

Choosing Tech Tools to Reach Your Pronunciation Teaching Goals

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What should you think about in choosing technology?

- **Goals:** What tools will help your students reach their pronunciation learning goals?
- **Practicality:** Is it easy to use? Does it work reliably and do what it says it will?
- **Cost:** Can you find tools that are free, cheap, or already available?

Goal: Provide a Pronunciation Model for Individual Sounds and Words

- **Sounds of Speech** (University of Iowa Phonetics). Website and app. Demonstrates individual sounds through animated sagittal section diagrams and videos of a speaker's mouth. Sample words are audio only. Free.

<http://soundsofspeech.uiowa.edu/> or on the Apple App Store or Google Play.

- **The Phonetics** (Fuminori Homma, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies). App. Demonstrates sounds and sample words through 3D animated sagittal section diagrams. Cost?

Search for *The Phonetics Interactive 3D models of oral visualization* on the Apple App Store.

Information website: <http://d3492jnbjg00z1.cloudfront.net/>

- **Any dictionary app or website with recorded words**, like these (all free):
 - Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary (American English): <http://learnersdictionary.com/>
 - Dictionary.com (American English): <http://www.dictionary.com/>
 - Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (American English): <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>
 - Cambridge Dictionary (Both British and American English): <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

Goal: Provide a Model of Connected Speech

- **English Central:** <https://www.englishcentral.com/videos> A wide range of short video clips with scripts and quizzes. Free and paid versions.
- **VOA News Learning English:** <http://learningenglish.voanews.com/> Some of the recordings are not the most natural model, but they're very slow and clear—easier for beginners to follow. Other recordings are more natural speech. Free.
- **Many, many other websites** with news, interviews, blogs, TED Talks. Choose carefully for topic, length, speed, and clarity.

Goal: Record Learners' Pronunciation

- **Cell phones** can record and send messages.
- **Most computers and tablets** have built-in sound recording applications.
- **Voxopop:** <http://voxopop.com/>. "Talkgroup" pages let students record their voices and comments in a discussion forum format. The teacher can listen to students' recordings and record a response.
- **Voicethread:** <http://voicethread.com/>. Upload a picture for students to respond to. It appears in the middle of a screen and students can record or type comments about it. The teacher can listen and record responses, though it's tricky to match comments to students' recordings.

Goal: Record Pronunciation Creatively

- **Narrated PowerPoint or Keynote slideshows**
- **Adobe Spark:** <https://spark.adobe.com/> or from the Apple App Store. Make a simple slideshow by choosing pictures, icons, or words, then recording narration. Free.
- **Puppet Pals.** Apple App Store. Choose characters and backgrounds, move characters around and record your voice to make them talk. Free, but you can pay for extra characters.
- **Voki:** <http://www.voki.com/> or from the Apple App Store or Google Play. Create cartoon characters called "avatars," then make them speak by recording your voice or typing in words and hearing an artificial voice. Free and paid versions.

Goal: Let Students Check Their Pronunciation Independently

- **Dictation** in Word, Pages, Google Docs, or other programs or apps. If it can transcribe what you're saying pretty accurately, you're doing all right.
- There are apps that say they analyze speech and rate its accuracy. Most don't work very well. Some give a percentage score, but don't tell you what's wrong or how it can be improved. If you're thinking of adopting one of these tools, test it for yourself and be careful not to fall for the hype.

Suggestions

- Think outside the box. Some tools that were meant for another purpose are also useful for pronunciation practice.
- Try out a tool before you commit yourself, especially if there's money involved. Read the reviews and get the opinion of colleagues who have tried it.
- Use what works for you, not necessarily what seems newest or flashiest. If you can do just as well without high-tech tools, that's fine too. Choose the tools—high-tech or not—that will help you reach your pronunciation teaching goals!