

Pronunciation Boot Camp: Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation

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What are the musical aspects of pronunciation (also called *suprasegmentals*)?

- Syllables and word stress
- Rhythm
- Thought groups
- Prominence
- Intonation
- Connected speech

We can practice the musical aspects of pronunciation using sight, sound, movement, and authentic materials.

Syllables and word stress

How many syllables do these words have? How many might your students think they have?

cat table imitation spring chocolate

How are stressed syllables different?

They can last longer:

consonant

They can be louder:

 consonant

They can be higher in pitch:

con^ˈsonant

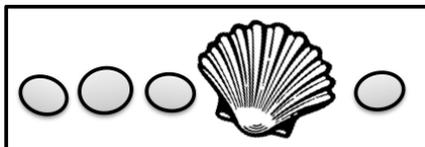
They have a clearer vowel sound:

cons^ənənt

Practice: Mark the stressed syllable with movement

Clap, tap, stomp, or nod. Stand up. Open your eyes wider. Stretch a rubber band (if you trust your students!)

Syllable models: What words could these patterns represent?



Make a syllable model of these words:

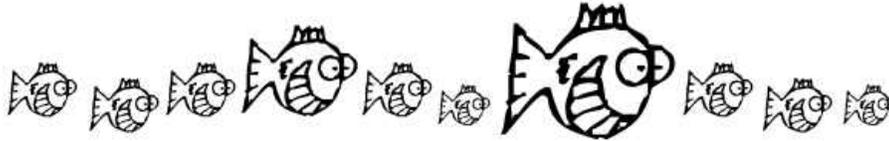
refrigerator imitate

strong imitation

Rhythm

In English, stressed syllables get more time and emphasis. Unstressed syllables are shortened and squeezed in between. Together, these make the rhythm of English.

We can use big and small pictures or shapes to represent stressed and unstressed syllables. The fish below could represent “Most of my colleagues are English teachers,” “Don’t get too close to the alligators” or many others.



Practice: Clap to the rhythm



KIDS

The KIDS

The CHILDrEn

The CHILDrEn might have been SINGing some SONGS.



SANG

SANG some SONGS.

have SUNG a few SONGS.



SONGS.

Chants

What’s for dinner?

What’s for dinner?

Soup and salad

Bread and butter

Cake and ice cream for dessert.

Set the table!

Set the table!

Plates and glasses

Forks and spoons

Now we’re ready. Let’s all eat!

Poems and rhymes

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.

All the king’s horses and all the king’s men

Couldn’t put Humpty together again.

Thought groups

Pausing in appropriate places helps listeners understand us better. It also lets the speaker breathe and think. Pauses divide speech into chunks of grammar and meaning called *thought groups*.

Where would you pause in reading this quotation? (There might be more than one way to do it.)

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did,

but people will never forget how you made them feel.” (Maya Angelou)

Practice: Mark pauses with movement

- Hold up red and yellow cards for longer or shorter pauses (think of traffic lights)
- Chop the air between thought groups

Prominence

In each thought group, one word is emphasized more than the others—it has *prominence* (also called *focus* or *sentence stress*.) Prominence often falls on the last content word of a thought group.

I want to learn **ENG**lish / but I don't want to do any **HOME**work.

When we change the prominent word, the meaning or intention of the sentence can change too:

Tom didn't do his **HOME**work. (But maybe he did something else.)

TOM didn't do his homework. (But someone else did.)

Tom **DIDN'T** do his homework. (You thought he did, but he actually didn't.)

Tom didn't do **HIS** homework. (But he did someone else's homework.)

Practice: Mark the prominent word with movement

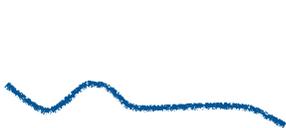
- Punch the air, tap, or stomp
- Stretch your hands apart or stretch a rubber band (again, if you trust your students)

Intonation

Intonation is the pitch pattern of a sentence—the up-and-down melody of your voice as you speak.

I want to learn **ENG**lish / but I don't want to do any **home**work.

Practice: Use tools and movement to model and practice intonation.



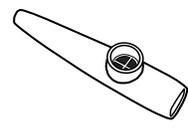
Pipe cleaners



Human intonation model



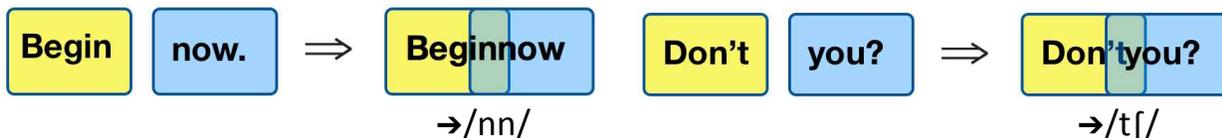
Conduct an orchestra



Kazoos or humming

Connected speech

Many sound changes happen when words come together and are linked to the words around them.



Say these sentences at a normal speed. Can you find examples of connected speech?

I want to learn English, but I don't want to do any homework.

I told them they should have read the instructions before they put it together.

Practice: Mark connected speech with movement or tools

- Grasp hands together to emphasize linking.
- Connect magnets or blocks with Velcro attached to the ends.
- Overlap words written on colored transparent plastic.

Dictations can draw attention to connected speech.

1. _____

2. _____

What words were hard for you to hear? Why do you think they were hard to hear?

Practicing suprasegmentals with authentic materials: Shadowing

In shadowing, learners listen to a short video clip and mark a particular pronunciation feature such as pauses, intonation, or linking. (Don't ask them to listen for too many things at a time.) Then students practice the dialog, trying to imitate the speakers exactly. Finally, they read the dialog along with the video.

A conversation from *Beauty and the Beast*

The Beast is holding Belle prisoner in his castle, but now he's falling in love with her. In this conversation, he makes a sacrifice so that she will be happy.

Beast: Belle, are you happy here with me?

Belle: Yes.

Beast: What is it?

Belle: If only I could see my father again, just for a moment. I miss him so much!

Beast: There is a way. This mirror will show you anything--anything you wish to see.

Belle: I'd like to see my father, please. Papa! Oh, no! He's sick. He may be dying, and he's all alone.

Beast: Then, you, you must go to him.

Belle: What did you say?

Beast: I release you. You're no longer my prisoner.

Belle: You mean I'm free?

Beast: Yes.

Belle: Oh, thank you! Hold on, Papa. I'm on my way.

Beast: Take it with you so you'll always have a way to look back and remember me.

Belle: Thank you for understanding how much he needs me.

Coming this summer from TESOL Press:

Beyond "Repeat After Me": An Essential Guide to Teaching Pronunciation by Marla Yoshida.

A concise, easy-to-understand introduction to sounds, suprasegmentals, and innovative ways to teach pronunciation. The companion website includes narrated tutorials covering basic concepts, recordings of all examples in the book, and downloadable pronunciation activity handouts.