How can you tell?” are questions that can help students begin to analyze pronunciation in an authentic way, connected to how people actually sound in dialogue.

### 7 ASSESS OFTEN, INFORMALLY AND FORMALLY.

Pronunciation class is also a chance to engage in some informal assessment: assessing students regularly with relatively small tools that are used within the course of a class day, such as walking around and noting how most students are doing with the final “—s” sound, and then pulling the class together to discuss common areas of concern. More formal assessments might include students taping themselves reading a passage that emphasizes a particular pronunciation issue or giving a short speech in front the class, which may be graded by a rubric.

### THE PRONUNCIATION CLASS CAN OFTEN FEEL LIKE A “NO-MAN’S” LAND, WHERE NO ONE HAS GONE BEFORE.

By carefully assessing the students and building a curriculum around common concerns, a well-structured pronunciation class may be designed.

# Teaching Pronunciation at the Segmental level

Any English speaker who has ever tried to perfect the trilled 'r' in Spanish knows that learning individual sounds can be a frustrating experience.

What's even more frustrating? Trying to teach that learner how to make the sound correctly. Add to that trying to teach a classroom full of students, all with their own unique pronunciation problems, and you have a very difficult task ahead of you. Here are a few tricks and tips for helping students with the most basic level of pronunciation instruction:

## HOW TO TEACH PRONUNCIATION AT THE SEGMENTAL LEVEL

### 1 KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

Each language has its own set of phonological sounds, and as we grow as children, we only recognize and produce the sounds of our own language - our minds sort of tune out the ones that are irrelevant to our everyday life. This is where the rumor comes in that people who learn second languages as adults will never sound like a native-speaker. While it is increasingly hard to perfect pronunciation as an adult learner, it is possible to improve significantly.

As a language teacher, you can help by recognizing the common English sounds missing from your students' native language inventories. Knowing which sounds are most difficult for your students can help you to plan lessons useful to the majority of your students.

A few common pronunciation difficulties by language group:

- Arabic p/b w/v f/v
- Spanish th sh/ch s/z
- French th r n/ng (like sing)
- Chinese l/r b/d w/v
- Korean p/f f/v th
- Japanese l/r f/v th

- Turkish th w/v n/ng (like sing)

It's important to note that these are not all of the problem sounds for each language group, but just three examples from each. Just about every language could also add vowels to their list of problematic sounds. Also, keep in mind that each individual speaker may have variations based on dialect and how long they've been learning English, so it's critical to get to analyze your students individually.

### 2 LISTENING PRACTICE

Research has shown that perception of sounds often precedes production of sounds - in other words, your students have to know that there is a difference between the sounds and be able to perceive that difference before they can be instructed to make the different sound.

Do lots of minimal pairs practice to help with listening (rake-lake, peach-beach, very-weary, etc.) There are lots of good minimal pairs resources available. You can use a note card activity where you give students a different-colored note card to represent each sound that you're practicing. Read off minimal pairs and have students raise the appropriate color of note card when they hear the sound.

### 3 BE EXPLICIT

If we were trying to retrain students in how to hold a pencil in their non-dominant hand, we could teach them by showing how to hold the pencil and even moving their hands for them. We can't do that when teaching pronunciation, yet we still have to retrain their tongue and mouth muscles to move differently than they ever have before. The next best thing is to show pictures and videos of what the tongue position should be and how the mouth should be shaped. These are easily accessible through free websites and YouTube.

### 4 USE SOME SORT OF UNIVERSAL ALPHABET

We all know that we learn best when we can build on pre-existing knowledge. If students can see the relationship between a sound in their language and the target English sound, they will more readily recognize the differences in sounds. They don't have to become expert linguists, but having a universal alphabet will help them to draw connections to sounds in English words. IPA is the most common and probably most prolific on the Internet, but it can be confusing (e.g. the symbol /i/ makes the [eee] sound and can be confused with the English letter 'e'.) The benefit to IPA is that it shows the relationship in terms of how to pronounce the sounds - for example, the vowel chart explains how the vowel sounds are related to each other as far as being front, back, high or low.

Other programs use color to help separate the sounds across languages which may be easier for your students to see and visualize. Rather than learning a new alphabet, color coding words in English will help them to pronounce new words based on their existing knowledge of familiar words because of the similar colors.

### 5 GIVE TIPS AND TRICKS

Showing your students pictures of the position of the mouth is good, but giving them some tangible tricks they can put into practice immediately will help them advance more quickly.

A few tricks for tricky pronunciation sounds:

#### /L/ AND /R/

For American /r/, the tongue should be flexed and the tip pointing upwards towards the back of the mouth. It is not trilled or rolled like in other languages.

The easiest way to distinguish /l/ from /r/ is to stick the tongue between the teeth when producing /l/. Most American speakers will produce the /l/

sound in this way and it is visually different from the /r/.

### **/P/ AND /B/**

Have students dangle a piece of paper loosely in front of their mouth. Tell them that when they produce /p/, there should be an extra puff of air that they don't have when they produce /b/. Explain that when they produce /p/, the paper in front of their mouth should move with the extra air-flow, but the paper should remain still when they produce /b/.

### **ALL VOICED AND VOICELESS SOUNDS**

Have students place their hand on their throat. Tell them to say "l" – they should feel vibration in their throat coming from their vocal cords. Next, tell them to make the "s" sound - there should be no vibration as this is a voiceless sound. Now you can introduce voiced/voiceless contrasts and tell students to feel for vibration. While there aren't many languages that struggle with differentiating voiced from voiceless sounds, knowing when a word ends with a voiced or voiceless consonant can be important for other word endings (like adding either /s/, /z/, or /iz/ for plurals and /d/, /t/, or /ld/ for regular past tense).

### **/TH/ SOUND**

This sound not found in a lot of our students' first languages, but it is relatively easy to correct. Tell students to stick out their tongue (don't be afraid-it's not rude in this context!) Tell them to bite down (gently!) on their tongue and blow air between their teeth. Practice turning on and off voicing (in the previous activity) to get the voiced and voiceless /th/ sound.

## **6 PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE**

As with any skill, the best way to get them to learn is to practice- a lot! Students may be shy at first about trying to pronounce these sounds as they don't want to make mistakes. Use tongue twisters as a fun activity to help students loosen up and feel more comfortable trying sounds. Make sure that you practice sounds in all word positions- beginning, middle, and end. Also, try it with some different letter combinations (for example, the word beard is considerably easier to say than world).

### **YOUNG STUDENTS CAN PICK UP PRONUNCIATION LIKE SPONGES, BUT IF YOU TEACH OLDER STUDENTS, YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF WITH FRUSTRATED LEARNERS.**

Try these tips and activities in your class and watch as they improve their skills!



# Online Odysseys: 3 Websites to Help You Teach Pronunciation

In order to gain regular and varied pronunciation practice, students should be exposed to a range of accents, speech patterns, and ideas to polish their own accents in and out of the classroom.

Deciding which pronunciation websites to showcase in the classroom can be time-consuming and cumbersome. Take a tour of these three tremendous websites and discover a new favorite to aid you in teaching pronunciation!

## THESE 3 WEBSITES WILL HELP YOU TEACH PRONUNCIATION

### 1 MERRIAM-WEBSTER'S LEARNER'S PAGE:

A favorite website of teachers around the globe who wish to inspire solid pronunciation skills is Merriam-Webster's Learner's Page ([www.learnersdictionary.com/](http://www.learnersdictionary.com/)). It has many uses, and could be utilized in and out of the classroom. One very useful aspect of this website is the Word of the Day feature. It provides a word with phonetic spelling, an easy-to-understand definition and an example sentence. For pronunciation refinement there is an audio file which students can listen to as many times as they need. It is suitable for pronunciation practice as well as an inherent vocabulary skill builder. Another useful section to this website is the area for pronunciation exercises which can be found at: <http://www.learnersdictionary.com/pronex/pronex.htm>

There are 14 sessions, and each session has 4 different exercises plus a review with sentence practice. Each of the exercises focuses on two specific sounds, homophones, or syllable stress. The exercises are presented by furnishing sentences with the focal sound in a written example. All sentences also include audio pronunciations that can be utilized repeatedly. Students learn not only pronunciation

but an abundance of new vocabulary and useful English language distinctions.

To gain access to even more exercises, students and teachers can register on the website at no cost. The free registration entitles users to their own dictionary of saved words. They can then access those at any time for practice. Registrants also gain access to the 3,000 words dictionary. This online learner's dictionary has compiled 3,000 of the most commonly spoken English words. The words are found in everyday speech and are requisite for anyone learning English as a second language. Once registered you can check off words from the list and place them directly into your personal word list. The dictionary entries are organized alphabetically, are searchable, and have an audio pronunciation.

### 2 HOWJSAY:

([howjsay.com](http://howjsay.com)) This free online talking dictionary has several uses for improving pronunciation. It is very simple to use and even students with little technical knowledge or experience with the internet will find it fun and user-friendly. To use it, simply type a word, phrase or sentence into the box and submit it. When you see the result, tap the mouse to access the entry. When you put your mouse over the result, the entry will be spoken in correct English. The words are pre-recorded in a human voice, with pronunciation in standard British English. World English alternatives like American English are also available.

The howjsay website offers a unique and valuable resource for non-native speakers to vocalize with confidence and fluency. There are several ways in which you could utilize this website. Bring it into the classroom as a resource for demonstrations, examples, or create your own word or phrase of the day. You could also recommend it to students for independent study. This website also offers free iPhone

and Android applications that could be of interest to students on the go.

### 3 RACHEL'S ENGLISH:

Rachel's English ([www.rachelsenglish.com/](http://www.rachelsenglish.com/)) provides a unique, practical, and distinct way to practice pronunciation. It was created by an ESL teacher who has also studied languages. These video lessons offer a range of topics which are approached very professionally. She furnishes the lessons with elements of fun and creativity, and she speaks slowly but not awkwardly. The provided explanations are easy to understand for all levels. The lessons come complete with memorable practice and are accented with a down-to-earth tone. Many of the videos show close-ups of her mouth in order to display how sounds are created and the varied subtleties of the English language. The videos are designated into 5 sections making it easy for you to find what you are looking for. The sections include everything necessary for good pronunciation and communication. The sections are: vowels, consonants, diphthongs, consonant clusters, and comparisons. She also provides pronunciation practice divided into four sections. Those sections are: stress, reduction, intonation, and practice. Within each of these sections, there are multiple topics, videos, and tests. This website is effective for in-class activities, independent study for students and teachers alike. Whether you are searching for new ways to explain the nuances of pronunciation or looking for interesting supplemental exercises, Rachel does a fantastic job of combining explanations with useful examples and challenging practice.

### TAKE A TRIP TO THESE WEBSITES AND EXPERIMENT WITH HOW YOU MIGHT INCORPORATE THEM INTO YOUR LESSONS.

Each one facilitates student-centered learning and provides real-world examples to become an expert speaker of English!

# Project Pronunciation: Perfecting Speaking Skills in Every Lesson

## PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE SHOULD BE A NATURAL PART OF EVERY ESL LESSON.

Speaking correctly is such a huge part of learning English, varied and interesting pronunciation practice should include communication, correction, and lots of organic speaking opportunities.

## PROJECT PRONUNCIATION: PERFECTING SPEAKING SKILLS IN EVERY LESSON

### 1 CORRECT, CORRECT, CORRECT

One of the most important aspects of any ESL classroom is creating a safe environment for learning where students are also corrected when they misspeak or make mistakes. This is especially important when approaching pronunciation because if students are allowed to make mistakes over and over again, they will develop bad habits that are difficult to break. In order to make corrections meaningful, students should repeat the correction on the spot immediately after the teacher corrects them. Students look to the teacher for consistent pronunciation correction because it establishes a level of trust: you are not going to allow them to speak incorrectly. So it is key for teachers to be able to correct with confidence and without stopping the flow of games or conversations. A good guideline for correcting pronunciation is to wait until you hear a student misspeak at least twice before jumping in to adjust the mistake. You have to seize the right moment to correct. Don't miss the opportunity to pass, but if you do miss your moment, be sure to snag the next chance. In addition, if you hear multiple students making the same mistake, it is time to not only correct, but to stop what you are doing to provide a short explanation of the correction.

### 2 READ IT ALOUD

It can sometimes be challenging

to create stimulating reading activities that provide an equal amount of practice for all students. In order to practice pronunciation as well as vocabulary, stress and intonation students should spend some amount of class time reading aloud. This doesn't have to be as dry as it sounds. Make games out of it. One option is to divide the class in half, and have a short reading or conversation in front of all students. Each half of the class will take turns reading a sentence as a group. The groups will alternate quickly. To make it more fun have students stand as a group as they read their sentence uniformly. This game should move fast from group to group, and students should be encouraged to speak clearly, loudly, and enthusiastically. You can also throw in additional elements like asking students to read with a particular emotion or characteristic like sadly or egotistically!

Other ways to incorporate reading aloud is to build in rounds practice. Rounds practice is simply when students go around the room and individually practicing Q and A, specific grammar structures, or conversation topics. Students are generally given a structure to follow, but must create their own question, answer, or opinion. This encourages students to pay attention and to be present in class because they know that they will be expected to speak in each and every class. Incorporating rounds practice takes the pressure off speaking aloud because the expectation is the same for everyone, and it yields a range of different examples. It also gets students interacting with one another. The teacher will help if students get stuck, and students will also begin helping one another when they run into problems with grammar, pronunciation or understanding.

### 3 DICTIONARY GAMES

There are several ways to make using a dictionary fun and inspiring. Some of the best ways to do this are to create games that utilize a dictionary so that students not only practice

pronunciation of new words, they also begin learning how to build vocabulary and remember new words.

To introduce dictionary work, make a team game out of quickly looking up words. You can do this by putting students into small groups and providing each group with an English dictionary. Then choose a word at random, say it to the students, and have them race to find it in their dictionaries. The first group to find the word reads out the definition and practices natural pronunciation as they go. To reward the winning group allow them to choose the next word to search. Before playing this game be sure that you have introduced how to locate words in a dictionary, and how to utilize the elements of the entries such as the pronunciation guide, the parts of speech, and the definitions. A variation on this game could be to write out a list of words on the board that the students must look up. That way they have to work out the pronunciation as well as locate the definition. To make this even more challenging, misspell some of the words, and have students make the corrections together.

One last idea to utilize dictionary work is to create an English Dictionary Word of the Day Wall. This works great for all levels, and you can have students contribute to it by writing down new words on color coded cards by part of speech. They can then write out the pronunciation and the meaning of the word before it gets posted on the wall. These dictionary tasks and games get students comfortable using dictionaries and empowers them to take control of their learning and pronunciation.

## EACH AND EVERY ESL CLASS SHOULD INCORPORATE PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE WITH A VARIETY OF SPEAKING EXERCISES.

Students will increase their retention of grammar and vocabulary when they gain confidence about pronunciation.

# What'd You Say? 3 Secrets to Targeting Problematic Pronunciation

## PRONUNCIATION CAN BE A TREMENDOUS BARRIER AND SOURCE OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS FOR ESL LEARNERS OF ALL AGES AND LEVELS.

It's critical to be sensitive to the needs of every individual as well as to devise practical and memorable pronunciation lessons and solutions. Examine these 3 secrets to target problematic pronunciation and learn how to combat common issues before they materialize.

## HOW TO TARGET PROBLEMATIC PRONUNCIATION

### 1 VOCAL CHORD EXERCISES

Have you ever seen actors or singers warm up their vocal chords? They do some pretty funny stuff to stretch out their lungs, exercise their lips and jaw, and relax facial muscles. There is great method to their madness which you can tap into for ESL learners. This type of practice can be amusing but also very effective to battle pronunciation intimidation or self-consciousness. There are many ways you can utilize these warm-up activities. You could perform some vocal chord exercises, jaw relaxations, and pointed practice on particular sounds. The students can then practice them on their own or together with you in class. These exercises can be done on the spot anytime you want to loosen up the mood and do pronunciation practice. This type of activity works really well because it is light-hearted and allows students to make some noise and put inhibitions aside.

If you would like some inspiration how to bring this into your classes, there are several YouTube videos that can help you learn the best exercises and sounds to utilize. One specific resource is an educator named Marsha Chan. She has created several videos on YouTube that you and your students could benefit from watching and imitating. She makes the exercises fun while also providing explanations and useful practice. Marsha inspires you to think about how we use our mouth, lips, jaw,

and vocal chords to make sound. You can easily use her exercises as a jumping off point to create your own. This type of pronunciation work is targeted and memorable. Once you refine your process of how and when to do some of these warm-ups, students will be begging for more!

### 2 VOICED AND VOICELESS CONSONANTS

Sharpening correct pronunciation of similar sounds is essential for learners to develop clear speech. Providing guidelines of which consonants are voiced and which are voiceless is an important first step. Voiced consonants create a vibration in the vocal cords. You can feel voiced sounds where they are produced, at the neck. Voiceless consonants are the opposite of voiced, and do not create any vibration in the vocal chords. To demonstrate voiceless sounds, students put fingers of one hand on their throat, and the other hand in front of their mouth. If they feel a heavy breath, but no vibration, it is a voiceless sound. An alternative to this is to put a piece of paper in front of the mouth. The paper should move when the sound is voiceless. Sometimes it can be a bit tricky for students to feel or not feel the vibration, so have them loudly and clearly produce the sounds so they can determine whether each sound is voiced or voiceless.

There are many more voiced sounds than voiceless. Here is the list of letters that are voiced and voiceless:

- VOICED: b, d, g, j, l, m, n, r, v, w, y, z, th
- VOICELESS: f, h, k, p, s, t, ch, sh, th

When working on these sounds, it is quite common to use a pair of opposites to really drive the point home. The pairs are often the commonly confused sounds anyway, so it is only natural to work on them together to punctuate the differences. Common pairs are k/g, b/p, l/r, and s/z. Also th has both a voiced

and voiceless component. To practice these, choose words that you can compare. For example, use the sentence: Think about this thing, that thing, and those things. In general, the voiced th sound occurs in a lot fewer words than the unvoiced th. However the voiced th sounds occurs a lot in small words like the, that, these, their, and them.

### 3 NURSERY RHYMES

It might sound crazy but Nursery Rhymes provide an unlimited supply of simple, quick pronunciation work. They can be nonsensical, often focus on specific sounds, and inherently have rhymes that assist with language development. You can find all the resources you need on the internet. Students are often curious about the meaning behind nursery rhymes as well, so you could explore the nonsense, or use them to increase vocabulary and explain concepts. A few examples of songs that are easy to learn and have great language value are: Hey Diddle Diddle, Pop Goes the Weasel, and Mary Had a Little Lamb. They are repetitive, often rhyme and have catchy and memorable melodies. Some of the other songs like Itsy Bitsy Spider, I'm a little Teapot, and the Wheels on The Bus can also be combined with hand motions for younger learners or adults who are open to being a bit animated.

### PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE STIFF, ROTE OR QUIET.

In fact healthy pronunciation practice should be exaggerated, loose, and full of sound. Try the above three secrets to keep your students engaged and excited about pronunciation work.



# 7 Fun ESL Games to Practice Pronunciation

**LET'S ALL BE HONEST. PRONUNCIATION IS ONE OF THOSE THINGS THAT WE DON'T OFTEN TEACH EXPLICITLY.**

Of course, we correct our students' pronunciation when they make mistakes, when they're not speaking clearly or when they need to be a little more accurate. But do we devote class time to pronunciation practice on a regular basis? Don't feel bad if your answer is no. Instead, try playing these games to practice pronunciation. Your students will thank you for it, and you'll be relieved you can make pronunciation practice fun!

## 7 FUN GAMES FOR PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE

### 1 ODD ONE OUT

Prepare a list with sets of three to four words that have the same vowel sound, plus one somewhere in the middle that is different. For example, cut, but, nut and put. Divide your class into two teams and have them form two lines in front of the board. Write the first set of four words on the board. The students at the front of the line must read the set of words, race to the board once they have identified the word that sounds different and circle it. The first student to circle the odd word scores a point for the team.

### 2 HOMOPHONE GO FISH

This is a game that is best played in pairs or small groups – a really fun way to practice homophones! Make a list of the homophone pairs you'll use, and write each word on a separate index card or piece of paper. Make as many decks of cards as you'll need depending on the number of groups you'll have. Each group gets a set of cards - each student gets five cards. The remaining cards are put in a draw pile. The goal of the game is to find the matching homophone by asking another student if they have "a word that sounds like...". For example:

*S1: Do you have a word that*

*sounds like "plane"?*

*S2: Yes, I do. (hands over "plain")*

Now, to keep the matching pair the S1 must use both words correctly in a sentence or two. If S2 does not possess the homophone he/she has to say, "Go fish!" And S1 takes a card from the draw pile.

### 3 PRONUNCIATION MAZE

In this game, students must connect words that have the same vowel sound. Take a look at this Pronunciation Maze ([busyteacher.org/10886-pronunciation-maze-oy.html](http://busyteacher.org/10886-pronunciation-maze-oy.html)) as an example. Here, students must follow the path from boys to choice by following the words with the /oy/ sound. But you can create your own maze. Make a 10x6 table, add the words that have the sound you want to practice, then fill in the rest with others words that don't have this sound at all. You can have students take turns on one maze. Or print out several copies to see who reaches the end of the maze first!

### 4 FOUR IN A ROW

Here's a good one for young learners! Divide your class into groups of three to four students. Print out this Four in a Row worksheet [[busyteacher.org/2764-four-in-a-row-phonics-worksheet.html](http://busyteacher.org/2764-four-in-a-row-phonics-worksheet.html)] (or make your own!) and cut it up into separate cards. In groups, students must work together to arrange the words into sets of four words that sound the same. The first team to complete all of the sets wins.

### 5 IPA BINGO

There are lots of pronunciation games you can play with IPA flashcards, but here's a great Bingo with a twist. You'll have to prepare several 5x5 Bingo sheets with sample words for each of the phonemes - students can play individually or in pairs. Take an IPA flashcard from a bag and say the sound: /oy/. Students must find the word that matches that sound on their Bingo sheet in order to cross it

out: toy. If this is too hard, you can say the sound and give them a sample word: /oy/ - toy. Students must find a word with the same sound: boy.

### 6 MINIMAL PAIR SLAP

There's no better way to practice those pesky little minimal pairs! Choose sets of minimal pairs and write down each word on a separate card/ piece of paper. Divide the class into two teams and have each team line up in front of a desk - the first students in line must have their hands behind their backs. Present two cards: forty and fourteen. Say one of the words out loud: fourteen. Students must slap the right card. The one who slaps it first must use the word in a sentence to get a point for the team.

### 7 RHYMING PAIR MEMORY GAME

Make cards with words that rhyme, like name/game, box/fox, tick/stick, etc. Place them face down. Students take turns turning over the cards to find the pairs that rhyme.

### IT TAKES A LOT MORE THAN SIMPLE CORRECTION TO IMPROVE YOUR STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION.

Take a few minutes of your class time every day to practice some phonemes, consonant or vowel sounds, or verb endings. And to add a little more fun to it, make a game out of it!

# The 10 Coolest Pronunciation Tools for ESL Students

ESL students struggle with a lot of things. Many of these they can practice with the use of self-study materials. They can do as many grammar exercises as they want, they can work with audio and video to improve listening, they can even join native English speakers in their free time for some extra speaking practice. But it is not likely they will correct your students' pronunciation. Pronunciation is one of those things that only teachers correct – in the classroom. Friends and acquaintances will usually let pronunciation mistakes slide for the sake of keeping the conversation flowing. So what can your students do in their self-study time to improve their pronunciation? In today's technological age, the best solutions to any of our problems are usually found online or in apps. And here are some pronunciation tools you can recommend to your ESL students.

## TOP 5 MOBILE APPS FOR PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE

### 1 SOUNDS: THE PRONUNCIATION APP

Published by Macmillan Publishers, Sounds: The Pronunciation App ([www.soundspronapp.com/](http://www.soundspronapp.com/)) is probably the most popular pronunciation app in the market. The app features an interactive phonemic chart in both American and British English, a "How do you say..." option that allows students to not only listen to how a word is pronounced but also record and playback their own voice, and even the possibility to buy additional wordlists once they have mastered the ones included in the app. Available for iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch and Android devices. There's a free download, but it only offers some of the features.

### 2 ENGLISH FILE PRONUNCIATION

Developed by Oxford University Press, this app also allows students to switch between American and British English. It features an interactive sounds chart, over 200 sample words and a pronunciation game, and gives students the option

to record and playback their own voices. Available for Android and iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad. The free demo comes with limited functionality.

### 3 PRONUNCIATION: CLEAR SPEECH

Pronunciation: Clear Speech ([www.cambridgeapps.org/pronunciation/pcs.html](http://www.cambridgeapps.org/pronunciation/pcs.html)) was developed by Cambridge University Press and provides a little more fun in pronunciation practice. It includes four games students can choose from for intermediate English pronunciation. Available for iPad, iPod Touch and iPhone. There is another version for pre-intermediate learners, Basic Pronunciation: Clear Speech from the Start ([www.cambridgeapps.org/pronunciation/bpc-sfs.html](http://www.cambridgeapps.org/pronunciation/bpc-sfs.html)).

### 4 HOWJSAY PRONUNCIATION DICTIONARY

The online dictionary, howjsay ([www.howjsay.com/](http://www.howjsay.com/)), is also available for download from iTunes and GooglePlay. This app features over 150,000 entries (the largest English pronunciation dictionary in the world!), all easily accessed with just one click.

### 5 PRONUNCIATION KING

Pronunciation King is an app that comes in two versions, one for UK English and one for US English. This app is very easy to use and works offline.

## TOP 5 ONLINE TOOLS FOR PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE

### 1 PRONOUNCE IT RIGHT

How do you pronounce "Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche"? Pronounce It Right ([www.pronounceitright.com/](http://www.pronounceitright.com/)) will tell you exactly how! This is a website that takes the guesswork out of pronouncing the names of famous composers, philosophers or writers. And good news! There's also an app available for Android and iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch. The app comes with 1000 famous names and works offline.

### 2 BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

Within its Learning English site ([www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learning-english/grammar/pron/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learning-english/grammar/pron/)), the BBC offers excellent pronunciation tips and opportunities for British English pronunciation practice, featuring the sounds and features of English pronunciation as well as interactive quizzes and three radio programs. An invaluable resource for both ESL students and teachers.

### 3 RACHEL'S ENGLISH

Rachel's English ([www.rachelsen-english.com/](http://www.rachelsen-english.com/)) is a website I can't recommend enough. In her series of free videos, Rachel shows students not only how to pronounce specific consonant or vowel sounds, she also covers all aspects of intonation and stress. This website is the ideal companion for any student who wants to devote some extra time to pronunciation practice.

### 4 THE SEPTIC'S COMPANION

The aubergine is a vegetable in British English and more difficult to pronounce than its American counterpart, the eggplant. The Septic's Companion ([septiccompanion.com/showcat.php?cat=places](http://septiccompanion.com/showcat.php?cat=places)) offers definitions of common British English slang, including foods, sport and places. Not recommended for children as it includes colorful insults as well.

### 5 INOGOLO

At Inogolo.com students will be able to hear the English pronunciation of names, places and a variety of other things. They also have very interesting pronunciation guides, in which students can hear the pronunciation of words and names in a variety of topics.

**WITH THE RESOURCES LISTED ABOVE, STUDENTS SHOULDN'T HAVE ANY EXCUSES FOR NOT PRACTICING PRONUNCIATION AT HOME. ON THE CONTRARY! THEY'LL BE TOO EAGER TO PRACTICE AS THESE APPS AND WEBSITES CERTAINLY MAKE PRONUNCIATION MORE FUN!**

# Ants in the Pants? Enchant Your Students with These Great Chants

**WHERE DID HUMPTY DUMPTY SIT? WHO HELPED PUT HIM BACK TOGETHER AFTER HIS TRAGIC FALL? IF YOU KNOW THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS, IT IS BECAUSE YOU'VE REPEATED THE FAMOUS NURSERY RHYME COUNTLESS TIMES. AND THAT IS THE POWER OF CHANTS.**

Chants are fun and easy to learn, mainly because they usually rhyme and can be easily repeated. But they are more than pure fun. Most are great sources of vocabulary and help improve pronunciation. Plus, they help restless students focus. Here are some chants you can use in your ESL class in a variety of ways:

## HOW TO USE CHANTS IN YOUR ESL CLASS

### 1 CLASSROOM RULES CHANT

Download this simple chant ([busyteacher.org/7162-classroom-rules-chant.html](http://busyteacher.org/7162-classroom-rules-chant.html)) - you may even print it and make it into a poster. It's a great, easy way to teach and review classroom rules with your students. Repeat it several times, and they won't soon forget the rules.

### 2 MY HOUSE

This is a fun way to teach the rooms in a house and some of the things you find in them.

*Bedroom, bathroom, living room, kitchen.*

*Bedroom, bathroom, living room, kitchen.*

*Bedroom, bathroom, living room, kitchen.*

*This is my family's house.*

*Sink in the bathroom. Sink in the kitchen.*

*Sink in the bathroom. Sink in the kitchen.*

*Sink in the bathroom. Sink in the kitchen.*

*This is my family's house.*

*TV and sofa are in the living room.*

*TV and sofa are in the living room.*

*TV and sofa are in the living room.*

*This is my family's house.*

And you can easily expand the chant to other rooms in the house. As you can see, it doesn't matter if the words don't rhyme - the essential element in the chant is repetition.

### 3 NURSERY RHYMES

Nursery rhymes are timeless classics that most people remember because they are repeated so often. TeachChildrenESL ([www.teachchildrenesl.com/songs.htm](http://www.teachchildrenesl.com/songs.htm)) has nursery rhymes in PDF files that you can download and print for your class. Of particular use in the ESL classroom are:

- Hey Diddle Diddle ([www.teachchildrenesl.com/filez8932/songs/diddle\\_diddle.pdf](http://www.teachchildrenesl.com/filez8932/songs/diddle_diddle.pdf)) – Practice simple past forms of verbs like laugh, run, and jump
- Humpty Dumpty ([www.teachchildrenesl.com/filez8932/songs/humpty\\_dumpty.pdf](http://www.teachchildrenesl.com/filez8932/songs/humpty_dumpty.pdf)) – Also features verbs in simple past

### 4 COUNTING BUBBLE GUM

This chant/game will help your young learners practice their counting skills and have fun while they do it. Have your students sit in a circle on the floor. Go around the circle and tap each head as you say: Bubble gum, bubble gum, in a dish, how many pieces do you wish? (student says a number). Count the number of heads indicated and the last student is eliminated from the circle. This student must stand up and eliminate another in the same way. The last student left standing wins!

### 5 HOW MANY DAYS?

This is the chant everyone learns to remember how many days are in each month – and a great way to practice them in English:

*Thirty days has September, April*

*June and November.*

*All the rest have 31, excepting February alone.*

*And it had 28 days time,*

*But in leap years February has 29.*

### 6 APPLES AND BANANAS

Here's a fun, but also challenging chant. Students review vowel sounds.

*I like to eat, eat, eat apples and bananas*

*I like to eat, eat, eat apples and bananas*

*I like to ate, ate, ate ay-ples and ba-nay-nays*

*I like to ate, ate, ate ay-ples and ba-nay-nays*

*I like to eat, eat, eat ee-ples and bee-nee-nees*

*I like to eat, eat, eat ee-ples and bee-nee-nees*

*I like to ite, ite, ite i-ples and by-ny-nys*

*I like to ite, ite, ite i-ples and by-ny-nys*

*I like to ote, ote, ote oh-ples and bo-no-nos*

*I like to ote, ote, ote oh-ples and bo-no-nos*

*I like to oot, oot, oot oo-ples and boo-noo-noos*

*I like to oot, oot, oot oo-ples and boo-noo-noos*

### 7 ONE, TWO, BUCKLE MY SHOE

Another great way to review numbers one to ten.

*One, two,*

*Buckle my shoe.*

*Three, four,*

*Knock at the door.*

*Five, six,*

*Pick up sticks.*

*Seven, eight,*

*Lay them straight:*

*Nine, ten,*

*A big fat hen.*

### 8 GRAMMAR CHANTS

Now, here's your chance to get creative and make your own chant! Remember that rhyming is not absolutely necessary, very often it's the repetition



that works best. Here's an example of a chant you can say to practise simple present in both affirmative and negative forms:

*Teacher: I*

*Class: I*

*Teacher: I see you.*

*Class: I see you.*

*Teacher: He*

*Class: He*

*Teacher: He sees you.*

*Class: He sees you.*

*Teacher: I*

*Class: I*

*Teacher: I don't see.*

*Class: I don't see.*

*Teacher: He*

*Class: He*

*Teacher: He doesn't see.*

*Class: He doesn't see.*

*Teacher: We*

*Class: We*

*Teacher/Leader: We speak English.*

*Class/Group: We speak English.*

### **NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF SIMPLE REPETITION!**

Students learn words, structures, and pronunciation. And don't be surprised if you hear them chanting as they walk down the hall. They may not be able to get your chants out their heads!

# Top 10 Tongue Twisters: True Teacher's Treasure?

## TONGUE TWISTERS IN THE ESL CLASSROOM – YES OR NO?

Although most don't make any sense at all, they can certainly help your students improve their pronunciation skills. Besides, they're a lot of fun! So, to spice things up a bit and inject a dose of silliness in the classroom, try using some of these classic tongue twisters combined with our useful suggestions for teaching them below:

## CLASSIC TONGUE TWISTERS

### 1 PETER PIPER

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. Did Peter Piper pick a peck of pickled peppers? If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?

### 2 WOODCHUCK

How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood? He would chuck, he would, as much as he could, and chuck as much wood as a woodchuck would if a woodchuck could chuck wood.

## EASY TONGUE TWISTERS

### 3 ICE CREAM

I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream!

### 4 I SAW SUSIE

I saw Susie sitting in a shoe shine shop.

## MEDIUM TONGUE TWISTERS

### 5 FUZZY WUZZY

Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear. Fuzzy Wuzzy had no hair. Fuzzy Wuzzy wasn't very fuzzy, was he?

### 6 CAN YOU CAN A CAN

Can you can a can as a canner can can a can?

### 7 I HAVE GOT A DATE

I have got a date at a quarter to eight - I'll see you at the gate, so don't be late.

### 8 TWO WITCHES, TWO WATCHES

If two witches would watch two watches, which witch would watch which watch?

## DIFFICULT TONGUE TWISTERS

### 9 BETTY BOTTER

Betty Botter had some butter, "But," she said, "this butter's bitter. If I bake this bitter butter, it would make my batter bitter. But a bit of better butter – that would make my batter better."

So she bought a bit of butter, better than her bitter butter, and she baked it in her batter, and the batter was not bitter. So 'twas better Betty Botter bought a bit of better butter.

### 10 DOCTOR DOCTORING

When a doctor doctors a doctor, does the doctor doing the doctoring doctor as the doctor being doctored wants to be doctored or does the doctor doing the doctoring doctor as he wants to doctor?

## TONGUE TWISTERS TEACHING TIPS

The first thing you'll need to consider is your students' ages and level. Tongue twisters are typically not very easy, but even very young ESL learners can learn to say, "I scream for ice cream!" Some of the tongue twisters that are longer can be cut down to a smaller bite size - most often only the first question in "Woodchuck" is used. You know your students better than anyone else, so choose the right tongue twisters for your class.

Choose a tongue twister with teaching potential. For example, "Peter Piper" is a great tongue twister if you want your students to practice the pronunciation of -ed endings (past form of regular verbs). "Betty Botter" has lots of great consonant sounds like the "b" sound. "I have got a date" is filled with words with the

same vowel sound.

## HOW TO PROCEED

1 Hand out copies of the tongue twister to your students and have them read it to themselves.

2 Discuss any words they may not be familiar with, like "batter" in Betty Botter. Make sure they understand what the tongue twister is trying to say - there's usually a logic to what initially seems to be a random jumble of words.

3 Ask a student to read it out loud, but don't make any corrections. Make a note of the problem areas. Do the same with the rest of the students in the class. Have them take turns reading the tongue twister, and you'll see which have greater difficulties.

4 Read each line or section, one at a time, and ask students to repeat after you. You may wish to do this with one student only, small groups, or the entire class, but this is a great opportunity to work especially with students who have pronunciation difficulties.

5 Focus on specific consonant or vowel sounds. This is a great time to practice sounds like the "t" sound in "better", "batter", and "bitter".

6 For extended practice, ask students to come up with more examples of homophones, like "which" and "witch", or more words that sound like "date", other than the ones included in the tongue twister - you may also choose to focus on the different pronunciations of the past form of regular verbs.

## AND DON'T FORGET TO HAVE FUN WITH THEM!

Try to read the tongue twister as fast as you can. Your students will be pleased to know that even YOU may get tongue tied! Or they may be very impressed as you roll one off your tongue perfectly. But remember that tongue twisters are not only fun. There are plenty of pronunciation lessons held within each and every one.

# How to Drill: Drilling Activities for Your English Classroom

**AFTER INTRODUCING NEW VOCABULARY WORDS, GRAMMAR POINTS, OR SENTENCE STRUCTURES, YOU HAVE TO DRILL THEM WITH YOUR CLASS.**

There are many ways to drill new material. Using a variety of drilling methods in your classes will help make this portion of the lesson more interesting and keep students focused.

## HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 CHORAL REPETITION

Choral repetition is a commonly used method of drilling. Students simply have to repeat words or phrases after you. This is a good method because it means that students are given excellent model pronunciation immediately before they are asked to respond.

Going through vocabulary this way many times in a single lesson will be boring for your students and they will be less inclined to perform well.

Break up the monotony by changing the speed or volume you use and have students change their responses accordingly. Using this method, students are not called on individually to pronounce words therefore you will need to check individual pronunciation and comprehension separately. Integrating these checks into your drill activities will keep students alert because they will never know when you may call on them.

### 2 DRILLING WITH FLASHCARDS

Drilling using flashcards can be useful as well. In the introduction, show students both the image and word sides of each flashcard. When you start drilling words for the first time, show students the word side of the flashcard so they can practice reading and pronouncing it.

Later on, rather than show students the word you want them to pronounce, show them the image. This will help check their comprehension of the material. With flashcards, you can also challenge your students when they become more familiar with certain vocabulary by flipping through the cards at a faster rate.

### 3 COMPREHENSION

Asking for volunteers or calling on students to give you a synonym, antonym, or translation of a new vocabulary word will check individual comprehension.

It is always nice to ask for volunteers as opposed to calling on students individually but generally a volunteer will be more confident in his answer so this will not properly show whether or not the class understands the material.

When you find it necessary to single out particular students who are not participating in drill activities, calling on them for answers is an easy method of focusing their attention on the lesson. Doing comprehension checks is also a good way to break up the drill activities a bit.

### 4 DRILLING IN PAIRS

As material becomes more familiar, you may want to conduct short pair activities where a student's comprehension is tested by his partner. To do this with a vocabulary list for instance, have student A read the translation of each word in random order while the student B says the word in English. Student A can then place a checkmark next to all the words student B got correct and then the students can switch roles. With this method students can check each other and have visual proof of how well they performed afterwards which they can refer to when practicing material on their own or preparing for exams.

Conducting an activity such as this on a regular basis will help students re-

view vocabulary often and should not take more than five minutes even with fifteen to twenty vocabulary words. It may still be necessary to practice using choral repetition before performing pair activities so that students are reminded of the proper pronunciation of the vocabulary.

### 5 GAMES

Breaking your classroom up into sections where each section says one portion of a new structure is another way of drilling material. In small classes you can conduct some drilling activities in a circle. The more variation there is to an activity, the more students have to pay attention but it is best to start off with the simplest, easiest variation of a game and build on it as opposed to trying to explain a complex activity from the very beginning.

Challenging students but not overwhelming them is important in maintaining their attention and participation.

**DRILLING IS GENERALLY NOT THE MOST FUN PART OF TEACHING OR LEARNING ENGLISH BUT IT IS AN ESSENTIAL STEP WHEN LEARNING NEW MATERIAL. VARYING YOUR APPROACH CAN MAKE IT MORE ENJOYABLE AND ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE MORE FULLY.**



# Phonology in the Classroom: It's Time to Teach Rhyme

**FOR THE ESL STUDENT, RHYME HAS GREAT VALUE. LEARNING ABOUT RHYME WILL INCREASE THE AWARENESS YOUR STUDENTS HAVE OF ENGLISH PHONOLOGY, WHICH IS ESSENTIAL FOR PRONUNCIATION AND PHONICS.**

Speakers of languages with different phonetic make up than English will find it especially important to learn the appropriate and complete set of sounds in English.

Not only that, understanding rhyme and the sounds that make it possible are necessary before a student can become a fluent reader.

## HOW TO TEACH RHYME IN YOUR CLASSROOM

### 1 RHYMING WITH TPR

TPR, or total physical response, is an ESL teaching method which teaches by associating physical movement with foreign language learning. You can use TPR techniques with your students when practicing rhyme. Walk around your classroom reading two words at a time, some rhyming pairs and others not rhyming. When your students hear a pair that rhymes, they should jump up from their seats. Have your class take their seats again and listen for the next rhyming pair. This activity can be a fun game for your students as they listen and physically respond at the appropriate times.

### 2 RHYMING WITH LITERATURE

Dr. Seuss is one of the most beloved authors of our time as well as a master of rhyme. You can do several activities with his work that challenge your students understanding of rhyme. One simple option is to photocopy a few pages from his books, pages that have several rhymes on them. Then white out one word of each rhyming pair. Challenge your students to see

if they can fill in words that will complete the rhyme. Following Dr. Seuss' example, allow students to make up their own words to complete a rhyme even if it becomes nonsensical. You can then read the actual text out loud to your class and have your students see how many words they chose the same as the doctor. This is also a good time to mention rhythm and rhyme when it comes to English sentences.

In a similar vein, nursery rhymes can be employed in the same manner. These childhood classics use rhythm and rhyme to tell short stories that kids love. Try reading one aloud and pausing whenever a rhyming word is needed, and see if your students can supply the missing word. For example, you may start, "Hey diddle, diddle, the cat and the..." encouraging your students to shout out any words that might complete the rhyme. Use the classics "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star", "Jack Sprat Could Eat No Fat" and any others that come to mind.

You may even want to copy and distribute copies to your students allowing them to illustrate their own classroom nursery rhyme book that you can later compile.

### 3 RHYMING WITH GAMES

Rhyming just might give you the excuse to bring some silliness into the classroom. You can declare a rhyme day in your classroom when you start the rhyming fun off by calling your students by rhyming names rather than their actual names. As you call attendance, call out a name that rhymes with each of your students' names, and challenge them to respond. If you cannot think of a rhyming name for your students, simply make one up. Your students will still understand the concept even if you have to make things up to meet the rule. Then, continue your day by calling students by rhyming names, and encourage your students to do the same.

Another easy rhyme game you can play is a rhythm-based circle. Have your class sit on the floor with legs crossed and start a percussive rhythm. With a four beat pattern, slap the legs twice, clap once and then do nothing on the fourth beat. This fourth beat is when you will say a word that your students will have to rhyme. For example, (slap, slap, clap) "Boy!" The group would continue (slap, slap, clap) and the next person would say, "Toy!" You can continue with the same rhyme pattern until no one else can think of another rhyme. Then change the word and play again. Either work your way around the circle, point to the people who should answer, or just let your students call out their ideas.

They will have fun with the game and learn more about rhyming in the process.

**WHENEVER YOU ARE TEACHING RHYME IN AN ESL CLASS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO POINT OUT THAT RHYMING WORDS ARE NOT ALWAYS SPELLED THE SAME.**

This is a perfect lead in to phonics and spelling, topics that are always good to review with nonnative English speakers. Ultimately, have fun with your class. Speakers and writers use rhyme for fun and creative expression, and you should encourage that in your students as well. When your students are having fun in the classroom, they will be motivated to learn and remember more of what you teach.

# 7 Ways to Correct Your ESL Student's Intonation Once and for All

Intonation is one of those crazy little things that can make one speaker sound bored and another interested – while they use the same exact words. Intonation adds a dimension to the English language, a richness that goes beyond the mere use of the right words and the right grammar structure. It's what helps you say a lot, in perhaps just a few words. ESL students learn intonation by imitation and understand it the more they listen to native English speakers, but it takes more than that, more than just listening. Intonation has to be taught. And corrected. And here's how.

## CORRECTING ESL STUDENT INTONATION: 7 WAYS

### 1 RISING VS. FALLING

The very first thing ESL students must understand about intonation is the difference between rising and falling intonation. The best way to illustrate this difference is to say the same sentence with both and discuss the speaker's intentions in each case.

You're John, aren't you? (The speaker is certain.)

You're John, aren't you? (The speaker is uncertain.)

Isn't that funny. (The speaker is making a comment.)

Isn't that funny? (The speaker is asking a question/seeking confirmation.)

Be sure to illustrate the difference with arrows and repeat the correct intonation for each case. Then, have students repeat examples in both rising and falling intonation. They may not get it at first – both may sound exactly the same. Have them repeat till they can clearly express both the rising and falling intonation.

### 2 FOCUS ON THE RISING PITCH

A lot of students end questions or sentences flat – no rising pitch at the end, and sometimes this rising pitch is absolutely necessary to convey the right

intention. If a student says "Sorry", it sounds like an apology. But if they are trying to get someone to repeat what they've just said, they should say, "Sorry?" Sometimes you need to exaggerate the rising pitch at the end and have students repeat. Don't worry if it sounds exaggerated at first. It'll sound more natural later as they gain confidence.

### 3 USE SHORT SENTENCES

In the beginning, the best way for students to both hear and repeat a rising or falling intonation is through very short phrases and sentences.

Sorry. Yes.  
Sorry? Yes?

Then, work your way towards longer phrases and sentences.

### 4 BUILD TOWARDS LONGER PHRASES

This is a great strategy to use when students are having a particularly difficult time with longer sentences. If you want your students to ask, "Would you mind closing the window?" start by saying and repeating the last word and working your way backwards:

Window?  
Closing the window?  
Mind closing the window?  
Would you mind closing the window?

### 5 PRACTICE DISCERNING

Just as important as using the right intonation is discerning the speaker's intention based on the intonation he/she uses. Give students exercises where they must listen (either you or an audio track) to different types of intonation, and ask them what the speaker's intention is.

Say: Isn't it hot. Ask: Am I asking a question or making a comment about the weather?

Say: Don't you like coffee? Ask: Do I sound certain or surprised?

Finally, say "You have to go?" And simply ask your students what you're indicating with your intonation (surprise).

### 6 ONE WORD ANSWERS

Another great way to practice intonation is by asking students to reply to a variety of situations with only one word. Because they can only use one word, the intonation has to be just right to carry the right intention. For example:

Say: What do you say to a friend who's just arrived late?

Student: Late.

Say: Your friend has not arrived yet, but you're not sure why. What do you say to your other friend?

Student: Late?

### 7 WATCH MY CUE!

Try this game to keep your students on their toes. Write out some short phrases on some cards but don't punctuate them. Give each student a card. Your student has to read the phrase, and say it out loud, but first they have to see what you indicate with your hands. Sweep your hand up if you want them to use rising intonation, but sweep it down if you want them to use falling intonation.

You won the lottery. (sweep you hand down)

You won the lottery? (sweep you hand up)

See how many get it right! And have other students say what is being expressed (surprise, certainty, comment, etc.)

**INTONATION MAY BE A PAIN TO TEACH BUT DON'T TRY TO AVOID IT. YOU OWE IT TO YOUR STUDENTS TO GIVE THEM ALL OF THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO COMMUNICATE ACCURATELY AND EFFECTIVELY. AND INTONATION IS ONE VERY POWERFUL COMMUNICATION TOOL.**

# 6 Fun Exercises to Improve ESL Pronunciation

Effective communication is a two-way street. ESL students must understand others when they speak English. But they must also make themselves understood. For ESL students who struggle with pronunciation, this is easier said than done. Which is why it is absolutely essential for you as an ESL teacher to include pronunciation practice in the course syllabus, and not merely correct pronunciation mistakes on the fly.

*I know. I know. Pronunciation practice can be tedious. It's hard! For you and for your students. But there are ways to make pronunciation practice a little more fun. Try any of these exercises!*

## ESL PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE: 6 FUN EXERCISES

### 1 VERB ENDINGS

The pronunciation of verb endings is something that is particularly troublesome for some students. The two main problem areas are:

Present Simple – third person singular. There are three possible sounds for the verb ending – [s] as in talks, [z] as in sees and [ɪz] as in confuses

The Past Simple of regular verbs. There are also three possible sounds for the –ed verb ending: [d] as in stayed, [t] as in talked and [ɪd] as in wanted.

After going over the differences, divide the whiteboard into three columns. First practice the verb endings for the third person singular in Present Simple. Place each sound at the top of each column. Say a verb and ask a student to say it in the third person singular. Ask the student which column the verb belongs to.

Finally, walk around the classroom and fire off one verb after another. Students must correctly pronounce the verb ending. If they make a mistake, they must try with a different verb till they get one right.

Do the same with the –ed ending of

regular verbs in Past Simple.

### 2 WHAT'S THE WORD?

Here's a fun, challenging exercise for students who are familiar with the phonetic spelling of words, or those who are not, but are clever enough to figure it out. Give them a list of words spelled phonetically. Students must write the word each describes:

*/ˈmʌð ər/* - mother. To make it more fun, show each student a card with a word and its phonetic spelling and ask them to say the word out loud. The best way to go about this exercise is to practice words with a similar sound so that students start seeing a pattern.

### 3 LETTERS VS. SOUNDS

One of the things students need to know is that although there are 26 letters in the English alphabet, there are 44 sounds, and that the number of letters in a word is not the same as the number of sounds. For example, the word bat has three sounds and three letters, but batch has five letters and three sounds (the “tch” is one sound).

Divide the whiteboard into six columns and at the top of each write “2 sounds”, “3 sounds”, “4 sounds” and so on till “6 sounds”. Give students a list of words and ask them to place each in the correct column.

### 4 MIMICKING PAIRS

Mimicking is an essential part of pronunciation practice, that is, you model a word and students repeat by copying the same stress and tone. But you can maximize the opportunities for learning by practicing two sounds at once. Have students repeat sentences like these:

*Sit in your seat.  
Chips are cheap.  
Your niece is nice.* Etc.

### 5 WHICH ONE MAKES SENSE?

Present students with two sets of possible answers to a question, for

instance:

*Hit it. /Heat it.  
Ask: The soup is cold. What should I do?  
He took the bait. /He took the bat.  
Ask: What did he take fishing?*

### 6 TONGUE TWISTING FUN

Tongue Twisters are fun and excellent for pronunciation practice. This is a great way to help students practice the longer ones. Let's see one as an example taken from this worksheet, “Betty Botter”. Write the Tongue Twister on the board:

*Betty Botter bought some butter,  
“But,” she said, “this butter’s bitter.  
If I bake this bitter butter,  
It will make my batter bitter.  
But a bit of better butter -  
That would make my batter better.”  
So she bought a bit of butter,  
Better than her bitter butter,  
And she baked it in her batter,  
And the batter was not bitter.  
So ‘twas better Betty Botter  
Bought a bit of better butter.*

Now, erase some of the words and have students say it again, filling in the blanks.

*Betty Botter bought some \_\_\_\_\_,  
“But,” she said, “this butter’s \_\_\_\_\_.*

*If I \_\_\_\_\_ this bitter butter,  
It will make my \_\_\_\_\_ bitter.  
But a bit of \_\_\_\_\_ butter -  
That would make my \_\_\_\_\_ better.”  
So she \_\_\_\_\_ a bit of butter,  
Better than her \_\_\_\_\_ butter,  
And she \_\_\_\_\_ it in her batter,  
And the \_\_\_\_\_ was not bitter.  
So ‘twas better Betty \_\_\_\_\_  
Bought a bit of better \_\_\_\_\_.*

Next, erase a few more words, and then again, till students remember and pronounce the Tongue Twister correctly.

**THOUGH PRONUNCIATION RULES ARE CLEAR, PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE IS NOT AN EXACT SCIENCE. SIMPLY GOING OVER “THE RULES” IS NOT ENOUGH. YOU HAVE TO GIVE STUDENTS SOME MOTIVATION AND THE ELEMENT OF FUN ALWAYS DOES THE TRICK.**



# Hearing is Believing: Teaching the Ways of Intonation and Stress

Stress and intonation come so naturally to native speakers, sometimes we forget the importance of devising its structured practice with natural examples. In order to gain fluency though, students need guidance and continual explanation of stress and intonation. Put your personality into teaching stress and intonation, and the results you hear will make you a believer.

## HOW TO TEACH INTONATION & STRESS

### 1 STRESSED AND UNSTRESSED WORDS

To begin teaching how stress works in English, you must first define common stressed and unstressed patterns. With this you must also explain the difference in speech patterns of a stressed syllable versus an unstressed syllable. First off, stressed syllables are louder and longer, and are the focus of the meaning we are trying to convey. Stressed syllables commonly occur in content words which are the meat of any sentence. They are nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Structure words, or the little words in sentences, are commonly unstressed syllables. These are articles, prepositions, pronouns and conjunctions. You can easily show this first with simple sentences, and eventually moving on to more complex sentences and conversations. When teaching how to stress words, show students that content words have one main stress.

Show student how the pitch or intonation rises with the stress. Once students gain the concept of stressing individual words in sentences, begin teaching the different ways stress influences meaning. It can be very interesting just taking one or two sentences per day and changing the stress on each content word to change the meaning. You can even do this coupled with whatever grammar point you are focusing on.

For example, if you are teaching a lesson on adjectives, you could do some stress examples to show emphasis, contrast or contradiction. Utilize adjectives to make your point. For example

take the sentence *I want a shiny, blue, new car.* The meaning can change depending on what word is given the main stress. Have students practice changing the stress from word to word and discuss how the meaning changes.

Another significant way to practice stress is to use Jazz Chants or have students clap, stomp, or bang to express where the stress lives. This works particularly well with young students, but adults will also have fun clapping or stomping their way to stress understanding.

### 2 RHYTHM AND REDUCTION

Often when students are studying English, one problem they encounter is not being able to understand native speakers with constant complaints that Americans speak too fast. One of the main issues here is reduction. To become fluent students need to practice pronunciation that includes reduction. Reduction is simply when speakers use reduced forms of words or phrases. This occurs when native speakers omit sounds or run them together. There are a lot of examples of these in every dialect and accent of English. Some common examples of reduction are:

*Gimme that* instead of *give me that*  
*I dunno* instead of *I don't know*  
*gotta* instead of *got to* (which is a reduction of *have to*)  
*wanna* instead of *want to* or *would like to*  
and the ever common *shoulda, coulda, woulda* for *should have, could have or would have*

It's important that students learn to determine when they hear reductions so that their fluency is not compromised. It is a fact that native speakers just do not speak perfectly and anyone studying English must learn that rhythm and stress go hand in hand for true understanding. To practice rhythm and reduction, you could invite another teacher into your classroom. The two of you could then perform some role

plays for the class. Focus on reductions and give students particular tasks for each conversation. You may just want them to determine the gist of what the role play was about, or you could have them jot down reductions as they hear them and then define them. You could also use listening exercises like songs or video clips to perform some of the same tasks.

### 3 HOW INTONATION CHANGES MEANING

Intonation is the subtle shift of patterns of stress in language. The improper use of intonation can cause confusion and can also change the meaning of words or phrases. To start out, teach the intonation for basic types of English sentences. You may want to begin with statements, yes/no questions and wh-questions. Another popular one to focus on intonation is tag questions where you can really drive home the meaning shifts with different intonations. Using the board, draw arrows to show the direction of the pitch for intonation. You could also say sentences or questions aloud while drawing the shape of the intonation in the air with your hand. Have students write intonation arrows for the meaning they would like to convey. You can utilize worksheets or have students generate sentences on the spot. It can also be effective to have them practice aloud using their hands to draw out the intonation in the air. One other common way to diagram intonation or stress is to use a staircase-like drawing on the board to demonstrate where the voice goes up and where it should go down. For example, *Susie is happy, isn't she?* Use the staircase drawing to change the intonation from *IS* to *HAPPY* to *SUZIE*.

### PRONUNCIATION HAS SO MANY ELEMENTS, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT STUDENTS ARE EXPOSED TO NATURAL LANGUAGE AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE.

Fluency in English cannot happen unless students practice stress and intonation with frequency at every level. Be sure to clue them in to shifting meaning, and challenge them to hear what is really being said.

# Avoid Sounding Like a Robot:

## 6 Top Tips for Teaching Intonation

“How are you today?” “I’m fine.” Those words “I’m fine” will be delivered quite differently when spoken by friends in good moods or by friends who are angry with each other. We convey most of our message with our words, but the intonation we use to deliver those words also sends a message. We often communicate emotions, uncertainties, intentions to continue talking, and signals let others know we’re finished speaking all through our intonation.

Not only is intonation important for communicating meaning, but it is also one of the greatest factors in producing accented speech. Students might have wonderful pronunciation skills, but if they speak in monotones like a robot, they will be often misunderstood. Given the importance of this skill, it’s essential that we address it in our ESL classrooms.

Here are some tips and activities for helping your students improve their intonation and rhythm.

### TRY THESE 6 TIPS FOR TEACHING INTONATION

#### 1 MODEL

Use proper intonation and stress yourself. The best way for students to learn intonation is to be exposed to accurate native-speaker intonation patterns. Be careful of “teacher talk.” Sometimes when we speak to students (especially beginning learners) we slow down too much and lose our own natural intonation. To be sure, we want to speak slowly enough for our students to understand, but we don’t do them any favors when we produce unnatural sounding speech. Showing them what NOT to do can also be effective. As a good way to begin the lesson, speak in absolute monotone for the first 5 minutes of class. As students begin to notice your different pattern of speaking, ask them if they thought it was easier or more difficult to understand you without proper intonation. Explain that English speakers are not used to hearing monotone intonation, and they will be harder to understand without good intonation

skills.

#### 2 ENCOURAGE AUTHENTIC LISTENING

Like any pattern, the best way for students to acquire these critical pronunciation skills is to listen to them as often as possible. Encourage your students to watch TV shows to learn different types of intonation. By watching sitcoms or dramas, students will be exposed to conversational exchanges to show them how we interact with one another and intonation. Encourage them to make notes of the different variations in intonation patterns and practice drawing intonation arrows for some of the sentences they hear.

#### 3 TEACH THE MOST COMMON PATTERNS

While allowing students to discover intonation patterns through listening will be most beneficial for them, teaching them some common patterns explicitly can help them get started. The following six patterns are among the most frequently used in English. Below is a simplified explanation that focuses on the ending of sentences.

- I want to travel to the Bahamas. (*Falling slightly at the end*)
- Do you want to travel to the Bahamas? (*Y/N Question --Raising at the end*)
- Where do you want to go? (*WH-Question- Rising/Falling*)
- Do you want to go to the Bahamas or Hawaii? (*Either/Or Questions-- Rising /falling*)
- You want to go to the Bahamas, don't you? (*Tag questions-- Rising/falling/rising*)
- When I go to the Bahamas, I'm taking my swimsuit, sunscreen, and camera. (*Series -- rising, rising, falling*)

#### 4 USE VISUALS

Since many languages manipulate intonation and rhythm in different ways, many students may find it difficult to hear the differences in English intonation patterns. To make these distinctions more clearly, use visuals to help

students see how different sentences are said. For intonation, use wavy lines and arrows to show the rising and falling of different syllables and words. Model example sentences and corresponding lines. Then, have students practice by drawing their own arrows on various sentences.

#### 5 DIALOGUES AND EMOTION

Sometimes the best way to hear intonation is to focus on drastic differences. One way to practice these skills is to practice a common dialogue in a variety of different contexts. Create a simple dialogue, such as the following:

- A: Good afternoon.*  
*B: Hi. How are you?*  
*A: Fine, thanks. And you?*  
*B: I've been busy, but good.*  
*A: Well, it was nice talking to you.*  
*See you later.*

*B: Same to you. Goodbye.*  
Pair students up and have them practice this dialogue with different scenarios. Example scenarios that are good for this activity include: two friends who haven't seen each other in a long time, an employee who was just fired and their former boss, a cop and a suspected criminal, a boy who really likes a girl but the girl doesn't like him, someone visiting an ill friend in the hospital, two strangers making small talk on a plane, etc. Make sure to emphasize to the students that the only difference between the scenarios is their intonation and rhythm - therefore, they have to really express their emotion using rising and falling voice. This would also be a good opportunity to teach other cultural customs in terms of body language, facial expressions, eye contact, etc. For example, in the cop/criminal scenario, the criminal might avoid making too much eye contact, which might raise suspicion for English-speakers. For a fun whole class activity, give each pair of students a different context and have the students practice and then perform their dialogue for the whole class. Then, have the other students guess what kind of situation they were performing.

## 6 USE KAZOOS

There are a number of things a learner must think about when speaking. Sometimes, fluency and forming difficult sounds can get in the way or frustrate a learner when speaking. To isolate the skill of intonation and rhythm, go to the dollar store and pick up kazoo for your students. Model on the kazoo different intonation patterns and show how much meaning can be made without words. Kazoos are a great way to target intonation skills in a non-threatening way. You can repeat the dialogue activity from above keeping the same scenarios but using the kazoo sound instead of words. Your students will have a blast with all the noise!

### **INTONATION IS A VITAL PART OF LEARNING ENGLISH AND TEACHING INTONATION AND RHYTHM DOESN'T HAVE TO BE INTIMIDATING.**

Using these fun activities can get students engaged and involved in the lesson all while drastically improving student pronunciation. Even if students can't pronounce all of the sounds in English correctly, having good intonation patterns will help them to be better understood.



# Do Your Students Make These Stress and Intonation Mistakes?

Do you have ESL students who do the robot? No, I don't mean the dance. I mean speak in a monotone, with no color, no feeling. It doesn't mean that they don't feel the language. They probably just don't know how to use stress and intonation to convey intention and meaning.

Most of the time, students who have trouble using the right stress and intonation speak native languages with very different rules. English is a stressed language, and this means that more attention should be paid to where you put the stress in a word or sentence, rather than the number of syllables. Check out these very common stress and intonation mistakes and what you can do to help your ESL students kick the robot to the curb.

## MOST COMMON MISTAKES: STRESS

### 1 STRESS ON THE WRONG SYLLABLE

The student says hó-tel instead of ho-tél. This type of mistake may lead to misunderstandings, and the speaker's meaning or intention may not be at all clear. An added complication is that there are plenty of words that have a different meaning when they are stressed differently. This is the case of ré-bel and re-bél. Or désert and dessért. Finally, if there are too many mistakes with word stress, the listener may become impatient or confused, and this is not good for communication.

### 2 STRESS ON THE WRONG WORD

Just like placing the stress on the wrong syllable within a word, placing stress on the wrong word in a sentence may lead to confusion or the speaker's inability to convey exactly what he/she means. Let's see an example. A sentence like, "John got a new job" can be stressed in different ways (stress can be placed on John, new or job), all of which convey different meanings. If you ask students, "Who got a new job?" they should re-

spond placing the stress on John. But if you ask them, "What did John get?" they should place the stress on job.

#### HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Draw your students' attention to the matter of stress. Explain that English is a stressed language and that word and/or sentence stress is important to convey the right meaning. Use clapping or tapping to indicate where the stress goes.
- Go over some basic rules of word stress. For example, when the same word can be both a noun and a verb (rebel, insult, suspect), explain that the first syllable is stressed in the noun and the second syllable is stressed in the verb.
- Indicate stress visually. You can mark the stress the way dictionaries do (*/hóu'tel/ for hotel*), use bigger or smaller circles as seen above (ho-tél) or use Cuisenaire rods. These are also useful to show where the stress goes in a sentence.
- Contrast. If it's hard for students to hear the right word stress, say it different ways – put the stress in different syllables so they can hear the difference and hear the right stress.
- Be sure to contrast the difference between placing stress on different words: I want to learn English vs. I want to learn English. Can your students tell the difference in meaning?

## MOST COMMON MISTAKES: INTONATION

### 3 NO RISING PITCH

This is the intonation mistake I encounter most often. Yes/No questions typically have a rising pitch towards the end, and lots of students end their sentences flat so they don't sound like questions at all: Do you like chocolate. They sound like statements. Students often have more trouble imitating the rising than the falling intonation.

### 4 USE THE WRONG PITCH

Students often don't use the right pitch to convey feelings. A single word like really can express completely different feelings: "Really" said with a falling intonation expresses disbelief, while "Really?" with a rising pitch expresses surprise.

#### HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Exaggerate. Even though it may not sound "natural", it's the best way to get the point across and students have a better chance of hearing the differences. Make the rising pitch as high as you can, and the flat intonation sound monotone. Make sure your face also shows the right feeling.
- Go over patterns, such as:
  - Yes/No questions have the rising pitch towards the end.
  - Questions that begin with wh-words have a falling intonation.
  - Statements have a falling intonation.
  - Question tags may have either depending on the intention of the speaker. Questions tags that are comments or observations have a falling intonation while questions tags used to check information or express uncertainty have a rising intonation.
- Use rising intonation to express surprise.
- Use falling intonation to express sarcasm or disbelief.

#### IN THE ESL CLASSROOM, SHOWING IS BETTER THAN TELLING.

Skip the explanations regarding theory or linguistics. Show them how to place stress to convey meaning. Exaggerate surprise or looks of disbelief so students get the full effect of the intonation. Stick to it and give it time. Soon enough you won't have any more robots in your class!

# yes Yes YES! How to Teach Sentence Stress

“Stress” is part of the rhythm of a language, the pattern of stressed or emphasized syllables and unstressed syllables of which English sentences are made up. Appropriate sentence stress is important for native-like or even comprehensible speech: if the stress pattern is incorrect, then listener comprehension will suffer.

Many ESL students lack an understanding of English sentence stress, however, often giving each syllable equal length, resulting in monotonous and difficult to understand speech.

## WHAT ARE METHODS TO TEACH NATIVE-LIKE SENTENCE STRESS?

### 1 START BY DISCUSSING STRESS

Read a sentence aloud from the textbook without stressing content or main idea words. Ask students if they think it sounds right. They will probably say no. Then read the same sentence with the correct stress pattern. Ask them what they think now. This will raise their consciousness about stress.

### 2 INTRODUCE SYLLABLES

Stress in English interacts with syllables: that is, syllables alternate between stressed and unstressed within a sentence. Select a sentence from a dialogue in your textbook and model “beating out” the syllables on the desk. Have students do the same. Have them count the syllables in the sentence.

### 3 ELABORATE ON STRESS

Explain the difference between stressed and unstressed syllables. Explain the stressed syllables are louder and longer. Stressed syllables tend to occur in content words such as nouns and verbs, while structure words such as articles and prepositions are usually unstressed.

### 4 PROVIDE EXAMPLES

Model stressed and unstressed syllables by selecting a sentence from your book and writing it on the board, marking the stressed syllables with a dash or a dot. Then read the sentence aloud, emphasizing the stressed syllables. Have students practice with you.

### 5 DEFINE SCHWA

Explain that most unstressed syllables in English are reduced and pronounced as a “schwa.” Teach the schwa sound (the “uh” sound as is the second syllable of “station”). Modeling the expressions “Uh-huh” (for “yes”) and “huh-uh” (for “no”) is a humorous way to teach this sound. The American English greeting “How are you doing?” for example is really pronounced /how’r yuh doin’/ --the structure words “are” and “you” get reduced to schwa.

### 6 PRACTICE SENTENCE STRESS

Practice the sample sentences on the board again, emphasizing the stress pattern, making the stressed syllables louder and longer and reducing the unstressed syllables. Ask students about the content and structure words and which are stressed and unstressed.

### 7 MARK

Have students on their own pull sentences from the same dialogue in their books and mark the stress patterns.

### 8 COMPARE

Students can then compare their markings with a partner.

### 9 PRACTICE IN PAIRS

Practice the dialogue in pairs, focusing on the stress patterns.

## MORE ADVANCED ACTIVITIES

**1** Teach specialized use of stress and how meaning can shift based on the stress pattern and what the speaker wants to emphasize. “I love my sister,” “I love my sister,” “I love my sister” and “I love my sister” all carry different meanings.

**2** Give out a dialogue with the content words deleted. Have students listen to a recording of the dialogue for the content words and fill them in. They can then practice the dialogues in pairs.

**3** An alternative to this, for more advanced students, is to have them predict the content words that belong in the blank spaces. Have them fill in the dialogues, check them against the tape, and then students can practice.

**4** Play “telegrams”: explain a telegram was something like a precursor to a text message—a message in which all the structure words or were deleted: “Mom sick. Come home.” Give out a page of “telegrams.” Have students add the structure words and practice reading with appropriate sentence stress.

**5** The above activities can also be done with popular songs. Play the song and hand out the lyrics, with content words or structure words deleted. Have students listen to the song and fill in the words.

**6** Poetry is also a great way to practice sentence stress as poetry

is actually based on regular stress, or meter, patterns. Teach students a simple poem, such as Frost's "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening." Have them practice reciting it. They may try writing their own similar poems after, imitating Frost's style and stress/meter patterns.

## 7

Humor is often based on the stress pattern, or "delivery" as comedians call it. Tell a well-known joke and show how the humor is affected by the way the speaker uses stress by delivering it first with the correct stress and then without.

## 8

Give out index cards with content words students are currently learning written on them. Have students line the cards up into "sentences," adding structure words as necessary, and mark the correct stress pattern then practice saying the sentences.

## 9

Do a "drawing" activity by handing out a dialogue and having students "map" the stress of each sentence in the dialogue over the sentence, with high peaks representing stressed syllables and dips unstressed.

## 10

Have students bring in idioms that they've heard or want to learn about and go over the stress patterns.

### **FREQUENTLY REVISIT THE PRINCIPLES OF SENTENCE STRESS, TAKING TIME REGULARLY TO MODEL THE STRESS PATTERNS OF SENTENCES SELECTED FROM DIALOGUES.**

Add to students' existing knowledge base by teaching stress related to different types of sentences, such as information ("Wh-") questions and "yes/no" questions.

Participating in a variety of related activities will result in a higher likelihood that students will internalize the principles of sentence stress in English.



# Ghoti is Fish? 6 Reasons to Teach Phonics in the ESL Classroom

## HOW CAN 'GHOTI' SPELL FISH? IT IS A CLASSIC PHONICS EXAMPLE.

Gh as in enough, o as in women, and ti as in nation come together to create the same sound patterns as the letters f-i-s-h! And though it is unlikely that you will give your ESL students this example in a phonics class, understanding the letter patterns in English and the sounds they make can help your students in more ways than one. Here are some reasons to feel good about including phonics in the ESL classroom.

## 6 REASONS TO TEACH PHONICS IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 READING COMPREHENSION

When your students understand how to identify the sounds represented by the letters on the page, they will have better reading comprehension. Hearing a word and learning it is one thing. Recognizing that word on the page is something different. When students can link the black and white word of the page to the living experience of a word they have heard, said and understood, they will naturally have better reading comprehension. This increased comprehension is directly related to their ability to identify words on the page, also known as word identification. When students are familiar with the phonetic patterns of English, they have better word identification and as a result reading comprehension.

### 2 DECODING NEW WORDS

Not only will your phonics students of English be able to identify the words they have already heard, they will have an easier time decoding new words with which they are not familiar. Since you teach word roots, prefixes and suffixes in your vocabulary lessons, your students who also know phonics will be able to identify those meaningful units in these unfamiliar words and use their knowledge of the

phonemes to determine the meaning of the unfamiliar combinations. So whether it is a familiar word in a new part of speech or a word completely foreign to them, your students will have the tools to sort out the puzzle of the word in front of them.

### 3 IMPROVED PRONUNCIATION

Once your students encounter a new word written on the page, if they know phonics they will be able to accurately pronounce that word, even if they have never heard it before. Language learning may start with the oral and move to the written, or it may follow the sequence in reverse. Your students who know how to pronounce common letter combinations and know the most frequent pronunciations for those combinations will have a better chance of pronouncing words they have only seen in print correctly when they seek to use those words in their spoken English.

### 4 MORE PRODUCTIVE DICTIONARY USAGE

How often do your students use a dictionary? Those with knowledge of English phonetics will have an easier and more productive time using dictionaries to look up unfamiliar words. Knowledge of phonics will help your students translate the written word to the spoken word, but it will also help them accurately translate spoken words to their written forms. Students looking up a new word can use its pronunciation to determine its most probable spelling. In addition, words that do not have expected spellings will also pose no problem for your phonics savvy students since they will know alternate ways of spelling the same sound patterns.

### 5 LESS MEMORIZATION

Though there is bound to be a certain amount of memorization that goes along with language learning, teaching your ESL students phonics

decreases how much your students must rote memorize. Rather than memorizing spellings for every new vocabulary word, your students will be able to use their knowledge of phonics to recognize or produce the day's spelling words based on the phonetic rules they have already mastered.

### 6 MAKING SENSE OF SPELLING

Language is a living entity. It changes over time. (Think about the English that Shakespeare used in comparison to how we speak today.) The spelling system in English, however, has not changed along with the pronunciation, syntax and phonology of the language. Though the English spelling system was originally based on pronunciation of words, the shift in pronunciation coupled with the static spelling system has brought us to a place of discord. The spelling of many English words no longer accurately represents the way they are pronounced (lettuce, for example). Teaching your ESL students phonics sidesteps the changes English has experienced and gives them the tools to read and spell words according to today's phonetic system.

## VARIOUS STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT STUDENTS WHO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND PHONICS DO BETTER IN ALL ASPECTS OF READING.

Their word identification, comprehension, fluency, spelling, and word decoding will be better than that of students who do not know phonics. In addition, they will have a more productive experience with dictionary usage and will need to do less rote memorization when learning new vocabulary. Though phonics has not always been popular in the ESL classroom, if you do include the science of sound and spelling, your students will have a reliable tool to help them become better readers of English as a second language.

# The Syllables Have It: Activities You Can Use to Teach Syllables

**A CATCHY TUNE CAN MAKE A PERSON FEEL HAPPY, BOUNCY OR ENERGETIC, BUT WHAT ABOUT A CATCHY RHYTHM? BY MANIPULATING WORDS, SOUNDS AND SYLLABLES, A CERTAIN PHRASE OR POEM CAN GET KEEP YOUR MIND CAUGHT UP JUST AS EASILY AS A LIKEABLE TUNE.**

Why not try some of these catchy syllable activities with your ESL class the next time you plan to talk about rhythm in spoken English.

## HOW TO TEACH SYLLABLES IN ENGLISH

### 1 WHAT IS A SYLLABLE?

Helping ESL students understand the concept of syllables can be challenging, but it is necessary for good pronunciation skills. As part of a pronunciation lesson, have available for your students several small, hand held mirrors. Using a list of vocabulary from your current unit, have students repeat one word at a time after you, concentrating on clear pronunciation. Encourage your students to watch your mouth as you say each word. Then as they repeat the word, have them watch their own mouth in the mirror. Point out that with each vowel sound (not necessarily each vowel in the word) your mouth opens. Each time your mouth opens, you pronounce one syllable. Have your students count the number of syllables in each of their vocabulary words as they watch themselves in the mirror.

While working in pairs, have your students group those same vocabulary words by the number of syllables each contains creating a list for one-syllable words, another list for two syllable words and so on.

### 2 WHAT IS IN A NAME?

Another way to help your students understand the number of syl-

lables in a word is to tell them that the number of beats in a spoken word corresponds with the number of syllables in that same word. The number of letters in a word or the way that word is spelled are not indicative of their syllabic structure, but simply clapping along with speech can make clear how many syllables that word contains.

To practice counting the number of syllables in words, have your class take turns saying their names aloud. As each person says his name or as you say it, have your class clap along with it and count the number of claps.

Once you have practiced the number of syllables in all the names of your students, give each person a list of his classmates and have him write down how many syllables each name contains. Do boy's names or girl's names usually have more syllables? Which nationality's names has the most syllables?

### 3 OPEN AND CLOSED

During your lesson on syllables, it may be a good time to show your students the difference between a closed syllable and an open syllable. A closed syllable is one that ends with a consonant sound. Most often, the vowel sounds in closed syllables are short vowel sounds. You may want to select some examples from their current vocabulary lists or write other examples on the board such as helmet or candid. Open syllables are those that end with vowel sounds. Most often, these vowels are long vowel sounds. Again, use examples from your current vocabulary list or supply other words like sky or raven.

Once students understand the difference between an open and closed syllable, point out that this knowledge can help them pronounce new words. By breaking the word into syllables and then determining whether those syllables are open or closed, your students can make educated guesses

about vowel pronunciation when they encounter unfamiliar vocabulary.

### 4 THE ROOT OF IT ALL

A natural extension of breaking words into syllables may be reviewing word roots, prefixes and suffixes. Your students will benefit from knowing that meaning can be found in the building blocks of words and that these building blocks can often be found in syllabic breakdowns. Take some time to review commonly encountered word roots including mal (bad), bene (good), ology (the study of), un (not), vis (see), and any other word roots that may make up your class' current vocabulary words.

If you are unsure which word roots may be a part of the vocabulary you are using in class, you can check this online source for word roots ([www.learnthat.org/pages/view/roots.html](http://www.learnthat.org/pages/view/roots.html)). Encourage your students that the more word roots they memorize and know, the easier it is to break down new vocabulary into pieces and decipher their meanings.

**SYLLABLES IN ENGLISH ARE KEY TO PROPER PRONUNCIATION, UNDERLYING WORD MEANING AND APPROPRIATE SPELLING. WHEN YOU TAKE THE TIME TO REVIEW SYLLABLES WITH YOUR ESL CLASS, YOU HELP THEM INCREASE THEIR LINGUISTIC SKILLS IN SEVERAL FACETS OF ENGLISH.**

Take the time to review syllables today and your students will surely benefit now and well into the future.

# 14 Quick Tips for Teaching Homophones

For students who have not had any exposure to homophones, they can be frustrating and confusing. For students who have studied the sound alike word pairs, they can be a source of linguistic challenge and entertainment. Either way, your ESL class will benefit from some experience with these unique word buddies in English! The next time you talk about homophones with your ESL class, keep the following tips in mind.

## HOW TO TEACH HOMOPHONES

**1** English is full of homophones. Giving your students a set which they can reference will help ease their anxiety when it comes to different words that sound the same. This set of 706 sets of homophones ([www.cooper.com/alan/homonym\\_list.html](http://www.cooper.com/alan/homonym_list.html)) that Alan Cooper compiled will help your students reduce their anxiety about homophones.

**2** Encourage your students to keep their own list of homophone pairs in a vocabulary notebook. From time to time, ask your students to write sentences that use both members of the homophone pairs in the same sentence.

**3** Sometimes what your students need most of all when it comes to homophones is practice. Giving them fill in the blank sentences or a cloze paragraph which test homophones will help them understand which word goes with which meaning.

**4** Dictating sentences that contain homophones is also beneficial to your students. If you collect their papers, you can see which of your students is having trouble with the sound alike words.

**5** It is not difficult to find online quizzes that test homophone comprehension. Giving your students a list of sites with these activities will give them resources they can use in their free time to do further homophone study.

**6** You can give your students practice matching homophones with the correct definitions by creating your own crossword puzzles. Simply give the definition of the word as the clue and have your students fill the answers in the chart.

**7** By writing pairs of homophones on index cards you can create your own set of Go Fish cards. Teach your students how to play the game if they do not already know how then use your cards to make matching pairs.

**8** You can use these same cards to play a game of homophone memory. Students lay all the cards out face down on a flat surface and take turns trying to match pairs of homophones to each other.

**9** You can play a relay race to review homophones with your class for a more energetic activity. Divide your class into two groups and have one person from each group come to the front board. Read a sentence which uses one of a pair of homophones. The first student to correctly write that homophone on the board scores a point for his team. The first team to reach fifteen points wins.

**10** Similarly, you can play homophone Pictionary by showing the two people at the board a homonym pair on an index card and having them race to illustrate the words. The first

team to guess the homophones correctly scores a point.

**11** Riddles can be another fun way to review homophones with your students. Ask your class a riddle which has a homophone pair for its answer. For example, what do you call a naked grizzly? A bare bear. Challenge your students to come up with some homophone riddles of their own. You can display the riddles on a bulletin board and challenge your class to come up with the answers during their free periods.

**12** Have your class list the letters of the alphabet from A to Z on a sheet of paper. Starting with each of the letters, see how many homophone pairs they can think of. Allow your students to work in groups and see if anyone can make a complete set of 26 homophone pairs.

**13** Divide your class into small groups and challenge the groups to write one sentence with as many homophone pairs as possible. What is the highest number of homophone pairs that a group can put into a logical sentence?

**14** Homophones are not a phenomenon unique to English. Group your students by their native languages to see if they can make a list of the homophones in their native tongue.

**HOMOPHONES CAN BE FUN AS LONG AS YOU TAKE TIME IN YOUR CLASS TO TALK ABOUT THE UNIQUE WORD PAIRS IN ENGLISH. TRY DOING ONE HOMOPHONE ACTIVITY EACH DAY OR SPEND A FEW DAYS ON A HOMOPHONE UNIT. WITH SOME EXPERIENCE, EXPOSURE AND ENTERTAINMENT, HOMOPHONES WILL BE FUN FOR YOUR CLASS RATHER THAN FEARFUL!**



# Woulda, Coulda, Shoulda: How to Teach Reductions

## TEACHERS OF ESL INSTINCTIVELY AND UNKNOWINGLY CHANGE THEIR NATURAL PRONUNCIATION AND SPEECH PATTERNS TO INCREASE THEIR STUDENTS' COMPREHENSION.

Studies show that teachers use motherese (the same characteristics women use when speaking to babies), when speaking to nonnative speakers. The qualities of motherese include speaking more slowly, using more dramatic inflection, speaking at a higher pitch and articulating carefully. This may be helpful for students as they learn to speak English, but this will not help them when they are in the real world with native speakers who do not cater to and do not care to cater their speech to your students. Therefore, to adequately prepare your students, it is important to create as realistic an environment as possible for their English studies. Part of this realistic speech needs to include the phonological phenomenon of reduction.

## WHAT IS A REDUCTION?

Reduction is a pronunciation pattern found in all languages in which the phonology, or sound pattern, of a given phrase is changed and simplified. Native speakers do not even realize they are practicing reduction. In reduction, the content words of a phrase are unchanged or minimally changed while more functional words with less content or meaning are downplayed and made less prominent in the phrase. For example, "You should have studied for the test," sounds stiff and formal coming from a native speaker in a casual context. What you will hear instead, if you listen for it, is "You shoulda studied fertha test." The grammatical structure words (have, for and the) are reduced. Their vowels are pronounced more neutrally (schwa sound) and there is less time and emphasis placed on them than on the other words in the sentence. The words containing more of the content of the message (should, studied and test) are pronounced without change or reduction. If you listen carefully, and this can be difficult to do if you are a native speaker, you will hear reductions in almost all spoken English. For a native speaker, this is natural and not even

noticed. For a second language learner, however, this is confusing and can make even the simplest statements incomprehensible. For this reason, every ESL student should have some instruction on reductions in their English program.

## WHERE DO REDUCTIONS COME FROM?

The first place to start teaching your students about reduction is with helping verbs. This grammatical structure is where most reductions will occur. Should have, would have, and could have are the most common culprits. They make their first move to should of, would of and could of. You will often hear this word change in native speech. If you do not give your students instruction on this point, they will see it as a grammatical change that is confusing. What is really happening in this case, "of" which has a more neutral a vowel than have, replaces the correct grammatical structure. We then end up with, "You could of done better." The phrase then becomes further reduced. The next step is the reduction of "of". What happens is the final /v/ sound is dropped simply leaving the neutral vowel (schwa). There is no separation from should and this vowel, and so we end up with shoulda. The same process occurs when "would have" becomes "woulda" and "could have" becomes "coulda." Though these phrases are not the only ones in which native speakers practice reduction, they are the most straightforward for introducing the concept of reduction to your students and are very easy to practice. Once your students are aware of the reduction phenomena, they will be able to better understand other situations in which reduction occurs. Another of the most common instances of reduction is from the phrase "going to." In this phrase the "to" is reduced to a schwa and the 'g' of "going" is dropped. The result is the all too familiar "gonna." It is valuable for your students to spend time on this reduction pattern as well because they will hear it many times in their future English conversations.

## PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

If you are teaching the future tense, this

is the opportune time to give your students practice with the reduction gonna. If your students have already covered the future but have not studied this reduction, simply introduce it now. Have one student ask what a second will be doing tomorrow, next week, or when he returns to his home country. "What are you gonna do tomorrow?" The second will answer, "I'm gonna get up early. I'm gonna go to the library. I'm gonna study for my test. I'm gonna meet my girlfriend for lunch. I'm gonna take my test in the afternoon." The more practice they have with the reduction, the more comfortable their speech will be with native speakers.

The use of reductions in phrases like woulda, coulda and shoulda is also easy for your ESL students to practice by creating a situation in which they give advice. Have your students describe some past situation in which they could have used advice from another. You can have them relate an embarrassing situation to their partner, a frightening situation or a disappointing situation. The student who tells the story will have some good conversation practice. Then the second student then gives advice to the person who told the story using the reduction "shoulda." When one student describes how she failed an important exam, her partner should say things like, "You shoulda studied. You shoulda gotten enough sleep. You shoulda talked to your teacher about it. You coulda hired a tutor." The first student can then answer the other student with an explanation. "I woulda hired a tutor, but I had no money. I know I shoulda studied, but I didn't have the time. I know I coulda done better, and now I'm sorry."

## THE HARDEST PART OF BEING COMFORTABLE WITH REDUCTIONS FOR ESL STUDENTS IS UNDERSTANDING THEM WHEN THEY HEAR THEM.

Because reductions do not follow the grammatical rules we teach our students, we have to take time out to give special instruction on reductions. All teachers want their students to be successful. If we want our students to be truly fluent in English, then reductions must be taught. Don't worry. It's gonna be fine.

# 4 Keys to teaching your beginning class past tense pronunciation

## TO VOICE OR NOT TO VOICE? THAT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE WHEN IT COMES TO ENGLISH VERBS AND PAST TENSE PRONUNCIATION.

Regular past tense verbs in English may be easy to spell, but correct pronunciation is another matter all together. It can seem complicated and unpredictable, but once your students understand voice in English, past pronunciation is really quite straightforward. And though at first voicing may sound like a foreign concept to you and your students, understanding voicing is really quite simple.

## HOW TO TEACH YOUR BEGINNING CLASS PAST TENSE PRONUNCIATION

### 1 WHAT IS VOICING?

Voicing is a linguistic term used to indicate whether the voice box is in use when a person produces a particular sound. To understand voicing, pronounce a [b] and a [p] aloud. (Don't worry. No one is listening.) Make the sounds again now paying attention to the detailed movements of your lips and mouth. You should notice that when you make both [b] and [p], your physical movements are identical. Still, these two sounds are distinct in English (or pat and bat would sound like the same word). What distinguishes them as sounds is whether or not your voice box is in motion.

You can think of your vocal chords (in your voice box) as strings on an instrument. When the strings are plucked, they begin to vibrate. When they vibrate, they make a sound. Your voice box does the same thing. When your vocal chords vibrate, you produce a voiced sound, like [b]. When your vocal chords do not vibrate, you produce a voiceless sound, like [p].

You can feel the difference between voice and unvoiced sounds by feeling your voice box while you speak. If you put your hand on the base of your throat and make the [p] and [b] sounds again, you should be able to feel your vocal chords vibrating when you make the voiced sound.

### 2 THE [T] / [D] CONUNDRUM

P and b are not the only sounds that use voicing to distinguish them from each other. Many sounds in English have a voiced/voiceless counterpart. Feel your voice box as you produce the following pairs of sounds: [t/d], [k/g], [f/v], [ch/j] and [s/z]. Each of these pairs has one voiced sound and one voiceless sound, but both letters use the same motions when they are produced. Not all sounds in English, though, have a voiced/voiceless counterpart. The sounds we make from letter combinations m, n and ng are all voiced and do not have voiceless counterparts. Likewise all vowel sounds are voiced.

Key #1: To make sure your students have perfect past tense pronunciation, they should understand the difference between voiced and voiceless sounds. Don't worry, though. There is no need for them to understand the vocabulary "voicing". They just need to be able to determine whether a particular sound uses the vocal chords.

### 3 AS EASY AS -ED, -ED, -ED

Once you and your students understand the concept of voicing, it is time to put it to practical use in the context of past tense pronunciation. The simple past tense ending in English -ed has three possible pronunciations. Sometimes "ed" sounds like a [t] (and is unvoiced). Other times "ed" sounds like a [d] (and is voiced). A third possibility is pronouncing [ɪd] just like it is spelled, with the vowel sound followed by d. In each case, the suffix has the same spelling, which can confuse students who are early in their English studies.

Key #2: Your students should know the three possible pronunciations of the simple past tense suffix -ed.

### 4 HOW DOES VOICING AFFECT PAST TENSE?

Now that your students understand the concept of voicing and know the three possible pronunciations of -ed, it is time to put the information together for perfect past tense pronunciation. The correct pronunciation of the past tense suffix -ed depends entirely on the voicing of the final sound in the basic form of the verb.

Take any verb in English – wag, for example. ('The dog wagged his tail.')

Have your students ask themselves what the final sound of the simple verb is. In this case, it is [g]. We already know that [g] is a voiced consonant in English. When we add -ed to make the past tense of the verb, we must choose the pronunciation that matches the final sound in the verb. In this case then, when we add -ed to the verb 'wag', we pronounce it in its voiced form – [d]. In effect, it sounds like we are saying [wagd]. The suffix -ed will be pronounced as [d] for any verb that ends with a voiced sound [b, g, z, j, m, n, ng, v and any vowels] with the exception of [d].

When we start with a verb that ends in a voiceless consonant, "ed" sounds different. When we say, "I washed my car," -ed sounds like [t]. This is because the sh at the end of wash is a voiceless sound. Again, the past tense ending matches the voicing of the final sound of the word. In this case, it sounds like we are saying [washt]. The -ed ending will sound like a [t] for any verbs ending with a voiceless sound [p, k, s, ch, f, sh] with the exception of [t].

The exceptions are when -ed sounds like [ɪd]. For any verb that ends with [t] or [d] sounds, the past tense ending is pronounced [ɪd]. This means that when an English speaker says, "He patted his stomach," the verb is pronounced just how it is spelled - [ɪd]. Also, when a speaker says, "The cat padded along the floor," "ed" is also pronounced the same way it is spelled - [ɪd].

Key #3: The pronunciation of -ed matches the voicing of the final consonant with the exception of verbs ending in [d] or [t] sounds.

Key #4: For verbs ending with [t] or [d] sounds, pronounce both the vowel and consonant in [ɪd].

## PAST TENSE PRONUNCIATION IN ENGLISH CAN SEEM UNPREDICTABLE AT BEST AND DOWNRIGHT CONFUSING AT WORST.

For students who understand the concept of voicing, though, past tense pronunciation is methodical and straightforward in English. Understanding voicing is key to correct pronunciation in the past tense in English, and as long as students know to feel their vocal chords to check for vibration, determining voicing is simple, too.

# It's All About Schwa: Introducing the Phonetic Alphabet

**DECIDING HOW AND WHEN TO INTRODUCE AND UTILIZE THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET OFTEN HAS TEACHERS SCRAMBLING, BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE STRESSFUL OR COMPLICATED.**

Follow these tips to introduce a useful tool to your students and of course, don't forget about the powers of Schwa!

## HOW TO INTRODUCE THE IPA (INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET)

### 1 WHAT IS IT?

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is a system used to transcribe words phonetically, or by how they sound. This is done by utilizing universal symbols to represent the spoken sounds in language. You can view the IPA on the right with examples of the sounds each symbol is replicating. Because pronunciation varies from region to region, the IPA provides a systematic and uniform way to perform these transcriptions. Most English dictionaries use the IPA as a standardized system to show pronunciation for all words. By using universal symbols to do so it takes the guesswork out of the often complicated and conflicting spellings of English words. The International Phonetic Alphabet represents specific sounds in language, not necessarily letters. For example some of the blended consonants sounds like “sh” are represented with one symbol because the two letters together produce one sound.

### 2 THE OPTIONS

Teachers who choose to use the International Phonetic Alphabet in some capacity have a few choices how to do so. One way is to memorize and intimately get to know the alphabet for yourself so that you can then utilize in the classroom. If you plan to introduce the entire phonetic alphabet to students and require them to memorize it, it is only appropriate that you should also do the same. The problem with using the entire phonetic alphabet is that it is time-consuming to introduce and to master. Also, many students will feel intimidated by such a task. If you undertake this strategy, be sure that your students can handle the in-depth instruction and practice it will require to get the best results.

That being said, there is another option. Many teachers opt to learn the IPA as they go or in the increments that they believe are useful for particular groups of students. That also means that the students would not be required to learn the entire IPA, but would utilize pieces of it to help resolve pronunciation questions, issues, or confusion. Some teachers choose to only use the IPA to display specific vowel sounds that may cause students difficulty, or for those consonant sounds that have great similarity.

#### Vowels and diphthongs

i	as in tree	/tri/
ɪ	as in insect	/ɪnsekt/
e	as in bet	/bet/
æ	as in cat	/kæt/
ɑ	as in car	/kɑ/ British, /kɑr/ American
ɒ	as in bought	/bɒt/
ɔ	as in saw	/sɔ/
ʊ	as in as in foot	/fʊt/
u	as in boot	/but/
ʌ	as in up	/ʌp/
ɜ	as in fur	/fɜ/ British, /fɜr/ American
ə	as in ago	/ə'gəʊ/
ɛɪ	as in play	/pleɪ/
əʊ	as in know	/nəʊ/
æɪ	as in sky	/skæɪ/
aʊ	as in how	/haʊ/
ɔɪ	as in boy	/bɔɪ/
rə	as in near	/nrə/ British, /nrər/ American
eə	as in where	/weə/ British, /weər/ American
ʊə	as in pure	/pjʊə/ British, /pjʊər/ American

#### Consonants

p	as in play	/pleɪ/
b	as in boy	/bɔɪ/
t	as in tree	/tri/
d	as in dog	/dɒg/
k	as in cat	/kæt/
g	as in got	/gɒt/
tʃ	as in chin	/tʃɪn/
dʒ	as in judge	/dʒʌdʒ/
f	as in fine	/faɪn/
v	as in visit	/vɪzɪt/
θ	as in thin	/θɪn/
ð	as in then	/ðɛn/
s	as in sick	/sɪk/
z	as in zoo	/zu/
ʃ	as in shine	/ʃaɪn/
ʒ	as in vision	/vɪʒn/
h	as in how	/haʊ/
m	as in much	/mʌtʃ/
n	as in now	/naʊ/
ŋ	as in sing	/sɪŋ/
l	as in leg	/leg/
r	as in read	/rɪd/ or /rɛd/
j	as in yes	/jes/
w	as in wet	/wɛt/



Still a third option is to give the students the entire alphabet, generally in chart form, and allow them to choose whether they would like to use it or not. You should also let them know that most dictionaries use it, so they can begin to learn key symbols.

Whichever option you choose, it is helpful for students to have some exposure to the International Phonetic Alphabet and know that it exists. Also, whether you choose to use the IPA in its entirety or in chunks, it is important not to introduce too much at one time. You don't want to overwhelm learners so an appropriate guideline is to teach no more than two to three sounds at a time. Create activities around the specific symbols so students learn to connect the sounds and the symbols. It might also be helpful to introduce the most useful symbols first and then add one or two at a time throughout the duration of the class.

### 3 SCHWA AND OTHER USEFUL SYMBOLS

The most powerful and useful symbol has been given a name. It is Schwa. Schwa is represented by the upside-down small [ə] sign as represented in the chart. Schwa is the most common vowel sound in English, and it is short and to the point. It is a fun sound to create and the more you learn about it, the more you will see just how often it occurs in spoken language. It's like the short u sound, or the sound a person makes when contemplating or stalling, like, "uh." All vowels make the schwa sound at one time or another. Here are some examples of words with the schwa sound:

The letter a: *about, banana, was*

The letter e: *the, open, travel, item, taken*

The letter i: *animal, family, pencil*

The letter o: *above, gallon, dinosaur, another*

The letter u: *particular*

For more on Schwa and how to teach it, reference this article from the BBC: [www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/teaching-schwa](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/teaching-schwa)

Two other very useful symbols are the two symbols for "th" sound. One displays the voiced sound as in the word then and the other displays the voiceless sound as in the word thin. Utilizing these two symbols can very clearly demonstrate the difference between these sounds, and helps with

tongue placement that can be confusing. Determining which symbols will be of considerable use for you will depend on your students, the region, and the common problems those students face. For example European students will have common pronunciation difficulties that are separate from students in Asia or South America. And further still, the countries within each region have their own dialects and pronunciation challenges. Keep this in mind when tailoring IPA coursework and instruction.

### UTILIZING THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET PROVIDES MANY DIFFERENT WAYS FOR STUDENTS TO REFINE THEIR PRONUNCIATION.

It takes a little getting used to, but with practice you will find that it can open up a whole new way for students to learn and develop their language skills.