

wʌns ə'pan ə taym / ðer wə Өriy 'litəl pigz // ðey wə
'miniyətʃə 'gowldən 'patbəliyd pigz / ənd ðey hvd in ə
Өriy 'bedruwm kandə'miniyəm / in ə niyt 'litəl 'mæstə
plænd kə'myuwnətiy 'hæfwey bə'twiyn las'aendʒələs
ənd sændi'yeygow // wʌn dey ðə pigz rə'siyvd ə 'letə
fram ðə 'prezədəntəv ðə 'howmownəz əsowsiy'eyʃən //

Understanding and Teaching the Pronunciation of English

its kʌm tuw awr ə'tenʃən / sed ðə 'letə / ðæt 'ænəməlz
əv ə 'barnyard 'neytʃə / 'neymliy Өriy 'litəl pigz / ar
'biyuŋ kept in yə 'rezədəns // ðis iz 'striktliy ə'genst awr
regya'leyʃənz // ðə pigz wil 'hæftə gow // ðə Өriy litəl
pigz wə ə'gæst // ðey stɔrm'd 'intə ðiy əfəs əv ðə
'prezədənt əv ðə 'howmownəz əsowsiy'eyʃən ən sed //
ðis iz ən 'awtreydʒ // wiy ar nat 'ɔrdneriy pigz // wiy
ar 'miniyətʃə 'gowldən 'patbəliyd pigz / wel 'edʒəkeytəd
ænd ə 'kredət tə ðə kə'myuw
ðə 'prezədənt əv ðə 'howmow

Marla Tritch Yoshida

pigz wil 'hæftə gow // ðə Өriy 'litəl pigz wə
browkən'hartəd // 'sædliy ðey pæk ðer 'suwtkeysəz ən
set af dawn ðə rowd tə faynd ə nyuw howm// ðey
'hædənt wɔkt far bə'fɔr ðey sə ə 'pikəp trək 'keriυŋ ə
lowd əv fowm 'pækŋ 'piynəts // ðə fəst pig sed //

Welcome!

Goals

Teaching pronunciation can be a challenge. It requires some technical knowledge about phonology, an ability to predict the problems students may have, plus a good supply of strategies, tools, and activities to help students understand and practice. Teaching pronunciation implies that the teacher can provide a good pronunciation model for students to follow, give explanations and demonstrations of things the students need to know, and lead them through a series of practice activities to help them make their new pronunciation habits automatic.

There are many good books about teaching pronunciation. So why does the world need another one? First, all the existing books are *books*. They are written on paper, representing sounds primarily through written symbols and descriptions. They may come with a CD with recordings of examples and exercises, but sound is not an integral part of the “story.” Pronunciation is a unique topic that really needs sound as part of the presentation. With recent innovations in multimedia electronic book formats, we can now provide explanations that combine words and sounds.

Second, books and articles about teaching pronunciation have almost always been written with an audience of native speakers of English in mind. Besides assuming that readers have an instinctive knowledge of the sounds and “music” of English, most books don’t touch on many issues that teachers who have learned English as a second language want and need to know about—questions that may not occur to native speaker teachers.

This book is written with special consideration of the needs and interests of nonnative speakers of English, who are, after all, the majority of English teachers worldwide. I assume that most of these teachers are working in EFL situations, that is, in countries where English is not a commonly spoken language and students have few chances to hear English in

everyday life. But native speakers also need the same types of information and can benefit from an introduction to the system behind the sounds, the problems their students might have, and ideas about how to help students overcome these problems. After all, the details of pronunciation are an aspect of language that most native speakers are not consciously aware of.

What's in this book?

I've tried to choose topics related to pronunciation, phonology, and pedagogy that are most necessary for EFL or ESL teachers and to explain them simply and clearly. In this book, you will read and hear about:

- The pronunciation of American English: Both individual sounds and the musical aspects of pronunciation, like intonation, rhythm, and word stress.
- Typical problems that students may have in learning the pronunciation of English.
- Some ways to teach pronunciation to your students in an interesting and meaningful way, including suggestions for teaching tools and types of activities.
- Issues of Nonnative English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) and Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) in teaching pronunciation.

The explanations and examples in this book are based on the pronunciation of standard American English. This is because it's the variety of English that I speak and the kind I've always taught, not because I think it has any superiority to other varieties of English. When it seems helpful, we'll also look at differences between standard American English and other varieties.

The written text of the book contains basic information about the pronunciation of English and suggestions for ways to introduce and practice sounds and other aspects of pronunciation. There are also boxes here and there with narrated slideshows or videos to supplement the text. These repeat some of the basic information from the chapter, but with sound. By reading the text and watching the videos, I hope you'll be able to increase your understanding of how the English sound system works and get ideas for ways to help your students develop good pronunciation habits.

My background

I'm a teacher. I've taught all aspects of English, including many, many pronunciation classes, for 25 years. I have a master's degree in linguistics from California State University, Fresno, where my coursework gave me a good foundation in phonology, along with linguistics in general. For the past 12 years I've been teaching in the ESL (English as a Second

Language) and TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) programs at the University of California, Irvine Extension. I've taught the Teaching Pronunciation Skills course in UCI Extension's TEFL Accelerated Certificate Program for a decade to students from many countries. The topic choices in this book are based in part on my TEFL students' insightful questions, comments, and stories about their teaching situations and experiences. Thank you, TEFL students!

I'm a native speaker of English, but I've also been a learner of several languages, including German, Japanese, Spanish, French, Latin, Russian, and Sanskrit. This is not to say that I speak all of those languages, but I've studied them. I know what it's like not to be able to hear the difference between unfamiliar new sounds, to struggle to pronounce them, and to feel satisfaction when I finally can (if that ever happens). I've experienced language classes where the teacher valued pronunciation and taught it well, and others where pronunciation was basically ignored.

You're also invited to look at the website I've put together for my TEFL students: <http://teachingpronunciation.weebly.com>. Many of the materials in this book started out there, and it also contains links to other websites that are useful in learning and teaching pronunciation. If you have any

comments or suggestions about teaching pronunciation, please feel free to send me a message through my website by clicking on the "Keep in Touch" tab. I'd love to hear your thoughts about teaching pronunciation, your experiences, and your suggestions for improving these teaching materials.

I know that the thought of teaching pronunciation can be intimidating, whether English is your native language or not, but it will be much less scary if you arm yourself with some basic knowledge and ideas for teaching techniques and activities. I hope you find this book helpful in reaching that goal.

Using the Book on Your iPad

Some features won't work well in portrait mode on your iPad, and some of the boxes and recordings might disappear. It's best to read in landscape mode. You'll be able to see everything correctly if you hold your iPad this way:

instead of this way:



Sound: If you see this symbol, touch it to hear sound:



Keynotes: These are narrated tutorials of some important points. Touch to watch and listen.

1.1 Why Do We Have Trouble Learning New Sounds?

Why do we have trouble learning new sounds?

Picture galleries: Flip through these to see a collection of related pictures.

7.1 Tools for teaching pronunciation

A dental model lets you show tongue positions for sounds.

Videos: Touch the “play” symbol to watch the video.



Review quizzes: Touch your answer choices to check your understanding. (Not all of the chapters have review quizzes.)

REVIEW: Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Question 1 of 7
What do we call the study of speech sounds in language?

A. Allotopes
 B. Phonology
 C. Articulatory system
 D. Phonemes

Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation

Why do we need to teach pronunciation?

There are many things that English teachers need to fit into their limited class time—grammar and vocabulary, speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Pronunciation often gets pushed to the bottom of the list. Many teachers say there's just not enough time to teach pronunciation. Students often think it isn't that important—after all, it won't be tested on their college entrance exams!

But if students need or want to speak English understandably, pronunciation is important. The days when learners only needed reading and writing skills in English are past. Many of your students will need to speak and understand English in

real life to communicate with both native speakers of English and speakers of other languages. Even if their grammar and vocabulary are strong, if their pronunciation isn't easy to understand, their communication will fail. We owe it to our students to give them the tools they'll need to be able to communicate successfully in English.

What are your goals?

Most teachers agree that they want their students to be able to speak English with good pronunciation. But what does that mean? What is good pronunciation?

One answer might be “sounding like a native speaker.” However, this answer is problematic for a couple of reasons. First, it’s hard to define what “a native speaker” sounds like. There are so many varieties of English and so much variation within each type that it’s almost impossible to define that elusive “ideal” pronunciation. Trying to sound like a native

Vocabulary and Spelling Note

Look carefully at these words to avoid common spelling mistakes:

Pronounce (verb): It’s spelled with “ou” in the second syllable.

Pronunciation (noun): It’s spelled with “u” in the second syllable.

* This word is **not** spelled correctly: * **pronounciation**

* And this is **not** a real word: * **pronunciate**

speaker is like throwing a ball at a moving target—difficult, frustrating, and hard to hit!

Another problem is that very few learners will ever be able to sound exactly like their preferred pronunciation model, no matter how hard or how long they try. This is especially true for adult learners and for those who don't live in areas where they constantly hear English in their daily lives. Whatever the definition, speaking with nativelike pronunciation is not an easy goal to reach.

A more realistic goal, and one that more and more teachers and researchers recommend, is *intelligible* pronunciation—speaking in a way that most listeners can understand without too much effort or confusion. It's not a bad thing if we can still tell that the speaker comes from a particular country, as long as the speaker can be easily understood by others.

(Celce-Murcia et al. 2010)

Still, it's clear that while it's not practical to set our goal impossibly high, we also can't afford to set it too low. It's not helpful for students to become too complacent and to believe that their pronunciation is fine when, in fact, it may not be easily understood by anyone other than their own teacher and classmates. To be truly intelligible to a wide range of listeners, and not just to willing listeners of their own

language background, speakers need to come fairly close to some kind of a recognized standard, whether it's one of the major native-speaker varieties or a non-native variety of pronunciation that is easily understood by listeners from many backgrounds. As responsible teachers, we can't set the bar too low.

We should also realize that English teachers, both native and non-native speakers, are often *not* the best judges of whether someone's pronunciation is intelligible. Many ESL or EFL teachers can understand their students' speech when people in the wider world can't; in fact, it sometimes seems that we teachers can understand practically anything. We're used to inaccurate pronunciation. We know what students are going through and how hard they're trying. We're on their side and *want* to understand them, while a future employer or a cashier at Starbucks might not try so hard. Non-teachers are a tough audience. (Lane 2010)

Accuracy and fluency

We often think of pronunciation teaching in terms of helping students achieve accurate pronunciation so that their production of sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation begins to match an ideal pattern. But **accuracy** is only part of the measure of good pronunciation. **Fluency** in producing sounds and other aspects of pronunciation is equally

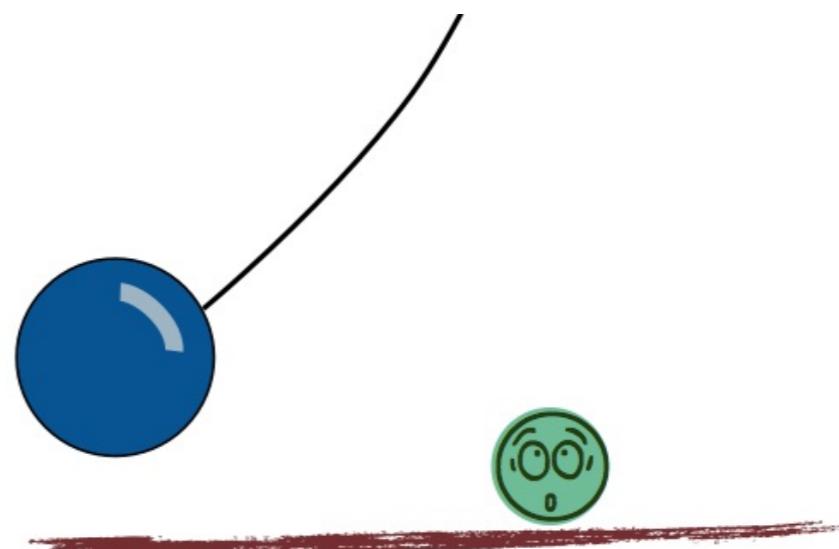
important. The two don't always go together. For example, many students learn to produce a new sound correctly when they're concentrating carefully and saying it alone or in a single word. When they try to have a conversation that includes the sound, however, it's much more difficult to keep producing it correctly—they can't pronounce the sound fluently. After all, in real-world speaking, pronunciation is just one among many things that we have to think about. Vocabulary, grammar, the ideas we want to express, and the appropriate degree of politeness and formality also occupy our attention.

It's hard to use pronunciation accurately and fluently at the same time. Because of this, when we're practicing pronunciation, we should include some activities that emphasize pronunciation fluency—speaking smoothly and easily, even if not all the sounds are perfect—along with activities that emphasize accuracy—producing sounds correctly. Both accuracy and fluency are important in pronunciation, just as they are in speaking in general, and both deserve attention and practice.

The pendulum swings. Don't get hit.

Over the years, styles of language teaching have changed greatly, and the same is true of teaching pronunciation. In some periods, teaching pronunciation has been considered

extremely important, while at other times it hasn't been given much attention at all. Trends in teaching pronunciation are like a swinging pendulum—the emphasis goes from one extreme to the other.



In pronunciation teaching the focus until recently was almost entirely on producing individual sounds and words correctly; not much attention was given to intonation, rhythm, or prominence. In the last 20 years or so, however, teachers and researchers have begun to realize the importance of these “musical” aspects of pronunciation and to emphasize them more strongly in teaching. Some scholars have gone so far as to claim that teaching individual sounds is not so important, and intonation, stress, prominence, and rhythm should be emphasized above all.

It seems more practical, however, to realize that no single aspect of pronunciation can stand on its own. Our students can benefit from learning about both individual sounds and the musical aspects of pronunciation, and we need to find a balance between these two areas. The pendulum of teaching trends might keep swinging, but we don't have to let it knock us down. Choose methods and activities that combine to work best for you and your students. (For a more complete discussion of the history of pronunciation teaching methods, see Celce-Murcia et al. 2010 Chapter 1)

What affects pronunciation learning?

The age of the learner

We've all observed how easily babies and very young children learn languages. They just seem to absorb the sounds and words they hear around them and, little by little, learn to imitate them accurately. Linguists call this time in a child's life, lasting up to the age of about 12-14 years, the **critical period** for language acquisition. Children learn the sounds of language more naturally than adults and can approach native speaker pronunciation, but *only if* they are surrounded by the language and have many chances to hear its pronunciation. Young children who hear English only a couple of hours a week lose much of their learning advantage.

Effective pronunciation learning is not limited to young children, however. Older children and adults have their own strengths and can also learn pronunciation well, even if they never sound quite like native speakers. Adults are better able to set goals and to practice purposefully. They can understand more abstract explanations and analyze how sounds are produced and how the melody and rhythm of language sound. Adults should not give up on the hope of having easily intelligible pronunciation; they just have to reach it in a different way than children.

Motivation

Learners in any subject tend to make more progress if they *want* to learn. No teacher can force students to learn if they're not motivated. A proverb says "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." This also applies to teaching pronunciation. We can provide information and many chances to practice, but we don't have the power to change our students' pronunciation for them. They have to want to do it and be willing to do the work themselves.

Three general sets of goals or desires have been suggested that can motivate students in language learning:

- They want to be accepted into a group that uses the language. The group might still recognize the learners as “outsiders,” but they can function well in the group.
- They want to be accepted as real members of the group. They don’t want to be recognized as “outsiders.”
- They want to be able to use the language to reach a goal: To get a job, to conduct business, to pass a test, or to travel easily in a foreign country.

If we recognize our students’ goals in learning English, we can help motivate them by showing them how improving their pronunciation will help them reach their goals. (Celce-Murcia et al. 2010)

Personality and aptitude

No two people are the same. We each have our own personality, talents, strengths, and weaknesses. These factors can affect how people learn pronunciation.

Teachers sometimes assume that more outgoing learners will be able to learn pronunciation better than shyer students, and there may be some truth to this. Confident students might speak more and be more willing to try new sounds, and this extra practice could help them improve their pronunciation. However, this improvement is certainly not guaranteed. Outgoing students may be producing a lot of language, but

they may also be jumping ahead without paying attention to the accuracy of their pronunciation. If listeners are impressed by their fluency and accept their imperfect pronunciation, they have no way to know that they need to improve.

Some introverted students might actually be thinking carefully about sounds and practicing “within themselves,” even if they don’t speak up much in class. Don’t underestimate the quiet students. Appreciate the strengths and possibilities of all your students and encourage everyone.

Another aspect of personality that can affect pronunciation is the degree to which a person is willing or able to change the way he or she sounds. Most of us have been speaking and listening to language in the same, familiar way since we learned to talk. Our voice and our pronunciation are a central part of the way we see ourselves. It can be uncomfortable, and possibly even frightening, to try out unfamiliar sounds and melodies of language. For some people this process seems like a small bump in the road, but for others, it’s a serious roadblock.

Finally, some people seem to have more of an aptitude or talent for learning language or imitating pronunciation than others. We say that some people “have a good ear” for language. Of course, this is something that is almost

impossible to define or measure. What seems like a natural talent may be partly due to special motivation, encouragement from parents or teachers, or growing up in an environment where there are many opportunities to hear and learn other languages. In fact, there's no magical ability possessed by some people but not others that determines whether someone can be a successful language learner. As teachers, we need to believe that everyone has an ability to learn pronunciation and give them the help they need to do it well.

Methods and quality of teaching

So far we've looked at factors that depend on the learners themselves, but there are outside factors as well. The kind of teaching students have experienced, both in amount and quality, has a strong influence on their learning. Have they received a lot of training in pronunciation, only a little, or perhaps almost none at all? How much practice have they had a chance to do? Was it effective practice using a variety of activities, or entirely "repeat after me"? Were their teachers interested in pronunciation, or did they consider it to be only unnecessary fluff? Is it even possible that their past teachers have given them false information or provided an extremely inaccurate model? The quality of

teaching that students receive certainly affects the quality of their learning.

Exposure to the target language

Students' pronunciation learning is also affected by how much English they have a chance to hear in their daily lives. Learners who live in an English-speaking country where they are constantly surrounded by the language will be more familiar with the sounds they're trying to imitate than those who have few chances to hear spoken English—perhaps only during English classes for a few hours each week.

Why do we have trouble learning new sounds?

Why do we have trouble learning new sounds?

The influence of the learner's language

A learner's first language (often referred to as **L1**) has a strong influence on the way he/she learns the pronunciation of a second language (referred to as **L2**). Often this influence is helpful, for example, when some sounds are very similar in the two languages. Knowing how to pronounce /m/ in one language makes it easy for a learner to pronounce /m/ in another language.

However, learners' pronunciation habits in their first language can also make it more difficult for them to pronounce sounds in the new language that don't exist in

their L1 or that are used in a different way. This influence is called **native language interference** or **language transfer**.

What happens when learners hear and try to pronounce strange, new sounds in the new language? These two types of problems often occur:

Merging: When learners hear unfamiliar sounds in a new language, they tend to interpret the sounds of the new language in terms of the categories of their original language. The learner's brain may hear two sounds as being the same when they're actually considered separate sounds in the new language. This leads to pronunciation errors. When our brains can't tell the difference between two similar sounds, we tend to pronounce both of them in the same way. For example, many languages don't have separate vowel sounds like the ones in *reach* and *rich*. Speakers of these languages may merge the two sounds and pronounce them both the same.

Substitution: When learners hear a new sound that doesn't match any of the sounds they know, they often substitute a familiar sound that is somewhat similar and easier for them to produce. For example, the first sound in *think* and *three* is found in relatively few languages in the world. Speakers of

languages that don't have this sound often substitute /s/, /f/, or /t/ so that *think* sounds like *sink*, *fink*, or *tink*.

The processes of substitution and merging can cause serious problems for learners' intelligibility. When listeners expect to hear one sound but actually hear a different one, communication can break down. Even when teachers make learners aware of what's happening, it's difficult not to fall into one of these traps.

Borrowed words: Many languages have borrowed English words, adapting their pronunciation to fit the sound system of the borrowing language. (Sometimes the meanings of the words have also changed, but that's a separate issue.) For example, here are some Japanese words borrowed from English. (A double vowel letter in the Japanese version represents a vowel that is longer in duration than a single vowel letter.)

Japanese Word	From this English word	Main sound changes
/dʒuusu/	juice	Extra vowel after final consonant
/garasu/	glass (the material)	Extra vowel to split up consonant cluster. Extra final vowel. Change in main vowel sound.
/hambaagaa/	hamburger	Change in first vowel. /ə/ in second and third syllables becomes /aa/.

Familiarity with the borrowed word can make it harder for learners to pronounce the word correctly in English if they assume that the pronunciation is the same in English. This can cause misunderstandings. In an ESL class that I observed recently, the teacher asked a Japanese student about his favorite food. The student answered: /karee/. (The last vowel is similar to the vowel in *bed*, not *need*.) The teacher had no idea what the student meant, and it took several tries by him and his classmates until the teacher recognized the word as *curry*, which in American English sounds like /kəriy/. Teachers need to take special care to point out and practice words that are pronounced differently in English than their borrowed counterparts.

Fossilization

One of the most stubborn problems that we face in teaching pronunciation is **fossilization**. Fossilization is a process that occurs when a language learner progresses to a certain point but then has a hard time making further progress. For example, a student who has been studying English for many years might still not be able to differentiate /v/ as in *very* and /b/ as in *berry*; this error just seems to have become a permanent part of the person's English.

When students begin to learn a new language, they usually feel like they're making progress fairly quickly. Since they're

starting from zero, any new knowledge feels like a great step forward. But after a while, students may find that their teacher and classmates understand them when they say /b/ instead of /v/, and so they lose their incentive for trying to say /v/ accurately. Their habit of saying /b/ for /v/ seems frozen in time, like a fossil of an ancient animal. Their mistake has become **fossilized**, and at this point, it becomes very hard to change.



A fish



A fish fossil

Most students who have been learning English for a while have some fossilized pronunciations that are very hard to change or improve. So what can the teacher do to help crack up those fossils?

First, we have to recognize the fossilized forms and help students realize what error they're making and why it's causing a problem in understanding. Next, the learner has to be willing to put in lots of effort to change his/her

pronunciation. It won't happen easily, and it won't happen at all if the student doesn't work at it. We need to provide information, opportunities for focused practice, and feedback to the learner on how well his/her pronunciation is reaching the goal. It's difficult to change fossilized pronunciation, but it is not impossible.

A more effective strategy in the long run is to prevent fossilization in the first place. Emphasize pronunciation at all levels of teaching, *especially for beginners*. It's easier to get learners started on the right path than to try to change their fossilized pronunciation later.

Hypercorrection

A less common pronunciation problem is **hypercorrection**, which literally means “too much correction.” This happens when a student has learned a rule and tries to apply it, but applies it in too many cases. For example, a common error among Korean learners is to substitute /p/ for /f/, a sound that doesn’t exist in the Korean language. The expected error is to say *pan* instead of *fan* or *punny* instead of *funny*. But sometimes a learner has been concentrating so hard on not saying /p/—on saying /f/ instead—that he or she says /f/ too often, even when the correct sound actually should have been /p/. He or she might say *fan* instead of *pan*.

Hypercorrection is a much less frequent and less serious source of error than fossilization—more like a slip of the tongue than a long-term problem.

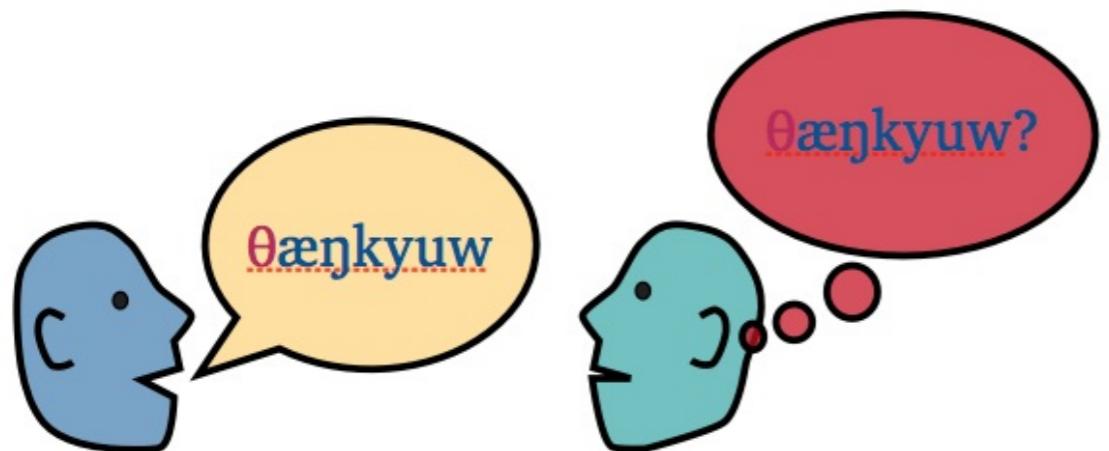
Learning to hear

Being able to hear the difference between sounds in a new language is as important as being able to produce the sounds. However, hearing new sounds is not always easy. How we hear sounds is a result of how we've gotten used to hearing and classifying them in our own language. As adults, we don't “hear” all the speech sounds that come into our ears—only the ones that we're used to.

When we were babies just learning our native language, our brains were ready to hear and accept the sounds of any language. Babies are talented that way. But as we grew up and became more firmly anchored in our own language, we got used to paying attention only to the sounds we needed to hear—the sounds of our own language that we heard around us every day. We didn't need to understand any other sounds, so our brains never built up the ability to hear and identify them. In effect, our brains developed a **phonological filter** that let us hear the sounds of our own language very efficiently, but “filtered out” unfamiliar, unnecessary sounds. As adults, when we hear new sounds, it's difficult to identify

or understand them—we’re still hearing through the filter of our L1.

To pronounce a new language well, we need to learn to hear again. We have to remove the filter that’s hiding some of those new sounds so that our brains can hear, accept, analyze, and get ready to imitate them. The first step in doing this is to be aware of the filter and deliberately try to get past it. The next, ongoing step is to build up our awareness of new sounds, to pay close attention to what we hear, and to imitate them until we can do it accurately. We need to practice hearing sounds well, just as we need to practice pronouncing them well.



I sometimes tell my students that in order to learn pronunciation well, they need to hear with their mouths and speak with their ears. That is, when we listen, we think to ourselves, “How would I move my mouth to make that same

sound? Where would I put my tongue and lips?” According to phonologist Peter Ladefoged, “It seems as if listeners sometimes perceive an utterance by reference to their own motor activities. When we listen to speech, we may be considering, in some way, what we would have to do in order to make similar sounds.” (Ladefoged 2006 p. 110) The other side of this idea is that when we speak, we should constantly listen to what we’re saying and compare it to what we know it should sound like. We monitor and self-correct our pronunciation, using our ears to give our mouths feedback about what we’re doing right or wrong and what needs to be changed.

Feelings that can stand in the way

Learners’ feelings about language and pronunciation sometimes make it harder for them to develop accurate pronunciation, especially for students who don’t have a choice about learning English. For example, junior high or high school students in EFL settings are sometimes reluctant to seem different from their peers by using new, “foreign-sounding” pronunciation. It’s easier and more comfortable to pronounce words in a way that fits their own language patterns. They may also not see the point in concentrating on pronunciation. After all, English is just one school subject among many, and, depending on their country and culture,

they may not foresee a need to speak English in their future lives. If pronunciation isn't tested and doesn't count for part of their grade, why try?

For all of us, our voice is an important part of ourselves, and our customary pronunciation is a vital part of our voice.

Throughout our lives, we've become used to hearing certain sounds come out of our mouths, and not others. Our pronunciation has always marked us as members of a certain language or dialect group. Changing our pronunciation can seem threatening, as if it will cause us to lose our identity as a member of our own group. It seems safer and easier not to change. (Gilbert 2008) However, if we see an attempt to change pronunciation as adding a new skill or a new, temporary language identity rather than replacing our original selves, it can seem less threatening.

In addition, sometimes learners can feel uncomfortable if they imitate a speaker or other model too exactly. They might have the feeling that the speaker will think they're mocking them if they try to sound *too* similar. (After all, young children sometimes make fun of a friend by imitating their speech, and they might be scolded for this.) But in pronunciation practice, we have to get over that feeling and realize that imitating someone exactly is our goal—it's a valuable skill in pronunciation learning.

Learning pronunciation takes time

Pronouncing sounds involves both our minds and our bodies. When we learn new sounds, we need to learn to move the muscles of our mouths in new ways and change the pronunciation habits we've built up all through our lives. This isn't easy, and, like learning any other muscular activity, it takes a long time. Most people can't learn to dance or to play a new sport immediately; they have to start out slowly, practice a lot, and gradually build up speed and skill. Our mouths also need to build up **muscle memory**—the ability to do something more easily after practicing it many times. Our muscles begin to “remember” how to move in a certain way because they've done it so often.

Teaching pronunciation also takes time. We can't just teach something once and expect our students to master it right away. We need to come back to the same point again and again, giving students lots of review and continued practice.

What do teachers need to know?

In order to teach pronunciation effectively, you need several types of knowledge:

1. You need to know the facts about pronunciation: How our mouths move to produce the sounds of language,

and how word stress, rhythm, connected speech, and intonation work.

2. You need to understand and predict the kinds of problems your students might have with pronunciation and why they happen.
3. You need to know how to teach pronunciation to your students, adapting your methods to fit them and their needs, and helping them practice effectively to overcome any problems they might have. (Celce-Murcia et al. 2010)

You'll also need to know about these basic principles of pronunciation teaching:

- Pronunciation teaching must include more than just “repeat after me.” Having students listen to a recording or to the teacher’s voice and then repeat is a useful part of a pronunciation lesson, but by itself it is not enough.
- We can teach most effectively by encouraging students to use more than one of their senses. We can use many different ways of learning—using sight, sound, and movement—to help students understand and remember better.
- It’s best to keep our lessons practical. For most students, theory and technical explanations are hard to understand

and are easily forgotten. Simple, concrete demonstrations followed by lots of practice produce better results.

Lessons need to fit our students’ level of understanding.

- We should include communicative practice whenever possible. Students need to work toward using their new pronunciation in real speech. In class, we can help them practice in ways that are similar to real communication.
- We should train students to become independent and autonomous learners. Our students won’t be with us forever. Someday they’ll be facing pronunciation puzzles on their own. If we can help them build up their own skills in listening and imitating, it will be a big help to them in their future learning.

In the rest of this book, we’ll talk about all of these things and how they can make your teaching of pronunciation more engaging and effective.

Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Phonology

Phonology is the study of speech sounds in language—the sounds themselves, how they are produced, and how they work together as a system in a particular language.

Phonology can be an incredibly detailed and complex subject. As a teacher, you don't have to know everything about it, but there are some basic concepts that will be very useful to know. In this chapter, you'll learn about some of them.

Letters are not sounds

First of all, it's important to remember that sounds and letters are two separate things. Letters are written symbols. We can see them, but we can't hear them. Sounds are vibrations that

our ears can hear and interpret. We can hear sounds, but we can't see them. Even though people sometimes talk about “the *g* sound” or “the *a* sound,” *g* and *a* are letters, not sounds. In the English spelling system, letters can often represent more than one sound, depending on the word they're in. For example, the letter *g* represents two completely different sounds in the words *go* and *gentle*. Also, a written letter sometimes represents no sound at all, like the *k* in *knee* or the *e* in *bake*.

This is a letter: **S**

This is a sound:



Be careful not to confuse letters with the sounds they represent. When we talk about pronunciation, we're talking about *sounds*, not written letters.

Phonemes and allophones

Phonemes are the distinctive sounds of a language; the sounds that a native speaker of the language considers to be separate sounds. Every language has its own set of phonemes; no two languages have exactly the same set.

In reality, no two spoken sounds are precisely the same. After all, speech sounds are produced by human beings, not machines. Each time you say a sound, it might be slightly different. Sometimes the differences are tiny and random, and sometimes they can be pretty substantial. When we listen

to someone talk, we don't usually notice all these differences. We don't realize that we're really hearing many different variations of sounds. Our minds only recognize a limited number of sounds—in English, about 42. These basic sounds of a language are its phonemes.

If sounds can have so many variations, how can we know if two sounds are the same phoneme or different phonemes? That is, how can we tell which sounds that we hear count as the same sound in a particular language?

We can use this test: If we change one sound to another in a word and the meaning of the word changes or the word becomes meaningless, those two sounds are different phonemes. We say they are **in contrast**. For example, if we say *talk* (/tɔk/), it means “to speak,” but if we say *walk* (/wɔk/), then it means “to move around on foot.” Because changing /t/ to /w/ changed one word into a different word, we know that /t/ and /w/ are separate phonemes in English. They function as different sounds. If we start with the same word *talk* and change /t/ to /z/, the word becomes meaningless—*zalk* isn’t a real word in English. So we can be sure that /t/ and /z/ are also different phonemes.

On the other hand, if we change one sound to another and the meaning of the word does not change, those sounds belong to the same phoneme.

For example, in the word *butter* (/bʌtə/), we can say the /t/ sound in different ways. We might say it the way most Americans do in words like this—like a quick, voiced /d/—and the word will still be *butter*. We could also say /t/ in *butter* as a “normal,” voiceless /t/, or even say a very puffy, breathy /t/, and it will still be the same word, *butter*. Because saying /t/ in these different ways did not change the meaning of the word *butter*, we can tell that these sounds

are *not* separate phonemes in English. They’re just three variations of the same phoneme, /t/. These variations of a phoneme that are still heard to be the same sound are called **allophones** of the same phoneme. Although they’re physically different sounds, they *function* as the same sound in English.

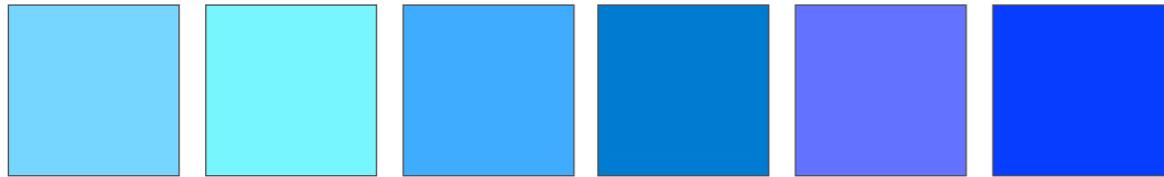
A phoneme is an abstract concept. It’s related not so much to the physical sounds themselves, but to the way our minds perceive and categorize sounds. And the way our minds categorize sounds is different for each language. That is, each language has a different set of phonemes.

2.1 Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology



To illustrate how phonemes and allophones work, let's compare sounds to colors. If you look at the boxes below, you'll probably say that they're all blue.



And yet no two of them are exactly the same color. Some are lighter or darker, more greenish or more purplish. So why do we call them all by the same name, "blue"? It's because English has a category called "blue" that includes all these colors, not because they're really physically identical. (In fact, in another language the colors in these boxes might not all have the same name. In that language, color categories might be divided differently.) We could say that all these shades of blue are "allocolors" of the same "coloreme." (These are not real words, so you don't have to remember them.) We understand them as all being "blue," even though they're really slightly different. They all *function* as the same color.

In the same way, allophones are groups of (usually) similar sounds that native speakers of a language recognize as being the same sound. Speakers don't usually even notice that the sounds are different. They just assume that they're the same.

Types of variation among allophones

Sometimes we have a free choice of which allophone we'll use. For example, we usually say the phoneme /p/ this way: Our lips come together, air pressure builds up behind our lips, and then we release the air with a little "pop." But when /p/ comes at the end of a word, we might say /p/ in a different way: Our lips come together, air pressure builds up behind our lips, and that's all—no release. We have a free choice of which kind of /p/ to use; at the end of a word. Either one is all right, although one may be more common than the other. In this example, we say the sounds are in **free variation**—we can use either one.

In other cases, the **environment** of a phoneme—the sounds around it—determine which allophone we will use. For example, the words *car* and *key* both start with the same sound: /k/. But if you listen carefully and feel the position of your tongue, you'll notice that the /k/ sounds are not exactly the same. When you say /k/ in *car*, your tongue touches much farther back in your mouth than when you say *key*. (Try whispering the two words to hear the difference better. One /k/ will be higher in pitch than the other.) The /k/ sound changes because it's affected by the vowel that comes after it. The two vowel sounds are pronounced with the tongue in a different part of the mouth, and they pull the /k/

sound to a different position too. We say that these two allophones are in **complementary distribution**. That means we can predict which allophone we'll hear based on its environment—the other sounds around it. This is a very common situation in many languages.

Complementary distribution among allophones is a lot like the comic book heroes Clark Kent and Superman. They're really both the same person, but you never see them at the same time. When things are calm, you see mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent. When there's trouble, he turns into Superman. The environment—a normal day or an emergency—determines who we'll see.

Every language is different

As we've said before, every language has its own set of phonemes. Two sounds that are separate phonemes in one language might be allophones of the same phoneme in another language. For example, in English, /s/ and /ʃ/ are separate phonemes. (*See* and *she* are different words; changing /s/ to /ʃ/ changes the meaning of the word.)

However, this is not the case in all languages. For example, in Japanese these two sounds are allophones of the same phoneme. They *function* as the same sound. If /s/ comes before the vowel /i/, it sounds like [ʃ]. If it comes before any

other vowel, it sounds like [s]. The phoneme /s/ in a word like /simbun/ (“newspaper”) is pronounced [ʃ] because there's an /i/ after it: [ʃimbun]. If someone pronounced it [simbun], the word would sound odd, but it wouldn't become some other word. On the other hand, when /s/ is followed by a vowel other than /i/, it sounds like [s], for example, in words like /sakura/ (“cherry blossom”) or /seito/ (“student”).

We sometimes hear teachers equate sounds in a new language with sounds in the learner's language. For example, a teacher might say, “The English sound /t/ is pronounced like the Spanish sound /t/ in *tienda* (shop).” However, these sounds are actually *not* the same; the tongue is much farther forward for the Spanish sound, right up against the teeth, and farther back for the English /t/, on the ridge just behind the teeth. In addition, the English sound is aspirated, or pronounced with a small puff of air, when it's at the beginning of a word, and the Spanish sound doesn't have this puff of air.

We need to be very careful to avoid teaching students that a sound in a new language is “the same as” a sound in their own language. Often the two sounds are similar, but *not* exactly the same. It's also not a good idea to **transliterate** English words into another writing system as a pronunciation aid. This often gives students a very inaccurate idea of what

the words really sound like. It's important to encourage students to hear and produce the sounds of a new language as they really are, as accurately as possible.

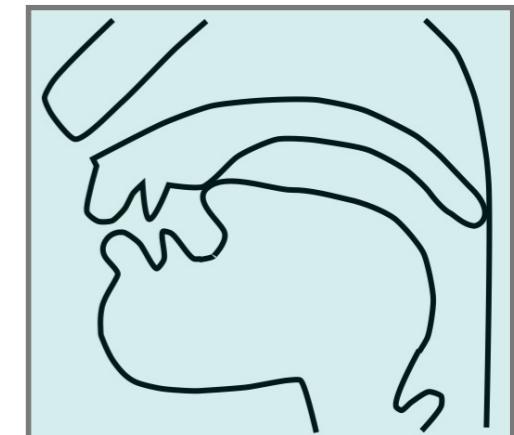
Consonants and vowels

We can divide the phonemes of any language into two types of sounds: **consonants** and **vowels**. **Consonants** are sounds in which the air stream meets some obstacles in the mouth on its way up from the lungs. The air stream is bumped, squeezed, or completely blocked. Words like *big*, *map*, and *see* begin with consonants. Most words contain at least one consonant, and some contain many more. For example, *saw* contains one consonant sound, *play* contains two, and *split* contains four. But a word doesn't have to have any consonants at all. For example, the words *I*, *a*, and *oh* don't have any consonant sounds—only vowels.

Vowels are sounds in which the air stream moves out very smoothly because there's nothing blocking or constricting it—it doesn't meet any obstacles on the way. Vowels are the “heart” of words and **syllables**. Words like *apple*, *east*, *over*, and *out* begin with vowels.

We sometimes think of consonants and vowels in terms of stationary positions of the tongue, lips, and teeth, especially when we look at diagrams of the vocal tract like the one

shown here. (This one might represent /t/, /d/, or /l/.) However, phonemes are actually produced by *movements* of parts of the vocal tract, not static positions. The tongue doesn't pause in one position—it keeps moving smoothly from one sound to the next. The diagrams show just one instant in the whole movement of a sound.



Minimal pairs

A **minimal pair** is a set of two words that are exactly the same except for one sound. Here are some examples of minimal pairs:

- *Boat* and *vote*
- *Sat* and *sad*
- *Paper* and *pepper*



Minimal pairs are very useful in teaching pronunciation, especially when students confuse two similar sounds. We'll hear more about using minimal pairs in pronunciation practice in Chapter 7, “Teaching Consonants and Vowels.”

The phonemic alphabet

A **phonemic alphabet** is a set of symbols that represent the sounds of a language. One symbol represents exactly one phoneme.

Why do we need a phonemic alphabet? It's because languages generally don't have perfect spelling systems, with exactly one symbol for each phoneme. Sometimes the same

Phonemic Symbols and Phonetic Symbols

Symbols that represent the phonemes of a language are called **phonemic symbols**. We write phonemic symbols with slash marks around them: /s/. Phonemic symbols represent only the basic phonemes of the language, not slight variations of them.

Symbols that represent the allophones of the phonemes of a language are called **phonetic symbols**. We write phonetic symbols with brackets around them: [s]. Phonetic symbols are intended to represent smaller, more exact variations of sound than phonemic symbols.

When we want symbols to represent actual **letters of the alphabet**, we can put them in quotation marks: "s."

When you write phonemic or phonetic symbols, be careful to write them exactly as they are. You can't change from a lower case to an upper case letter or make other changes in form. For example, /R/ is a totally different symbol than /r/. Different letter shapes might also be different symbols; /e/ does not represent the same sound as /ɛ/; /a/ is not the same as /ə/.

symbol can stand for more than one sound. For example, in English the letter "c" can represent at least three different phonemes:

- /k/ as in *cat*
- /s/ as in *city*
- /tʃ/ as in *cello*



In other cases, the same sound can be represented by more than one spelling. For example, the sound /f/ in English can be spelled in these ways:

- "f" in *fun*
- "ph" in *phone*
- "gh" in *cough*

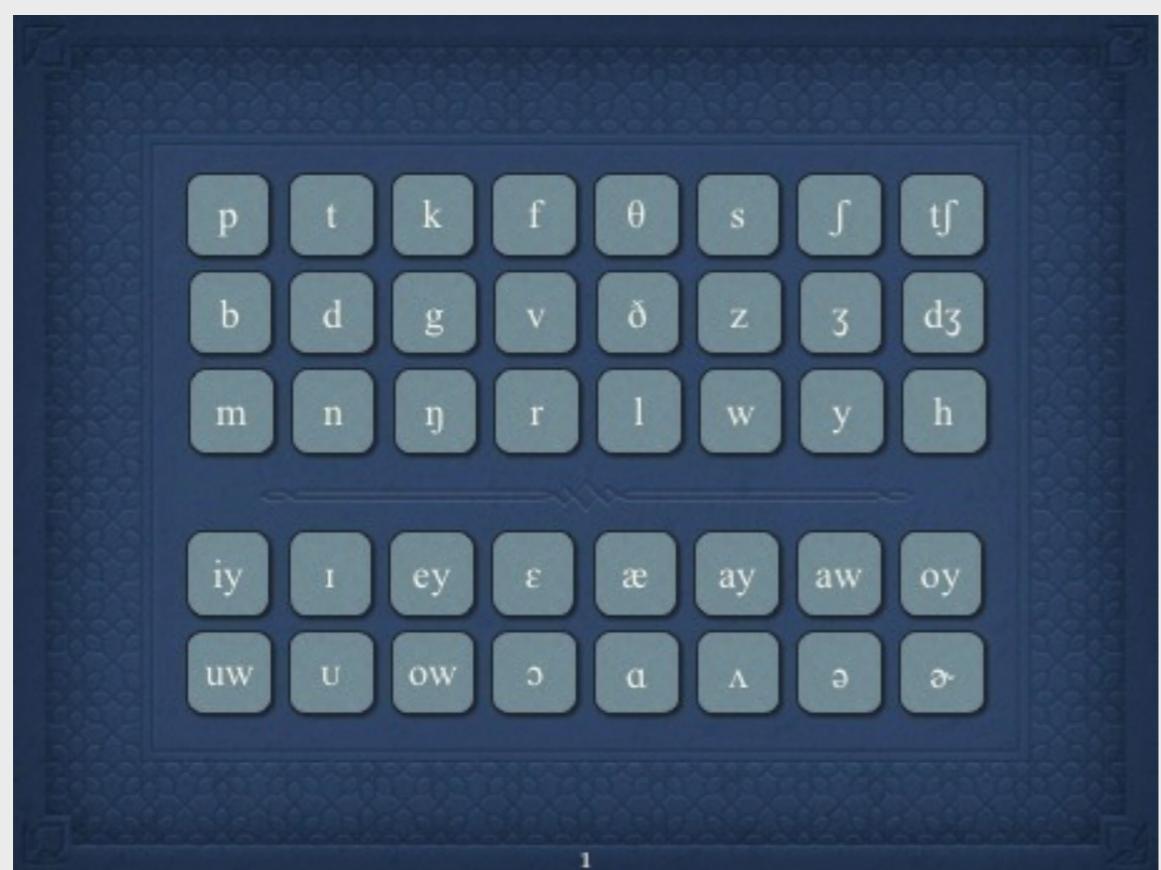
Because of this, it's useful to have a special set of symbols that can represent sounds more consistently. These phonemic symbols can help both teachers and learners to record and interpret the pronunciation of new words accurately.

Some of the symbols in the phonemic alphabet of English, such as /g/ and /a/, look like letters used in ordinary spelling. However, they don't always represent the same sounds that they do in normal spelling, and they can each represent only *one* sound. For example, the phonemic symbol /g/ can represent *only* the first sound in *good*, not the first sound in *gentle*; /a/ can represent *only* the vowel sound in

car, not the vowels in *cat*, *cake*, or *care*. Those have their own symbols.

Other phonemic symbols, like /ə/, /θ/, and /ŋ/, are not found in ordinary English spelling. They've been added to represent sounds that didn't have satisfactory spellings in the regular alphabet. Box 2.2 shows phonemic symbols for all the sounds of English. Touch the symbols in the chart to hear the sounds they represent.

2.2: The Phonemes of American English



Touch a phonemic symbol to hear the sound it represents.

There are actually several different versions of the phonemic alphabet that are used to represent the sounds of English. They're all variations of the International Phonetic Alphabet, or **IPA**, a system of symbols developed in the late 1800s to try to represent all the sounds that are used in human languages. Variations of IPA are used in many textbooks and dictionaries to represent pronunciation. Although these alphabets are often referred to as "IPA," most of them are not exactly like "real" IPA. They've been changed a little to make them fit the needs of language learners and teachers better.

Typing Phonetic/Phonemic Symbols

Some "regular" fonts, like Times New Roman and Arial, actually include many of the IPA symbols, like æ, ŋ, and θ. It's just not easy to find them or know how to type them.

You can download free IPA fonts for Windows and Mac at the website of SIL International (formerly called Summer Institute of Linguistics): <http://scripts.sil.org/FontDownloadsIPA> Their Charis SIL is used in this book.

Type It (<http://ipa.typeit.org/>) is a website that lets you type IPA symbols or letters from languages that don't use the Latin alphabet, then copy and paste them into a document.

Both Mac and Windows computers have utilities that let you see what keys to press to type unusual characters. I also recommend an inexpensive program for Mac called PopChar, available from Ergonis Software: <http://www.ergonis.com/products/popcharx/>. If you often type IPA symbols or any other unusual font characters, it is absolutely worth the €19.99 price.

The symbols used in this book are like those used in many American ESL textbooks, and are in the Charis SIL font.

Should you use a phonemic alphabet in teaching pronunciation? Maybe, or maybe not. For some students it's valuable, but for others it's confusing and scary. You'll need to think about your students—their age, expectations, and learning styles—before making this decision. We'll look at this question in more detail in Chapter 14: “Different Places, Different Learners.”

If you decide to use a phonemic alphabet in teaching, which version of IPA will you use? Most likely you'll choose the one that is found in the textbooks and dictionaries that are in common use in your country—that is, the one everyone else is using.

Segmental and suprasegmental features

When we hear the word “pronunciation,” the first thing that usually comes to mind is the individual sounds of a language—the vowels and consonants. But the sounds themselves are not the only things that affect pronunciation. There are also more “musical” aspects of pronunciation, such as **rhythm**, **intonation**, and **word stress**. We also need to know how sounds affect each other and how they change in connected speech. These aspects of pronunciation, which affect more

than just a single sound, are called **suprasegmental features of pronunciation**, or just **suprasegmentals**. We refer to the individual phonemes of a language—the consonants and vowels—as **segmental features of pronunciation** or **segmentals** because they affect only one segment of sound. It's important to know about and practice both segmental and suprasegmental features. Both of these work together to make pronunciation understandable to listeners.

Syllables

A **syllable** is a rhythmic unit in speech—a unit of sound that gets one “beat” in a word. A syllable must have a vowel (or a syllabic consonant, which we'll read about in Chapter 4). It might also have one or more consonants before the vowel and one or more consonants after it. For example, the word *potato* has three syllables: *po-ta-to*. Each syllable in this word has one consonant followed by one vowel. The word *strong* has just one syllable: *strong*, with three consonants, then one vowel, then one consonant. (The end of the word has two letters: *ng*, but these stand for just one sound: /ŋ/.)

Varieties of English

The English language is not the same everywhere. There are many different **varieties**, or **dialects**, of English that are spoken in many countries around the world. A dialect is a

form of a language that is associated with a particular country, region, or social group. When linguists use the term “dialect,” it does *not* mean an unusual or inferior way of speaking; the word “dialect” does *not* have a negative meaning. A language can have both standard and nonstandard dialects. *Everybody* speaks a dialect of some kind. However, since many people have come to associate the term “dialect” with types of language that are not considered standard or desirable, it may be safer to use the term “variety” of a language instead of “dialect.”

The varieties of English that are most often used as models in pronunciation teaching are:

Standard American English is the form of English spoken in the United States and Canada by educated speakers and most TV or radio announcers. (There are only slight differences between standard U.S. and Canadian English.) It can also be called *North American English*, *General American English*, or just *American English*. Many Americans speak Standard American English, often with slight regional variations.

Received Pronunciation (RP) has long been considered the standard form of British English pronunciation, based on educated speech in southern England. It is sometimes also

called *The Queen’s/King’s English* or *BBC English* (since announcers on broadcasts of the BBC—the British Broadcasting Corporation—have traditionally been expected to speak in this way). Actually, only a small percentage of people in the UK speak RP, and these days, even some BBC presenters speak somewhat different varieties of British English.

Of course, there are also many other varieties of English besides these—Australian English, New Zealand English, Scottish English, Irish English, and many others—each with its own regional variations. There are also varieties of English that are spoken in countries where English is not the main language, but is used as a common language of business or education.

We’ll look again at varieties of English and the question of choosing a pronunciation model in Chapter 14, “Different Places, Different Learners.”

What are pronunciation rules?

When we describe the pronunciation of English, we often talk about pronunciation rules, or we say that certain combinations of sounds are or aren’t allowed in English. It’s important to understand what we mean when we say this and to think about where language rules come from. They’re not

like the rules that tell you that you can't touch the ball with your hands when you're playing soccer, or that you have to drive on the right or the left side of the road. Those rules were made by people. Someone had to decide the rules first, and now people are required to follow them. If someone breaks a rule, there are negative consequences.

Rules in language don't work that way. They were *not* artificially created for people to follow; instead, they're a description or summary of what people already do naturally when they speak. Language rules exist primarily in speakers' minds; the speakers are usually not even aware of them. Linguists and teachers try to discover the rules, not to create them. They observe how people talk and make generalizations about what they hear. The rules don't tell what a language *should* be like; they're a summary of what it *is* like. (In other words, they're **descriptive rules**, not **prescriptive rules**.)

There are many, many varieties of English, and not all speakers sound the same way. Because of this, we shouldn't be surprised if we find that some speakers aren't following the rules that we've read in a textbook—this one or any other. This is pretty normal.

Language is messy

Finally, here's a basic truth to remember: Language is like a living thing—messy, inconsistent, and constantly changing. In fact, it is often said that the only thing that's constant in language is the fact that it's always changing. New words are invented, grammar rules change gradually, and sounds come and go. If we listen to what English sounded like hundreds of years ago, it's almost impossible to understand—it's changed that much.

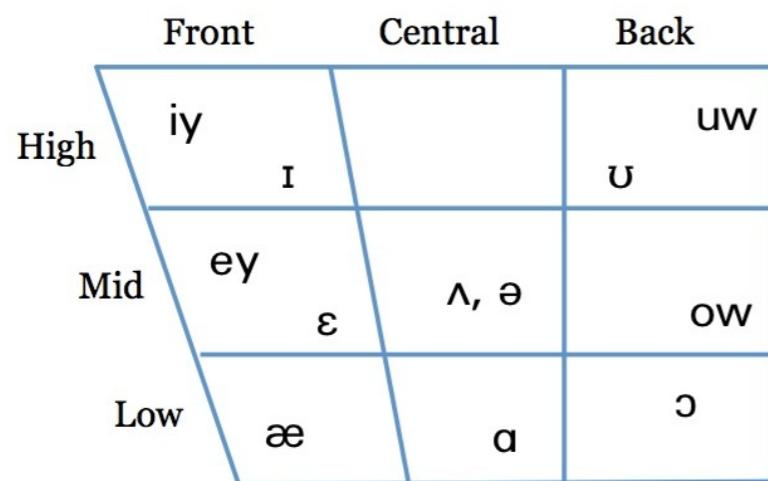
In the same way, the sound system of English is changing even now. We can't always be sure what direction the change will take or what the accepted forms will be like in the future. We just have to stay calm and accept the fact that change is inevitable.

When we see diagrams, rules, and lists describing a language, they look neat and exact, but the reality is that sounds and other aspects of language vary a lot from speaker to speaker,

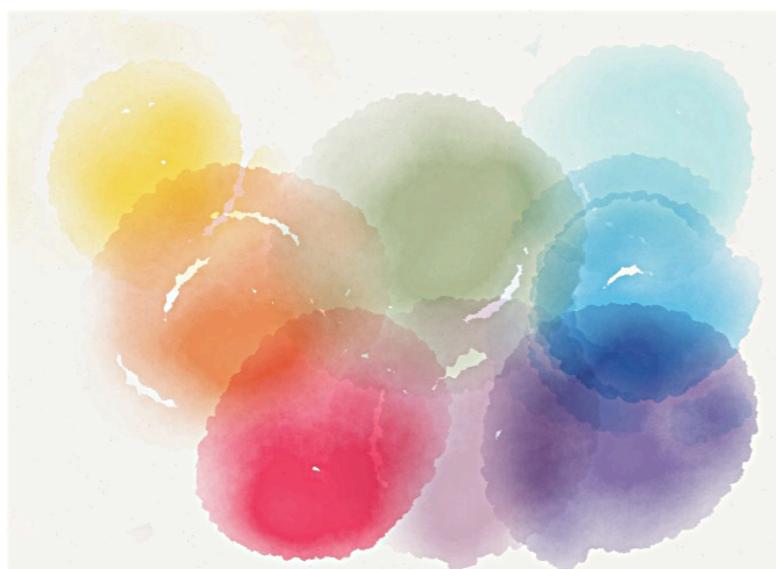
This is what Old English sounded like. It's part of a riddle from the Book of Exeter, a collection of poems and other writings from over 1,000 years ago. You can hear this recording by a modern reader on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJ3H9qAgdxk>

and they're always in a state of change. Linguists do their best to analyze this amazing mess, but rules often have exceptions, and what is true today might not be true 50 years from now. Even the experts often disagree on the details of what's happening and why.

So when you see a nice, neat chart like this:



Remember that the reality is probably more like this:



Language and its sounds are not as neat and tidy as we sometimes imagine, but that just makes them more interesting.

Internet Links

These videos show how English sounded many years ago.

Old English: This is a riddle from the Book of Exeter, a collection of poems and other writings from over 1,000 years ago, read by Michael D. C. Drout.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LI3H9qAgdxk>

Middle English: Prologue to the Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer, written in the late 14th century, and read by Diane Jones:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahuT-JwxIa8>

Early Modern English: Linguist David Crystal and his son Ben demonstrate how the language in William Shakespeare's plays would have been pronounced around 1600 A.D.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?
feature=player_embedded&v=gPlpphT7n9s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=gPlpphT7n9s)

The Articulatory System

How do we produce sounds?

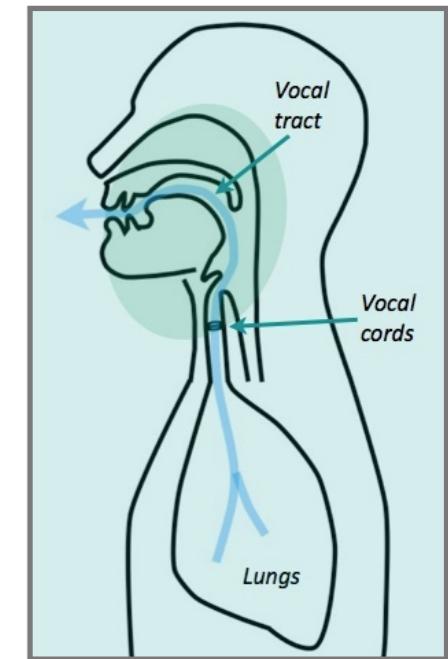
Think for a minute about what happens when we talk. Say a few words and concentrate on what's happening inside your mouth. The movements of your tongue, lips, and jaw are incredibly quick, delicate, and complex—just as complex as the movements of an Olympic gymnast or a surgeon's hands. When you think about it, it's a miracle that anybody can talk at all. So how do we produce speech sounds?

When we speak, we push air out of our **lungs**, up through our throat, and out our mouth or nose. The vibration of our **vocal cords**, along

with movements of our tongue and lips, changes the airflow and produces different sounds. Even a slight change in the position and movement of these parts can make a perceptible change in the sound that is produced.

The articulatory system

All of the body parts that we use to produce speech sounds are called the **articulatory system**. Teachers need to understand how the articulatory system works so they can help students learn how to produce sounds accurately. These are the most important parts of the articulatory system:



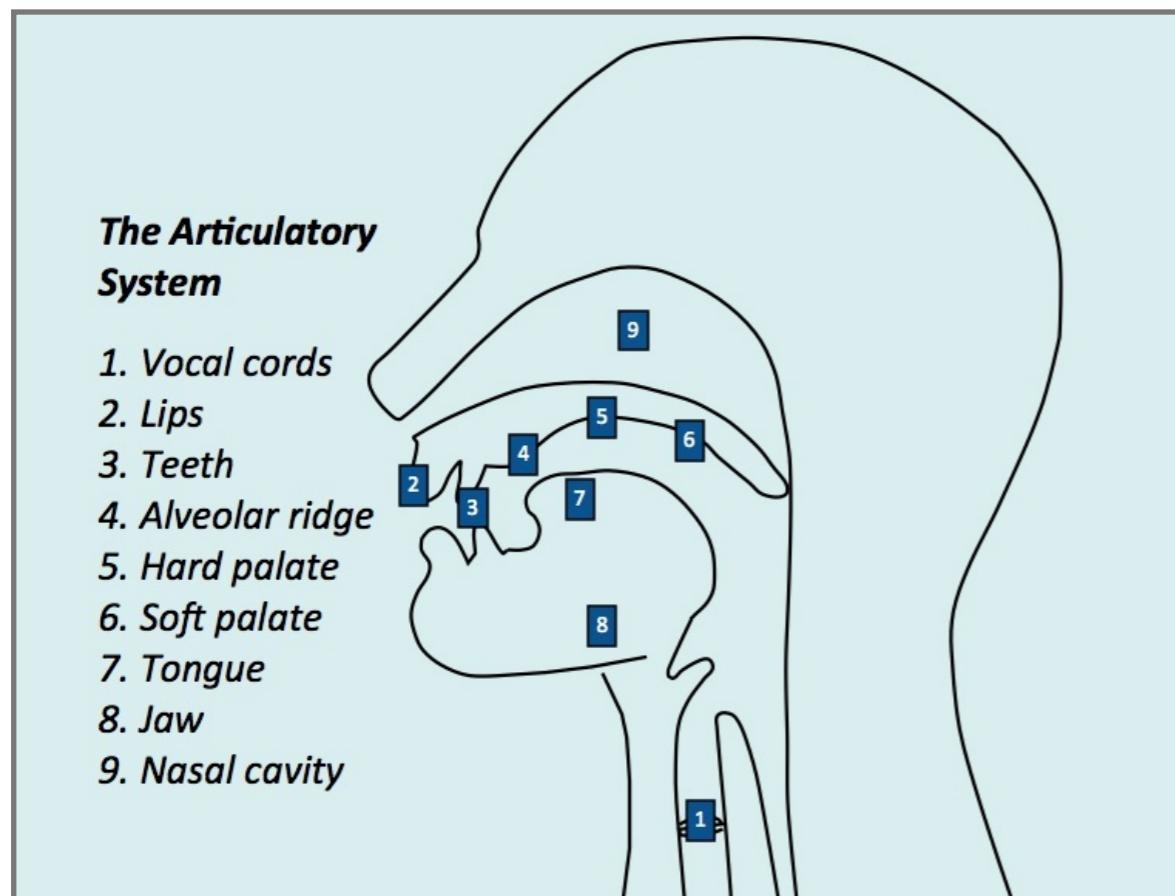
The lungs are where sound production begins. When we breathe, air moves in and out of these two bag-like organs in our chest. When we speak, our lungs push air up past the **vocal cords** and through the rest of the **vocal tract**, the space in the throat, mouth, and nose where sound is produced.

How Do We Produce Sounds?

How Do We Produce Sounds? The Articulatory System

The **vocal cords** or **vocal folds** are two small membranes in the throat that produce the sound of the voice. When the vocal cords are

stretched tight and close together, air passing through them makes them vibrate rapidly—more than 100 times per second—and the sound that comes out is louder. When the vocal cords are more relaxed, the sound that comes out is quieter, like a whisper. The vocal cords also affect the **pitch** of the sounds we produce. Pitch is a measure of how high or low the voice is at a particular point in time; that is, high or low in the sense that a musical note is high or low; it doesn't mean a high or low volume or loudness. When the vocal cords are longer, the sound has a lower pitch; when they are shorter, the sound has a higher pitch. The space between the vocal cords is called the **glottis**.



Above the vocal cords, in the vocal tract itself, are several parts that move in various ways to change the size and shape of the open part of the vocal tract and produce all the sounds of English, or any other language. These are called the **articulators**.

The **lips** are used in the production of several consonant sounds: /p/, /b/, /m/, /w/, /f/, and /v/. The way we move our lips—making them rounded, relaxed, or stretched a bit wide—also affects the sounds of vowels.

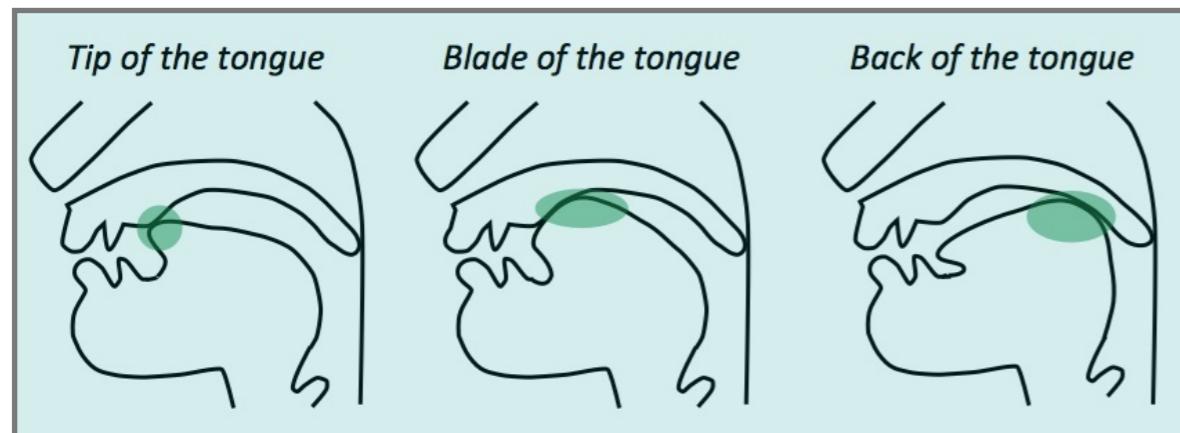
The **teeth** are used when we say the consonant sounds /f/ and /v/, with the upper teeth touching the lower lip, and also /θ/ and /ð/, with the tip of the tongue touching the upper teeth.

The **alveolar ridge** is the slightly rough area just behind the top teeth. It can also be called the *tooth ridge* or the *gum ridge*. The tongue touches or almost touches the alveolar ridge when we say the sounds /t/, /d/, /s/, /z/, /l/, and /n/.

The **hard palate** is the hard part at the top of the mouth, beginning just behind the alveolar ridge. It can also be called the *roof of the mouth*. When you close your mouth, your tongue is probably flat against your hard palate. The tongue touches or almost touches the hard palate when we say the sounds /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, and /y/.

The **soft palate** is the softer part of the roof of the mouth, farther back than the hard palate. It is also called the *velum*. If you touch the roof of your mouth with your tongue and then keep moving your tongue farther back, you'll find that softer area. The back of the tongue touches the soft palate when we say the sounds /k/, /g/, and /ŋ/.

The **tongue** is involved in producing almost all the sounds of English, both consonants and vowels. We'll sometimes need to refer to different parts of the tongue: *the tip of the tongue*, *the blade of the tongue*, and *the back of the tongue*.



The lower **jaw** moves up and down to allow the mouth to open and close. Raising or lowering the jaw also helps the tongue move to higher or lower positions, and it makes the open space inside the mouth bigger or smaller. All of these movements have a great influence on the sounds we produce.

The **nasal cavity** is the space inside the nose where air passes in and out when we breathe through our nose. It can

also be called the *nasal passage*. This area is important in producing the nasal sounds /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/. For these sounds, the air stream moves up and out through the nose instead of the mouth.

Teaching about the articulatory system

It's important for students of all ages to become aware of the parts of their mouths and how they move when they produce sounds. It's much less important for them to memorize the names of the parts of the articulatory system, either in English or in their native language.

We can use tools, models and illustrations to help students of all ages understand the articulatory system. For example:

- Have students look in a **mirror** to see how their mouths move, whether their lips are rounded or not, and how wide open their mouths are so they can compare these things with an illustration or the teacher's example.
- Have students touch their throats to feel the vibration of the vocal cords.
- Use a **dental model** (a set of giant teeth like dentists use to show children how to brush their teeth) to show students what's happening inside their mouths. It's much easier to show students where the alveolar ridge is on a model, for example, than to try to get them to look inside

the teacher's mouth. (It's dark in there!) We'll talk more about using a dental model in Chapter 7.

- Diagrams of the vocal tract, like the ones we've seen in this chapter, also give students a visual image of the position of the articulators during speech. This type of diagram is often called a **sagittal section diagram** or a **Sammy diagram**. However, these diagrams are sometimes hard for students to understand and connect to reality, especially for younger students.
- Many websites and software programs offer videos or interactive diagrams showing the articulation of sounds. One of the best-known is the Phonetics Flash Animation Project of the University of Iowa (<http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/>). For each of the phonemes of American English, it shows an animated sagittal section diagram, a video of a speaker pronouncing the sound, and recorded example words. The site also shows the phonemes of Spanish and German.

For young learners, show students what to do and keep explanations especially simple. Children are already aware of the more visible parts of the articulatory system—the tongue, teeth, and lips—and this is usually enough to help them understand what they need to do to say a sound.

Tools for teaching about the articulatory system



A mirror helps students see the movements of their lips and tongues.

• • • •

Think of images or actions to help children understand how to pronounce new sounds, and keep them within the realm of children's experience. For example, when practicing the /θ/ sound, you might say, "Pretend you're licking a lollipop" to make it easier for them to stick their tongues out just a bit. To get them to round their lips for sounds like /w/ and /uw/, have them pretend they're blowing soap bubbles. (Or bring in actual lollipops and bubbles for them to practice with, if it's

allowed by your school.) For the /s/ sounds, ask them to make a sound like a hissing snake.

Internet links

- An x-ray video of a person talking, from the companion website to Peter Ladefoged's book *A Course in Phonetics*:
[http://www.phonetics.ucla.edu/course/transcription
%20exercises/moviepage.htm](http://www.phonetics.ucla.edu/course/transcription%20exercises/moviepage.htm)
- The University of Iowa Phonetics Flash Animation Project: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/>

The Consonants of American English

How do we describe consonants?

Consonants are sounds in which the air stream meets some obstacles in the mouth on its way up from the lungs, as we learned earlier. Most consonants are not as smooth-sounding as vowels; they pop, hiss, snap, or hum. Box 4.1 shows the phonemic symbols for American English consonants. There are alternate symbols for a few of these sounds, but overall, the consonant symbols are very consistent across different versions of the phonemic alphabet, and they are basically the same for American English and British English.

Most words in English contain at least one consonant, and some contain many more. For example, *at* and *she* each

4.1 CONSONANTS OF AMERICAN ENGLISH



Example	Symbol	Example	Symbol
<i>pot</i>	/p/	<i>shop</i>	/ʃ/ or /š/
<i>book</i>	/b/	<i>beige</i>	/ʒ/ or /ž/
<i>take</i>	/t/	<i>house</i>	/h/
<i>dog</i>	/d/	<i>chip</i>	/tʃ/ or /č/
<i>cat</i>	/k/	<i>jump</i>	/dʒ/ or /j/
<i>good</i>	/g/	<i>man</i>	/m/
<i>fun</i>	/f/	<i>now</i>	/n/
<i>very</i>	/v/	<i>sing</i>	/ŋ/
<i>thick</i>	/θ/	<i>lamp</i>	/l/
<i>then</i>	/ð/	<i>road</i>	/r/
<i>sun</i>	/s/	<i>win</i>	/w/
<i>zoo</i>	/z/	<i>you</i>	/y/ or /j/
(<i>why</i>)	(/hw/)	Most speakers of English don't use /hw/ as a separate phoneme. They use /w/ instead.	

contain one consonant sound, *play* contains two, and *spring* contains four. (Remember that we're counting the consonant *sounds*, not the consonant *letters*. The letters *ng* spell one sound: /ŋ/.) But words don't have to have any consonants at all. For example, the words *I*, *a*, and *oh* have no consonant sounds—only vowels.

Phonologists classify consonants by describing these three sets of categories:

- **Voicing**
- **Place of articulation**
- **Manner of articulation**

Charts summarizing each of these categories are at the end of this chapter. (4.12, 4.13, and 4.14)

Voicing

When the vocal cords are stretched tight so that they vibrate during the pronunciation of a sound, we say that the sound is **voiced**. Sounds that are produced without vibration of the vocal cords are called **voiceless**. To tell if a sound is voiced or voiceless, touch your throat gently as you say it. When you say a voiced sound, you can feel a vibration or buzzing in your throat. For a voiceless sound, you can't. You can also feel the voicing of sounds by putting your fingers in your

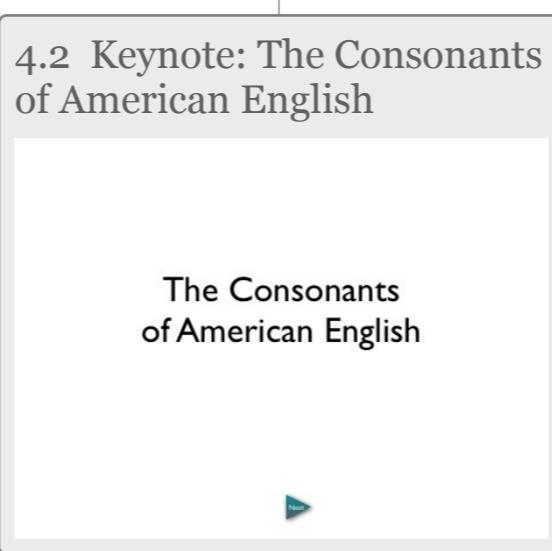
ears. When you say a voiced sound, it will seem louder. When you say a voiceless sound, it won't.

When you talk about voicing with students, try to say only the sound you're listening to, without a vowel after it. For example, when practicing /t/, say only /t/, not /tə/ or /tiy/. If you pronounce a vowel after /t/, the voiced vowel will cause vibration and students might be confused and mistakenly think that /t/ is voiced.

Many of the consonants of English form pairs—a voiced and a voiceless sound that are the same except for voicing. For example, /b/ and /p/ are identical except that /b/ is voiced and /p/ is voiceless. (Notice that one of these pairs—the voiceless sound /θ/ and the voiced sound /ð/—are both spelled with the same two letters in normal spelling: *th*.)

The voiced sounds /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /l/, /r/, /w/, and /y/ have no voiceless counterparts, and the voiceless sound /h/ has no voiced counterpart.

Box 4.12 shows the voiced and voiceless consonant sounds of English. Paired sounds are in boxes next to each other. If a sound has a gray box next to it, it has no paired sound.

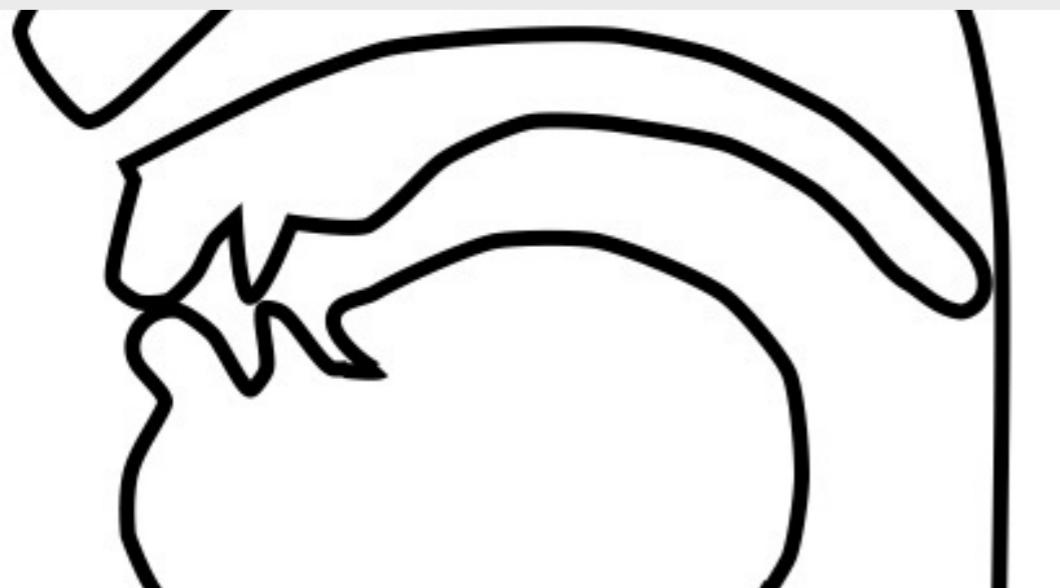


Place of articulation (Where?)

We can also classify consonants by referring to the parts of the articulatory system that are active when we produce each sound. This is called the **place of articulation**. As you can see in the list below, some of these terms are similar to the names of the parts of the articulatory system that are used in making those sounds. The same information is summarized in the chart in Box 4.13.

- **Bilabial:** Both lips touch or almost touch. The sounds in this group are /p/, /b/, /m/, and /w/.

4.3 Sagittal Section Diagrams of American English Consonants



/p/ as in *pan* and /b/ as in *ban*

1 of 16

- **Labiodental:** The upper teeth softly touch the lower lip. The sounds in this group are /f/ and /v/.
- **Dental** (also called interdental): The tip of the tongue touches the bottom edge of the top teeth or between the teeth. The sounds in this group are /θ/ and /ð/.
- **Alveolar:** The tip of the tongue touches or almost touches the alveolar ridge (the tooth ridge). The sounds in this group are /t/, /d/, /s/, /z/, /n/, and /l/.
- **Palatal** (also called alveopalatal): The blade of the tongue touches or almost touches the hard palate. The sounds in this group are /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /r/, and /y/.
- **Velar:** The back of the tongue touches the soft palate. The sounds in this group are /k/, /g/, and /ŋ/.
- **Glottal:** There is friction in the glottis (the space between the vocal cords). The only phoneme in this group is /h/.

Manner of articulation (How?)

There is often more than one sound that is pronounced in the same part of the mouth, that is, with the same place of articulation. To distinguish between these similar sounds, we can describe their **manner of articulation**. This tells how we produce a particular consonant sound—whether it comes out smoothly or roughly, whether it's like a pop or a hiss or a hum. The manners of articulation for English consonants are

listed below. The same information is summarized in the chart in Box 4.14.

- **Stops** (also called plosives): The air stream is blocked completely somewhere in the mouth, air pressure builds up, and then it's released, like a tiny explosion. The stops in English are /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, and /g/.
- **Fricatives:** The air stream is compressed and passes through a small opening in the mouth, creating friction—a hissing sound. The air stream is never completely blocked, so the sound can continue. The fricatives are /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, and /h/.
- **Affricates:** A combination of a stop followed by a fricative—an explosion with a slow release. The affricates are /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. Each of these symbols is made up of two parts—a stop symbol and a fricative symbol. This reminds us that the sounds also have two parts.
- **Nasals:** In these sounds, the tongue or lips block off the vocal tract so air can't go out through the mouth. Instead, the passage leading up into the nose opens so that the air stream can go out through the nose. The sounds in the nasal group are /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/.
- **Liquids:** These are sounds that are pronounced very smoothly, like water flowing in a river. The air stream moves around the tongue in a relatively unobstructed

Tips for Demonstrating Manner of Articulation

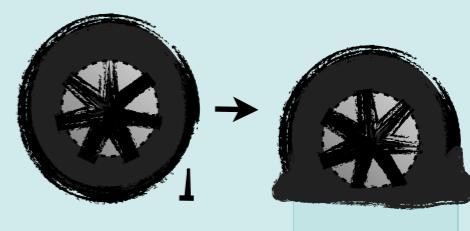
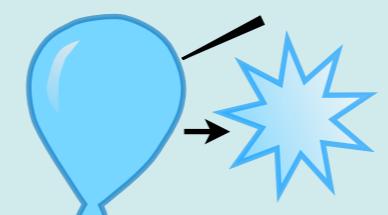
Stops: A stop works like a pop gun. The tube is like the vocal tract. The cork plugs the tube, then when you push the handle, air builds up and pushes the cork out, just as air builds up behind a blockage in the mouth and is released in a stop sound.



Fricatives: When you push air out of a balloon pump, it passes out through a small opening, making a hissing sound like a fricative. The sound is never completely blocked.

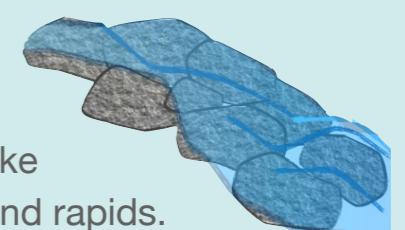


Stops and affricates: Stops “explode” suddenly, like a balloon popping. Affricates also “explode,” but they end more gradually. Think of a flat tire—it pops, but the air hisses out slowly.



Nasals: To show that air comes out the nose rather than the mouth, have students hold a mirror under their noses and say /m/. The mirror should fog up because air is coming out through the nose. Or have them hold their noses closed. If no sound can come out, the sound is a nasal.

Liquids: Think of the image of water (a liquid) flowing smoothly in a calm river to illustrate these sounds. Contrast them with the “rougher” types of sounds, such as fricatives and affricates, which are more like a roughly flowing river with lots of rocks and rapids.



manner. The liquid sounds in English are /l/ and /r/.

- **Glides** (also called semivowels): A glide is like a very quick vowel. This is why they're sometimes called semivowels, which means “half-vowels.” They sound like vowels, but they can function as consonants. The glides in English are /w/ (which sounds like a quick /uw/) and /y/ (which sounds like a quick /iy/).

An almost-extinct consonant sound: /hw/

Most speakers of English today pronounce the first sounds in *witch* and *which* in the same way: as the voiced glide /w/. However, until fairly recently, these were two separate sounds. Words like *weather*, *woman*, and *wish* started with a voiced /w/, and most words spelled with “wh,” like *whether*, *which*, and *what*, started with a different sound, a voiceless glide that can be represented by the symbol /hw/. Gradually the /hw/ sound has been going out of use, and it's been replaced by /w/.

Today the main areas where people commonly distinguish these two sounds are Scotland, parts of Ireland, and some parts of the Southern United States. In other

Manner of Articulation	Place of Articulation						
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop							
Voiceless	/p/			/t/		/k/	
Voiced	/b/			/d/		/g/	
Fricative							
Voiceless		/f/	/θ/	/s/	/ʃ/		
Voiced		/v/	/ð/	/z/	/ʒ/		/h/
Affricate							
Voiceless					/tʃ/		
Voiced					/dʒ/		
Nasal							
Voiced	/m/			/n/		/ŋ/	
Liquid							
Voiced				/l/	/r/		
Glide							
Voiced	/w/				/y/		

4.5 Words with /w/ and /hw/



/w/	/wh/
-----	------

witch weather Wales	which whether whales
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areas, some speakers may differentiate /w/ and /hw/, but most people don't.

For pronunciation teaching purposes, it's not necessary to teach students to use the /hw/ sound unless your textbook teaches it. Listen to some examples of these sounds in Box 4.5.

Restrictions on where some consonants can occur

Most consonants can appear in all positions in words: at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end. However, some consonants cannot occur in all positions in words.

/ŋ/: The consonant /ŋ/ cannot begin a word in English, but there are many words that have it in the middle or at the end: **singer, think, song, tongue**.

/ʒ/: English has only a few borrowed words that begin with the consonant /ʒ/, (*genre* may be the only common one) and only a small number that end in this sound (*beige, garage, prestige*). It is more often found in the middle of words: *usual, measure, leisure, vision*.

/h/: The sound /h/ cannot occur at the end of a word. When we see the letter *h* at the end of a word, it is either silent (*oh, hurrah*) or part of a two-letter combination that spells a different sound (*rich, fish, tooth*).

Syllabic consonants

We've said before that every syllable needs a vowel.

However, this is not 100% true. Sometimes we can have a syllable with no vowel if a consonant stretches out longer to replace the vowel. Only a few consonants are able to do this: /n/, /l/, and /r/.

The phonemes /n/ and /l/ most often become syllabic after a stressed syllable that ends in an alveolar consonant: '*Kitten, button, didn't, shouldn't, kettle, little, ladle, tunnel*. (Keep reading to find out how the /t/ sound can change when a syllabic /n/ comes after it.)

In American English, /r/ often acts like a vowel sound in words like *her, learn, word, water, and butterfly*. In the syllables written in red in these words, we only hear the /r/ sound with no separate vowel before it. This is different from words like *wear, wore, hear, or tired*, where we can clearly hear a separate vowel before /r/. Many textbooks use the symbol /ər/ or /ɜr/ to represent this “syllabic /r/,” while others use a double symbol like /ər/ or /ɜr/.

Allophones of some consonant phonemes

Some consonants are pronounced differently depending on where they are in a word and what sounds are around them. (That is, some consonant phonemes have more than one

allophone, depending on their phonetic environment.) Let's look at the consonant variations in American English that are most important for you to know about as a teacher.

Allophones of voiceless stops: In English, the three voiceless stops, /p/, /t/, and /k/, have allophones that follow the same pattern. (The phoneme /t/ also has some extra allophones.)

When /p/, /t/, and /k/ come at the beginning of a word or at the beginning of a stressed syllable, they are **aspirated**. That is, they are pronounced with a small puff of air. When we want to be very exact, we can represent these sounds by adding a small "h" to the phonemic symbol:

- [p^h] *pan, price, po'tato, a'pppear*
- [t^h] *top, 'table, to'gether, a'ttend*
- [k^h] *can, 'kettle, com'puter, a'ccuse*

When /p/, /t/, or /k/ are in a **consonant cluster** after /s/ at the beginning of a word, they are **unaspirated**. There is no puff of air when we say them. To represent these sounds, we don't add anything to their phonemic symbols.

- [p] *span, 'special, spring*
- [t] *stop, 'staple, string*
- [k] *scan, 'scatter, screen*



When /p/, /t/, or /k/ comes at the end of a word, it is often (but not always) **unreleased**. This means that we start to say the sound by blocking off the air flow in our mouth, but we don't release the air. We add a small circle to the phonemic symbol to represent these sounds.

- [p°] *stop, hope, de'velop*
- [t°] *coat, late, 'basket*
- [k°] *back, lake, 'stomach*



(The rules we have just looked at only apply to voiceless stops (/p/, /t/, /k/). Voiced stops in English (/b/, /d/, /g/) are never aspirated. They don't have a puff of air in any position.)

In addition to these sound variations that work the same way for all voiceless stops, in American English, /t/ has some more allophones that /p/ and /k/ don't have.

The first “extra” allophone of /t/ is the sound that we usually hear in American English in the middle of words like



water, *city*, and *bottle*. This is a voiced sound called an alveolar **flap** or **tap**. The tongue taps the alveolar ridge very quickly so that it sounds like a quick /d/. The flap is represented by this symbol: [ɾ]. It's very much like the sound represented by the letter "r" in Spanish and many other languages, but it's different from an English /r/. (When we say an English /r/, the tongue doesn't touch the alveolar ridge. For the flap, it does.)

When words are pronounced with [ɾ], some words with /t/ sound just like words with /d/:

- '*Latter* and '*ladder* sound the same.
- '*Writing* and '*riding* sound the same.
- '*Metal* and '*medal* sound the same.



When do we pronounce /t/ as a flap? We say it this way only when two things happen:

- When /t/ comes between two vowels (or vowels followed by /r/).
- When the syllable before it is stressed, and the syllable after it is unstressed.

Look at the examples in Box 4.7. When the stress is before the /t/ sound, it's a flap. When the stress is after /t/, /t/ is not a flap.

4.7 EXAMPLES OF FLAPS AND GLOTTAL STOPS



"normal" /t/	/t/ is a flap	/t/ is a glottal stop
be'tween	'butter	'button
a'tomic	'atom	'satin
four'teen	'forty	im'portant
re'turn	'reticent	'retina
pa'ternal	'pattern	'patent
'master	'matter	Man'hattan

The second "extra" allophone of /t/ is a glottal stop, represented by this symbol: [?]. To produce this sound, the vocal cords close tightly, air builds up behind them, and then they open quickly. It's like the beginning of a small cough, or the middle sound when we say *huh-uh* to mean "no."

In American English, the phoneme /t/ can be pronounced as a glottal stop when two things happen:

- When the syllable before it is stressed and the syllable after it is unstressed.
- When the syllable after it is /ən/ or syllabic /n/. (That is, /ə/ disappears and /n/ is lengthened and becomes a whole syllable. The symbol for syllabic /n/ is [n].)

It's not absolutely necessary for learners to pronounce the flap [ɾ] or the glottal stop [?] allophones of /t/, but they need to understand them when they hear them. And in normal American English speech, they will hear them often.

A third allophone of /t/ occurs when /t/ comes before /r/. In this case, /t/ sounds very much like /tʃ/. The tongue is moving farther back in the mouth toward the hard palate, getting ready to say /r/, so the /t/ is also pulled a little farther back. This happens naturally through the process of **assimilation**, a sound change in which one sound becomes more similar to a sound that comes before or after it. This happens naturally and doesn't need to be specifically taught.

Light and dark /l/: The consonant /l/ is traditionally said to have two allophones: “light” or alveolar /l/ (with the symbol [l]) and “dark,” or **velarized** /l/ (with the symbol [ɫ]), each occurring in different positions:

- [l] (light /l/) is found at the beginning of a syllable, especially before front vowels, in words like *light*, *left*, and *believe*. It is pronounced with the tongue touching the alveolar ridge and the sides of the tongue open.
- [ɫ] (dark /l/) is found at the end of syllables and before back vowels, in words like *low*, *ball*, and *pool*. It is also pronounced with the sides of the tongue open, but with

4.8 ALLOPHONES OF VOICELESS STOPS

	/p/	p ^h p p°	pan a'pear stop lip	When /p/ comes at the beginning of a word or the beginning of a stressed syllable, it's aspirated. When /p/ comes after /s/ or at the beginning of an unstressed syllable, it's unaspirated. When /p/ is at the end of a word, it's often unreleased. The lips come together, but don't open.
		t ^h t t°	top a'ttend cat past	When /t/ comes at the beginning of a word or the beginning of a stressed syllable, it's aspirated. When /t/ comes after /s/, it's unaspirated. When /t/ is at the end of a word, it's often unreleased. The tongue blocks the air, but it doesn't open.
		r ?	'city 'water 'button 'sentence	When /t/ comes between vowels, before an unstressed syllable, it's a voiced flap. It sounds like a quick /d/. When /t/ comes before an unstressed syllable /ən/, it can become a glottal stop—a sound like the beginning of a cough.
	/k/	k ^h k k°	kite cry sky scream sick mark	When /k/ comes at the beginning of a word or the beginning of a stressed syllable, it's aspirated. When /k/ comes after /s/ or at the beginning of an unstressed syllable, it's unaspirated. When /k/ comes at the end of a word, it's often unreleased. The back of the tongue closes, but it doesn't open.

the tongue higher at the back of the mouth. The tip of the tongue might or might not touch the alveolar ridge. In some dialects, particularly some types of British English, dark /l/ sounds almost like /o/ or /u/.

However, in the speech of most Americans, the difference between these two allophones is small, and some Americans don't make this distinction at all. Instead, they pronounce a sound that's similar to a dark /l/, with the tongue touching the alveolar ridge, in all positions. Because of this, if your pronunciation model is American English, the distinction between dark and light /l/ does not need to be a high priority. You and your students have more important things to think about.

Consonant Clusters

Consonant clusters are groups of two or more consonant sounds in a row, as in *spot*, *strong*, *desk*, *desks*, or *sister*. It's important to remember that we're talking about groups of consonant *sounds*, not consonant *letters*. These are not always the same thing. For example, *ship* and *sing* each have groups of two consonant letters, but each group represents only one sound (*sh* = /ʃ/ and *ng* = /ŋ/). On the other hand,

the letter *x* as in *six* represents a consonant cluster of two sounds: /ks/.

Consonant clusters in English can occur at the beginning, middle, or end of words. There are restrictions on how many consonants can occur in a particular position and which consonants can occur together. For example, /sk/ as in *sky*, /pl/ as in *play*, and /spr/ as in *spring* are all possible consonant combinations at the beginning of a word in English, but /sd/, /fp/, and /zpr/ are not. There just aren't any words that start with those combinations of sounds.

At the beginning of words: In English, we can find words and syllables that begin with one, two, or three consonant sounds, but never

more than three.

In initial clusters with **two consonants**, we can find the combinations listed in Box 4.10. Notice that while some of these words begin with only one consonant *letter*, they actually have two consonant *sounds*. For example, *cute*, *beauty*, *pure*, *few*, and *huge* all begin with one written consonant, followed by an “invisible /y/” and the vowel sound /uw/. We hear a /y/ sound, which counts as a consonant, even though there's no letter *y*. (For example,

4.9 Syllable Structure and Consonant Clusters

Syllable Structure and Consonant Clusters



cute is pronounced /kyuwt/, not /kuwt./.) In words like *quick*, *quiet*, and *question*, the letters *qu* stand for the consonant cluster /kw/.

When **three consonants** come together at the beginning of a syllable, we find fewer possible combinations. The first

4.10 INITIAL TWO-CONSONANT CLUSTERS



First Sound	Second Sound	Examples
/p/	/l/, /r/, /y/	Play, pray, pure
/b/	/l/, /r/, /y/	Blue, brown, beauty
/t/	/r/, /w/, /y/	True, twin, (tune)
/d/	/r/, /w/, /y/	Draw, dwell, (due)
/k/	/l/, /r/, /w/, /y/	Close, crowd, queen, cure
/g/	/l/, /r/, /w/	Glow, green, [Gwen]
/f/	/l/, /r/, /y/	Fly, free, few
/θ/	/r/, /w/	Three, [thwart]
/s/	/l/, /w/, /m/, /n/, /p/, /t/, /k/	Sleep, swim, smile, snow, speak, stop, skate

Words in () = Many people pronounce these words without /y/.
Words in [] = Very few words begin with this combination.

4.11 INITIAL THREE-CONSONANT CLUSTERS



First Sound	Second Sound	Third Sound	Examples
/s/	/p/	/l/, /r/, /y/	Splash, spring, spew
	/t/	/r/, /y/	String, (stew)
	/k/	/l/, /r/, /w/, /y/	[Sclerosis], scrap, squirrel, skewer

Words in () = Many people pronounce these words without /y/.
Words in [] = Very few words begin with this combination.

consonant is always /s/, the second is a voiceless stop, and the third is a liquid or glide. However, not all of these combinations actually occur, and some are very uncommon. Box 4.11 lists possible three-consonant combinations at the beginning of syllables.

At the ends of words, we can have one, two, three, or four consonants together. Some of the longer clusters are in words with the grammatical endings -s or -ed, which add an extra sound. (See Chapter 6 for more details on these endings.) Here are some examples of words ending in two-consonant clusters:



help, felt, old, milk, shelf, curb, art, cord, mark, bump, ant, hand, tense, ranch, sink, else, bulge,

course, march, arm, barn, girl, wasp, trust, ask, soft, act, tax, fourth

Here are examples of words ending in three-consonant clusters:



text, sixth, exempt, waltz, world, glimpse, quartz, against

Some words end in four-consonant clusters because a grammatical ending has been added:



texts, sixths, exempts, waltzed, worlds, glimpsed

Simplification of consonant clusters

We generally encourage students to pronounce every sound in a consonant cluster. However, there is one situation when it's acceptable to simplify a consonant cluster, that is, to omit one of the consonants. When there are three or more consonants in a row, the *middle* one is sometimes dropped. (The first or last consonant is *not* dropped.) This happens most often when the middle consonant is a stop, /θ/, or /ð/. For example:

- *tests* might sound like /tɛstəs/ or /tɛs/
- *asked* might sound like /æskt/ or /æst/
- *months* might sound like /mʌnθs/ or /mʌns/
- *sixths* might sound like /sɪksθs/ or /sɪks/



Native speakers are often not aware that they're omitting these sounds. However, these pronunciations are very common and are found in all but the most careful types of speech.

Another way native speakers make consonant clusters easier to pronounce is by **resyllabification**. That is, they split up a consonant cluster so that the last consonant in the cluster joins the syllable after it. For example, when we say: *The cats are sleeping*, the final /s/ in *cats* sounds like it joins the following word: *The cat sare sleeping*. We'll read more about this type of linking between words in Chapter 12, "Connected Speech."

Some learner problems with consonants

Learners' problems in pronouncing new sounds vary depending on the sound system of their native language. To predict the kinds of problems their students might have, teachers need at least a basic knowledge of the sound system of the learners' language. But whatever the student's language, the general *types* of problems can be similar. Some sources of problems can be:

New sounds: When learners try to pronounce a sound that doesn't exist in their own language, it's naturally difficult, and they may substitute a similar (but not identical) sound

from their own language. For example, many languages don't contain the phonemes /θ/ or /ð/, so speakers of those languages often have a hard time hearing and distinguishing these new sounds. When they try to say the new sounds, they often substitute more familiar sounds, like /s/, /f/, or /t/ for /θ/ and /z/, /v/, or /d/ for /ð/. It's important to help students hear and understand that there actually *is* a difference between the new sounds and the familiar first-language sounds so they can begin to pronounce the new sounds more accurately. If we allow learners to assume that the new sounds are identical to sounds in their own language, they will have little chance of pronouncing new sounds well.

Familiar sounds in unfamiliar environments: There can also be sounds that are easy for learners to pronounce in some phonetic environments, but difficult in others. For example, the glide /w/ is not a serious problem for Japanese or Korean speakers when followed by most vowels. Saying *wet*, *way*, or *wine* is not hard. However, when /w/ is followed by /uw/ or /u/, it's more of a problem. Words like *woman*, *wood*, and *woo* are a pronunciation challenge. This is because those languages have sound combinations similar to /wi:/ /wɛ:/, and /wa:/, but not combinations like /wu:/ or /wU/. The fact that the sounds of /w/ and /u/ are very similar can also make it hard for learners to pronounce them in sequence, and *wood* can end up sounding like /ud/.

The same situation happens with /y/ before the similar vowel sounds /iy/ and /ɪ/. It's hard for many learners to distinguish *year* and *ear* or *yeast* and *east*, even though *yet* and *you* might not be a problem.

Final consonants: Consonants at the ends of words are often more troublesome than the same consonants at the beginnings of words. This is especially true for students whose native language does not allow any consonants at the ends of words, or perhaps only a limited set of consonants.

When learners have trouble pronouncing final consonants, they cope in different ways, depending partly on their language background. Speakers of some languages tend to omit final consonants. For example, they might pronounce *meet* as /miy/ or *back* as /bæ/. Speakers of other languages might add an extra vowel after the final consonant, pronouncing *meet* as /miytə/ or *back* as /bæku/.

Another problem with final consonants affects speakers of languages such as German, Dutch, Russian, and Polish, where final stops, fricatives and affricates (together called **obstruents**) are always voiceless, even if they're spelled with letters that normally represent voiced sounds. For example, the German word *Hand* (meaning *hand*) is pronounced /hant/, not /hand/. When speakers of these

languages pronounce English words that end in voiced obstruents, they may substitute voiceless sounds instead.

Because all these changes fit the familiar patterns that the learners are used to using in their own language, they usually don't realize that they're changing anything. They unconsciously reshape new words to fit the comfortable pattern of their own language.

Consonant clusters: Languages also have different restrictions on what kinds of syllables and consonant combinations are possible. Some languages don't have consonant clusters at all. Others have fewer clusters than English, or they allow different combinations of consonants. Learners whose languages have different syllable structure rules than English may have trouble pronouncing some words with consonant clusters.

Learners cope with unfamiliar consonant clusters in different ways. They might omit one or more of the consonants. For example, they might pronounce *section* as /səʃən/ or *spring* as /spɪŋ/ or /pɪŋ/. Other learners add an extra vowel before or between the consonants. For example, *school* might become /ɛskuwl/ (if the speaker's L1 is Spanish) or *spray* might become /supurey/ (if the speaker's L1 is Japanese).

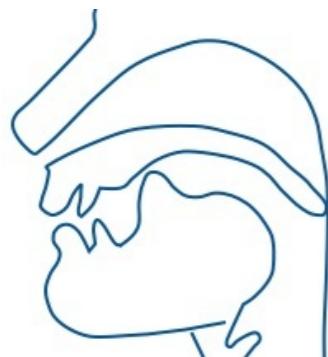
All of these are changes that learners unconsciously produce to make words easier and more comfortable to pronounce. However, they also make it harder for listeners to understand what the speaker is trying to say. Teachers need to help students understand and practice the patterns of English syllable structure to make their speech more understandable.

Some troublesome consonant sounds

Let's look at a few of the consonant sounds that are difficult for some learners.

/r/: When pronouncing /r/, the lips are a little bit rounded, and the tip of the tongue does not touch the roof of the mouth. (This is different from sounds spelled with the letter *r* in some other languages. The /r/ sound in both American and British English is *not* a **flap** or a **trill**, as it is in Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and many other languages.)

There are actually two tongue positions for pronouncing the /r/ sound in English, and both sound the same. Some speakers of English pronounce /r/ with the tip of the tongue curled up a bit. Others say it with the back of the tongue pulled back and bunched up, without curling the tip. Both ways can produce the same sound, and students should use the way that produces the best results for them.



/r/ with the tongue curled



/r/ with the tongue pulled back

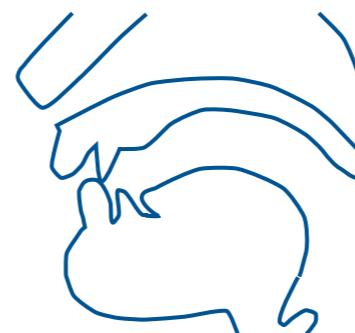
/l/: As we read earlier, when we say /l/, the tip of the tongue touches the alveolar ridge, but the sides of the tongue are open, so air can flow around the tongue. Unlike /r/, the lips are not rounded when we say /l/.

Here's one way to feel the difference between /r/ and /l/: Say /r/ and stop in the middle of the sound, keeping your mouth and lips in position. Then breathe in quickly. The air rushing into your mouth should make *the underside of the tip of your tongue* feel cold. Now say /l/, again stopping in the middle of the sound and breathing in. Now the *sides* of your tongue should feel cold air. If a different part of your tongue feels cold, something may be wrong.

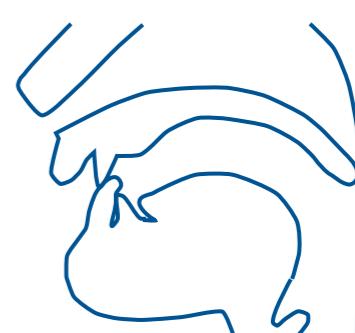
Learners can also check their pronunciation using a mirror. When they say /r/, their lips should be a bit rounded, and they should be able to see a little of the underside of their

tongue. When they say /l/, their lips should not be rounded, and they should see just a little bit of the tip of their tongue.

/f/ and /v/: In pronouncing both /f/ and /v/, the top teeth gently touch just inside the lower lip, and air passes out under the teeth. Many students have been told to "bite their lip" when they say /f/ and /v/. This gives them a rough idea of where to put their teeth and lower lip, but it's a bit extreme for real speech. If students put their teeth too far forward on their lower lip or bite too hard, it will be hard to get enough air coming through to make the sound properly.



Usual pronunciation of /f/ or /v/

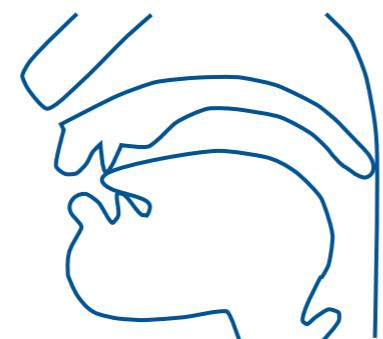
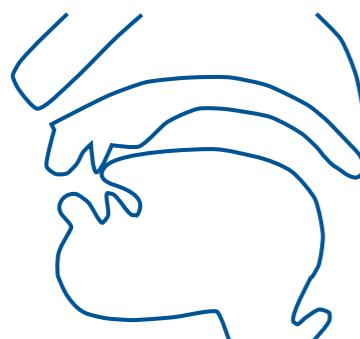


"Bite your lip." This is too much.

Speakers of languages that do not have labiodental sounds may substitute the bilabial /b/ for /v/, and some also substitute /p/ for /f/. If this happens and the speaker's lips really want to close when they say /f/ or /v/, have them put a finger on their top lip to hold it up out of the way. This makes it easier for just the top teeth to touch the lower lip.

If students look in a mirror while saying /f/ or /v/, they should be able to see their teeth just a bit. If their lips are closed, or if they're too close together to see their teeth, they're not saying the sounds correctly.

/θ/ and /ð/: In saying /θ/ and /ð/, the tip of the tongue gently touches the back or bottom of the top teeth. For these sounds, students may have been told to “bite your tongue” or “stick out your tongue.” Again, this is a good hint for giving students a feeling of where to put their tongues, but in normal speech, the tongue doesn’t stick all the way out.



Usual pronunciation of /θ/ or /ð/ “Bite your tongue.” This is too much.

In conclusion

Learning to pronounce new consonant sounds can be challenging, and it won’t happen all at once. It takes time for students to learn to recognize new sounds and get used to moving their mouths in strange new ways to produce them.

4.12 VOICED AND VOICELESS CONSONANTS

Voiced Consonants		Voiceless Consonants	
/b/	<i>b</i> ig	/p/	<i>p</i> en
/d/	<i>d</i> og	/t/	<i>t</i> op
/g/	<i>g</i> ive	/k/	<i>c</i> at
/v/	<i>v</i> ote	/f/	<i>f</i> ood
/ð/	<i>th</i> is	/θ/	<i>th</i> ick
/z/	<i>z</i> oo	/s/	<i>s</i> un
/ʒ/	<i>beige</i>	/ʃ/	<i>sh</i> ip
		/h/	<i>h</i> ouse
/dʒ/	<i>j</i> uice	/tʃ/	<i>ch</i> ip
/m/	<i>m</i> an		
/n/	<i>n</i> ow		
/ŋ/	<i>sing</i>		
/l/	<i>l</i> ove		
/r/	<i>r</i> un		
/w/	<i>w</i> et		
/y/	<i>y</i> es		

4.13 PLACE OF ARTICULATION

Name	Meaning	Example Sounds
Bilabial	Both lips come together.	/p/, /b/, /m/, /w/
Labiodental	Lower lip and upper teeth.	/f/, /v/
Dental (or Interdental)	Tongue tip and inner edge of upper teeth.	/θ/, /ð/
Alveolar	Tongue tip and alveolar ridge.	/t/, /d/, /s/, /z/, /n/, /l/
Palatal (or Alveopalatal)	Blade of tongue and hard palate.	/ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /r/, /y/
Velar	Back of tongue and soft palate.	/k/, /g/, /ŋ/
Glottal	Throat passage is constricted to produce friction.	/h/

4.14 MANNER OF ARTICULATION

Name	Meaning	Example Sounds
Stop	The air stream is blocked completely before it is released, like a small explosion.	/p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/
Fricative	The air stream passes through a small opening, creating friction—a hissing sound.	/f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /h/
Affricate	Combination of a stop and a fricative—an explosion with a slow release.	/tʃ/, /dʒ/
Nasal	Air passes through the nose instead of the mouth.	/m/, /n/, /ŋ/
Liquid	The air stream moves around the tongue in a smooth, unobstructed way.	/l/, /r/
Glide	The sound is like a very quick vowel.	/w/, /y/

The Vowels of American English

How do we describe vowels?

Vowels are sounds in which the air stream moves up from the lungs and through the vocal tract very smoothly; there's nothing blocking or constricting it. The first sounds in the words *extra*, *only*, and *apple* are vowels.

In general, every syllable has a vowel sound (although, as we saw in the last chapter, the consonants /n/, /l/, and /r/ can sometimes be lengthened to become a syllable in themselves). Vowels are the “heart” of syllables.

When we compare American, British, Australian, or other varieties of English, we see that vowels differ much more

than consonants. Within each of these varieties there are many dialects, and their vowels may also differ greatly.

Sometimes people assume that there are five vowel sounds in English: A, E, I, O and U. However, this is a misconception. These are vowel *letters*, not vowel *sounds*. Each vowel letter can represent more than one sound. For example, the letter “a” can represent /æ/ as in *hat*, /ey/ as in *hate*, /ɑ/ as in *car*, or /ɛ/ as in *care*. Also, each vowel sound can be represented in more than one way in spelling: The sound /iy/

5.1 VOWELS OF AMERICAN ENGLISH



Example	Symbols		Example	Symbols	
beat	/iy/	/i:/	boot	/uw/	/u:/
bit	/ɪ/	/i/	book	/ʊ/	/u/
bait	/ey/	/eɪ/	boat	/ow/	/ou/
bet	/ɛ/	/e/	bought	/ɔ/	/ɔ:/
bat	/æ/	/æ/	box	/ɑ/	/a/
but	/ʌ/	/ə/	by	/ay/	/ai/
sofa	/ə/	/ə/	cow	/aw/	/au/
her	/ə/	/ər/	boy	/oy/	/ɔy/
	/ɜ/	/ɔr/		/ɔi/	/ɔɪ/

can be written as *ee* in *seem*, as *ea* in *seal*, as *ie* in *piece*, as *ei* in *seize*, as *ey* in *key*, as *i...e* in *machine*, and perhaps more. There's certainly not a one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds, and English has many more vowel sounds than vowel letters.

For most speakers of American English, there are 14 vowel sounds, or 15 if we include the vowel-like sound in words like *bird*, *her* and *turn*. The phonemic symbols for the vowels are shown in Box 5.1. For each sound, you'll see at least two symbols. This is because different textbooks and authors use different versions of the phonemic alphabet, with different sets of symbols for vowels. Many American textbooks use symbols similar to those in blue, while others use symbols like those in green. The symbols in British textbooks are similar, but not identical, to the symbols in green. You might see still more variations of the symbols in addition to the ones that are shown here. In this book, we'll use the symbols shown in blue.

Describing vowels is trickier than describing consonants. The tongue is floating freely around the mouth, not touching other parts of the vocal tract. This makes it harder to describe exactly what's happening inside the mouth. When we describe the vowels of English, we talk about:

- **Tongue position**
- **Lip rounding**
- **Tense and lax vowels**
- **Simple vowels, glided vowels, and diphthongs**

These categories are not as precise or reliable as those we use to describe consonants. Some of them are not even as firmly based on physical reality as we like to think, and they can vary a great deal among individual speakers. Still, the descriptions are useful in teaching, and it's important for teachers to know how vowels are traditionally described.

Tongue position

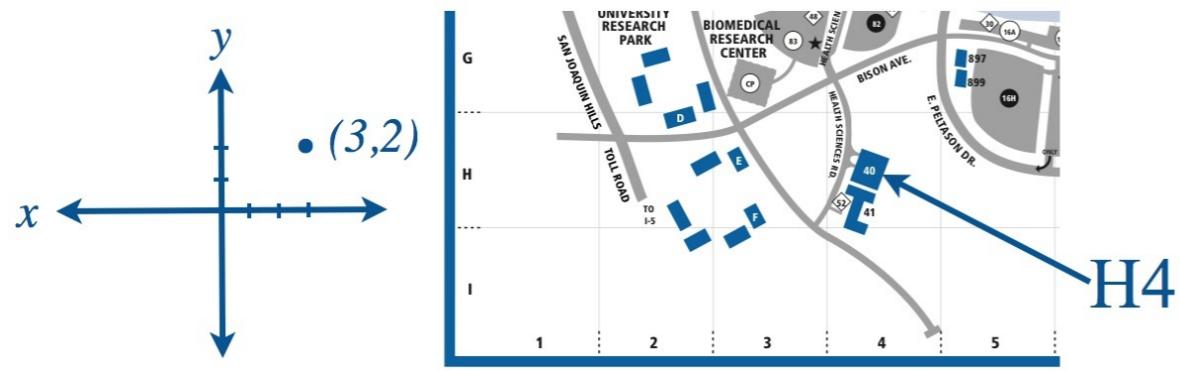
The way we move and shape our tongue plays a big part in giving each vowel its own sound. When you pronounce a vowel, even a small change in the position of your tongue can make a big difference in how the vowel sounds.

When we talk about tongue position, we mean: Where is the highest, tensest, or most active part of the tongue? The way we describe this position is something like graphing a point in math or finding a location on a map. We give two "coordinates" to describe where the point is, like the x and y coordinates of a point on a graph or a location on a map.

5.2 The Vowels of American English

The Vowels of American English



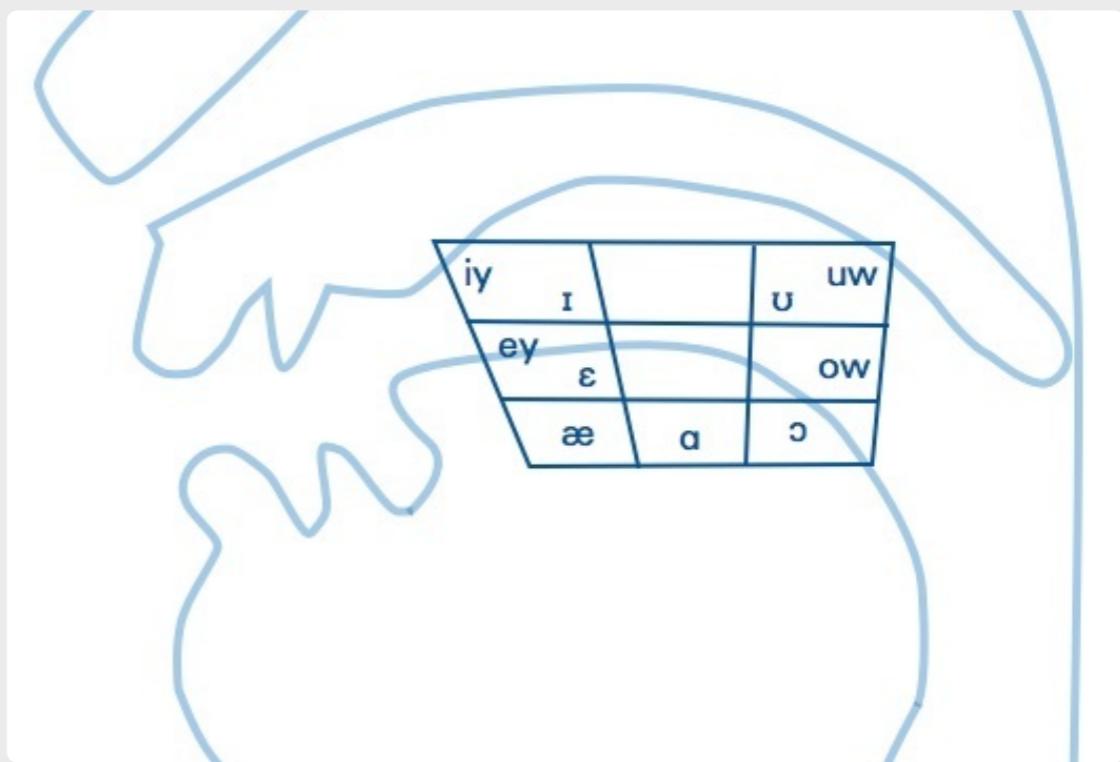


In describing a vowel, we list the vertical position of the tongue first: **high, mid, or low**. That is, is the tongue raised toward the top of the mouth, or farther down with a more open jaw? Then we name its horizontal position: **front, central, or back**. A description of the tongue position for vowels tells both of these “coordinates.” For example:

- /æ/ as in *cat* is a low front vowel. The most active part of the tongue is in the lower front part of the mouth.
 - /ʌ/ as in *cut* is a mid central vowel. The tongue is resting in the middle of the mouth in a very neutral position.
 - /u:/ as in *boot* is a high back vowel. The back of the tongue is bunched up high at the back of the mouth.

We can show the tongue positions for different vowels by using a diagram called a **vowel quadrant**. This chart is divided into nine sections, each representing a different tongue placement, vertically and horizontally. Box 5.3 shows several versions of the vowel quadrant. The first shows how

5.3 Vowel Quadrant Diagrams for the Vowels of English



1. The vowel quadrant drawn on top of a diagram of the vocal tract

the sections of the vowel quadrant are related to the parts of the vocal tract, and the second shows the vowel quadrant alone. We'll refer to the others later in this chapter.

Vowels that are near each other in the vowel quadrant are pronounced with tongue positions that are close to each other and their sounds are similar, so learners are more likely to confuse them than pairs that are farther apart in the vowel quadrant. For example, learners often confuse *sheep* (/iy/) and

and *ship* (/ɪ/), whose vowels are in adjacent boxes, but they seldom confuse *sheep* and *shop* (/a/), which are farther apart.

We can also use **sagittal section diagrams**, or “**Sammy diagrams**”, to show tongue positions for vowels. The diagrams in Box 5.4 show tongue positions for the vowels of English.

Lip rounding

Vowel sounds are also affected by the shape of the lips—whether they’re very rounded, just a little rounded, relaxed, or stretched a bit wide.

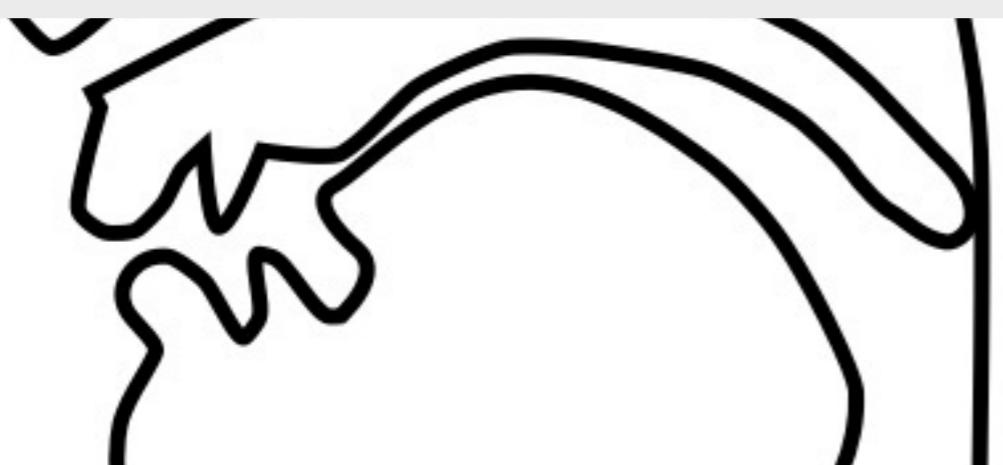
In English, the back vowels, /uw/, /u/, /ow/, and /ɔ/, are pronounced with varying degrees of lip rounding, and /r/ also has a little bit of lip rounding, whether it’s used as a consonant (/r/) or a vowel (/ə/). The front and central vowels—/iy/, /ɪ/, /ey/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ə/, and /a/—are unrounded. For the vowels /iy/ and /ɪ/, the lips may be spread or stretched a bit wide, and some textbooks even tell students to “smile” when they say the vowels in *heat* or *hit*. Box 5.5 shows typical lip positions for American English vowels.

In reality, however, the lip positions that native speakers use for vowel sounds vary quite a bit. Some people don’t move their lips much, and others move them much more. Their lip positions may not look just like those in the chart, but they can still produce perfectly normal vowel sounds. Still, knowing and imitating these “standard” lip positions can help students to pronounce vowel sounds more understandably.

Tense and lax vowels

We can also divide vowels into two categories called **tense** and **lax** vowels. This is a distinction that separates pairs of vowels like those in *sheep* (/iy/) and *ship* (/ɪ/), *late* (/ey/) and *let* (/ɛ/), *fool* (/uw/) and *full* (/u/). Phonologists have traditionally thought of these as being a difference in the tension or tightness of the muscles of the tongue or lips while

5.4 Sagittal Section Diagrams for American English Vowels



/iy/ as in *beat*

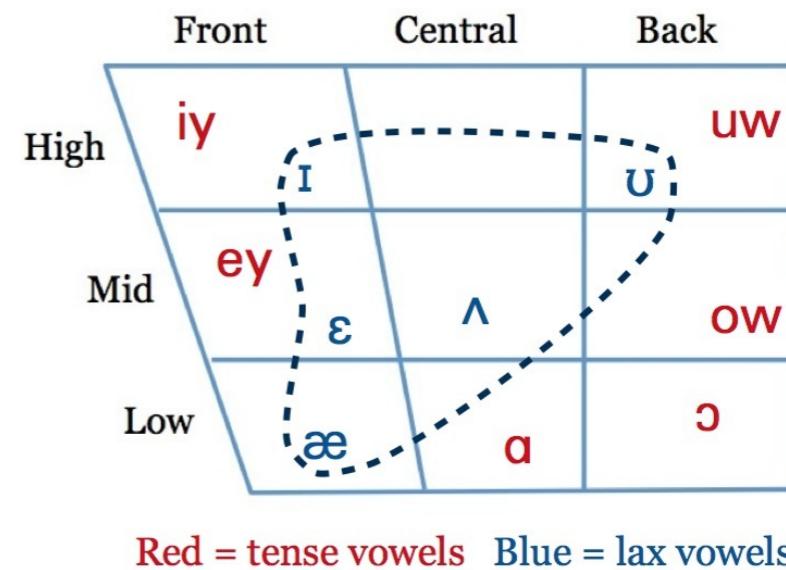
5.5 LIP POSITIONS FOR VOWELS OF ENGLISH

Vowel	Lip Position	Picture
/iy/	Unrounded, can be stretched a bit	
/ɪ/	Unrounded, can be stretched a bit	
/ey/	Unrounded, not so stretched	
/ɛ/	Unrounded, not so stretched	
/æ/	Unrounded, open wide	
/ɑ/	Unrounded, open wide	
/ʌ/, /ə/	Unrounded, neutral and relaxed	
/uw/	Very rounded	
/ʊ/	Moderately rounded	
/ow/	Rounded at the end of the vowel	
/ɔ/	Open and a bit rounded	
/ə/	A bit rounded	
/ay/	Unrounded → unrounded	→
/aw/	Unrounded → rounded	→
/oy/	Rounded → unrounded	→

saying the sound, but again, this is an oversimplification. There is sometimes not a great difference in physical tension of tense and lax vowels. (Ladefoged 2006)

Which vowels are in each group? The vowel quadrant in 5.6 shows the tense vowels in red and the lax vowels in blue. If you look at the dotted line that divides the two groups, you can see that the tense vowels are mostly toward the outside edges of the quadrant, indicating that they have more extreme tongue positions, and the tongue has to stretch or push a bit farther to get there. The lax vowels are closer to the middle of the quadrant; the tongue is not pushing out toward the extreme edges of the mouth, so in a sense, it is more relaxed.

5.6 Tense and lax vowels



Red = tense vowels Blue = lax vowels

Another difference between tense and lax vowels is the positions in which they can be used in words. Tense vowels can occur both in **closed syllables** (those that end in a consonant sound, like *meet* or *goal*) and **open syllables** (those that do not have a consonant sound after the vowel, like *me* or *go*.) Lax vowels can occur in closed syllables, but not in stressed, open syllables. This means that we often find words that end in tense vowels: *Me, day, shoe, show, saw, happy, today, subdue*, etc. However, we never find words that end in lax vowels. That is, American English doesn't have words like /mɪ/, /dɛ/, /ʃæ/, or /bu/.

Simple vowels, glided vowels, diphthongs

Finally, we can classify vowels based on how much tongue movement there is during the vowel. For example, when we say /æ/ as in *bad*, the tongue position and quality of the vowel stay constant throughout the sound, even if we continue to say the vowel for a long time. We call this type of vowel a **simple vowel** or a **pure vowel**.

Other vowels have a small change in tongue position from the beginning to the end. For example, when we say /ey/ as in *day*, our tongue moves just a bit, from the position of /ɛ/ to the position of /iy/. We call vowels of this type **glided vowels** or **vowels with glides**. (In some textbooks, glided vowels aren't considered a separate group. Some authors

include them with the simple vowels, while others group them together with the diphthongs.)

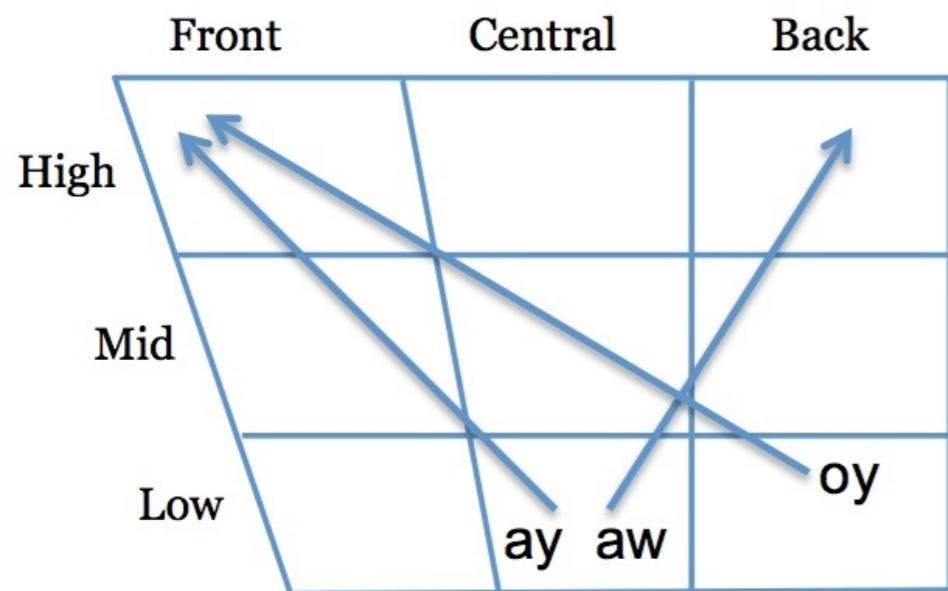
It may be difficult to hear the difference between the simple vowels and glided vowels when someone is speaking at a normal speed, but when you say the vowels slowly, you should be able to hear and feel the change in tongue position. In particular, it's the slight glide at the end of /ey/ and /ow/ that makes them sound different from /e/ or /o/-type vowels in many other languages.

Finally, some vowels have a big change in tongue position and sometimes also in lip rounding from the beginning to the end of the sound. For example, /ay/ as in *buy* sounds like a combination of the vowels /a/ and /iy/ blended together,

5.7 Vowels Categorized by Degree of Tongue Movement

Amount of Tongue Movement During a Vowel			
None	Very little	Some	A lot
Simple Vowels	Vowels with Glides	Diphthongs	
i	iy	ey	ay
e	uw	ow	aw
æ			oy
ʌ			
ʊ			
a			
ɔ			

with the first part longer and more prominent, and the second part lasting a shorter time than the first. We call these vowels **diphthongs**. The vowel quadrant shown below illustrates the diphthongs by drawing arrows from the beginning to the ending tongue positions for each one.



In addition to the change in tongue position, the diphthongs /aw/ and /oy/ also have a change in lip rounding; /aw/ begins with unrounded lips and changes to rounded lips, and /oy/ moves from rounded to unrounded.

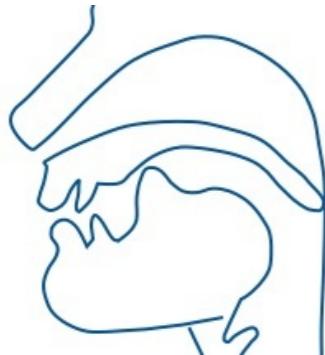
The glided vowels and diphthongs in American English all end in the glides /y/ or /w/. We've already seen glides as a category of consonants, which are also called **semivowels**. We can see now why they have this name, which means

"half-vowel." They sound like quick vowels, but function as either vowels or consonants, depending on the context.

The vowel /ə/

There is one more vowel-like sound in English, which can be represented by the symbol /ə/. This is the sound in words like *bird*, *first*, and *her*. In many textbooks this sound is analyzed as a combination of a vowel plus a consonant, and represented by the symbols /ər/, /ɜr/, /əʳ/, or /ɜʳ/. In others, it's represented by a single symbol, /ə/. Whichever symbol we use, this sound is best thought of as a single vowel sound, rather than a vowel sound followed by a consonant. The only difference between the vowel /ə/ and the consonant /r/ is in timing: /ə/ lasts longer so that it becomes the "heart" of the syllable.

There is actually more than one way to pronounce the /ə/ sound. Some people pronounce it with the tip of the tongue curled back a bit. In fact, the /r/ and /ə/ sounds are often called **retroflex** sounds, a name that comes from a Latin word meaning "bent backward." However, other people pronounce /r/ and /ə/ with the back of the tongue bunched up at the back, without curling the tip. Both ways can produce the same sound. With both tongue positions, the lips are slightly rounded.



/r/ with the tongue curled



/r/ with the tongue pulled back

An endangered vowel sound: /ɔ/

As you know, languages and their sounds are changing all the time. One change that is happening now in American English involves the vowel sound /ɔ/. For many speakers, the vowel /ɔ/ is **merging** with /ɑ/. This means that these speakers pronounce words that are listed in most dictionaries with the vowel /ɔ/, like *caught*, *saw*, and *walk*, with an /ɑ/ sound instead. So *caught* and *cot* sound alike: /kat/, and *dawn* and *don* sound alike: /dan/.

The merging of /ɔ/ and /ɑ/ is occurring mainly in the Western and Midwestern areas of the United States and is more common among younger speakers than older speakers (Ladefoged 2005 p. 28). We might say that in many areas of the United States, /ɔ/ is an “endangered sound.” As time goes by, it’s being used less and less in some words, and could even eventually die out as a separate phoneme.

Because of this merging of sounds, for teaching purposes it’s much less important to teach the difference between /ɔ/ and /ɑ/ than it is to teach the difference between, for example, /ɑ/ and /æ/. If students pronounce *cot* and *caught* the same way, they’ll be understood, but if they pronounce *cot* and *cat* in the same way, people could be confused.

“Invisible /y/”

Learners sometimes have trouble knowing how to pronounce words spelled with the vowel letters *u*, *ue*, *eu*, *ew*, or *ui*. In American English, these letters sometimes represent the sound /uw/, as in the words *suit* (/suwt/) or *true* (/truw/), and sometimes /yuw/, as in the words *music* (/myuwzik/), *computer* (/kəm'pyuwtə/), and *pew* (/pyuw/). In some words spelled with these letters, the vowel sound can even be pronounced either way, such as *new* (/nuw/ or /nyuw/). What’s happening here?

We sometimes say that the /yuw/ pronunciation in words like this has an “**invisible /y/**” because we hear a /y/ sound, but it’s not represented in spelling. We might think of /yuw/ as another diphthong, but with the glide at the beginning instead of the end.

In standard American English, invisible /y/ is not found after certain sounds: /r/, /dʒ/, /tʃ/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /s/, and /z/, and it’s

seldom found after /t/, /d/, /n/, and /l/, although some people do pronounce it in words like *new* (/nuw/ or /nyuw/) or *Tuesday* (/tuwzdey/ or /tyuwzdey/). In British English, the “invisible /y/” is much more common, with pronunciations like /syuwt/ for *suit* or /tyuwb/ for *tube*.

The “invisible /y/” is never found in words spelled with *oo* or *o*, like *food* (fuwd), *moon* (muwn), or *move* (muwv). This is true in both American and British English.

“Invisible /y/” can cause confusion if the learner’s language has words that are similar to those in English, but without the “invisible /y/,” especially in languages that are also written with the Latin alphabet, like German *Musik* (/muzik/, not /myuzik/) or Spanish *regular* (/řegular/, not /řegyular/).

Vowel length

We sometimes hear teachers talk about “long vowels” and “short vowels.” When people call vowels “long” or “short,” they *do not* mean that the sounds are identical except for length. We don’t want students to think that the *only* difference between the pairs of vowel /iy/ and /ɪ/, /ey/ and /ɛ/, or /uw/ and /u/ is that one is longer in duration and the other is shorter. Many students have learned this, but it just doesn’t work as a way of producing

understandable vowels. (Ladefoged 2006, Celce-Murcia et al. 2010, and many, many other sources)

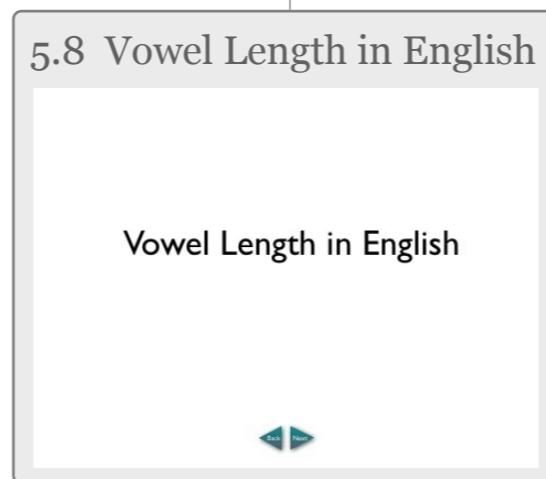
In reality, the difference between the vowels in each of these pairs depends primarily on two points: 1) tongue position and 2) tenseness or laxness of the vowel. As we saw earlier in this chapter, these factors change the quality of the vowels and make them sound different. Students *must* pronounce these pairs of vowels with different vowel quality, not simply with a difference in length.

What affects vowel duration?

As it happens, the time duration of any vowel sound varies a lot. All vowel sounds tend to be longer in some environments and shorter in others. Here are two important principles that affect the time duration of vowels:

The following sound: The duration of a vowel depends greatly on the sound that comes after it. Vowel sounds are usually shorter in duration before voiceless sounds and longer before voiced sounds. They’re longest of all when they come at the end of a word.

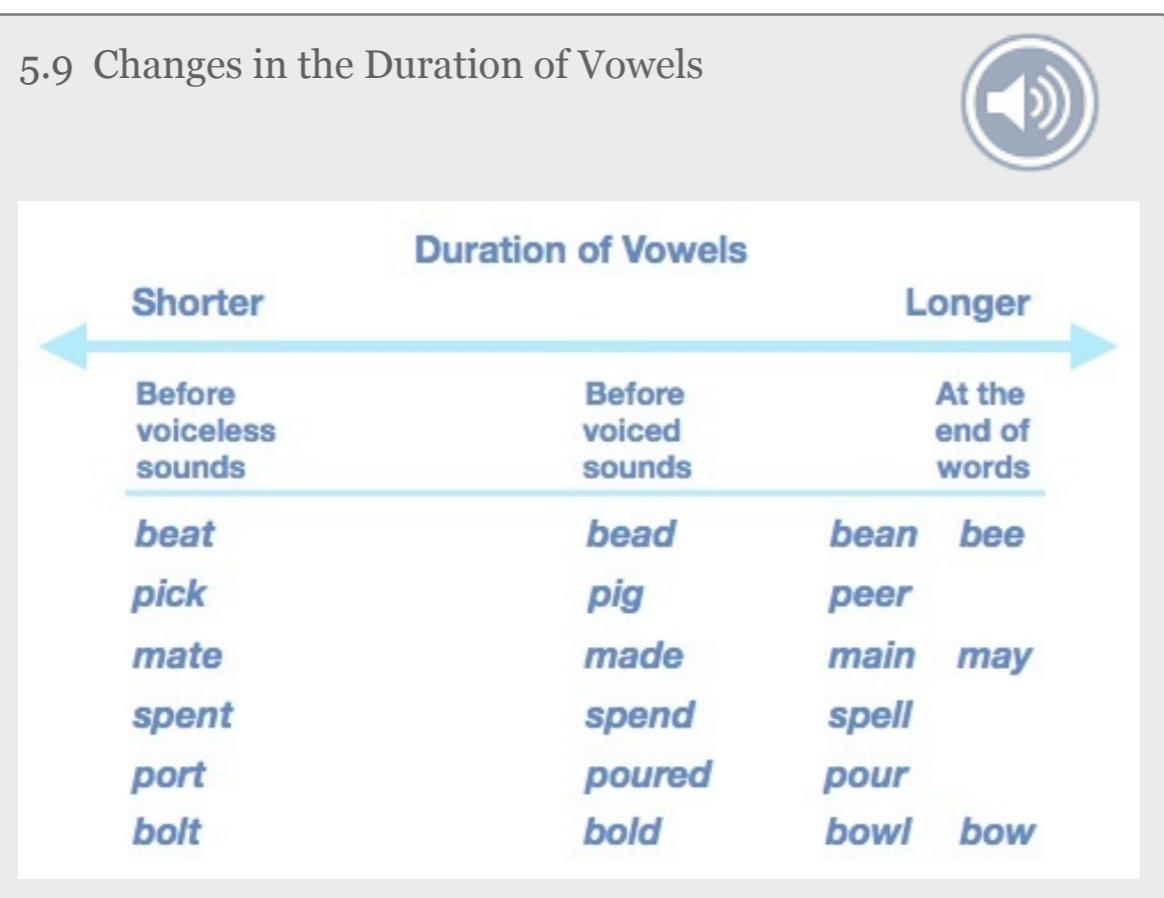
There are also slight variations in vowel length before different kinds of voiced sounds. Vowels are longer before



“smooth” sounds like nasals and liquids (which are all voiced in English) than before “rough” sounds: voiced stops, affricates, and fricatives. However, this length difference is so small that it’s hard to detect without special measuring instruments.

The same changes in vowel length also happen in words like *spent* and *spend*, *port* and *poured*, *bolt* and *bold*, even though another consonant—/n/, /r/, or /l/—comes between the vowel and the final sound. The vowel in the first word in each of these pairs is shorter than the vowel in the second word.

5.9 Changes in the Duration of Vowels



Why is this change in vowel length important? It’s often hard to hear the difference between final voiced and voiceless sounds. As we learned in Chapter 4, stop consonants at the end of words are often unreleased; that is, they’re not pronounced completely. This makes pairs of sounds like /p/ and /b/, /t/ and /d/, /k/ and /g/ hard to distinguish on their own when they’re at the end of a word. The listener’s brain uses the length of the preceding vowel sound to help figure out which consonant was heard. For example, listeners unconsciously tell the difference between words like *seat* and *seed* from the length of the vowel, not so much from the difference in the final consonants. This is why it’s important for speakers to make vowel sounds a bit longer before voiced consonants.

Vowel length and stress: All vowel sounds tend to last longer in stressed syllables than in unstressed syllables. This is an important factor in making stressed syllables stand out and be noticed. For example, the first syllable in *city* /'sitiy/ will last longer than the second syllable because it’s stressed. The fact that /ɪ/ is sometimes called a “short vowel” and /i/ is called a “long vowel” doesn’t matter. It’s important for students to know that within a polysyllabic word (a word with more than one syllable), the stressed syllable will last longer than the unstressed syllable or syllables.

In the same way, within a sentence, words that have more stress or emphasis will last longer than words that are unstressed. For example, in this sentence:

My friend should have **called** me.



The words *friend* and *called* are stressed more than the others, and so they last longer. The words *my*, *should*, *have*, and *me* are unstressed, and so they are very short. The words last different lengths of time, even though they each have one syllable. (We'll learn more about which words receive the most stress in sentences in Chapter 10, "Thought Groups and Prominence.")

What do students need to know about vowel length?

From a teaching perspective, there are three points that are most important for students to know:

- The difference between tense/lax pairs of vowels like /iy/ and /ɪ/, /ey/ and /ɛ/, or /uw/ and /ʊ/ is more than just length. We have to pronounce the sounds differently, too.
- Vowels are longer before voiced sounds or at the end of a word and shorter before voiceless sounds.
- Vowels are longer in stressed syllables and shorter in unstressed syllables.

British and American Phonologists' Analysis of Vowel Length

One source of confusion comes from a difference in the ways British and American phonologists traditionally analyze and describe vowel length. However, if you look at the summary below, you'll see that despite the difference in presentation, both are saying basically the same thing.

British analysis

Length of vowels out of context (The vowel by itself)
"Long" vowels are longer:

"Long" vowel

"Short" vowel

American analysis

Both are the same length:

"Long" vowel

"Short" vowel

Length of vowels before a voiceless sound

Long vowels become shorter:

"Long" vowel

"Short" vowel

All vowels become shorter:

"Long" vowel

"Short" vowel

Length of vowels before a voiced sound

Short vowels become longer:

"Long" vowel

"Short" vowel

All vowels become longer:

"Long" vowel

"Short" vowel

Vowels in unstressed syllables

We learned in Chapter 2 that words can be divided into **syllables**—rhythmic units of sound that each get one “beat.” In a word with more than one syllable, one of the syllables is **stressed**, or emphasized. Other syllables are unstressed. In English, vowels in unstressed syllables are often different from those in stressed syllables. They become weaker, quicker, and less clear than vowels in stressed syllables. We say these syllables and their vowels are **reduced**.

Vowels in unstressed syllables often (but not always) become a sound represented by the symbol /ə/ (called *schwa*). It is a sound that, for most speakers of American English, is very similar to /ʌ/: a mid-central, lax, unrounded vowel. When saying /ə/, the tongue sits in a relaxed position in the middle of the mouth. The difference between the phonemic symbols /ʌ/ and /ə/ is that /ʌ/ is customarily used to represent a vowel in a stressed syllable, and /ə/ is used to represent only an unstressed vowel. Because it is found in so many unstressed syllables, and because there are more unstressed syllables than stressed syllables, /ə/ is the most common vowel sound in English.

Box 5.10 shows some examples of vowel sounds in unstressed syllables. The first column lists the vowels most commonly

5.10 VOWELS IN UNSTRESSED SYLLABLES



More Common Unstressed Vowels		Less Common Unstressed Vowels	
Vowel	Examples	Vowel	Examples
/ə/	'sofa, 'glasses, a'bout	/ey/	main'tain, 'rotate
/ə̇/	'water, cur'tail, 'orderly	/ɛ/	Sep'tember, medi'cation
/ɪ/	'music, 'vanish, in'tense	/ʊ/	'childhood, 'handbook
/iŋ/	'city, 'happy, 'twentieth	/ay/	li'brarian, ci'tation
/ow/	'shadow, ho'tel, pi'ano	/aw/	'eyebrow, ou'tside
/uw/	'menu, u'surp, 'venue	/oy/	'hard-boiled, exploi'tation

found in unstressed syllables; the examples in the right-hand column show less common vowels in unstressed syllables.

Reduced function words

We have just seen that unstressed syllables in words can have weak, reduced forms. In a similar way, whole words can sometimes have reduced pronunciation forms when they’re unstressed. This happens most often with **function words**—words that have **grammatical meaning** rather than **lexical meaning**, such as articles, pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions. These “small” words can be pronounced in

two ways—as a **citation form** or as a **reduced form**. The citation form is the way we pronounce the word when we’re saying it very carefully—the unreduced form. For example, the citation form of *to* is /tuw/. When we say *to* in normal speech, however, we don’t usually say /tuw/. We’re much more likely to pronounce it /tə/. This is its reduced form, the way it’s pronounced in normal, connected speech when it isn’t being emphasized.

Because unstressed function words and syllables are closely connected to the rhythm of English, we’ll look at reduced forms of function words in more detail in Chapter 9, “Rhythm.” There are lists of common reduced forms of function words in that chapter.

Vowels and consonants: a blurry line

In this chapter and the previous one, we’ve seen something surprising: The differences between vowels and consonants are not as clear-cut as we might imagine, and some sounds can have qualities of both. For example, we’ve seen that a few consonants (/n/, /r/, and /l/) can also be used as the “heart” of syllables when they become vowel-like syllabic consonants. They’re consonants, but they can function as vowels. Also, the consonant /r/ and the vowel /ə/ are actually the same sound—the difference is in duration and function within a syllable. Finally, the glides /w/ and /y/ are

used as consonants in words like *win* and *yes*, but they can also be the final part of the diphthongs /ay/, /aw/, and /oy/. Like many rules and categories in language, the boundary between vowels and consonants is a little blurry.

Sources of learner problems with vowels

New sounds: English has more vowel sounds than many other languages. According to the *World Atlas of Language Structures Online*, the average number of vowels in the languages of the world is five or six. English has more than twice that number! Vowels that are found in English but not in the learner’s language are often challenging since the learner’s tongue and lips need to get used to moving into unfamiliar positions and new combinations of movements.

Differences between the phonemes of different languages:

Some pairs of vowels that are separate phonemes in English may be allophones of the same phoneme in other languages. For example, /iy/ and /ɪ/ are separate phonemes in English, and we find many minimal pairs such as *sleep* and *slip* or *least* and *list*. But these sounds are variations of a single phoneme /i/ in Japanese, Spanish, Korean, and many other languages. Other pairs of tense and lax vowels are also often confused in this way: /iy/ and /ɪ/, /ey/ and /ɛ/, /uw/ and /u/. Other similar vowels, such as /ɛ/

and /æ/ or /ʌ/ and /ɑ/, may also be heard as variations of the same sound in some languages.

Glided vowels: English vowels that end with a /y/ or /w/ glide can also cause problems, particularly /ey/ and /ow/. Many languages have vowels that are similar to these, but without the final glide. Speakers of these languages may keep the vowel sound consistent throughout the vowel instead of adding the final glide, leading to vowel sounds that may be hard to recognize.

Vowels followed by /r/: Learners from some language backgrounds have particular problem with vowels followed by /r/, especially in words like these:

- *stir* and *star* *stir* and *store*
- *curd* and *card* *curd* and *cord*
- *were* and *wore* *word* and *ward*



Reduced vowels: In English, many unstressed vowels are reduced to /ə/. In many languages, this does not happen; vowels retain their “full” quality, whether they’re stressed or unstressed, or spoken slowly or quickly. Speakers of these languages may pronounce unstressed syllables in English with “full” vowels too, and this can make it hard for listeners to understand which words are meant.

Internet links

Here’s a link to an x-ray video of someone pronouncing five vowels, from the companion website to Peter Ladefoged’s book *Vowels and Consonants*. We can see that there really is a correlation between the tongue position and the place of a vowel in the vowel quadrant. <http://www.phonetics.ucla.edu/vowels/chapter11/tongue.html>

Pronunciation of Some Word Endings

Word endings

In English, some grammatical word endings are pronounced in more than one way, depending on the sound that comes before them. In this chapter we're only going to talk about the *sounds* of these endings, not their spelling. We can't always predict the pronunciation of an ending by looking at the spelling of the word. We have to think about the *sounds* that are around it. (There is a separate and independent set of rules about changes in the spelling of words when these endings are added. To read about these, look at Chapter 15, "Spelling, Sounds, and Phonics.") First, let's look at the pronunciation of the endings *-ed* and *-s*.

Pronunciation of *-ed* endings

The *-ed* ending is added to regular verbs to show the past tense and past participle forms.

The *-ed* ending can be pronounced in three ways:

- If the base verb ends in /t/ or /d/, we add an extra syllable: /əd/ or /ɪd/.
- If the verb ends in any *voiced* sound except /d/, we add a voiced ending: /d/. We add just one sound, not an extra syllable.
- If the verb ends in any *voiceless* sound except /t/, we add a voiceless ending: /t/. Again, we add just one sound, not an extra syllable.

6.1 PRONUNCIATION OF *-ED* ENDINGS



If the word ends in one of these sounds	The <i>-ed</i> ending is pronounced like this	Examples
/t/, /d/	/əd/ or /ɪd/	chatted, waited, added, needed
Any <i>voiced</i> sound besides those listed above	/d/	cried, viewed, moved, robbed, buzzed, judged
Any <i>voiceless</i> sound besides those listed above	/t/	stopped, walked, passed, laughed, washed, matched

The first form of the ending is listed above as “/əd/ or /ɪd/.” This is because the exact vowel of the ending might vary a little. It can sound like /ə/, like /ɪ/, or like a vowel between the two. The important thing is that an extra, unstressed syllable is added when we put an -ed ending on regular verbs that end in /t/ or /d/.

Pronunciation of -s endings

The -s ending can be used in four different ways:

- It can be added to regular nouns to make the plural form.

box→boxes pen→pens book→books



- It can be added to all nouns, both regular and irregular, to make a possessive form, either singular or plural.

Although the spellings of the singular and plural possessive forms are different, they both sound the same.

boy→boy's book elephant→elephant's trunk
boys→boys' books elephants→elephants' trunks
child→child's toy children→children's toys



- It can be added to verbs to make the third-person singular present tense form.

kiss→kisses run→runs walk→walks



- In contractions, it can be a reduced form of *is* or *has*.
(Contractions of *is* and *has* sound the same.)
he is→*he's* *it is*→*it's* *he has*→*he's* *it has*→*it's*
what is→*what's* *where is*→*where's* *what has*→*what's*



All of these -s endings follow the same pronunciation rules, no matter what their meaning is. The -s ending can be pronounced in three ways:

- If the word ends in /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, or /dʒ/ (the sounds that are similar to /s/, called **sibilant** sounds), we add an extra syllable: /əz/ or /ɪz/.
- If the word ends in any *voiced* sound except the ones listed above, we add a voiced ending: /z/. We add just one sound, not an extra syllable.
- If the word ends in any *voiceless* sound except the ones listed above, we add a voiceless ending: /s/. Again, we add just one sound, not an extra syllable.

Just as with the -ed endings, the vowel in the first form of the -s ending can sound like /ə/, like /ɪ/, or like a vowel between the two. Here too, the important thing is that an extra, unstressed syllable is added when we put an -s ending on words that end in /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, or /dʒ/.

6.2 PRONUNCIATION OF -S ENDINGS



If the word ends in one of these sounds	The -s ending is pronounced like this	Examples
/s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/	/əz/ or /iz/	boxes, roses, bushes, judge's, bosses', Max's, kisses, catches, wishes
Any <i>voiced</i> sound besides those listed above	/z/	pens, bags, birds, eyes, boy's, Betty's, children's, runs, sees, returns, goes, he's, she's, where's, Bob's
Any <i>voiceless</i> sound besides those listed above	/s/	books, boats, laughs, Mike's, cat's, cats', walks, laughs, stops, it's, what's, Elizabeth's

Problems with -ed and -s endings

Learners from many language groups tend to have some of the same problems with -ed and -s endings. Here are some reminders for learners:

Don't add an extra syllable when it's not needed.

Learners sometimes add unnecessary extra syllables with -ed and -s endings, especially when adding the ending results in a troublesome consonant cluster. For example, *watched*, *judged*, *stopped*, and *walked* have just one syllable each, even though some of the final consonant clusters may be

hard to pronounce. Learners should be careful not to say *watch-ed*, *stopp-ed*, or *walk-ed*.

Don't confuse the sounds that trigger each ending.

The final sounds that cause the ending to have an extra syllable are different, depending on whether the ending is -ed or -s. When students learn the rules for both endings, they sometimes forget which sounds go with which rule. It's important to help them see *why* particular sounds trigger an extra syllable: Sounds that are very similar to the sound of the ending need an extra vowel to separate them from that similar sound. This helps the ending to be heard more clearly.

Don't forget the endings. Learners sometimes omit -ed or -s endings entirely, especially if their native language has few or no consonants at the ends of words, or if adding the endings results in unfamiliar consonant clusters. The endings are important; the listener needs to hear them to get grammatical information to help understand the whole meaning of what's being said.

Think about sounds, not letters.

They're not the same. For example, the verb *hope* ends in a vowel *letter*, but a voiceless consonant *sound*. When we add an -ed or -s ending, the ending is voiceless: *hoped* /həupt/ or *hopes* /həups/.

It's sometimes hard to hear the difference between the voiced and voiceless endings /z/ and /s/ or /d/ and /t/. This is because voiced **obstruents** (obstruents are **stops, fricatives, and affricates**) are usually not very strongly voiced at the ends of words. This can make it hard to hear the difference between voiced and voiceless sounds. Also, as we learned in Chapter 4, voiced and voiceless stops are both often **unreleased** at the ends of words, so they sound very similar. For the purpose of teaching the pronunciation of these word endings, it's less important for students to differentiate between the voiced and voiceless endings than between the “extra syllable” and “no extra syllable” endings.

Some adjectives that end in -ed

We've just looked at the pronunciation of the past tense/past participle verb ending *-ed*. We know that past participles are often used as adjectives: *tired, surprised, broken*. For these past participles-turned-adjectives that end in *-ed*, the verb form is pronounced according to the regular rules:

We *learned* some new words. /lənd/

The priest *blessed* the people. /blesɪd/

You haven't *aged* a bit. /eydʒd/

6.3 Pronunciation of -s and -ed Endings

Pronunciation of -s and -ed Endings



But for a few of them, the related adjective is pronounced with an extra syllable, /əd/ or /ɪd/:

a *learned* professor /'lənəd/

blessed freedom /'blesəd/

my *aged* grandparents /'eydʒəd/



This extra-syllable pronunciation only happens with a very limited group of words, often old-fashioned, formal, or poetic sounding words. Not all verb/adjective pairs ending in *-ed* are pronounced differently. For example, *tired, surprised, bored*, and many others are pronounced the same whether they're verbs or adjectives.

There are also some adjectives ending in *-ed* that do not come from past participles of verbs. They often have the form

6.4 PRONUNCIATION OF VERBS AND ADJECTIVES ENDING IN -ED



Pronounced differently (These and very few others)		Pronounced the same (These and many others)	
Verbs	Adjectives	Verbs	Adjectives
blessed	blessed	tired	tired
learned	learned	surprised	surprised
aged	aged	bored	bored
beloved	beloved	confused	confused
dogged	dogged	worried	worried

of a noun followed by *-ed*. Most of these are also pronounced with an extra syllable /əd/ or /ɪd/.

a *crooked* line a *naked* man *ragged* clothing
rugged mountains a *four-legged* table
a *wretched* feeling a *wicked* witch



Pronunciation of *-ing* verb endings

The *-ing* ending found on present participle verb forms can also be pronounced in different ways. However, these don't follow definite phonological rules like the ones for the *-ed* and *-s* endings. Instead, they vary depending on the degree of formality or informality and the speed of speech, and they act more like the full and reduced forms of function words that are described in Chapters 5 and 9. When the *-ing* ending is pronounced carefully, it sounds like /ɪŋ/. However, in more casual speech, it often sounds like /ən/ or /ɪn/. This pronunciation is sometimes represented in writing as *-in'* when the writer wants to seem casual or folksy, as in the old song title "Blowin' in the Wind" or the even older movie title "Singin' in the Rain."

It's useful to know that the /ən/ or /ɪn/ pronunciation of the *-ing* ending is not always appreciated by strict teachers or parents who want to encourage "correct" pronunciation. They may warn children not to "drop their g's," although of

course there was never a /g/ sound in this ending to start with. It's probably best to help students to understand the reduced pronunciation of the *-ing* ending when they hear it, but not require them to use it themselves.

Verbs with *-ing* are often used as adjectives (*boring*, *interesting*, *tiring*, *exciting*, etc.) Interestingly, these adjectives ending in *-ing* are less often pronounced with a reduced ending, even in casual or rapid speech.

Was the movie *interesting* or *boring*? /intrəstɪŋ/ /bɔːrɪŋ/
We had a *tiring* day. /tayrɪŋ/
What a *fascinating* story! /fæsəneɪtɪŋ/



6.5 PRONUNCIATION OF *-ING* ENDINGS



In careful speech (citation form)	In casual speech (reduced form)
I'm doing my homework. We're learning about sounds. Are you coming? "Blowing in the Wind" "Singing in the Rain"	I'm doin' my homework. We're learnin' about sounds. Are you comin'? "Blowin' in the Wind" "Singin' in the Rain"

Teaching Consonants and Vowels

In this chapter

In this chapter we're going to look at some ways to introduce and practice consonant and vowel sounds—alone, in words, in sentences, and in speaking. Examples of some of the activities are at the end of this chapter. Ways of practicing other pronunciation skills, emphasizing **suprasegmental features** such as intonation, stress, and rhythm, are in Chapter 13, "Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation."

Planning a lesson

In many traditional classrooms, learning pronunciation has meant mainly repeating words and sentences after the teacher or a recording. But "repeat after me" is not enough to

help students achieve clear pronunciation. Students need help in learning to notice how the sounds are pronounced and to understand them when they hear them. They also need to practice using new sounds in context and eventually use them in communicative activities too. As a teacher, you'll need to plan a sequence of activities to lead students through the whole process of mastering a new sound, beginning with hearing and trying it out for the first time and continuing through practicing it in several ways, from simple to more complex.

When you're planning a practice sequence, you need to think about more than just what you are going to do as the teacher. You should also think about it from the students' point of view: How will they notice and begin to understand the new sounds? What will they be doing to help them master the sounds? How will they experience and practice using them? Will they understand your presentation easily? Will they feel interested and engaged?

Steps in practicing a new sound

Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) recommend using a communicative framework for teaching pronunciation, with a series of steps building toward using the new sounds in realistic communication. They suggest these steps in introducing and practicing a new sound or sound contrast:

Description and Analysis — oral and written illustrations of how the feature is produced and when it occurs within spoken discourse

Listening Discrimination — focused listening practice with feedback on learners' ability to correctly discriminate the feature

Controlled Practice — oral reading of minimal-pair sentences, short dialogues, etc., with special attention paid to the highlighted feature in order to raise learner consciousness

Guided Practice — structured communication exercises, such as information-gap activities or cued dialogues, that enable the learner to monitor for the specified feature

Communicative Practice — less structured, fluency-building activities (e.g., role play, problem solving) that require the learner to attend to both form and content of utterances (Celce-Murcia et al. 2010)

These steps do not have to be done all in one lesson. They could easily extend over many practice sessions, especially if pronunciation is only one element among many in your curriculum. You'll also find that the steps overlap to some extent, and there's not always a clear distinction between them. If you're not sure which category an activity belongs

to, don't worry too much. It's more important to do a variety of activities leading from simple to more complicated than to classify the category of each activity.

Finally, the sequence of activities doesn't have to be a one-way street. Even after you've gone through all the steps, you might want to circle back to an earlier stage and do more practice. Review is a good thing.

Let's look more closely at each step in the process.

Description and analysis

A better name for this first step might be "introducing the sounds," since it doesn't necessarily have to include verbal explanations or explicit analysis. There are several ways to introduce sounds, depending on the age and abilities of the students and the preferences of the teacher:

Demonstrations: *Show* how to produce the sound. Use your own voice and mouth as a model. You can supplement this by using a dental model to show how to produce the sound. Use your hand to represent the tongue and show its position and movement.



Explanations: Tell students how to produce the sound, using clear, simple, concrete descriptions. Where does the tongue touch? What are the lips doing? For most groups of learners, avoid technical language as much as you can. Remember that explanations alone are not enough, and simply telling is not teaching. Descriptions are a good beginning, but they need to be combined with demonstrations and visuals.

Videos demonstrating sounds: Several websites have short videos giving explanations and demonstrations of how to produce sounds. However, check the quality of the video contents carefully before you use it in class. Some look good at first glance, but are actually inaccurate or misleading. Links to some reliable sources can be found on the website <http://teachingpronunciation.weebly.com> → Resources for Teaching Pronunciation.

Visual symbols: Some teachers and students like to use phonemic symbols to represent sounds; others hate them. For young children, they're too abstract and just won't work well. For adults, especially visual learners, phonemic symbols can provide a "hook" to connect a sound to and to help them keep all those strange new sounds from seeming like a shapeless, confusing mass. Other students are just confused by the symbols, especially if they're also just starting to learn

the English alphabet. Used judiciously, phonemic symbols can be helpful, especially for sounds that don't have a consistent spelling in English. (See also "Should you use phonemic symbols in teaching?" in Chapter 14, "Different Places, Different Learners.")

Sounds can be represented visually in other ways if phonemic symbols don't seem helpful:

- Represent each sound with a color, either one whose name contains the sound it represents (red for /r/, yellow for /y/) or one that just seems to fit the sound. (I've always thought that bright, warm colors like yellow and orange fit better with front vowels, and rich, cool colors like blue and purple are better for back vowels. Gray seems good for /ə/. What do you think?)
- Represent each sound with a picture of an object or animal that contains the sound: a dog for /d/, a monkey for /m/, an elephant for /ɛ/.

For young learners, any of these representations can seem friendlier, less threatening, and easier to remember than traditional phonemic symbols.

Gestures and movements: Gestures or body movements can be used to represent sounds and remind students of how they're pronounced. For example, holding one hand with the

fingers curled up could represent /r/, to mimic the movement of the tongue. Some teachers create whole sets of gestures for the teacher and students to use in representing sounds. For example, Alexander (2003) describes a technique she calls *Pronouncercizing*—a set of body movements to represent the phonemes of English. You can see a short example video of this technique at <http://www.newreaderspress.com/Items.aspx?hierId=0450>.)

Deductive or inductive teaching? Some teachers prefer to introduce new information **deductively**. That is, they give an explanation, rule, or generalization and then have students practice using what they've learned. Others prefer to introduce new material **inductively**. They give several examples of a rule or pattern and guide students as they try to figure out the general principle for themselves. Both of these can be effective ways of introducing new pronunciation information. You might want to use both methods at different times. However, here are some warnings about using each way of introducing new material:

If you introduce new sounds or rules **deductively**, keep your explanations short, simple, and easy to understand, and move quickly toward the practice stage. Don't let your explanations and analysis be so lengthy and detailed that students are overwhelmed, bored or confused. Simply listening to an

explanation is not learning. Students have to *use* what they're learning.

If you introduce new sounds or rules **inductively**, be sure that the examples you present will be *more than enough* to lead students to the rule or generalization. This isn't supposed to be a guessing game; the conclusion should be obvious after students think about it for a while. Remember that students can't read your mind. Sometimes the rule you're trying to get across is clear to you, but still a complete mystery to your students. If they just don't seem to be "getting it," there's nothing wrong with going ahead and giving them more hints or even telling them the rule you're trying to teach.

More advice for introducing new sounds:

- Don't try to introduce too many sounds at once. Students will just be confused by too much information.
- Practice slowly at first. Pronunciation is a muscular activity, and the muscles in learners' tongues, lips, and jaws have to get used to moving in new ways when they pronounce new sounds. It's like learning a new dance—you have to practice the steps slowly at first, and then you can gradually speed up. In pronunciation, too, you can't expect students to speak at a normal speed from the beginning.

- When explaining or demonstrating a sound, give students many chances to practice during your explanation. They need to try out each element that you explain right away. Explain or introduce a small point briefly and then spend lots of time practicing. If students hear too much explanation before they have a chance to practice, they'll forget everything and won't be able to use what you've told them. In other words, your lesson should look like this:

Explain → Practice → Explain → Practice → Explain → Practice

Not like this:

Explain Explain Explain Explain → Practice

Listening discrimination

If someone can't hear the difference between two sounds, then it will be very difficult for them to pronounce those sounds correctly. Students need to build up their ability to recognize new sounds and differentiate them from each other and from sounds in their own language. Here are some types of practice that emphasize listening, moving roughly from simpler to more demanding:

Same or different: Students hear two words and decide whether they're the same or different. For example, if they hear *right, right*, they say "same," but if they hear *right, light*, they say "different."

"Odd man out" listening: Students hear a series of three or four words, all the same except one. They have to identify which one is different (the "odd man out"). For example, if they hear *right, light, right, right*, they'll say that the second word is different.

Matching spoken words to written words or pictures: Students see a series of pairs of pictures representing minimal pair words (for example, pictures of a sheep and a ship or a piece of paper and a pepper shaker). As they hear words, they choose the matching picture. This can also be done with written words instead of pictures, or with spoken sentences matched to written sentences or pictures. If you do the activity with pictures, be sure students know what word each picture represents. For example, does a picture of a smiling man holding a book represent *man, boy, teacher, student, person, happy, smile....?* Sometimes it's hard to tell.

Sound sorting: Prepare a handout with boxes for the sounds you've been practicing, each labeled with a phonemic symbol, example word, or picture, depending on your students. Give students a set of words containing the sounds,

either in writing or verbally. Students read or listen to the words, decide which sound they represent, and write the words in the correct boxes.

Listening practice using minimal pairs:

1. Choose a minimal pair that contains the sounds you're practicing. For example, for /r/ and /l/, you might choose *rock* and *lock* or *right* and *light*. Choose words that your students know; uncommon words like *roam* and *loam* are not the best choices. Write the two words on the board or draw pictures to represent them if your students are not yet able to read.
2. Say the words and have students repeat them. Show and explain differences in how the sounds are pronounced using demonstrations, mirrors, or a dental model.
3. Label the words on the board “1” and “2.” Say one of the words and have students tell you which word you’ve said, holding up one or two fingers. Keep this up until they can identify the sounds easily.
4. Have students do the “1 or 2” practice with a partner for a few minutes while you go around and check their pronunciation. Students take turns saying one of the words for their partner to identify.

A variation of minimal pair practice: Practice in the same way again, whispering or saying the words without making any sound, and have students decide which word you’re saying. This pushes them to pay attention to lip rounding, tongue movement, etc. (Don’t use this to practice differentiating voiced/voiceless pairs like /b/ and /p/! All the sounds are voiceless when you whisper.)

Minimal pair sentences are sentences that are exactly the same except for one sound. For example:

We enjoy **voting**. We enjoy **boating**.

He’s a **pirate**. He’s a **pilot**.

Give me the **paper**. Give me the **pepper**.



Pairs of sentences like these are useful for practicing in the same way as minimal pair words, and they offer at least a little bit of context. You’ll probably find, though, that writing minimal pair sentences is much harder than thinking of minimal pair words because the sounds, meaning, and grammar all have to fit together perfectly.

Cloze listening with sentences or paragraphs: Prepare a handout with sentences or a paragraph with some words replaced by blanks. As the teacher reads or plays a recording of the text in the handout, students try to hear and write down the missing words. When planning this activity, keep in

mind the time it takes for students to hear, process, and write the missing words. Don't put the blanks too close together; give students enough time to finish writing each one without feeling too rushed. You might pause after each sentence to give students a little more time to write. To make the activity simpler, you could supply two or three word choices for each blank instead of asking students to think of words entirely on their own.

Teacher dictation: Prepare several sentences including the sounds you're working on. Make sure the vocabulary and sentence structure are well within the students' ability; if they have to struggle to understand the meaning of the sentences, the activity is much less effective. Read or play a recording of the sentences and ask students to write them down as well as they can. Repeat a couple of times, pausing during the sentence if it's too long to remember all at once. Then have students compare their writing with a partner, and then check what they've written against the correct sentences. Finally, ask students what words were difficult for them to understand. This can lead to a discussion of *why* they misheard some words and how they can improve their listening. ("I thought you said *sick*, but you really said *thick*. Why couldn't I tell the difference?") Of course, dictations can only be used if your students already have some ability to write in English.

Partner dictation: Prepare a pair of handouts, each with two or three simple sentences and space below to write other sentences. (Different sentence for each of the pair of handouts.) Put students in pairs and give each partner a different handout. Students take turns dictating their sentences to their partner, who writes them down. Then both students check what they've written, trying to see which sounds they've misheard. This activity gives students practice in both producing and hearing sounds.

Controlled practice

In controlled practice, students work with new sounds in a very structured way. The words to be practiced are supplied by the teacher or textbook; the students just have to repeat them. Learners need this controlled practice when they begin to learn a new sound. It gives them time to concentrate on reproducing the tongue and lip movements without also having to decide what words they're going to say or what grammatical forms they need. Repetition helps students to build **muscle memory**—an increased ability to do a physical activity easily after practicing many times.

At this stage it's especially important for students to have **feedback** about the accuracy of their pronunciation. They need to know if they're doing something wrong so they can change it and they won't keep practicing mistakes. A famous

American football coach, Vince Lombardi, once said, “Practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect.” While this is an exaggeration, it helps us see that students will not improve if they unknowingly practice the same mistakes over and over.

Choral and individual repetition are the simplest types of controlled practice. Students repeat words, minimal pairs, or sentences after a model provided by the teacher or a recording, with feedback on how well they’re doing. While learners need lots of practice of this type in order to be able to produce sounds automatically, it’s best not to continue simple repetition for too long at a time. Follow up with more contextualized and meaningful practice to avoid boredom—for the students *and* the teacher.

Sentences: Find or write sentences using words with the sounds you’re practicing, or have students write sentences. They may enjoy practicing sentences they’ve created themselves more than those from a book. It can also be fun to include the students’ names or something about the class now and then. Don’t choose sentences that are too difficult, especially in the beginning, or students will get frustrated and discouraged. Have students practice repeating the sentences, as a group and then with a partner.

Tongue twisters can also be used for repetition practice, but they should be used with caution. See “Some Thoughts on Tongue Twisters” later in this chapter.

Proverbs and famous quotations: These are also good for repetition practice, especially with more advanced learners. For example:

- *Time flies.* (practice with /ay/ or /l/)
- *Birds of a feather flock together.* (/f/ or /ð/)
- *All's fair in love and war.* (/l/ and /r/)



Be sure the students understand the meaning—both literal and figurative—of what they’re saying. If you have students discuss the proverbs or quotations with a partner or group and try to work out their meaning, they’ll be able to do valuable communicative practice along with their pronunciation practice.

Dialogs and skits: These provide controlled practice with the possibility of more context and more meaningful and useful language. Choose dialogs that fit situations the students might encounter or words and expressions that they need to know. Make sure the dialogs make sense and sound as realistic and natural as possible. In other words, don’t try to include as many words with a particular sound as possible if it will make the dialog sound forced and phony. Have

students repeat after the model and then practice the dialog with a partner. Even when doing controlled practice, encourage learners to speak with feeling, as if they were really in the situation of the dialog.

Stories and anecdotes: Reading prepared stories out loud can provide good controlled practice if the material contains the pronunciation elements that you're practicing. However, a disadvantage of reading aloud is that it divides students' attention and effort between pronunciation and decoding the written symbols. Be sure that the story contains language that students are familiar with and can read easily so that they can give more attention to pronunciation.

Strip stories: Cut up a simple story into individual sentences and mix them up. Give the sets of strips to pairs or small groups of students and ask them to reassemble the story. The pronunciation practice comes as students read each strip while arranging them, and then read the whole story after it's assembled.

Guided practice

Guided practice is a bit freer than controlled practice. Words, phrases, and examples are given or suggested, but complete sentences or dialogs are not predetermined. The teacher gives a framework, but students have to create their own "script"

or figure out what to say to accomplish a task. Some of the activity types listed below are most often thought of as speaking activities, but if they are planned so that students must use the sounds being practiced in order to complete the task, they are also good pronunciation practice. Here are some examples of types of guided practice activities:

Information gaps: An information gap activity, or info gap, is a pair-work activity in which each partner has some of the information needed to complete a task, but neither one has all of it. The partners need to talk to each other and combine their information to solve a problem, fill out a chart, etc. In the simplest kind of info gap, the partners might each have a grid in which some boxes are empty and others have a picture or word containing the target sound. They ask each other questions like "What word is in Box 2?" and fill in the blanks with the information they learn. There are many variations of info gap activities that make good guided pronunciation practice if the words or names are chosen to include the sound being practiced. The next paragraphs describe some of these.

Calendars and schedules: Each partner has a schedule of his/her imaginary daily activities. They try to find a meeting time that works for both of them by asking and answering questions about their schedules.

People charts: Create a family tree, sports team roster, or organizational chart of workers in an office that includes names or other words with a particular sound and have students ask and answer questions about the people. Create two versions of the chart, each with some names missing, and have students talk together to discover the missing names.

Maps, floor plans, and diagrams: Find or create a map, floor plan, or diagram with labels using the sounds you want to practice. Pairs of students ask and answer questions about the map or plan, give each other directions to particular places, or plan where to add features to the diagram, for example, where to add furniture on a floor plan of a house, or where to “build” a new shopping center, amusement park, or university on a map of a city.

Journals and diaries: To practice the pronunciation of past tense *-ed* endings, students look at a journal or list of someone’s actions in the past and tell each other about them. These can be real events in the students’ lives, news stories, or actions by famous people, real or imaginary. (If it turns out that some of the verbs students use are irregular and don’t illustrate the *-ed* endings, that’s all right. Students need practice with irregular verbs too.)

Sound scavenger hunt: Ask students to find things in detailed drawings, in pictures cut from a magazine, or in the real-life classroom that contain a particular sound or sounds. Pairs can work together to make lists and see who can find the most words.

Brainstorming lists of words: Ask students to think of words in particular categories that contain the sound you’re practicing. For example, ask them to think of names of countries, types of food, animals, words related to sports, or some other category that all begin with /v/. Pairs or groups can try to see who can think of the most words. They’ll practice pronunciation as they brainstorm the word lists and then tell their words to the rest of the class. (This is very much like the commercially available game “Scattergories.”)

Communicative practice

Communicative activities, in which students have freedom to choose their own words to express their own ideas, can be useful for pronunciation practice. Because these same types of activities are also used for speaking practice, adult students sometimes don’t understand why they’re doing them in a pronunciation class. It’s important to explain the reason for using communicative practice in teaching pronunciation: Sounds don’t exist in isolation—they live in words, stories, conversations, and other kinds of real language. If learners

can only say words in isolation but not in real speaking, their skill is not very useful. Many learners can say a sound perfectly in one word at a time, but they forget it entirely in conversation. This is why we use communicative activities for pronunciation practice—to help learners get ready to use sounds in real conversation.

Here are some examples of communicative activities that can be used to practice sounds if we “lace” them with words containing those sounds:

Role plays and simulations: Give students a situation and a list of suggested vocabulary words containing the sounds you want to practice. Ask them to create and practice a conversation to fit the situation. The activity can be based on a handout with authentic or teacher-created materials, such as a menu (for a conversation between a waiter and customer), a web page showing items for sale (for a conversation discussing which things to buy), advertisements for movies, plays, or concerts (to discuss which one to go to), or many other possibilities. If many of the names and words on the handout contain the sound you’re practicing, students will have to produce those during their role play.

Lists, ranking, and problem solving: Give students a task involving listing (“If you were stranded alone on an

island, what ten items would you want to take?”), evaluating and choosing (Read descriptions of three job applicants and decide who should be hired), or ranking (Look at a list of 10 hobbies and arrange them in order of students’ preference).

Writing stories: Give students a list of words containing particular sounds and ask them to write sentences or a story using some of them. It’s best if you give a context or purpose for the story; writing random sentences without context is less meaningful. Students can then practice reading their story and share it with others in the class.

Dialogs and drama: Have students create dialogs or short skits using words with the chosen sound. Encourage them to say the lines with feeling as they practice with a partner. Then it’s only a short step to using drama—short skits or impromptu role plays—that encourage students to use what they’ve been practicing.

Teaching with authentic materials

We can find plenty of materials for practicing pronunciation in textbooks. However, we can also use **authentic materials** as a basis for interesting and effective pronunciation practice. Authentic materials are things that were created for real-life purposes, not especially for teaching, such as newspapers, magazines, TV or radio

programs, movies, YouTube videos, advertisements, recipes, menus, poems, and songs. Materials like these will often keep students' interest more than the usual textbooks. For learners living in English-speaking countries, they show students how they can use the sounds and words they've been practicing in their lives. For those living in areas where English is seldom spoken, they give learners a taste of everyday life in new and interesting places, and may give them a stronger motivation to practice.

To use authentic materials, look for materials that contain words with the sounds you're practicing or that can be described or discussed using those sounds. Then plan what you'll have students do with the material. The activity types listed earlier in the Guided Practice and Communicative Practice sections will often work. Depending on the type of material, you might ask students to:

- Practice reading the material aloud.
- Summarize or tell a story about it.
- Ask and answer questions.
- Write and practice a dialog that fits the material.
- Do impromptu role plays.
- Compare two items and describe the differences.
- Make a list of things that they see or words that can describe them.

- Make predictions about what something is or what will happen.
- Brainstorm solutions to a real or imagined problem related to the material.

Some thoughts on tongue twisters

Tongue twisters are phrases or sentences that are designed to be challenging to say. They usually contain several words with the same sound or with two sounds that are easily confused. You may remember practicing tongue twisters like this very famous one: *She sells seashells by the seashore*.

Many teachers like to use tongue twisters in pronunciation practice, and they can be valuable tools if used wisely. However, if they're misused, they can lead to frustration and discouragement. Here are some recommendations.

- Use tongue twisters sparingly. They may be fun once in a while, but students will get tired of them quickly if they have to do them too often.
- Make sure students understand what they're saying. If they don't understand the words, it becomes just a difficult tongue exercise, and that's not much fun.
- Don't make the tongue twisters too hard or too long, or they become pointless. If *you* can't say a tongue twister easily, your students probably won't be able to say it at

all. For example, here's one that is hard enough to discourage even the most eager student: *The sixth sick sheik's sixth sheep's sick.*

- Don't emphasize speed too soon. We've probably all practiced tongue twisters in our own language, trying to say them several times very quickly, but it's much harder to do that in a new language. Don't rush until students are ready.
- Don't jump too quickly from explanation and very controlled practice directly to a difficult tongue twister. Do some practice with simple, ordinary sentences first. (After all, you wouldn't give somebody one tennis lesson and then send them to play at Wimbledon, would you? They need lots of easier practice first!)
- Here are some examples of tongue twisters that are simple and reasonably easy to understand:

We took a cheap ship trip.

Funny Frank fell fifty feet.

Orange jello, lemon jello

The three trees

Betty loves the velvet vest best.



Meeting students' real-life needs

With adult or young-adult students who need to use English in their everyday lives, especially in an ESL (rather than EFL)

context, taking a few minutes to answer questions that students bring in can be a good way to begin a pronunciation lesson. Ask students to write down and bring to class the words or phrases that they've had trouble pronouncing or understanding in their daily activities, such as street names (*Harvard Boulevard* vs. *Harbor Boulevard*), cities (*Irvine, Las Vegas, La Jolla*), words they need in their jobs or studies (*cash register, availability, anesthesiologist*) or even beverages at Starbucks (*vanilla spice latte*). These can be used as the basis for practice with common words and sound combinations. Students might also appreciate help in practicing the pronunciation of their own address, phone number, or other basic information. This practice gives students a sense that they have a say in what they do in class, and it often fits their needs better than using only what's in the textbook. Getting the specific help they need can empower them and make a real difference in their lives.

Auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning

People learn in many ways: by hearing, by seeing, and by touching and manipulating objects. Everyone can use all of these skills, although most people are stronger in some types of learning than in others. In planning pronunciation teaching, we should try to include all three learning modalities:

- **Auditory learning (learning through listening):** Listening to a model provided by the teacher or a recording.
- **Visual learning (learning through seeing):** Watching how the teacher or someone on a video produces sounds, using mirrors so students can see how their own mouths move, looking at sagittal section diagrams or a dental model to see how sounds are produced, or using phonemic symbols as a visual representation of sounds.
- **Kinesthetic learning (learning through doing):** Using gestures and movements to represent sounds, using feathers, straws, rubber bands, or other gadgets to help students understand how sounds are produced or to guide their own pronunciation.

Your pronunciation toolbox

To help you teach using all three learning modalities, you'll need to have the right tools. Explanations alone aren't enough to help students achieve good pronunciation; merely pointing out what they should do is sometimes meaningless. Tools and gadgets that students can see and touch help them understand pronunciation better. Some of the most useful tools for teaching pronunciation are described here. See box 7.1 for pictures.

Before you start using any of these tools and gadgets, think carefully about whether they're appropriate for your group of students. Ask yourself: Is this tool safe for my students, given their age and maturity level? Will it hurt them, or will they hurt it? Is there any possible way my students can use this tool to get into mischief or cause distractions? Will it make a mess in the classroom? Will my students understand the purpose of using this tool? Most importantly, will it help the class achieve a learning goal?

Mirrors are absolutely necessary in teaching pronunciation. It's not always easy for students to feel whether their lips are rounded or whether their tongue is touching their teeth, but with a mirror they can see what's happening. If you can't find enough small mirrors, try using blank CDs. They don't reflect as well as real mirrors, but they're cheap, easy to get, and not easily breakable.

A dental model (the kind dentists use to teach children how to brush their teeth) is a good way to show students what's happening inside their mouths. Use your hand as a "tongue" to show the articulation of sounds. You can make a "tongue puppet" out of red or pink felt or other fabric to cover your hand to make a more realistic "tongue," or put a sock over your hand. It's much easier to see what's inside the mouth with the dental model than by trying to look inside the

teacher's mouth, and probably more pleasant, too! (A list of sources is at the end of this chapter.)

If you don't have a dental model, you can use Marsha Chan's technique of using your own hands to show the pronunciation of sounds. Hold one hand with the palm down to represent the roof of the mouth. Bend your fingertips down a bit to represent the teeth. Use your other hand as the tongue, showing how it moves and touches parts of the roof of the mouth. (Source: "Using Your Hands to Teach Pronunciation," a teacher training video from Sunburst Media. See a short demo video at <http://www.sunburstmedia.com/UsgHands-demo.html>)

The disadvantage of using either a dental model or your hands is that they have no lips. Both tools are great for demonstrating sounds and contrasts like /θ/ and /s/, /z/ and /dʒ/, or /n/ and /ŋ/, but not so helpful for /f/, /v/, /m/, /w/, or other sounds that involve the lips. Maybe someday someone will invent a dental model with lips!

Listening tubes like those sold under the names Whispy Reader, Toobaloo, Hear Myself Sound Phone, WhisperPhone, and others are basically a curved tube. When learners hold them like a telephone receiver, speaking into one end and listening to the other, they can hear their own voices more

clearly while background noise in the classroom is blocked out. Listening tubes are useful for both children and adults, although some companies' models are really too small to be comfortable for adults. Listening tubes can also be easily made out of PVC pipe and elbow-shaped fittings. A cheap-and-quick version can also be made out of folded paper. (See

7.1 Tools for teaching pronunciation



A dental model lets you show tongue positions for sounds.



the pictures in Box 7.1 and the pattern at the end of this chapter, after the example exercises.)

Rubber bands can be used to illustrate the difference between tense and lax vowels. Have students hold a rubber band and stretch it as they say words like *see, say, new, or go* to help them feel the tension in their tongues and lips during those vowels. Have them hold the rubber band loosely when they say *sit, set, book, or sat* to illustrate that those sounds are pronounced in a more relaxed way. Be sure to use the thickest rubber bands you can find. (The ones I buy list their size as #84.) Thin ones stretch or break too easily, and they're easier for students to get in trouble with by snapping each other or flinging them across the room.

Drinking straws are useful for practicing several sounds. To help students get a feeling for the tongue position for /r/, have them grip a straw horizontally between their teeth (like a dog holding a bone in its mouth) so that their tongue is guided backwards and can't reach the alveolar ridge. For /l/, have them bite gently on the end of a straw, with the last 1/4 inch (0.5 centimeter) in their mouths. Have them put the tips of their tongues above the short bit of straw that extends into their mouths. The straw will push the tip of the tongue up to the alveolar ridge.

When practicing /w/, and /kw/, and /uw/, which all require rounded lips, have students put the end of a straw in their mouths and tighten their lips around it to encourage lip rounding. For /u/, use a bigger straw (a milkshake or “boba” straw) or a finger-sized rolled-up paper so that the lips are a little less rounded.

Feathers or tissue paper can be used to illustrate the aspiration of initial stops /p/, /t/, and /k/. When we say words beginning with these sounds, there's a small puff of air that makes the feather or paper move slightly. If students are not aspirating the stops enough, the feather or paper won't move. (Some books recommend using a lighted candle for this purpose. However, this can be quite dangerous, and is *not* a good idea, even with adult students.)

Using gadgets with adults: Some teachers wonder if it's all right to use kinesthetic teaching aids with adult students. I've found that most tools work well with adults, as long as you explain the purpose of what you're doing and tell them how it will help them improve their pronunciation. Most adults appreciate these learning aids if they see that they have a learning purpose. While you won't want to do extremely childish or cute things with adults, you don't have to be businesslike 100% of the time either, even with business-oriented adults.

Games for teaching sounds

We've been looking at activities for teaching pronunciation.

Games can also be effective teaching tools. First let's consider the difference between an activity and a game.

Games have an element of competition—between individuals, between teams, or even with individuals competing against their own past performance. Games have rules that need to be followed, and there are usually winners and losers (or to be kind, we could say “non-winners.”) In activities that are not games, the main purpose is not to win, but to accomplish a purpose. Everybody can succeed at the same time. Even though some students may be checking their own work against that of others to see who is doing the best, the main point is not competition.

You can turn many activities into games by adding an element of competition. Divide the class into teams and have them take turns doing bits of practice: Read words with correct pronunciation, identify which sound they hear, think of a word that rhymes with a given word, list words starting with a given sound, or many other possibilities. Whether you count points or award prizes is up to you. (A round of applause can be a great prize, and it's free!)

You can turn many common games into pronunciation teaching tools. For example:

Bingo: Make Bingo grids with minimal pairs using vowels or consonants, or pairs of words that are the same except for stress. (See the example near the end of this chapter. The basic rules of Bingo are given there.) For additional practice, students can take turns calling the Bingo words.

Card games: Children's card games like Go Fish and Crazy Eights can be used to practice pronunciation if we make cards with pictures of objects that contain the sounds you want to practice instead of the usual hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades. Look here for instructions for basic card games: <http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/card-games>.

Concentration: This is a game played with cards that match up in pairs: A word and its meaning, a picture and its word, etc. The cards are set out upside down. Players take turns choosing two cards to see if they match. If they do, they are left face up and the player gets a point. If they don't match, they're turned upside down again and the next player chooses two cards. The object of the game is to find as many matching pairs as possible.

Board games: Find or make a game board with spaces leading from the first to the last space. Write questions or

instructions on cards or slips of paper. Change the questions to practice different subject matter. Players throw dice, move the indicated number of spaces, choose a card and answer the question. The object of the game is to reach the “finish” square first.

Unless you’re teaching young children, be careful about how many games you use. They’re the icing on the cake, not the cake itself. Students will overdose if they have too much.

Classroom management while using activities, games, and gadgets

Teachers sometimes worry that if they use pair work, games, toys, and gadgets in teaching, the class will be noisy and out of control. This can certainly happen, especially with elementary or junior high school-age learners. However, if you have a plan for good classroom management, your class can be purposeful and under control even while having fun. Here are some suggestions that can be adapted to fit the age and attitudes of your students:

- **Choose your game or activity carefully** to fit the needs, abilities, and age of your students. If the activity is too complex for young learners, or too childish for older learners, it won’t be successful.

- **Be purposeful.** Don’t treat an activity, game, or use of a gadget as *just silly play*. Yes, it’s fun, but it should also have a serious learning purpose. Help students feel that they’re learning and accomplishing something.
- **Build accountability** into your activity. Give students a specific task to do, something to produce, or a chart to fill in to ensure that they’re on task.
- **Explain** what the students are going to do and why. For example, you might say, “This game will help you practice the /v/ sound” or “When you imitate this video, it will help your intonation sound more natural.”
- **Give simple, clear instructions** step by step. Plan ahead of time how you’ll give instructions. (Exactly what are the steps for students to follow? What words will you use to explain them? What misunderstandings could arise, and how can you avoid these by making the instructions clearer?) Check to be sure students understand the instructions. Some teachers like to ensure understanding by having students repeat the instructions back to them. Demonstrate what to do by doing it yourself or by trying it with a student.
- **Remind students** of your expectations for behavior, especially with younger learners. They shouldn’t be

allowed to goof off or misbehave just because they're doing something "fun." Make your expectations stick.

- During the activity, **walk around** the room and monitor students' work. Nip problems in the bud. Keep students on task.
- **Don't overdo** the "fun stuff," or students will get bored. Use games or gadgets as the dessert, not the whole meal.

Correcting pronunciation errors

When and how should we correct students' pronunciation errors? Students need feedback so they'll know what they're doing wrong and they can try to do it differently and begin to improve, but we don't want them to feel too discouraged by focusing too much on what they *can't* do. Adult students sometimes ask the teacher to correct all their pronunciation mistakes, but this really isn't practical or even very helpful. To a student who is having trouble, constant corrections might feel like nagging or scolding and have a negative impact on his/her motivation. So we have to be selective about which errors we choose to correct and how we do it. Goodwin (2001) makes this suggestion:

"Which errors should we correct? Rather than overwhelming the student with feedback on every possible error, follow the guidelines below:

1. Errors which cause a breakdown in communication
2. Errors which occur as a pattern, not as isolated mistakes
3. Errors which relate to the pronunciation points we are teaching"

When we do make a correction, there are many ways to do it. Choose the way that works best for you, your students, and your teaching style. Here are a few possibilities:

- Model the correct pronunciation and have the student imitate it. Make sure the student realizes that what you're modeling is different from what was originally said.
- Explain the difference between the correct way and the student's mistake, giving instructions for the correct pronunciation. Then have the student repeat.
- Demonstrate the student's way and then the correct way so the student can hear the difference. Then have the student repeat.
- During pair or group work, take notes of errors that many students are producing and practice those points with the whole group afterwards. This has the advantage of not calling attention to the student who has made the mistake. On the other hand, it has the disadvantage that the students who made the mistakes might still not realize that they were doing something wrong.

- Know when to quit. If a student tries and tries and still can't "get it," pushing further at that moment could just lead to frustration, anger, and resistance in the future. It's sometimes better to say "It's OK. We'll keep working on it," move on to something else, and come back to that problem later. Reassure students that learning pronunciation is a process that takes time. They don't have to be perfect immediately.

Review is important!

Don't be afraid to teach the same point more than once or to review often. If students wonder why they have to practice the same sounds again and again, make an analogy with learning to play a musical instrument. Someone who is learning to play the violin can't say, "Oh, I've already played that song. I don't need to play it again." They know that they have to play the same song many times, haltingly at first and then more smoothly, before they can play it really well.

Example activities

On the next pages are examples of some of the activity types that have been described in this chapter. Any of these activities can be adapted to practice other sounds or to fit the needs of your particular students.

Which Vowel Sound?

Say each word in the list below. Decide what vowel sound it contains and write the word in the box with the same sound. There should be three words in each box.

Say	Made	Sad	Still	Trip
Cap	Next	Big	Spell	Red
Three	Clean	Drank	Paid	Leave



1. /iy/ beet	2. /ɪ/ bit	3. /ey/ bait	4. /ɛ/ bet	5. /æ/ bat

Which Vowel Sound?

Listening Discrimination Practice

The purpose of this sound-sorting activity is to practice hearing and identifying sounds. The handout has boxes for some of the vowel sounds, each labeled with a phonemic symbol and an example word. Practice the example words in each box and the words in the list at the top of the page. In pairs, students decide which sound the words represent and write them in the correct boxes.

A similar activity can be done by writing each word on a card and having students sort the cards into groups based on the sound they represent.

Which word is different? Put a check mark by its letter.

Example: a. b. c.

1. a. b. c.

2. a. b. c.

3. a. b. c.

Recording script:

Which word is different? Put a check mark by its letter.

Example: a. ship b. sheep c. sheep

1. neat knit neat

2. fill fill feel

3. leave live live



Circle the word that you hear.

Example: shop chop

1. ship chip

2. shoe chew

3. wash watch

Recording script:

Circle the word that you hear.

Example: shop

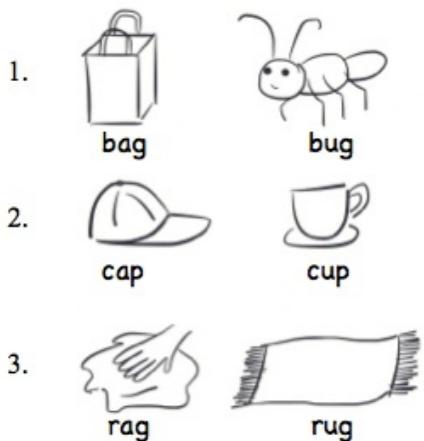
1. chip

2. shoe

3. wash



Circle the picture that matches the word that you hear.



Recording script:

Circle the picture that matches the word that you hear.

1. bug

2. cap

3. rug



Which Word Do You Hear? Listening Discrimination Practice

Three variations of activities in which students identify the sounds they hear.

1. “Odd man out.” Which of the three words sounds different?
2. Circle the word that you hear.
3. Circle the picture that matches the word that you hear.

/iy/ & /I/

/iy/

eat	review	We received it.
easy	believe	three green leaves
mean	machine	Leave me alone.
cheap	police	Thieves steal things.
key	tree	We'll eat at three.
teacher	guarantee	It's completely free.

/I/

big	interesting	fish are swimming
little	building	chilly winter
city	business	thick and thin sticks
sister	dictionary	I fixed the window.
within	giving	make a quick list
assistant	music	six big pigs

/iy/ /I/

bead	bid
reach	rich
cheek	chick
steal	still
sleeper	slipper
feeling	filling
sheep	ship
beaten	bitten

1. I received three thick dictionaries as a birthday gift.
2. People in this city like to see films in the evenings.
3. The field was filled with leafy green trees.
4. Sixteen children fell asleep after their visit to the beach.
5. Please read this list of instructions before you begin.
6. Listen to me while I sing a silly song.
7. People in different countries speak different languages.
8. Libby's having a party on January sixteenth.

Bill is talking to his English teacher after class:

Bill: You wanted to see me, Ms. Lee?

Ms. Lee: Yes, Bill. Have a seat. I've noticed you've been falling asleep in class a lot lately. Is everything OK?

Bill: I'm fine. I've just been staying up too late.

Ms. Lee: You've also been eating in class—chips, candy, even cheese sandwiches.

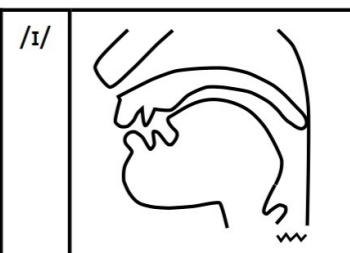
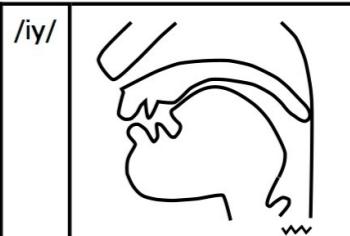
Bill: I was hungry. Since I got up late, I didn't have time to eat breakfast.

Ms. Lee: You've been using Twitter during class, too. Can't you do your tweeting after class?

Bill: I'm sorry, Ms. Lee. I won't do it again.

Ms. Lee: Well, just try to get some more sleep. You can't learn English if you're asleep in class.

Bill: I will. I'll start sleeping in my history class instead. Just kidding!



Words, Sentences, Dialogs Controlled Practice

This handout lists words, phrases, minimal pairs, sentences, and a dialog to practice the vowel sounds /iy/ and /I/. They can be used for choral or individual repetition practice, or as a springboard for students to add their own words and sentences or to write variations of the dialog.

Partner Dictation: Person 1

These are your sentences. Say them and your partner will write them.

1. Do you want a new seat?
2. We watched a movie about pirates.
3. I don't want to think.

Write your partner's sentences here:

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
-

Partner Dictation: Person 2

These are your sentences. Say them and your partner will write them.

1. It's just a little road.
2. Did you buy a new fan?
3. The tip wasn't big enough.

Write your partner's sentences here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Partner Dictation Listening Discrimination/Controlled Practice

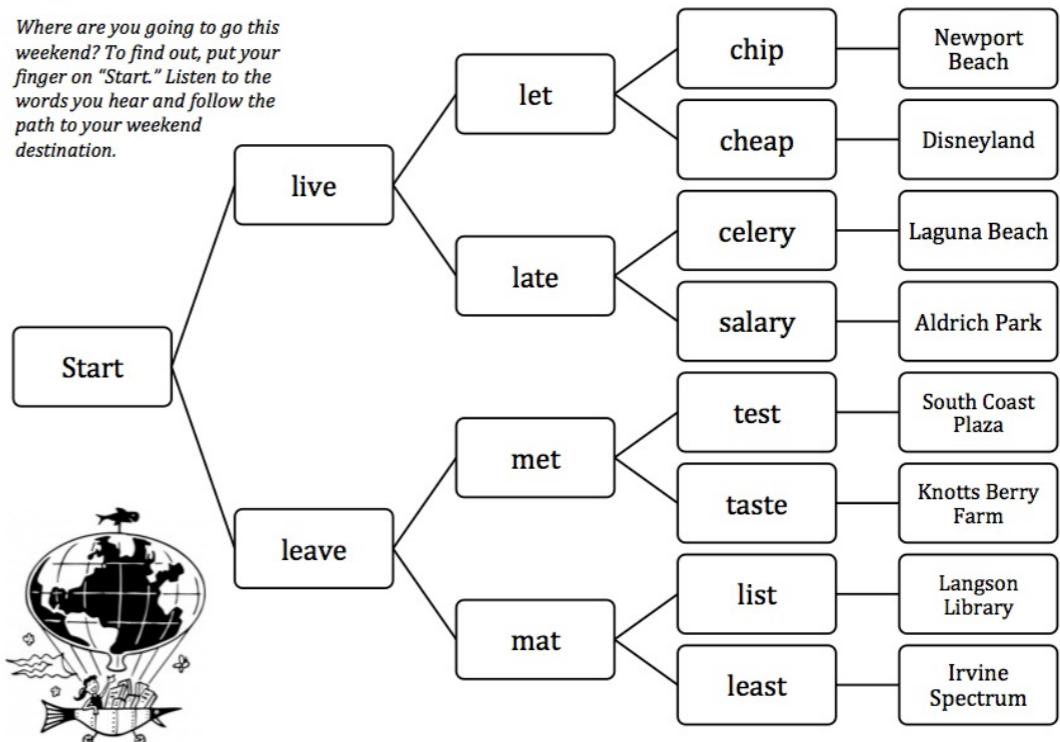
Have students work in pairs. Each partner looks at a different half of the handout. (Cut the copies in half or have students fold the paper in half and look at just one set of sentences.) Students should not look at their partner's sentences.

The partners take turns dictating their sentences for their partner to write down. When they're finished, they both check what they've written against their partner's paper.

The sentences in this example could be based on minimal pair sentences: "Do you want a new seat/sheet? We watched a movie about pirates/pilots. I don't want to think/sink." However, any sentences that fit what you've been practicing will work.

Weekend Plans

Where are you going to go this weekend? To find out, put your finger on "Start." Listen to the words you hear and follow the path to your weekend destination.



Weekend Plans Listening Discrimination Practice

The purpose of this activity is to practice hearing and pronouncing the front vowels.

Tell students they're planning their weekend. To find out where they're going to go, you'll give them some clues. Have students point at "Start." Then read one of the words in the next set of branching boxes ("live" or "leave"). Students follow the line to that box. Continue until you reach one of the destination boxes on the right.

Next, have students play in pairs. Partners take turns saying words while their partner follows the path.

If there's time, replace the printed words with other minimal pairs and have students play again.

Based on an activity from *Pronunciation Games* (Hancock 1995)

Partner 1				
	1	2	3	4
A	bed	mat		pen
B		sat		
C	man		bad	pan
D			men	

Partner 2				
	1	2	3	4
A			head	
B	sad		shall	had
C		said		
D	shell	met		set

Simple Info Gap with /æ/ and /ɛ/ Guided Practice

This is the simplest form of information gap activity. Have students work in pairs. Each partner looks at a different version of the chart. (Cut the copies in half or have students fold the paper in half and just look at one side.) Students should not look at their partner's paper. Point out that the words in the boxes have lots of /æ/ and /ɛ/ sounds.

The partners ask each other questions to try to find out what words are in each box. (What word is in box A-1?)



Calendar Info Gap with /θ/ and /s/ Guided Practice

Have students work in pairs. Each partner looks at a different calendar. (Cut the copies in half or have students fold the paper in half and just look at one calendar.) Students should not look at their partner's calendar.

The partners ask each other questions to try to find a day when they're both free to do something together. (Have lunch? Go to the beach? Elope to Las Vegas?) Point out that the events on the calendars have lots of /θ/ and /s/ sounds. Encourage them to say the dates, most of which also have /θ/: fourth, fifth, etc.

Start

kitchen	dishes	three	eggs	put
never	write	shoe	seven	knob
miss	tag	giraffe	tax	bath
clock	good	desk	cat	thin
book	chair	part	name	neck

Finish

Sound Maze Guided Practice

- This activity uses a grid of squares with words written in them. The goal is to move from “Start” to “Finish” by moving from one square to another, following a rule. Here the rule is to move to a square that starts with the same sound that the previous sound ended with. (E.g., kitchen → never → write).
- Mazes can also use other rules: Find words that start with the same sound, words that have the same vowel sound, words with the same number of syllables or the same stress pattern, and so forth.

chip	luck	coat	pat	caught
rob	ship	pet	sale	sick
pull	end	FREE	cheap	ball
sheep	edge	sell	pool	rub
bowl	seek	lock	and	age

Ways to win in Bingo

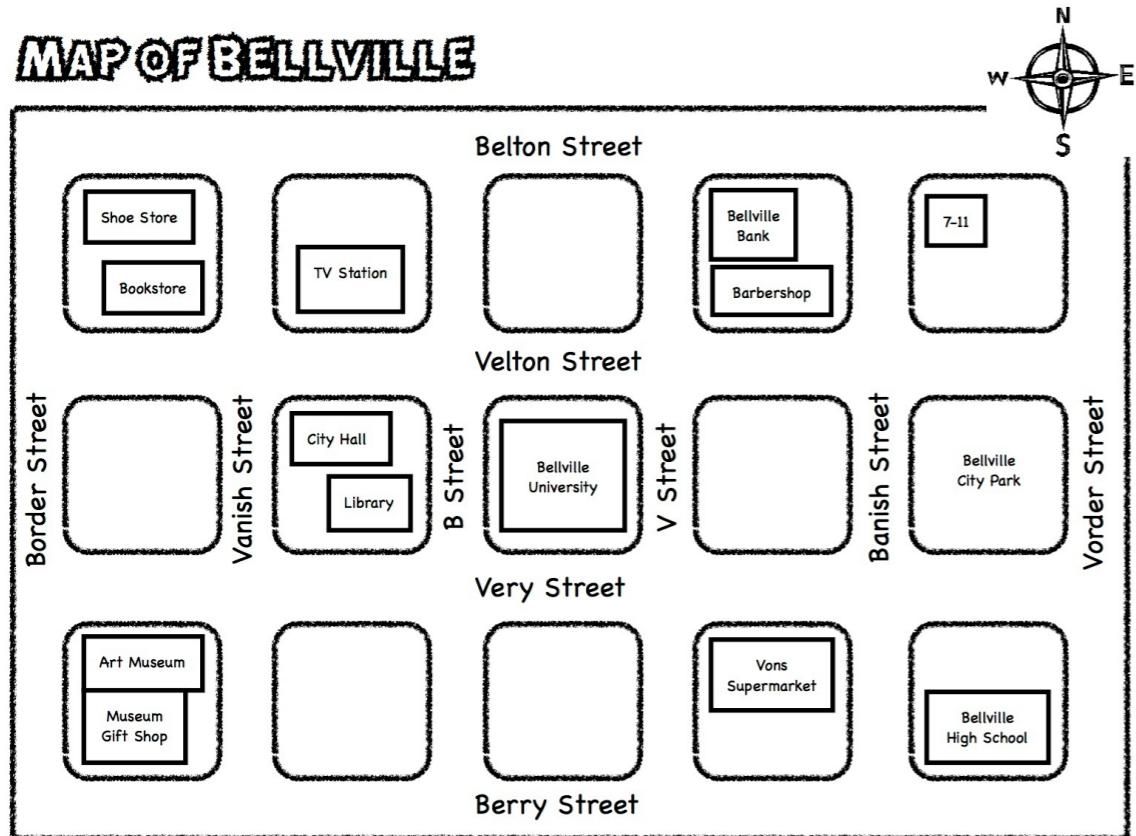
x	x	x	x	x
	x			
x		Free		
x				
x				

x				x
	x		x	
		x		
	x		x	
x				x

Vowel Bingo Listening Discrimination/Guided Practice

- Each student has a paper with a grid of squares with words written in them. This example has minimal pairs with different vowel sounds: chip and cheap, pat and pet, etc. To simplify preparation, give students blank cards. Write the words on the board and have students copy them in the boxes at random. To make cards reusable, put each one inside a clear sheet protector. Players can mark boxes with dry-erase markers.
- The teacher has a set of cards with the same words and calls out words one at a time. Players find the matching words on their cards and put a checkmark or a small marker on them.
- When a player has covered up five squares in a row vertically, horizontally, or diagonally, he/she calls out “Bingo!”
- Have the student read off his/her winning words. Check to make sure you really called those words and the student is saying them correctly.
- Play again with students taking turns calling out the words.

MAP OF BELLVILLE



Map of Bellville

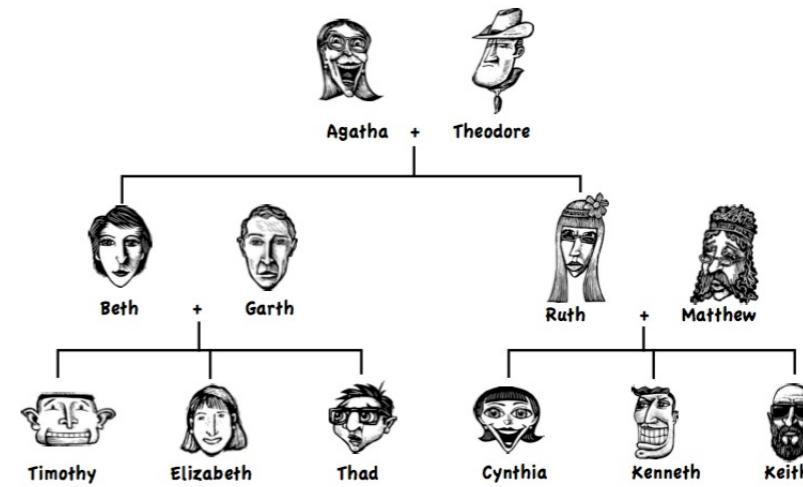
Guided/Communicative Practice

Point out that all the street names in Bellville have the /b/ or /v/ sounds in them. Have students repeat the names after you.

Students work in pairs. One student chooses a spot on the map to represent where he/she is standing now. He/she chooses a destination on the map and asks his/her partner how to get there. ("Could you tell me how to get to the Art Museum?" etc.) The partner gives directions, using the street names. Then students change roles.

Students can also add extra place names in the empty blocks, trying to use the target sounds as much as possible. Then they explain to their partner what they've added and why.

The Thistlethorpe Family Tree



The Thistlethorpe Family Tree Guided/Communicative Practice

Give pairs of students the family tree. Point out that all the names have /θ/ in them. Have students practice the names of the family members. Make sure they know family vocabulary (cousin, uncle, daughter-in-law, etc.)

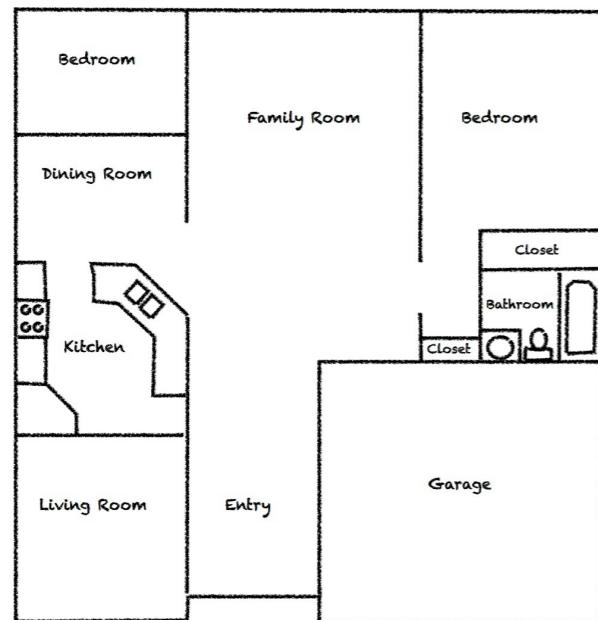
- Put students in pairs. Have them ask each other questions about the family members: "Who are Beth's children?" "Timothy, Elizabeth, and Thad."
- Have students play a guessing game. One partner chooses a family member and gives his/her partner clues. ("This person is Matthew's son.") The other partner guesses who it is.
- Info gap activity: Make two copies of the family tree, labeled "A" and "B," and remove different names from each one. (Make sure there are one or two names that are included on both versions.) Give "A" to one partner and "B" to the other. They ask each other questions to fill in the missing names.
- Have students tell stories about the family members, based on their pictures and family relationships.

Based on an activity in *Teaching Pronunciation: A Sourcebook and Reference Guide*. (Celce-Murcia et al. 2010)

Your New House

What do you want to add to your new house? Draw some furniture and other things in the house below. Then tell your partner about what you've drawn. Here are some ideas:

Doors	Table	Couch	Car
Windows	Chairs	Armchair	Tools
Curtains	Bed	Desk	Plants & trees
Rugs	Dresser	TV	Flowers
Fireplace	Bookshelves	Lamps	What else?



Your New House Communicative Practice

Practice the vocabulary on the handout together, emphasizing the pronunciation of words with /r/ and /l/.

In pairs or groups, students brainstorm items they want to put in the house and draw their additions. Each student can create his/her own drawing or each group can choose a “designer” to draw the group’s decisions to one group plan.

Students share their drawings in one of these ways:

- Each student explains his/her own drawing to someone in the same group or a different group.
- Each group tells another group about its group drawing.
- Each group tells the whole class about its group drawing.

Phil's Fabulous Fast Food



Breakfast

Peach Pancakes. Four fluffy buttermilk pancakes served with fresh sliced peaches \$4.95

Phil's special French toast, topped with fresh blueberries \$4.50

Lunch & Dinner

Phil's fabulous hamburger and French fries \$5.50

Fish sandwich and crispy fried onion rings \$6.95

Two pieces of crispy fried chicken with a fresh, hot biscuit, butter, and honey \$3.50

Slice of pizza with pepperoni and pineapple \$2.95

Phil's Bargain Menu

Fried chicken leg \$1.00

French fries (very small size) \$1.00

Soft pretzel with lots of salt \$1.00

Fruit parfait made with vanilla frozen yogurt and fresh fruit \$1.00

Beverages

Coke • Diet Coke • 7-Up • Iced Tea • Coffee

Small \$1.25

Large \$1.75

Dessert

Hot fudge sundae: Vanilla ice cream with hot chocolate sauce and chopped peanuts \$3.45

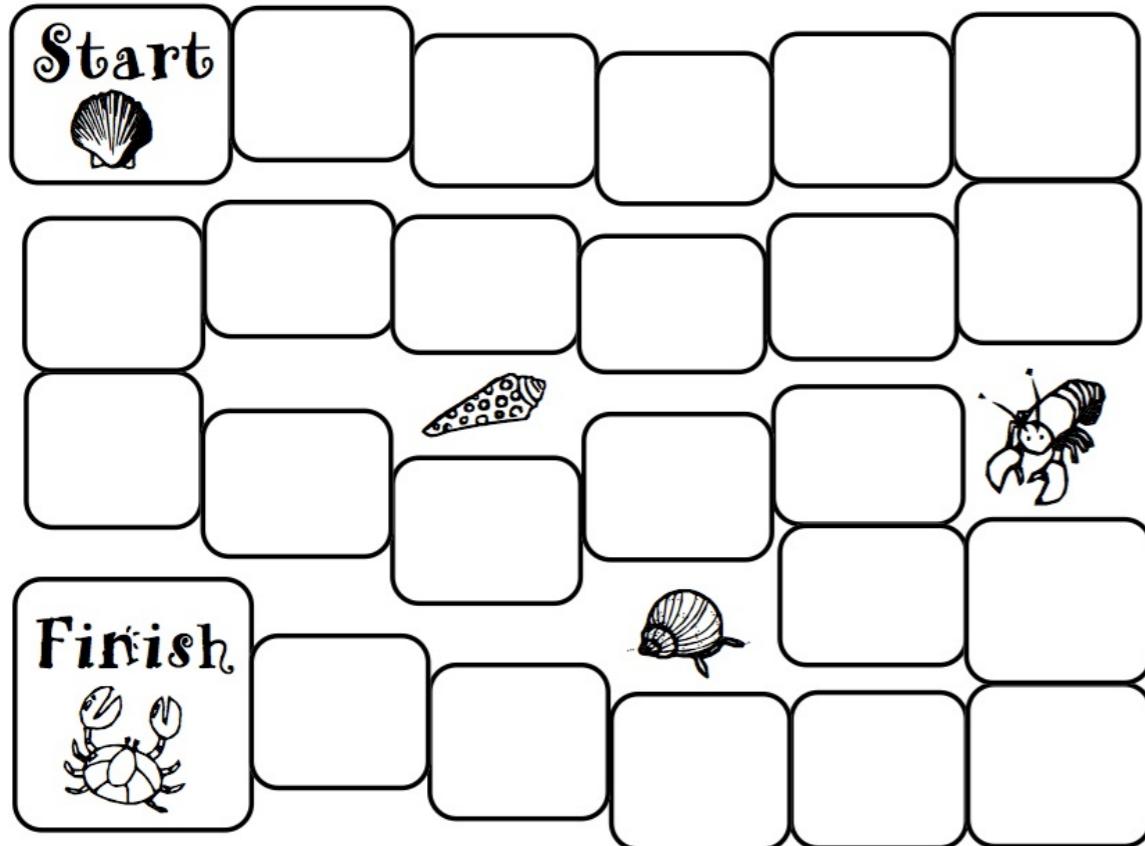
Peach pie with a scoop of vanilla ice cream \$3.45



Phil's Fabulous Fast Food Communicative Practice

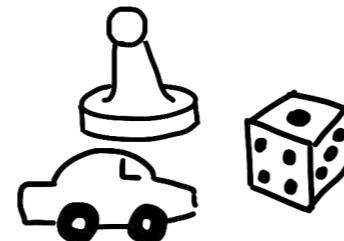
The menu contains lots of these sounds: /f v p b h/.

- Present and practice a sample dialog for ordering food with parts for a customer and the cashier. Then have students do their own role play as customer and cashier, ordering the food they want.
- A variation: Each pair/group has a set amount of money to buy lunch. They have to decide what to order so everyone has something to eat, staying within their budget.
- Another variation: Groups of students pretend to be the board of directors of Phil's Fabulous Fast Food, an up-and-coming new fast food chain. The board will discuss the items on their menu, deleting some items or suggesting additions.



Challenge!

Say this tongue twister:
Thelma Smith sells thimbles.



Name a word that starts
with this sound: /ð/

Which two of these words
have the same vowel sound?
good, full, shut, rude

Pronunciation Review Board Game

For each group of 3-5 players, you'll need:

- A game board
- Dice
- A marker for each player (a small toy, eraser, coin, etc.)
- A set of question cards

Make question cards by writing these types of instructions on small cards or slips of paper:

- Words or short sentences containing sounds you're practicing. Students must read them correctly.
- Questions about pronunciation. For example:
 - Which of these words begin with the same sound? *This, thin, then, that*
 - Which two of these words have the same vowel sound? *Bread, bead, head, near*
 - Which of these words end in /z/? *Dogs, pigs, cats*.
 - How many sounds are there in the word *ship*?
 - Name a word that starts with the same sound as *cat*.

The first player throws the dice and moves his/her marker that number of spaces. He/she picks up a question card and answers the question. If he/she can do it successfully (as judged by the other players, with the teacher as referee), he/she can stay on that space. If not, he/she must move back to his/her previous space. It's fine for players to help each other.

If you want, include some cards labeled "Challenge." These are extra difficult questions or tongue twisters. If a player can successfully answer a "Challenge" question, he/she takes an extra turn.

Players take turns in this way until everyone reaches "Finish." The first player to reach "Finish" is the winner.

Sources of pronunciation teaching tools

Dental models

- The most reliable source at a reasonable price is Lakeshore Learning: <http://lakeshorelearning.com>. Search for “dental model.” They’re also available from websites that sell supplies to dentists, but these are usually much more expensive.

Listening tubes

- Hear Myself Sound Phone:
<http://www.lakeshorelearning.com/> (search for "Hear Myself Sound Phone")
- Whispy Reader:
<http://www.imaginativelearningtools.com/shop/customer/home.php>
- Toobaloo: <http://www.toobaloo.com/>
- Webber Phone:
http://www.superduperinc.com/WXYZ_pages/wf22_44.html
- Elephone:
<http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=ELE350>
- WhisperPhone/WhisperPhone Element:
<http://www.whisperphone.com/>

- Phonics Phone:

<http://www.crystalspringsbooks.com/phonics-phone-mo.html>

Making your own listening tubes

You can make listening tubes yourself from PVC pipe. Get the fittings you need at Home Depot, Lowes, etc. and assemble them easily. For each listening tube you’ll need a straight piece of pipe about 5 inches/12 cm. long and two elbow joints. You can glue the pieces together, but they usually stay together well enough without glue. Be careful not to make the middle (straight) section too long, or the phone will be too long to fit between your ear and mouth.

You can also make listening tubes from heavy paper using the pattern and instructions on the last page of this chapter. (See Box 7.1 for pictures of several kinds of listening tubes.)

Kazoos

Party supply stores often sell inexpensive plastic kazoos in the party favor section. They’re also available online from Oriental Trading Company: <http://www.orientaltrading.com/> Search for “kazoo.” Kazoos that are too small don’t make a good sound. They should be at least four inches (10 cm.) long. Kazoos made of hard plastic or metal have a better sound than those made of softer plastic.

Things you can find in hobby or craft stores

Feathers, pipe cleaners, glass blobs, popsicle sticks are usually available in hobby or craft supply stores or some do-it-yourself stores. Some may be available in WalMart, Target, and similar stores that sell a wide variety of products.

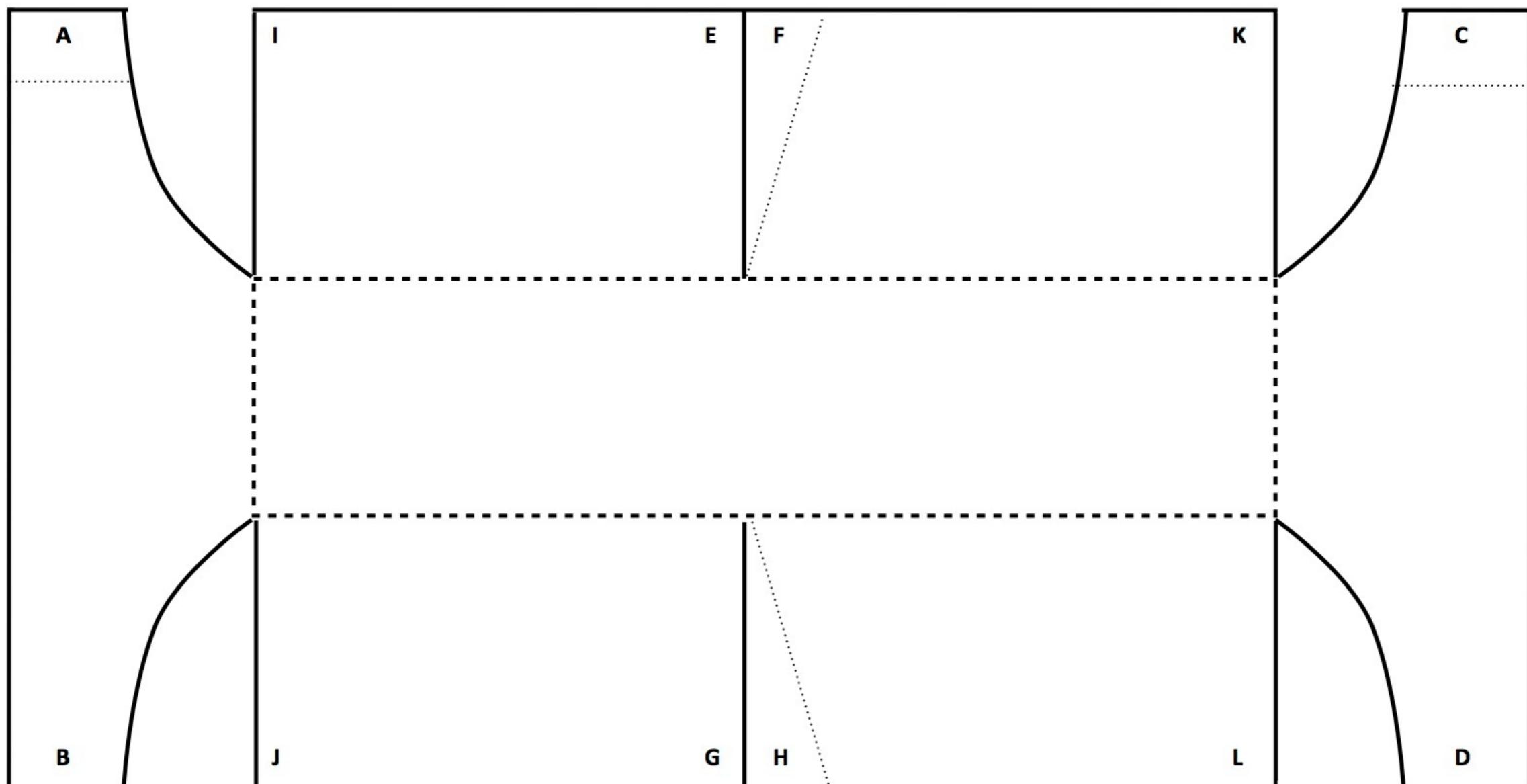
Things you can find in supermarkets

Straws, plastic spoons, balloons, mirrors, and many other items can be found in supermarkets, discount stores, dollar stores, or other places that sell general merchandise.

For a good selection of very thick rubber bands, you'll have to go to an office supply store or stationery store. For best results, get the thickest ones you can find.

Paper Listening Tube

1. Cut out the pattern below along the solid lines.
2. Fold up on the dotted lines.
3. Lap tab A over tab B as far as the light dotted line and tape in place to make a small tubelike area. Do the same with tabs C and D.
4. Lap E over F as far as the light dotted line and tape together. Do the same with G and H.
5. Fold the tubelike ends up and tape I and J to their sides. Do the same thing with K and L.
6. Bring the long edges of the middle section together and tape together.
7. Hold the finished tube to your ear and mouth like a telephone receiver and speak into it to make your voice sound louder.



Syllables and Word Stress

Segmentals and suprasegmentals

Until now we've been talking about individual phonemes—consonants and vowels—which together are called the **segmental features of pronunciation**. In the next five chapters we'll be going beyond just the sounds to talk about **suprasegmental features**—the aspects of pronunciation that affect more than just a single sound. The most important suprasegmental features of English are:

- **Word stress:** The extra emphasis given to one syllable in a word that has more than one syllable.
- **Thought groups:** Groups of spoken words that form a grammatical and semantic unit and seem to fit together.

- **Prominence:** The one word or syllable in each thought group or sentence that receives more stress than the others.
- **Intonation:** The pitch pattern of a sentence—the up-and-down “melody” of your voice as you speak.
- **Rhythm:** The characteristic pattern of longer and shorter, stressed and unstressed syllables in a language.
- **Connected speech:** The changes in pronunciation that happen when words come together and are linked to the words around them.

How important is it for these features of pronunciation to be taught, learned, and used? These days, teachers and scholars recognize that stress, rhythm, intonation, and other suprasegmental features are very important in helping speakers sound natural and be understood, but this hasn't always been the case. Until the 1970s, suprasegmental features were mostly ignored in language classes, and pronunciation teaching usually concentrated on individual sounds. With the growing popularity of **communicative language teaching** beginning in the late 20th century and continuing into the 21st, however, many scholars began to emphasize the importance of suprasegmentals. In fact, some claimed that in order to make speech understandable, pronouncing individual sounds accurately was much less

important than using word stress, rhythm, and intonation well. More recently, scholars and teachers have begun to look for a more balanced approach that helps learners to use both aspects of pronunciation more effectively (Celce-Murcia et al. 2010). As classroom teachers, we need to help our students learn about and practice both individual sounds and the overall musical patterns of English. In this chapter, we'll take a closer look at the first two topics related to suprasegmental features: Syllables and word stress.

Syllables

A **syllable** is a rhythmic unit in speech—a chunk of sound that gets one “beat” in a word. As we’ve read in Chapter 2, each syllable must have a “heart”—usually a vowel, but sometimes a **syllabic consonant**. In English, a syllable can also have one or more consonants before the vowel and one or more consonants after it. Here are some words with the number of syllables in each:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| • <i>book</i> | 1 syllable |
| • <i>pen•cil</i> | 2 syllables |
| • <i>com•put•er</i> | 3 syllables |
| • <i>dic•tion•ar•y</i> | 4 syllables |
| • <i>con•grat•u•la•tions</i> | 5 syllables |
| • <i>re•spon•si•bil•i•ty</i> | 6 syllables |



8.1 Syllables and Stress

Syllables and Word Stress

It may seem that counting the syllables in a word is a simple thing. We just count the beats, maybe clapping or tapping along with the syllables to help us feel the rhythm better. But for learners, counting syllables is not always easy, especially if their native language has different syllable structure patterns than English or a different way of counting syllables. Here are some things that can cause confusion in counting syllables:

- When vowel sounds are spelled with more than one vowel letter or with a final “silent e” (*read, beautiful, make*), learners may count the vowel letters instead of the vowel sounds.
- It’s sometimes hard to tell if a sequence of two vowel letters represents one syllable or two. For example, *cream* (/kriym/) and *suit* (/suwt/) each have one syllable, but *create* (/kriy'eyt/) and *ruin* (/’ruwin/) each have two, even though they’re spelled with the same vowel letters.
- In words with consonant clusters, learners may feel that each consonant in the cluster should have its own syllable, especially if their native language has a strict consonant-vowel syllable structure with few or no clusters. For example, *spring* or *strike* may seem to have

more than one syllable to students who cope with unfamiliar consonant clusters by inserting extra vowels between them.

- Similarly, learners whose languages don't have word-final consonants may add an extra vowel after a consonant at the end of a word and feel that this is an extra syllable.
- Learners may be unsure about when the *-s* and *-ed* endings add an extra syllable and when they don't. (See Chapter 6, "Pronunciation of Some Word Endings.")
- Learners may be fooled by the spelling of words with "disappearing syllables" that are not usually pronounced. (See the next paragraph.)

Disappearing syllables

Some words in English are normally pronounced with what might be called "disappearing syllables"—we see letters in the spelling of the word, and if we pronounce the words very slowly and carefully, we *might* hear a syllable, but in normal pronunciation a syllable is not pronounced. For example, *chocolate* looks like it should have three syllables: *choc•o•late*, but in normal spoken English, it has only two syllables: /'tʃak•lət/. Some other words with similar "disappearing syllables" are listed in Box 8.2. These pronunciations should not be thought of as sloppy or careless; they are normal and acceptable in all types of English.

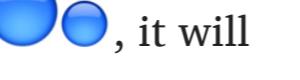
8.2 SOME WORDS WITH "DISAPPEARING SYLLABLES"

The syllables written in smaller letters are not normally pronounced.



aspirin	natur <u>ally</u>
average	restau <u>rant</u>
business	separ <u>ate</u> (adjective only)
camera	temperatu <u>re</u>
chocolate	vegetab <u>le</u>
comfortable	
deliberate	(adjective only) -ary (<i>These are just a few examples</i>)
desperate	elementa <u>ry</u>
different	documenta <u>ry</u>
enviro <u>nment</u>	complimenta <u>ry</u>
evening	
every	-ally (<i>These are just a few examples</i>)
family	basically
favorable, favorite	practically
general	accidentally
interest, interesting	awfully
laboratory	

Word stress

If a word in English has more than one syllable (We call these **polysyllabic words**), one of the syllables is **stressed**; that is, it is emphasized more than the others. It's very important for learners to put the stress in the right place. If the wrong syllable is stressed, listeners may not be able to understand what word is being said. We understand words not only from their sounds, but also from their pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. For example, if a speaker pronounces the word *conversation* with a pattern like this:  when we expect it to have a pattern like this: , it will take us longer to realize what the word is and to understand its meaning.

Characteristics of stressed syllables

How are stressed syllables different from the other syllables in a word? What characteristics does the stressed syllable need to have to let the listener know that it is being emphasized? In English, a stressed syllable can have any or all of the following qualities:

- **It's longer in duration** than the other syllables:

ba n ana

- **It's louder** than the other syllables:


banana

- **It's higher in pitch** than the other syllables:


ba n a na

- **Its vowel sound is more distinct** (It's not reduced):


bənænə

Not every stressed syllable will have all of these qualities, especially if the speaker is talking quickly, but overall, these are the signs that tell the listener which syllable is stressed. It's important for learners to get used to using these signals to make stressed syllables stand out.

Primary and secondary stress

We know that in every polysyllabic word, one syllable has the **main stress**, or **primary stress**. In longer words, there is often another syllable that receives a little stress, but not as much as the main-stress syllable. We say this syllable has **secondary stress**. For example, the word *congratulations* has five syllables, with the primary stress on the fourth syllable:

con grat u **LA**tions



But we can also hear that the second syllable has some stress; it is pronounced with just a bit more force than the syllables before and after it:

con **grat** u **LA**tions

The other syllables in the word have no stress at all. They are called **unstressed syllables**. *Congratulations* has three unstressed syllables: *con*, *u*, and *tions*.

Using phonemic symbols and including symbols to mark primary and secondary stress, we can write *congratulations*

this way: /kən,grætʃə'leyʃənz/. (See the notes in the green box “Symbols for Indicating Stress.”)

It's very important for learners to know where the primary stress in a word is. For teaching purposes, secondary stress is less critical. As long as the primary stress is in the right place, the stress pattern will sound acceptable to most listeners.

Symbols for Indicating Stress

Textbooks and dictionaries use two main ways of indicating stress in words. (Unstressed syllables are usually not marked.)

1. A small vertical line above the line of type at the beginning of a syllable shows primary stress: **com,muni'cation**.

A small vertical line below the line of type at the beginning of a syllable shows secondary stress: **com,muni'cation**.

2. A slanted accent mark with a positive slope above a vowel shows primary stress: **commùnicátion**.

A slanted accent mark with a negative slope above a vowel shows secondary stress: **commùnicación**.

Other ways to indicate primary stress:

3. Write the stressed syllable in capital or bold letters (or both): **communiCAtion**.

4. Underline the stressed syllable: **communicAtion**.

5. Put a circle, dot, or other mark above the stressed syllable:

communication, **communicAtion**.

Characteristics of unstressed syllables

Unstressed syllables are those that don't receive any stress at all. They tend to be weak and somewhat unclear. In contrast to stressed syllables, unstressed syllables can have some or all of these qualities:

- They're shorter in duration than stressed syllables—quick and weak.
- They're a bit quieter than stressed syllables.
- They're lower in pitch than stressed syllables.
- Their vowel sounds are less distinct than those in stressed syllables and are often (but not always) reduced to become /ə/. In fact, in many unstressed syllables it doesn't matter if you say /ə/ or /ɪ/ or a sound in between. The unstressed vowel is just the quick little sound that your tongue makes while moving from one important sound to another. There may be some variation in what the vowel sounds like without causing misunderstanding. (For example, the vowels in the -ed and -s endings in Chapter 6 work this way.)

In order for speech to be easily understood, it's important for unstressed syllables to be *much* shorter and weaker than stressed syllables. This helps the listener recognize the whole syllable pattern of the word and begin to identify it. If there's

not enough contrast between the stressed and unstressed syllables, listeners' minds may be looking for a word that has the wrong stress pattern and never find the actual word.

Which syllable should be stressed?

It sometimes seems that word stress in English is arbitrary—that there's no way to predict which syllable will be stressed in any particular word. Actually, there are rules and generalizations that can often (but not always) predict where word stress will fall. They take into account the historical origin of the word, its prefixes and suffixes, and the word's grammatical function in a sentence. These rules are rather complex, and we will only look at a few of them here. For a more complete discussion of factors that help determine word stress in English, see Celce-Murcia et al. 2010 pp. 185-198.

Teachers sometimes wonder if they should require students to memorize detailed rules about word stress. As with many other aspects of pronunciation, it's *not* a good idea to try to teach *all* the rules to students or to expect them to memorize them, especially with younger learners. It's just too much. In any case, memorizing a rule is seldom the best way to learn to use it well. It's better to guide students to discover some basic generalizations about word stress and give them plenty of practice in using the patterns they find.

Also, when learning new vocabulary, it's very important for students to learn stress patterns along with the pronunciation and meaning of the new words. As they say the words many times through repetition and other practice activities, word stress and syllable patterns will start to feel natural and become a part of the student's permanent knowledge about the words.

The next sections describe some of the simpler guidelines about word stress that are easy to understand and teach.

Nouns and verbs: A general guideline

There's no rule that works 100% of the time in predicting where the stress will be in words in English. However, there is a somewhat reliable generalization about word stress in nouns and verbs that have two syllables.

According to Avery and Ehrlich (1992), two-syllable nouns are stressed on the first syllable more than 90% of the time, while two-syllable verbs are stressed on the second syllable more than 60% of the time. In other words, two-syllable nouns are much more likely to have a stress pattern like this:

, while two-syllable verbs are more likely to have a stress pattern like this: . The following table lists some words that follow this pattern:

Two-Syllable Nouns: 			Two-Syllable Verbs: 		
woman	pencil	window	receive	become	improve
table	color	apple	appear	begin	express
paper	people	mother	describe	compare	believe

Noun-verb pairs with different stress

In keeping with the general rule we've just learned, there are some word pairs consisting of a noun and a verb that are spelled the same way, but the noun is stressed on the first syllable and the verb is stressed on the second syllable. For example, '**permit**' is a noun, but **per'mit** is a verb:

- You need a '**permit** to park here.'
- Please per'**mit** me to help you.



Sometimes a change in vowel sounds goes along with this change in word stress because the unstressed vowels are reduced to /ə/. For example, the first syllable in *contrast* is pronounced as /a/ when it's a noun (and that syllable is stressed) but it's pronounced /ə/ when it's a verb (and that syllable is unstressed.)

Box 8.3 shows a list of some of the most common noun-verb pairs with different stress patterns.

8.3 SOME NOUN-VERB PAIRS WITH DIFFERENT STRESS

When these words are nouns, they're stressed on the first syllable.
When they're verbs, they're stressed on the second.

Addict	Contrast	Implant	Progress	Relay
Address	Converse	Import	Project	Repeat
Affect	Convert	Imprint	Protest	Reprint
Ally	Convict	Incline	Rebel	Research
Combat	Decrease	Increase	Recall	Reset
Combine	Default	Insert	Recap	Rewrite
Commune	Defect	Insult	Record	Subject
Compact	Desert	Intern	Recount	Survey
Compound	Digest	Intrigue	Redirect	Suspect
Compress	Discard	Misprint	Redo	Torment
Conduct	Discharge	Object	Redress	Transfer
Confine(s)	Discount	Offset	Refill	Transplant
Conflict	Escort	Perfect	Refund	Transport
Console	Export	Permit	Refuse	Update
Construct	Extract	Present	Rehash	Upgrade
Contest	Finance	Proceed(s)	Reject	Uplift
Contract	Impact	Produce	Relapse	Upset

These pairs often have very closely related meanings. For example, a '**permit**' is something that *permits* you to do something. However, the meanings are not always so close.

For example, the verb *com'bine* means “to put things together,” while the noun '**combine**' means “a big tractor-like machine that harvests grain.” Although the meanings came from the same source, the connection isn’t obvious now.

It’s important to remind students that while some noun-verb pairs follow this pattern, not all do. For example, *travel*, *practice*, and *answer* can all be used as either nouns or verbs, but they’re always stressed on the first syllable. *Result*, *command*, and *attempt* are always stressed on the second syllable, whether they’re used as nouns or verbs.

Also, there can be individual differences in the stress patterns of the words in Box 8.3. For example, some people pronounce the noun *address* with stress on the first syllable and some with stress on the second syllable. After all, language is often variable and inconsistent.

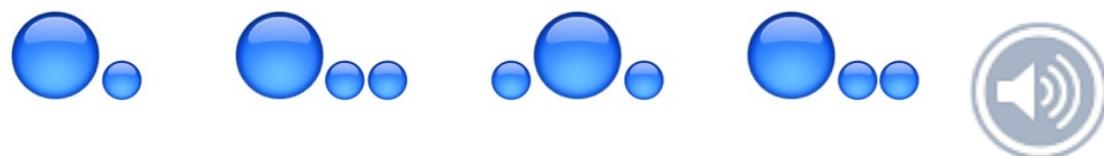
It’s also important to remember that as time goes by, words in English can easily change from one part of speech to another, so a word that is used only as a noun now might become a verb in the future, and vice versa. When this happens, it usually doesn’t change its original stress pattern.

Stress in compound nouns

English has many **compound nouns**—combinations of two words that together make a new noun, such as *newspaper*, *motorcycle*, or *post office*. Some compound nouns are written as one word (*textbook*, *toothpaste*, *haircut*). Others are written as two words (*high school*, *parking lot*, *swimming pool*). A much smaller number of compound nouns are written with a hyphen between the two parts (*T-shirt*, *dry-cleaner*, *six-pack*). There is no firm rule to predict whether a particular compound noun will be written as one word, two words, or with a hyphen—we just have to check a dictionary—and even then, different dictionaries often list different spellings.

No matter how a compound noun is written, its stress is in the same place—on the stressed syllable of the *first* element in the word. The second part of the compound is unstressed:

'**haircut** 'b**a**sketball po'l**i**ceman 'swim**m**ing pool



If the second part of the compound is a polysyllabic word that would normally have a stressed syllable, all of its syllables are still unstressed or only very lightly stressed.

'**paper**

'**newspaper**

'**cycle**

'**motorcycle**

'**officer**

po'**lice** officer

'**organizer**

'**conference** organizer



The stress pattern in compound nouns is different from the stress pattern in an ordinary adjective + noun combination. While a compound noun is stressed on the first part, a phrase with an adjective and a noun has some stress on both parts. For example, these compound nouns and phrases have different stress patterns and different meanings:

Compound Nouns:



- 'black**board** (something to write on)

- 'White **House** (the home of the US president)

- '**hot dog**

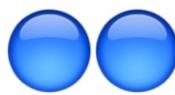


(a kind of sausage sandwich)

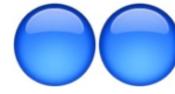


Adjective + Noun Phrases:

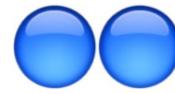
- '**black 'board**
- '**white 'house**
- '**hot 'dog**



(a board that's black)



(a house that's painted white)



(a dog that feels hot)

If you don't already know, how can you tell if a combination of words is a compound noun or an adjective plus a noun? Here are some guidelines, although they don't always work:

- If it's written as one word or as two words with a hyphen, it's a compound noun.
- If it's written as two words, the more common, well-established phrases are more likely to be compounds. More unusual or unpredictable phrases are probably not, but sometimes it's hard to tell.

For example, the following box lists some compound nouns beginning with the word *school* and some phrases that use *school* to modify a noun.

Compound nouns (Stress on first part)	Not compound nouns (Stress on both parts)
School age	School administrator
School board	School classroom
School book	School colors
School boy	School counselor
School bus	School diploma
School child	School festival
School day	School library
School district	School lunch
School girl	School nurse
School hours	School principal
Schoolhouse	School project
Schoolroom	School psychologist
School teacher	School transportation
School work	School trip
School year	School violence

Overall, the first group has more common combinations that have been in use for a long time, like *schoolhouse* and *schoolteacher*, and the second group has less common or more recent phrases, like *school psychologist* or *school trip*. Still, it's often hard to predict whether a particular phrase is a compound noun or an adjective plus noun.

So what can students do? When they learn a new compound word, they should learn its stress pattern along with its pronunciation. Listen to it when it's modeled, practice saying

it correctly, and get used to the whole sound of it. They should also pay attention to the stress patterns of commonly used adjective-noun combinations when they hear them, just as they do when they learn new vocabulary words. Still, learners will probably use incorrect stress from time to time, just as they probably make mistakes in pronouncing sounds. This is an inevitable part of learning.

Stress in phrasal verbs

English also has many **phrasal verbs**, or **two-word verbs**, such as *put on*, *get up*, *turn off*, and *take over*. Phrasal verbs are usually written as two separate words, and in sentences, their two parts are sometimes separated by other words. Unlike compound nouns, phrasal verbs are usually stressed on the *second* part, especially when it comes at the end of a sentence or thought group.

Please come 'in.



Pick it 'up.



I turned it 'on.



However, when a phrasal verb is followed by a noun that is its object, the stress is different. The first part of the verb receives a little stress, and the primary stress moves to the object of the phrasal verb:

Pick up the 'paper.



I turned on the 'light.



Some of these two-word verbs can also be used as nouns. In this case, they follow the same pattern as the noun-verb pairs that were described earlier (*permit*, *suspect*, *progress*). They're stressed on the first part when they're nouns and on the second part when they're verbs. Also, they're typically written as one word when they're nouns, but as two words when they're verbs:

I'll print it 'out.

I'll give you a 'printout.

The plane took 'off. *It was a smooth 'takeoff.*



Suffixes and stress

Students are sometimes confused by sets of words that come from the same basic **root** but have stress on different syllables. At first glance, these changes seem completely random. For example:

- *e'lectric* *elec'tricity* *electrifi'cation*
- *'technical* *tech'nique* *techni'cality*
- *'specify* *spe'cific* *specifi'cation*
- *'natural* *'naturalize* *naturali'zation*



However, there actually is a pattern in stress placement in these words. All of them have **suffixes** such as *-ic*, *-ity*, *-ify*, or *-tion* that have been added to their roots to make a change in meaning. Certain suffixes, especially those which were borrowed from Latin or Greek, cause words to be stressed on a particular syllable. There are several groups of suffixes that affect word stress in different ways:

Group 1: Many suffixes cause the stress to be on the syllable just before the suffix. Box 8.4 shows the most important ones.

congratu'lations



scien'tific



mu'sician




Group 2: A smaller number of suffixes cause the stress to fall *two* syllables before the suffix. (Of course, if there is only one syllable before the prefix, that one is stressed, for example: '**donate**.) The most important suffix in this group is *-ate*. (See Box 8.5.)

'graduate



'demonstrate



col'laborate




8.4 GROUP 1: STRESS THE SYLLABLE BEFORE THE SUFFIX



SUFFIX	EXAMPLES
-tion, -sion, -ion	con'dition, ex'tension, o'pinion
-ity, -ety	crea'tivity, i'dentity, elec'tricity, an'xiety
-ic, -ical	scien'tific, e'lectric, i'dential
-al (sometimes)	depart'mental, inci'dental, adjec'tival
-ial, -cial, -sial, -tial, -ual	fi'nancial, contro'versial, i'ntial, re'sidual
-ian, -cian, -sian, -ia	mu'sician, phy'sician, 'Persian, 'mania
-ous, -ious, -eous, -uous	mys'terious, cou'rageous, am'biguous
-ient, -ience, -iant, -iance	'patient, 'patience, 'radiant, 'radiance
-ify	i'dentify, hu'midify, e'lectrify, 'beautify
-ive, -itive, -ative	pos'sessive, 'positive, 'relative
-itude	'gratitude, 'aptitude, 'latitude, 'attitude
-graphy, -grapher	pho'tography, pho'tographer, bi'ography
-logy, -logist	bi'ology, bi'ologist, soci'ology, soci'ologist

8.5 GROUP 2: STRESS THE SECOND SYLLABLE BEFORE THE SUFFIX



SUFFIX	EXAMPLES
-ate	'estimate, pro'crastinate, 'graduate, 'separate

Some words with -ate can be either verbs or nouns/adjectives. The stress is the same for both, but the pronunciation of -ate changes:

Verbs: He'll *graduate* from college. /'grædʒuweyt/
-ate = /eyt/. Let's *separate* the truth from the lies. /'sepəreɪt/

Nouns/adjectives: She's a college *graduate*. /'grædʒuwət/
-ate = /ət/. That's a *separate* problem. /'sepərət/

8.6 GROUP 3: STRESS THE SUFFIX



SUFFIX	EXAMPLES
-ee	refe'ree, nomi'nee, refu'gee
-ese	Japan'ese, Chin'ese, bureaucra'tese
-ette	disk'ette, kitchen'ette, cigar'ette
-esque	pictur'esque, gro'tesque, Roman'esque
-ique	u'nique, tech'nique, bou'tique
-aire, -eer	question'naire, volun'teer, engi'neer
-esce, -escent, -escence	coa'lesce, ado'lescent, ado'lescence

8.7 GROUP 4: THE SUFFIX DOESN'T CHANGE THE STRESS



SUFFIX	EXAMPLES
-able, -ible	under'standable, 'com'fortable, 'pos'sible
-ness	'kind'ness, 'care'fulness, po'liteness
-ful	'care'ful, 'mean'ingful, 'beau'tiful
-less	'care'less, 'mean'ingless, 'thank'less
-ish	'self'ish, 'yellow'ish, 'child'ish
-er, -or, -ess, -ist	'teacher, con'ductor, 'actress, 'dentist
-ly (adjective/adverb)	'man'ly, 'woman'ly / 'easily, 'quick'ly
-en	'threat'en, 'tight'en, en'light'en
-hood	'brother'hood, 'child'hood, 'knighthood
-some	'handsome, 'tiresome, 'loath'some
-dom	'freedom, 'kingdom, 'wisdom
-ward	'homeward, 'seaward, 'forward
-al (sometimes)	oc'casional, 'fictional, 'personal
-ment	'document, en'joy'ment, enter'tainment
-ize, -ise, -yze	'capital'ize, 'real'ize, 'adver'tise, 'analyze
Grammatical endings: -s, -ed, -ing, -er, -est	under'stands, 'catch'es, under'standing, 'catch'ing, 'happ'ier, 'happ'iest

Group 3: With some suffixes, we stress the suffix itself. The suffixes in this group have all been borrowed from French, where words tend to be stressed on the last syllable. The most common ones are listed in Box 8.6.

tech'niqe



kitchen'ette



volun'teer



Group 4: Finally, many suffixes have no effect on word stress. The stress stays on the same syllable where it was before the suffix was added. Many of these suffixes are of Germanic origin, although *-al*, *-ize* and *-ment* come from Latin. The main suffixes in this group are listed in Box 8.7.

under'standable



'beautiful



e'motionless



Exceptions: As with most rules, there are exceptions to these, too. For example, *'television* ends in the suffix *-sion*, so we might expect it to be stressed on the second-to-last syllable, but it's actually stressed on the first. *Cre'ate* might be expected to be stressed earlier because of the suffix *-ate*.

There can also be differences among dialects or even between individuals. For example, *employ'ee* and *cigar'ette* are predicted to have stress on the last syllable, and they often do, but many people stress them differently: *em'ployee* on the second syllable and *'cigarette* on the first. In a limited number of words, two stress patterns are acceptable.

Prefixes and stress

Unlike suffixes, prefixes have little effect on word stress. The prefixes themselves are generally unstressed or weakly stressed, and they don't cause the stress to change in the rest of the word. For example:

- *'cover* *un'cover* *dis'cover* *re'cover*
- *o'bey* *diso'bey*
- *cur'ricular* *extracur'ricular*
- *ap'praise* *reap'praise*



Numbers ending in *-teen* and *-ty*

It's often difficult to hear the difference between pairs of numbers like *fourteen* and *forty* or *nineteen* and *ninety*, even for native speakers of English. When we look at the written forms *fourteen* and *forty*, it seems that it should be easy to tell them apart—just listen for the /n/ at the end of *fourteen*. Unfortunately, though, people don't usually pronounce these

numbers clearly enough to hear that last /n/, especially when the next word starts with /n/ or another sound that blends with the /n/. Fortunately, there are other clues that distinguish the *-teen* and *-ty* numbers. Here are two simple clues to help students:

Word stress: The *-ty* numbers are always stressed on the first syllable. The *-teen* numbers are *usually* stressed on the last syllable. (But look at the section on **variable word stress** at the end of Chapter 9 to see some exceptions. There are always exceptions, aren't there?)

The sound of /t/: Both *forty* and *fourteen* have the phoneme /t/ in the middle, but because of the difference in stress, /t/ sounds different in each word. In *-ty* words, the stress is *before* /t/, so it becomes the alveolar flap [ɾ]. It's voiced, and it sounds like a quick /d/. In *-teen* words, the stress is *after* /t/, so it doesn't become a flap. It sounds like a normal, aspirated /t/. It's voiceless, and it's pronounced with a slight puff of air. (See Chapter 4 for more details about the allophones of /t/.)

In real life, if you're not sure what number you've heard, just ask for clarification. Everybody does from time to time, including native speakers, and nobody will mind.

Here's a summary of the pronunciation differences between numbers ending in *-ty* and *-teen*:

Type of number	Stress pattern	Sound of /t/
<i>-ty</i> words (e.g. 40)	O o	Flapped /t/
<i>-teen</i> words (e.g. 14)	o O	Aspirated /t/
<i>Listen:</i> 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90		
<i>Listen:</i> 13 14 15 16 17 18 19		

Compound adverbs

Compound adverbs are words made up of two separate parts that function as adverbs. When these words tell location or direction, they are normally stressed on the last part of the word:

down'town *north'east* *south'west*
over'seas *down'stairs* *out'side*

Reflexive pronouns

Reflexive pronouns are pronouns that refer back to the subject of the sentence. They end in *-self* or *-selves*, and are stressed on the last syllable:

my'self *him'self* *our'selves* *them'selves*



Word stress in other languages

Not all languages have word stress, and even in those that do, it may not work the way it does in English. This can cause problems for speakers of other languages in producing the stress patterns of words in English.

In some languages, like Mandarin and Thai, almost all words have just one syllable, so the idea of word stress simply doesn't come up. In other languages that have many polysyllabic words, stress syllables may not sound the way they do in English. For example, in Spanish and Italian, stressed syllables are emphasized and are more forceful and higher in pitch than unstressed syllables, although there is typically a smaller contrast between stressed and unstressed syllables than in English. However, unstressed syllables in these languages are never reduced. That is, the vowels in unstressed syllables still have the same clear sounds as in stressed syllables; they do not become /ə/ as they often do in English.

Japanese is another example of a polysyllabic language that does not use stress in the same way that English does. In Japanese words, one syllable can be higher in pitch than the others, but it is *not* louder, longer, or stronger, and the lower-pitched syllables are *not* reduced. (Actually, Japanese is said to have pitch accent rather than word stress.) To a speaker of

English, the high-pitched syllables may sound like they're stressed, but what's happening is actually somewhat different.

Still other languages, like German and Russian, have word stress that works very much as it does in English. The stressed syllables are emphasized and higher in pitch, and the unstressed syllables are reduced. Speakers of these languages will probably have less difficulty in getting used to the idea of word stress in English than speakers of languages without word stress.

Learners whose native language has a different system of stress or pitch than English will need help getting used to the stress patterns of English. Be sure to make them aware of how word stress is different in English than in their native language. They'll need guidance in noticing and practicing stress in English words—emphasizing stressed syllables and de-emphasizing unstressed syllables.

Should students memorize all the rules?

What can you, as a teacher, do to help students learn the correct stress patterns for the thousands of words they'll need to know in English? Should you ask them to memorize all the rules about how word stress is determined? No, definitely not. Even if students memorize rules, it's hard for them to

apply the rules in correctly producing word stress. It works better to help students *notice* the stress of new words and realize that stress is an important and necessary part of each word. Then as learners say and use the new words many times, the stress patterns will become natural and automatic. They'll build up a kind of muscle and sound memory of each word, including the appropriate stress. This is much less frustrating than trying to memorize a list of rules, but it does require that students get plenty of practice using new words in many contexts—something that good language teachers should be helping their students to do anyway.

Rhythm

Language has rhythm

Just as music has rhythm, every language also has its own **rhythm**—that is, its own pattern of syllables that are longer or shorter, faster or slower, and more or less emphasized. When we listen to music, we sometimes hear a very regular rhythm, with all the notes lasting about the same time. Other music has a more irregular rhythm, with a mixture of long and short notes.

This drumbeat has a regular rhythm:



This drumbeat has an irregular rhythm:



It's important to remember that rhythm is not the same thing as intonation, in the same way that the rhythm of a song is separate from its melody. Rhythm is about timing; intonation is about how the pitch of the speaker's voice goes up and down. The drumbeats we just heard have rhythm, but no melody. This tune played on a slide whistle has melody, but no rhythm:

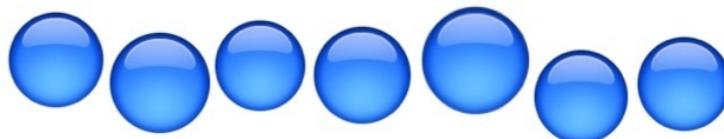


Slide whistle

Types of rhythm

Phonologists have traditionally divided languages into two groups, based on the type of rhythm they have:

Syllable-timed languages: Many languages have a very regular rhythm, with each syllable lasting about the same length of time and receiving about the same emphasis. These are called **syllable-timed** or **syllable-based languages**. If we use circles to represent syllables, we can picture the rhythm of a syllable-timed language like this:



Stress-timed languages: The rhythm of stress-timed languages is different—it's less uniform, and syllables do not

all last the same length of time. Stressed syllables last longer, and unstressed syllables are shorter and quicker. The time between the stresses remains fairly steady, and unstressed syllables have to crowd in between the stressed syllables. We say a language with this type of rhythm is a **stress-timed or stress-based language**. English is a stress-timed language.

We can picture its rhythm like this:



In addition to English, some other stress-timed languages are German, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish (and other Germanic languages), Russian, Czech (and some other Slavic languages), European Portuguese, and some dialects of Arabic. Some syllable-timed languages are Spanish, French, Italian, Brazilian Portuguese, and most other Romance languages, Japanese, Korean, Cantonese and some other varieties of Chinese, Vietnamese, Polish, Farsi, some dialects of Arabic, and Hindi (and related languages).

Although the division into stress-timed and syllable-timed languages is an accepted way of categorizing the rhythm

9.1 The Rhythm of English

The Rhythm of English



patterns of languages, in reality, the distinctions between these two rhythm types are not always so clear-cut. These rhythm patterns are tendencies, not absolute rules, and they can vary somewhat, depending on the individual speaker and the context. (Roach 1982) There can be differences between the rhythm patterns of different dialects of a

language (as in Portuguese and Arabic), and even between different speakers of the same dialect.

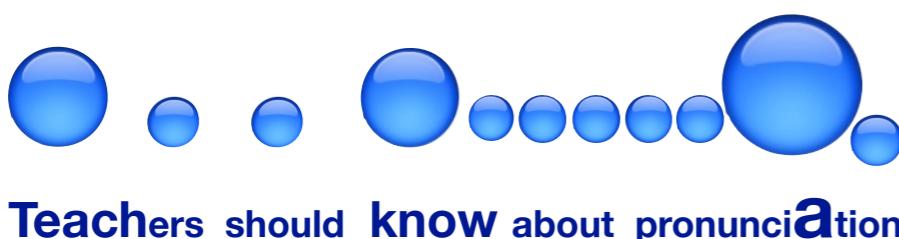
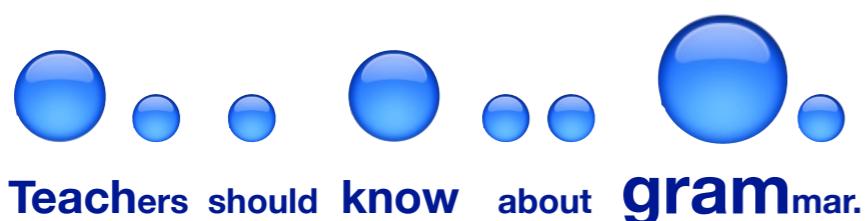
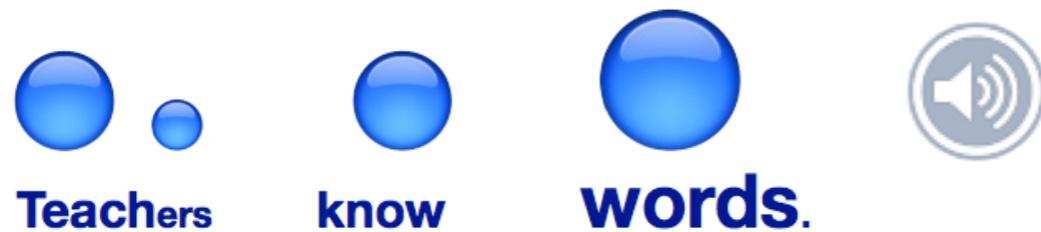
In spite of this, we can easily hear and feel that languages have their own characteristic rhythm patterns that set them apart from each other. The rhythm of English is quite different from that of some learners' languages. In order to be understood easily, students need to be aware that rhythm is an important part of language and try to accurately imitate the rhythm of the language they're learning.

What makes the rhythm of English?

In English, as we've seen, not all syllables last the same length of time. In particular, stressed syllables last longer than unstressed ones. These longer, stressed syllables and shorter, unstressed syllables fit together to create the characteristic pattern of English rhythm. For the rhythm to sound natural, the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables

must be right. Stressed syllables need to last longer, and unstressed syllables need to be short and quick so they don't compete with the stressed syllables.

Listen to these sentences:



The time between the stressed syllables in each sentence stays fairly constant—not precisely the same, but close—even though there are many more unstressed syllables between some pairs of stressed syllables than others.

Content words and function words

To help us know which words and syllables in a sentence are stressed or unstressed, we need to know the difference between **content words** and **function words**. We've talked earlier about **function words**—words that have grammatical meaning, such as prepositions, articles, pronouns, and conjunctions. These are words that show the relationship between other words and don't have much meaning in themselves. These are types of function words:

9.2 FUNCTION WORDS	
Category	Examples
Articles	a, an, the
Auxiliary verbs	does, did, has, had, am, is, can
Personal pronouns	I, you, he, she, me, him, her
Possessive adjectives	my, your, his, her, its, their
Demonstrative adjectives	this, that, these, those
Prepositions	in, on, under, with, to, in, for
Conjunctions	and, or, but, so, because, before, while
Relative pronouns	which, who, whom, whose, that

Content words, on the other hand, are words that have lexical meaning, not grammatical meaning, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and question words. These words have meaning in themselves; they refer to objects, actions, or ideas in the real world. We can think of them as the words that are most important in conveying the basic meaning of a sentence. Here are types of content words:

9.3 CONTENT WORDS	
Category	Examples
Nouns	book, teacher, responsibility
Main verbs	read, eat, study, examine, report
Adjectives	big, beautiful, tired, many
Possessive pronouns	mine, yours, his, hers, theirs
Demonstrative pronouns	this, that, these, those
Questions words	who, what, where, when, why, how
Not and ~n't	not, isn't, don't, hasn't, can't
Adverbs	often, always, easily, happily

In English, content words tend to receive more stress than function words, and, therefore, they are usually longer in duration. Function words tend to be unstressed, and so they last a shorter time. This is a basic principle that helps create the rhythm of English.

Reduced function words

Look again at this example sentence:

TEACH•ers should KNOW a•bout pro•nun•ci•A•tion.



There are five unstressed syllables between the last two stresses. How can speakers manage to say so many unstressed syllables so quickly?

We've learned in Chapter 5 that unstressed syllables and function words can have weak, reduced forms. In fact, some reduced forms are even written in a shortened form, especially in product names, like *In-N-Out Burger*, McDonald's *Filet-O-Fish* sandwich, *Land O'Lakes* dairy products, or *Sweet'N Low* artificial sweetener.

These reduced forms make syllables shorter and enable them to squeeze in between the stressed syllables. Sometimes sound changes also make it easier for us to say the reduced forms quickly so that regular timing can be maintained. This helps create the “music” of English. If we pronounced each syllable of each word with its full “dictionary” form, or **citation form**, the rhythm would sound unnatural and staccato—we'd be singing an entirely different song.

Here's another example:

I should have GIV•en him a PRES•ent.



This sentence has only two content words: *given* and *present*. All the others are function words, and they've all been shortened and reduced so that they fit into the available space. For example, *should have* doesn't sound like its full form of /'ʃudhæv/. Instead, it sounds like /'ʃudə/. Also, *him* sounds like /ɪm/ instead of /hɪm/.

If we say this sentence with full forms of all the function words, the rhythm doesn't sound quite natural, like this:

I should have GIV•en him a PRES•ent.



Changes in reduced function words

Many common function words are listed in Boxes 9.3 - 9.6 with their citation forms and common reduced forms. In addition to these, other function words also become weaker, quicker, and less distinct when they're unstressed. Here are some types of changes that can happen when function words are reduced.

Contractions

When we use shortened forms like *I'm*, *he's*, *I'd*, *isn't*, and *can't*, whole syllables are lost and the combined form becomes shorter. For example, in the following sentence, *do not* and *you are* can be changed to the contractions *don't* and

Pronouncing *Can* and *Can't*



The contrast between the words *can* and *can't* is often especially troublesome. Here are some ways to tell them apart.

Can't is usually stressed. It sounds like /kænt/ or /kænʔ/, with a clear /æ/ sound. (We may not be able to hear the final /t/.)

I **CAN'T** go with you. Why **CAN'T** you help me?

Can is usually unstressed. It often sounds like /kən/ or /kn/, with a reduced vowel.

I **can** go with you. Who **can** help me?

But when *can* is alone, with no verb after it, it's stressed.

Can you help me? Yes, I **CAN**.

Can you help me? I **CAN** tomorrow, but not right now.

you're. (More contractions are listed in Box 12.2 in Chapter 12, Connected Speech.)



I am **aFRAID** I do not **underSTAND** what you are **SAYing**.

→ I'm **aFRAID** I don't **underSTAND** what you're **SAYing**.

Loss of consonants

The following words (pronouns and possessive adjectives) that start with /h/ can lose the /h/ sound in their reduced forms:



He → /i/ Did **he** **TELL** you about it?

- Him → /ɪm/ We **HELPED** **him**.
 His → /ɪz/ Do you know **his** **NAME?**
 Her → /ər/ Do you know **her** **NAME?**

The pronoun *them* can also lose its initial /ð/ sound and be pronounced /əm/. (However, /ð/ is *not* lost when we say *they* or *their*—only *them*.)

Them → /əm/ Did you **TALK** to **them**?

They → /ðey/ (not /ey/) What do they **NEED**?



Because of these changes, *him* and *them* often sound very similar. Fortunately, in conversation we can usually tell which word is being said from context.

Have, *has*, and *had* often lose their initial /h/ when they're used as auxiliary verbs. As we saw earlier, sometimes they're reduced even further into contractions.

Have → /əv/ or /v/ What have you **DONE**?

Has → /əz/, /z/, or /s/ What has he **DONE**?

Had → /əd/ or /d/ What had he **DONE**?



Of and *and* often lose their final consonant sound, especially when they come before a word that starts with a consonant:

Of → /ə/ And → /ən/

I want a **CUP** of **COFFEE** with **CREAM** and **SUGAR**.



Articles

Students learn very early that the indefinite article has two forms: *a* (usually pronounced /ə/) before consonant sounds and *an* (usually pronounced /ən/) before vowel sounds. In most speakers' pronunciation, the definite article *the* also has two different pronunciations, although they're both spelled the same way. *The* is usually pronounced /ðə/ before consonant sounds and /ðɪy/ before vowel sounds.

It's important to remember that these forms of the articles are based on the *sound* that comes after them, not the spelling; spelling is not always a reliable indication of pronunciation.

9.2 FORMS OF DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLES

	Before a consonant sound	Before a vowel sound
a/an	A box /ə 'baks/	An apple /ən 'æpəl/
	A child /ə 'tʃayld/	An umbrella /ən əm'brelə/
	A unit /ə 'yuwnət/	An hour /ən awr/
the	The box /ðə 'baks/	The apple /ðɪy 'æpəl/
	The child /ðə 'tʃayld/	The umbrella /ðɪy əm'brelə/
	The unit /ðə 'yuwnət/	The hour /ðɪy 'awr/

Vowel changes

The vowel in a reduced form often changes to /ə/:

You → /yə/

From → /frəm/

To → /tə/

Did you **FLY** from New **YORK** to Chi**CAgo**?



Common expressions

Some common expressions with modals or similar verbs have their own reduced forms. (More of these are listed in Box 9.5.) For example:

Going to → /'gʌnə/ (sometimes written *gonna*)

Want to → /'wanə/ (sometimes written *wanna*)



Have to → /'hæftə/ (sometimes written *hafta*)

Have got to → /('əv) 'gatə/ (sometimes written *gotta*)

Could have → /'kudə/ (sometimes written *coulda*)

Should have → /'ʃudə/ (sometimes written *shoulda*)

These reduced pronunciations are commonly used in many types of speech in all but very formal situations. However, it's important *not* to use the written forms—*gonna*, *wanna*, *hafta*, and so forth—in formal, business, or academic writing. The written forms should only be used in very casual situations, like notes or emails to a close friend.

When don't we reduce function words?

There are some situations when function words should *not* be reduced. This usually happens in one of these situations:

- When we want to emphasize the function word
- When the function word is in a position that needs to be stressed in order to make the rhythm right
- When they're actually main verbs, not auxiliary verbs

Let's look more closely at each of these situations.

For emphasis: Sometimes a function word is very important to the meaning of a sentence. In this case, we emphasize it by using its full form, not its reduced form. For example:

We **MIGHT** go with you, but we haven't decided.

Put your book **ON** the desk, not **UNDER** it.



A: Would you rather be rich or good-looking?

B: I want to be rich **AND** good-looking!

(We'll read more about this type of emphasis in Chapter 10: "Thought Groups and Prominence.")

To maintain rhythm: We don't reduce *be* verbs, modals, or other auxiliary verbs when there's not another word soon after it that will receive stress, such as a main verb, predicate

noun, predicate adjective, or the negative word *not*. Compare these examples:

Can you help me? (*Can* is reduced.)



Yes, I can help you. (*Can* is reduced.)

Yes, I **CAN**. (*Can* is not reduced; there's no verb after it.)

Are you listening to me? (*Are* is reduced.)

Yes, I'm listening. (*Am* is reduced.)

No, I'm not listening. (*Am* is reduced.)

Yes, I **AM**. (*Am* is not reduced.)

No I'm not. (*Am* is reduced.)

Is the new student lazy? (*Is* is reduced.)

If he is, we'll soon find out. (*Is* isn't reduced, but *will* is.)

Here's another case when we don't reduce function words when the rhythm requires it. Prepositions are usually reduced, but when a preposition is the last word in a sentence or clause, we don't reduce it. In this case, we don't necessarily emphasize the preposition; we just don't reduce it. This sometimes happens in questions or in sentences with adjective clauses or noun clauses.

What are you listening to?



Where can I plug my computer in?

That's the man I wanted to introduce you to.

The painting I'm looking at is strange.
I don't know where he's from.

When a word is really a main verb: Some verbs can be used as either main verbs or auxiliary verbs, like *have*, *do*, and *be going to*. We reduce these forms when they're auxiliary verbs, but generally not when they're main verbs. For example:



I'm going to study can become *I'm gonna study*.

But *I'm going to school* cannot become * *I'm gonna school*.

We could have studied can become *We coulda studied*.

But *We could have fun* cannot become * *We coulda fun*.

Changes in word stress

We know that in English, every polysyllabic word has one stressed syllable. However, there are times when the position of stress in a word can change if this will help maintain a more comfortable overall rhythm. Having two stressed syllables together makes an awkward rhythm; an alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables is more natural sounding. Therefore, the stress sometimes moves to create an alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. (Ladefoged 2006 p. 115) We can call this process **variable word stress**. Here are some examples of when this stress change can happen:

Numbers: Numbers ending in *-teen* are normally stressed on the last syllable. (See Chapter 8.) However, the stress in these numbers can change to the first part in these situations:

- When we're counting, we tend to stress *-teen* numbers on the first syllable:



THIRteen, FOURteen, FIFteen, SIXteen, SEventeen.

- Years starting with *-teen* numbers usually have some stress on the first syllable. There is also stress on one of the syllables in the last part of the year:

- 1999 → NINEteen ninety-NINE
- 1492 → FOURteen ninety-TWO
- 1812 → EIGHTeen TWELVE



- In combinations of a *-teen* number plus a noun, the stress on the *-teen* number often moves to the first syllable:

- 15 years → FIFteen YEARS
- 19 people → NINEteen PEOPLE



- Numbers between 21 and 99 are also usually stressed on the last part (the “ones” part). However, when they are followed by a noun, the stress can move to the first part of the number:

- 24 → twenty-FOUR 32 → thirty-TWO
- 24 hours → TWENTy-four HOURS
- 32 ounces → THIRty-two OUNCes



Other words with final stress: When a word with final stress is followed by a word with initial stress, leading to two stressed syllables in a row, the stress in the first word can move to an earlier syllable, although it doesn't have to. For example, *volun'**teer*** is normally stressed on the last syllable, but in a phrase like '**volunteer** 'teacher', it can move to an earlier syllable.

Important points for teaching rhythm

To make the rhythm of English sounds natural, the most important thing students need to remember is this: Make the stressed syllables longer and clearer, and the unstressed syllables shorter and less clear.

In learning about reduced forms of words, it's very important for learners to be aware of how those forms sound so that they'll recognize and understand them when they hear them. Even if learners don't always use reduced forms themselves, it's absolutely necessary to understand them for comprehension of natural, spoken English. This is especially true in casual or rapid speech, but also in more formal, careful speech. Native speakers do not normally speak using only full citation forms of function words—not even when they're speaking slowly and formally.

9.3 REDUCED FORMS OF SOME FUNCTION WORDS 1

Word	Citation Form	Reduced Form	Example	
Prepositions				
At	/æt/	/ət/	We're at home. Look at that.	
For	/fɔr/	/fər/	It's for you. For a long time.	
From	/fram/	/frəm/	He's from Irvine.	
Of	/əv/	/ə/ /əv/	(Before consonants) A cup of tea. (Before vowels) A couple of eggs.	
To	/tuw/	/tə/ /tuw/	(Before consonants) Go to school. (Before vowels) Go to a movie.	
Conjunctions				
And	/ænd/	/ən/, /n/	Up and down. Salt and pepper.	
Or	/ɔr/	/ər/	Soup or salad. Yes or no.	
As...as	/æz/	/əz/	As fast as you can. Just as good.	
Because	/biykɔz/ /bəkʌz/	/kəz/ /bəkʌz/	I'm smiling 'cause I'm happy. I'm happy because it's Saturday.	
Articles				
A	/ey/, /ə/	/ə/	(Before consonants) A box. A unit.	
An	/æn/	/ən/	(Before vowels) An egg. An hour.	
The	/ðiy/	/ðə/ /ðiy/	(Before consonants) The children. (Before vowels) The end. The others.	

9.4 REDUCED FORMS OF SOME FUNCTION WORDS 2

Word	Citation Form	Reduced Form	Example	
“Be” Verb, Auxiliary Verbs, and Modals				
Am	/æm/	/əm/, /m/	What am I doing? I'm going.	
Are	/ar/	/ər/	What are you doing? You're going.	
Is	/iz/	/iz/, /z/	What is he doing? He's going.	
Have	/hæv/	/əv/, /v/, /ə/	What have they done? They've finished. You should have studied.	
Has	/hæz/	/əz/, /z/	Bob has left. He's told them.	
Had	/hæd/	/əd/, /d/	Bob had left. He'd told them.	
Do	/duw/	/də/	What do you want to do? Do you want to dance?	
Does	/dʌz/	/dəz/, /z/	Where does he live? Who does he know?	
Did	/dɪd/	/əd/, /d/	What did you do? Who did you see?	
Can	/kæn/	/kən/, /kn/	I can see it. What can you do?	
Will	/wil/	/əl/, /l/	What will you do? I'll go now.	
Would	/wud/	/əd/, /d/	It'd be nice to go. I'd go there.	

9.5 REDUCED FORMS OF SOME FUNCTION WORDS 3

Word	Citation Form	Reduced Form	Example	
Expressions with <i>to</i>				
Going to	/gɔɪŋ tuw/	/gʌnə/	I'm going to do my homework. Are you going to eat now?	
Want to	/want tuw/	/wanə/	I want to go to Disneyland. Do you want to come with me? <i>But not: *He wanna *He wantsa</i>	
Have to	/hæv tuw/	/hæftə/	We have to wait for the bus. Do you have to study?	
Have/ has got to	/hæv gat tuw/ /hæz.../	/əvgatə/ /əzgatə/ /gatə/	Students have got to study. The student has got to study. I've got to go. I('ve) got to go.	
Modal + <i>have</i>				
Should have	/ʃud hæv/	/ʃudə/	You should have waited for me. You shouldn't have forgotten.	
Could have	/kud hæv/	/kudə/	We could have tried harder. We couldn't have known that.	
Would have	/wud hæv/	/wudə/	He would have helped you. He wouldn't have told the secret.	
Must have	/mʌst hæv/	/mʌstə/	They must have been hungry. (We don't really say <i>mustn't have</i> .)	
Might have	/mayt hæv/	/maytə/	I might have known the answer. (<i>Mightn't have</i> is also kind of strange.)	

9.6 REDUCED FORMS OF SOME FUNCTION WORDS 4

Word	Citation Form	Reduced Form	Example	
Pronouns and Possessive Adjectives				
You	/yuw/	/yə/	You did it. Do you want to go?	
He	/hiy/	/iy/	Is he here? What did he do?	
Him	/him/	/im/	Tell him. Give him some time.	
Her	/hər/	/ər/	Tell her. What's her name?	
Them	/ðəm/	/ðəm/ /əm/	Did you tell them your name? I saw them. Give them a present.	
Your	/yuwr/	/yər/	What's your name? Use your pen.	
His	/hiz/	/iz/	What's his name? She's his mother.	
Our	/awr/	/ar/	Our car is big. They're our friends.	
Miscellaneous Words				
That	/ðæt/	/ðət/	He said that he was ready. The book that I read was good.	
Than	/ðæn/	/ðən/ /ən/	Elephants are bigger than mice.	
Kind of	/kayndəv/	/kayndə/	We're kind of late.	
Sort of	/sɔrtəv/	/sɔrtə/	It's sort of hot today.	

Internet links

Just for fun: Here's a video of an Italian TV program from the 1970s. The song, written and sung by Adriano Celentano, has the rhythm and overall sound of American English, but the words are meaningless. Does it sound like English? <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcUi6UEQh00>

Thought Groups and Prominence

Thought groups

Can you imagine what it would be like if we kept talking steadily without even a pause? Listeners would have a hard time understanding our speech, and they'd soon get tired of listening to us talk nonstop. Before long, we'd run out of breath and our faces would turn blue. Obviously, we need to pause when we talk.

Pauses give speakers a chance to catch their breath, but they also make our speech easier to understand. Pauses help listeners understand which groups of words belong together grammatically and how the meaning is organized. When we

pause, listeners have a little time to absorb the meaning of what we've said, and it's easier for them to follow our ideas.

We need to pause when we talk, but we can't pause just anywhere. It seems to make more sense to pause in some places than in others. For example, which of these sentences seems more natural? (The slash marks represent pauses.)

1. Last Thursday / after I left school / I went to the supermarket/ and bought some vegetables /
2. Last / Thursday after / I left school I went to / the supermarket and bought / some / vegetables /



It's easy to see that the first sentence is divided more naturally. Its pauses break the sentence up into logical parts that each have both a grammatical structure and a chunk of meaning. These groups of words that are divided by pauses are called **thought groups**. In contrast, the parts of the second sentence seem random and just don't make sense.

In reality, not everyone breaks up thought groups in the same way. If someone is talking faster, he/she will probably pause less often and have fewer thought groups; slower speech leads to more pauses and more thought groups. In more formal language, such as when someone is giving an important speech, he/she often uses more pauses. These can

be a valuable tool for the speaker to draw the listeners' attention to important points. The speaker's own style and personal preferences can also affect how often he/she pauses.

In spite of these individual differences, we can make some generalizations about thought groups and how they are divided. According to Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), thought groups have these characteristics:

- A thought group has pauses or almost-pauses before and after it. We pause between thought groups, but not within them. A pause might not be a complete stopping of sound. Instead, it might just be a slowing or lengthening of the last stressed syllable of the thought group. (Murphy 2013)
- A thought group contains one **prominent** element. This is the word that receives the most emphasis in that thought group. (More information about prominence begins later in this chapter.)
- Each thought group has its own intonation pattern. That is, the speaker's voice goes up and down in a "melody" for that stretch of speech. Because of this, thought groups are sometimes called **intonation units**. (There's more about intonation in Chapter 11: "Intonation.")

10.1 Thought Groups and Prominence

Thought Groups and Prominence



- A thought group usually has its own grammatical structure. It's often a phrase, a clause, or a sentence—a chunk of language that feels like it has its own structure and expresses a thought or a unit of meaning.

Punctuation and thought groups

In writing, we can use punctuation to show the boundaries of phrases, clauses, and sentences. In

spoken language, of course, there is no punctuation to mark these grammatical units. Instead, the listener must pay attention to pauses and intonation patterns. In the following sentences, notice the difference in punctuation, pauses, and intonation and see how the meaning changes:

"Tom," said the teacher, "is brilliant."
Tom / said the teacher / is brilliant /



Tom said, "The teacher is brilliant."
Tom said / the teacher is brilliant /



Although the words are the same, the meaning is completely different. In the first sentence, the teacher is speaking and Tom is brilliant. In the second, Tom is speaking and the teacher is brilliant. Here's another example:

The students who study hard will get good grades.



The students who study hard / will get good grades /

The students, who study hard, will get good grades.



The students / who study hard / will get good grades /

Again, the words are the same, but in speaking, pauses and intonation change the meaning. In the first sentence, all the students study hard and get good grades. (This is called a non-restrictive adjective clause—it doesn't limit the number of people that the clause refers to.) In the second, only the students who study hard will get good grades. (This one is a restrictive adjective clause.) When these pairs of sentences are written, punctuation gives us clues to their meaning, but when they're spoken, only pauses and intonation indicate the difference.

This humorous message was seen in our ESL program office:

Let's eat Grandma.

Let's eat, Grandma.

Punctuation saves lives!



Pauses also save lives. (Or at least they help us communicate our meaning more clearly!)

What is prominence?

In every thought group, there is one word that is emphasized more strongly than the rest. This most-emphasized word is called the **prominent word**, or the word that has **prominence**. Prominence can also be called **focus** or **sentence stress**. If the prominent word has more than one syllable, only its stressed syllable is emphasized. In some cases, the prominent word is one that is very important for the meaning of the sentence or one that the speaker wants to bring special attention to; however, even if there is no word that needs particular attention, there is still a prominent word that is pronounced more forcefully than the rest.

How is the prominent word different from the others? In some ways, the prominent word in a thought group is like the stressed syllable in a word. Some of the same qualities make it “pop out” at the listener. These are the qualities that make the prominent word different from the rest of a thought group:

- The prominent word is pronounced more forcefully than the other syllables, and it may be louder than the others.

- There's a change in pitch on the prominent word. It usually has a higher pitch than the words around it, although this may be different if the sentence ends in rising intonation, as in a yes/no question. (There's more about intonation in Chapter 11.)
- The stressed syllable of the prominent word is a bit longer in duration than the other syllables.
- The vowel sound in the stressed syllable of the prominent word is clear and distinct. It's not reduced.

Just as with word stress, it's also important to make the other words in the sentence weaker so that the prominent word will stand out in contrast.

Which word has prominence?

In order to make the rhythm of English sound natural, we emphasize content words (the “important” words that carry meaning in themselves) and weaken function words (words that show the grammatical relationships between other words). The tables in Boxes 9.2 and 9.3 in the previous chapter list examples of content words and function words.

In a typical thought group, there are both content words and function words, which are made up of stressed and unstressed syllables. All the stressed syllables can receive some emphasis, but only one syllable in one of those words

receives prominence. How can we tell which word should receive prominence? There are several guidelines that can help us predict the prominent word.

The “last content word” rule

In most thought groups, when there's nothing special that the speaker needs to emphasize, **the last content word in the thought group receives prominence**. All the words in that thought group after the prominent syllable are unstressed and often low-pitched, even if they normally would be stressed. This is the “default” stress pattern for typical sentences.

I've already started to read the TEXTbook.

There's so much useful inforMAtion in it.

I think I'll read it aGAIN.

Do your homework quickly and CAREfully.

Please be QUIet. I'm trying to STUDy.

However, if there are adverbs telling a place or time at the end of a thought group, they are often unstressed and at a low pitch. (Lane 2010 p. 97)

We went to DISneyland yesterday.

I'd like to GO there sometime.



New information/old information.

New information usually receives prominence, while old information doesn't. Old information is something that has already been mentioned in the conversation, or something that the speaker assumes the listener knows about already. New information is just that—information, facts, or opinions that the speaker wants to tell the listener for the first time. Since new information is usually more fresh and interesting than what we already know, it's easy to see why it is emphasized. Look at these examples:

A: Where do you want to go for LUNCH?

B: How about going to that new Italian RESTaurant?

A: Well, I think I'd rather have MEXican food.

In English, new information often comes toward the end of a sentence. The subject usually names the topic—something that we've already been talking about. The verb phrase is the comment—some new information that we want the listener to know about the subject. Because of this, this rule matches well with the previous one.

Emphasis (emphatic stress)

If the speaker wants to emphasize or highlight a word or idea, that word can receive prominence. For example:

No, you may NOT play in the street.

A lot of people like CHOColate, but I REALLY love it.

A: Thank you for coming to my PARty.

B: Thank YOU for inviting me.

Words that are emphasized in this way are often content words, but function words can also receive prominence if that helps communicate the meaning of the sentence.

I said you can have a cookie OR some candy. You can't have BOTH.

HE said it; SHE didn't.

A: Finish your HOMEwork!

B: But I HAVE finished my homework.

Contrast (contrastive stress)

If it's important for a speaker to show that two words or ideas are different from each other, those words can both receive prominence. This is very similar to emphatic stress. The speaker is emphasizing two words because they contrast with each other.



I ordered COFFee, but the waiter brought me TEA.

A: Oh, I see you bought a new CAR.

B: No, I didn't BUY it. I only RENTed it.



Disagreeing and correcting

When we want to disagree with someone or correct a mistake that we hear, we can give prominence to the incorrect item and the correction. We can think of this as a kind of contrastive stress, emphasizing a difference between the incorrect and correct information or between what you think and what I think.

A: Isn't Los Angeles is the capital of CaliFORNia?

B: No, it's not Los ANGeles; it's SacraMENTo.

A: This soup is too HOT!

B: It seems COLD to me.

A: No, I mean SPICy hot, not TEMPerature hot.



These ways of using prominence to show emphasis, contrast, or disagreement are very common in English, but prominence may not be used to mark these things in other languages;

word order or grammatical forms may be used instead. Because of this, it's important for students to learn and practice using prominence and intonation to indicate words that they want to emphasize when speaking.

Prominence changes meaning

If we change the word that has prominence in a sentence, our understanding of the speaker's intention or meaning can change, too. Even though the basic grammar and vocabulary stay the same, the speaker's purpose and the meaning he/she wants to convey can be very different. Look at these examples:

Emma said she lost her KEYS again.

(Standard prominence. I'm just reporting a fact.)

EMMA said she lost her keys again.

(*Emma* said it, not anyone else.)

Emma SAID she lost her keys again.

(She *said* it, but I'm not sure I believe it.)

Emma said SHE lost her keys again.

(No one else lost them; *she* did it herself.)



Emma said she LOST her keys again.

(She didn't hide them or sell them; she *lost* them.)



Emma said she lost HER keys again.

(Not my keys or your keys, but *her* keys.)



Emma said she lost her keys AGAIN.

(I can't believe she did it *again*!)



Putting prominence in the appropriate place to express our meaning clearly is very important in communicating well in English.

Internet Links

Here's a link to a FedEx commercial made in 1981 with actor John Moschitta, who at one time held the Guinness World Record as the world's fastest talker. He speaks very quickly with no pauses at all. See how hard it is to understand him?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHiFQRqGB90>

This is an example of a more formal speech that makes effective use of pauses—a graduation speech given by Steve Jobs at Stanford University in 2005:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF8uR6Z6KLc>

Intonation

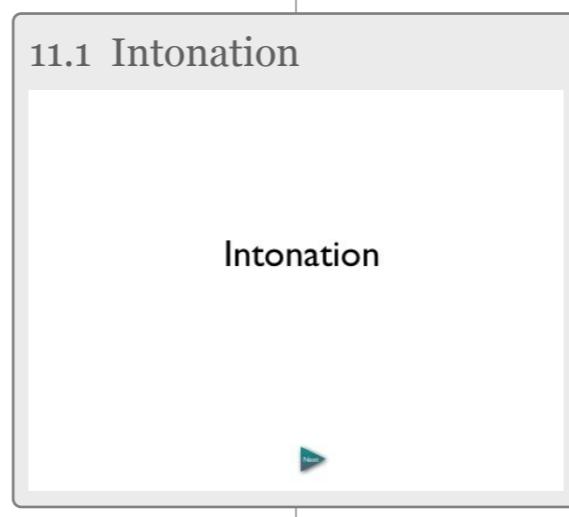
What is intonation?

Intonation is the “melody” of language—the pattern of higher and lower pitch as we speak. Using intonation appropriately is important in helping us be understood. Intonation can change a statement into a question or a polite request into a rude command. It can make a speaker sound happy, sad, sincere, angry, confused, or defensive.

It’s not simple to predict what the intonation will be for any particular bit of language. Intonation is variable and can be affected by many things, such as:

- The grammatical form of the sentence
- The speaker’s assumptions about what the listener knows or does not know
- The speaker’s emotions and intentions
- The speaker’s age, occupation, and personality
- Whether the speaker wants to keep talking or stop and give someone else a turn
- Whether the speaker is reading from a prepared script or speaking freely
- The situation: formal or informal, serious or silly, at work or at home
- And many, many other factors that often seem random and unpredictable. (Celce-Murcia et al. 2010)

No one can describe or analyze all of these factors, and we certainly don’t want to confuse our students with too much detailed analysis. The most practical plan is to teach students some basic patterns that they can use reliably—to give them a “starter set” of intonation patterns. As time goes by, we can expose them to more and more patterns through authentic language in movies, TV, and conversations. With listening and practice, these will help them increase their understanding and use of natural intonation.



Typical intonation patterns in American English

American English intonation tends to have a wider pitch range, that is, more extreme “ups and downs,” than many other languages. (Of course, this also varies from person to person and situation to situation.) This wider pitch range sometimes makes it difficult for learners to get used to using natural-sounding patterns. For example, if a learner is used to hearing and speaking with a pitch range something like this:



Then the learner may feel uncomfortable trying to imitate a pitch range like this:



In books, you may see intonation contours drawn in different styles, sometimes very rounded, and sometimes more angular. Both describe the same thing; it's mainly a matter of style:



Let's look at some generalizations about intonation that are simple and reliable enough to present to students. We'll look at these from three points of view:

- Intonation patterns that are related to **grammar**.
- Intonation patterns that are based on the function of the sentence in **discourse**, that is, the purpose it serves in the context of a whole conversation, speech, story, etc.
- Basic **meanings** conveyed by each intonation pattern.

Intonation patterns related to grammar

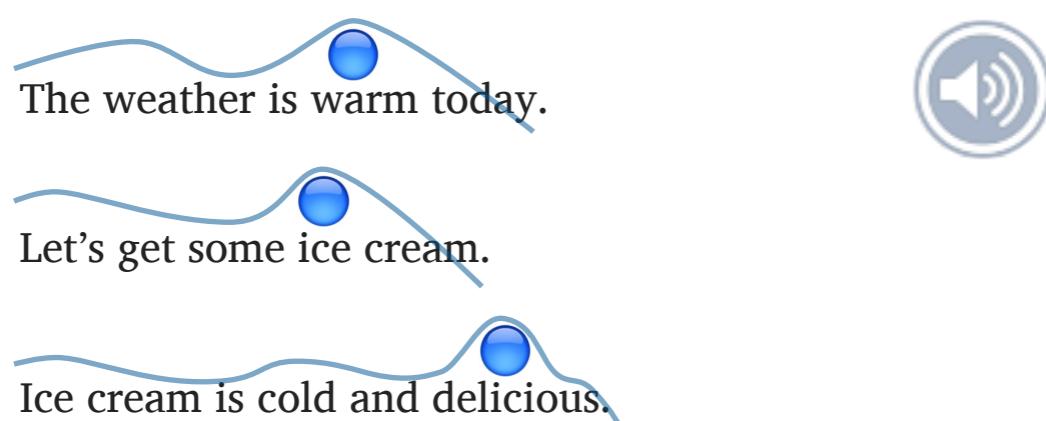
Sentences of different grammatical types are often used with their own typical intonation patterns. Of course, these are not firm rules that are followed 100% of the time—there's a lot of variation in the intonation patterns that speakers use in real life—but they are useful generalizations that help students speak with acceptable intonation patterns.

In matching intonation to the grammar of a sentence, it's the intonation at the end of a thought group or sentence that is the most significant. Is it rising or falling? Does it go all the way up to the highest point in the speaker's pitch range, or only part way? Does it fall all the way to the lowest point, or does it stay fairly flat?

In Chapter 10, we learned that each thought group has a prominent word—often the last content word in the thought group, or sometimes another word that is being emphasized. The highest point in the intonation of a thought group generally coincides with the prominent word. Many thought groups also have a smaller “bump” in intonation near the beginning, often on the subject of the sentence or another important word. Let’s look at some grammatical patterns and the intonation that often goes with them.

Statements

Statements usually end in falling intonation. The intonation rises on the prominent word and then stays low after that. The statement ends at the lowest point in the pitch range.

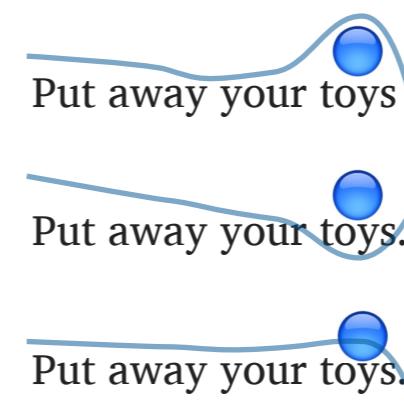


Commands and requests

Commands and requests also often end in falling intonation.



However, the intonation of commands and requests can vary, depending on the situation, the speaker’s attitude, and the relationship between the speaker and the listener. For example, a parent telling a child to put away his toys might say it in different ways. Can you feel a difference?



A boss might give instructions to an employee like this:



But if an employee used the same intonation when talking to the boss, there could be trouble.

If a request is in the form of a question, it usually has rising intonation, like a yes/no question.



Questions

Questions do not all have the same intonation. For example, questions that can be answered with *yes* or *no* (*yes/no*

questions) generally have different intonation than questions beginning with words like *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* (called *WH- questions* or *information questions*). Students may not realize this and may use the same intonation with all question types.

Yes/no questions usually end in rising intonation. The prominent syllable is marked by a change in pitch, either higher or lower, depending on the speaker. In either case, the intonation at the end of the sentence goes up to the highest point in the pitch range. You might hear either of these patterns. The first is more commonly represented in textbooks, although the second is closer to the intonation most Americans actually use.

Is this your notebook?

Is this your notebook?



WH- questions usually end in falling intonation. As in statements, the intonation rises on the prominent syllable and then stays low after that, ending at the lowest point in the pitch range. For example:

What's your favorite kind of music?



Where are you going today?

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Surprise: Rising intonation can be a sign of surprise or disbelief. It can also change a statement into a question:

The meeting is today? I thought it was next week.

What? You won a million dollars?



Clarification or repetition questions: Sometimes a speaker says something that the listener can't understand or something that sounds strange or unbelievable. In this case, the listener might ask another question to get the speaker to clarify or repeat what he/she has said. Like expressions of surprise, these questions usually have rising intonation. This is true even if they are *WH- questions*, which normally have falling intonation. The question word also receives more emphasis than it normally would.

A: Where did you go on your vacation?

B: I went to Yosemite. It was so beautiful!



- A: Where did you go?
- B: To Yosemite. Do you know where it is?
- A: What's your address?
- B: It's 123 Miller Street.
- A: What's the name of the street?
- B: Miller Street. It's spelled M-I-L-L-E-R.

Tag questions begin with a statement, followed by a short question form at the end, like these:

Our test is today, isn't it?

You've finished your homework, haven't you?

It's not raining now, is it?

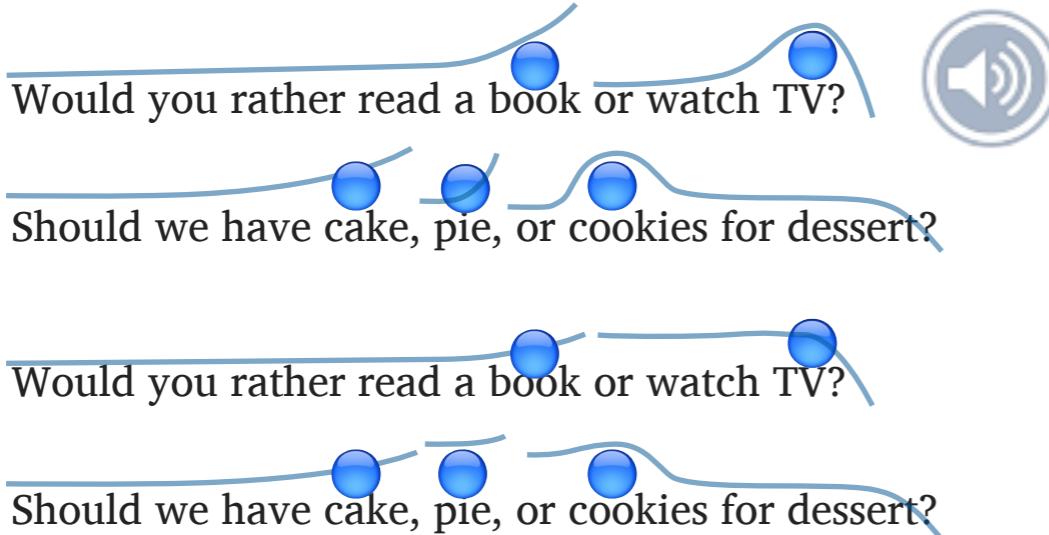
Questions like these can be spoken with two different kinds of intonation, with two different kinds of meaning. In both cases, the intonation on the first part goes down, like a statement. However, the last part varies. Sometimes the speaker really wants information and doesn't know what the answer will be. In this case, the final intonation goes up:

- 
- We're having a quiz today, aren't we?
I really don't remember, and I want to find out.
- You've finished your homework, haven't you?
I don't know if you've finished or not.
- It's not raining now, is it?
I'm indoors and can't see out the window, so I don't know.

In other cases, the speaker already knows the answer or assumes that the listener agrees. The speaker isn't really asking for information; he/she is just making conversation or trying to get the listener to express agreement. In this case, the final intonation goes down.

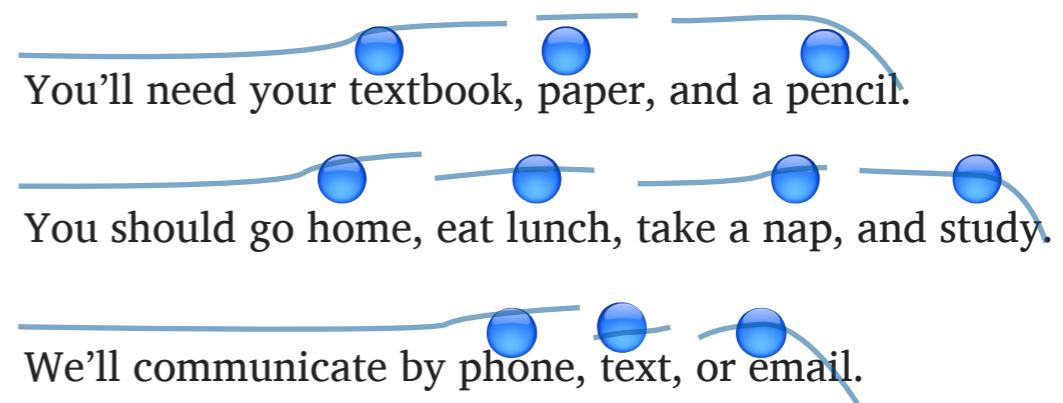
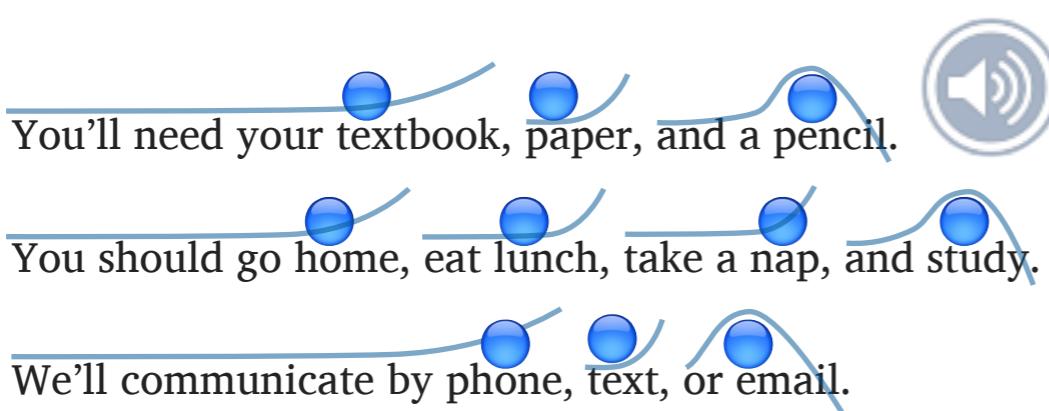
- 
- We're having a quiz today, aren't we?
I know we're having a quiz; I just want to talk about it.
- You've finished your homework, haven't you?
I know you've finished; you always finish it.
- It's not raining now, is it?
I can see that the rain has stopped. I just need something to say.

Questions with ***or*** that offer a choice between two or more things have intonation patterns like those shown below. The intonation on the choice (or choices) before *or* goes up, or sometimes stays rather flat. The intonation at the end of the sentence goes down, like a statement.



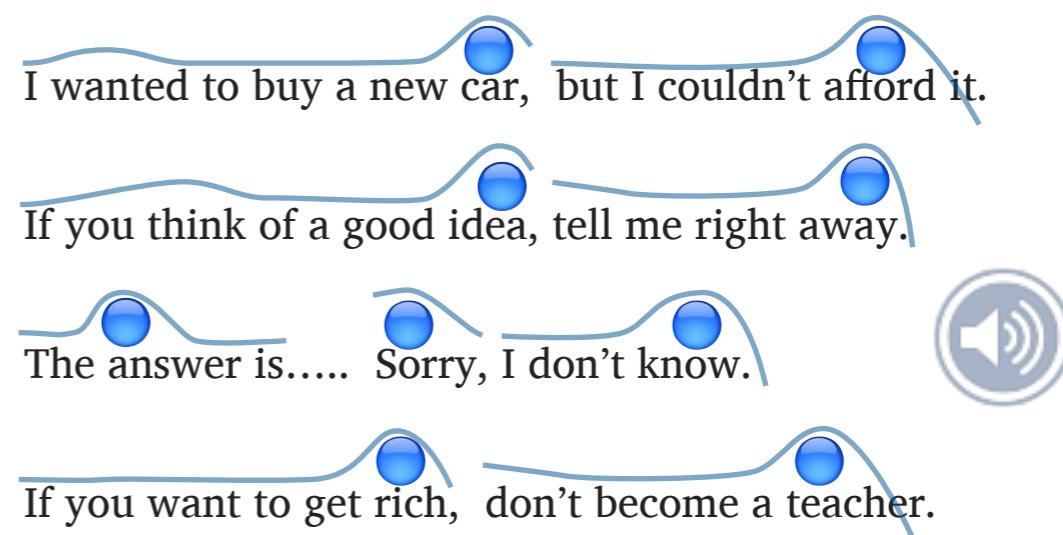
Lists

Lists of three or more things joined by *and* or *or* have intonation similar to that of *or* questions: Up or somewhat flat on the first things in the list, and down on the last one.



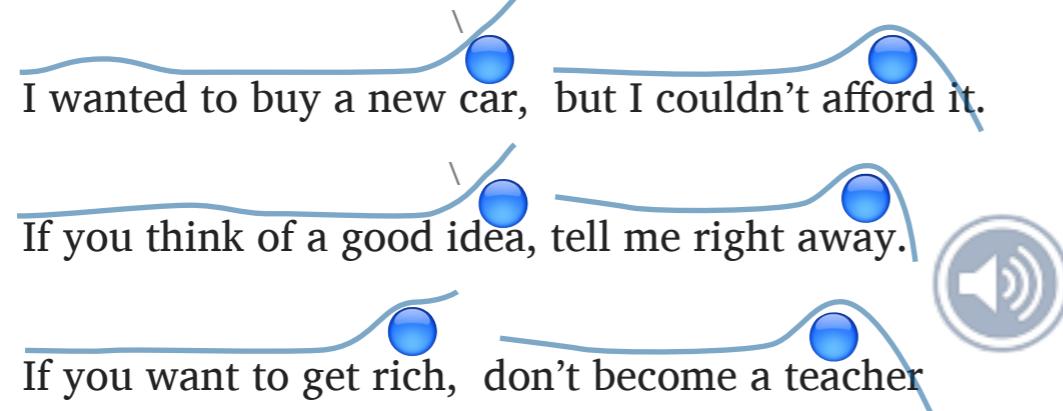
First clauses or incomplete sentences

Sometimes a thought group is not a complete sentence, either because there's another clause coming after it or because the speaker just stops in the middle. In this case, the intonation of the incomplete part is often flat at the end, or it falls just a bit, but not as much as at the end of a statement.



Sometimes these “first clauses” have a very definite rising intonation, almost like a question. This is not a traditional intonation pattern, and you may not see it described in

textbooks, but it's becoming much more common in American English recently.



Intonation in context

Another way of looking at intonation is to think about the role it can play in **discourse**, that is, in longer conversations, stories, speeches, or other types of connected language, rather than just in single sentences. This view looks at the whole context in which intonation occurs.

Old information and new information

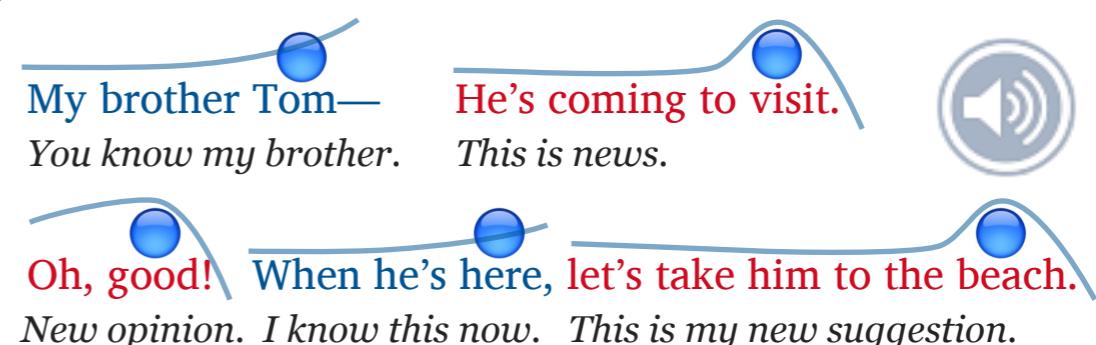
By listening to intonation, we can tell which information the speaker and listener both already know (**old information**) and which information the speaker wants to tell the listener for the first time (**new information**).

In Chapter 10, we learned that new information usually has prominence, while old information does not. The difference in intonation is related to this difference in prominence. New information, which most often comes near the end of a

thought group, has a “bump up” in pitch on the prominent word, followed by falling intonation. Some authors refer to this pitch pattern as a **proclaiming tone**; the speaker is proclaiming, or announcing some new and important information. (Brazil 1997)

Old information within a thought group does not have prominence. In a similar way, thought groups that give old, shared information have intonation that shows that their information is not new—it’s just there to remind the listener of the topic the speaker is talking about, as if the speaker is saying, “You’re with me on this; you know what I’m talking about; we have something in common.”

Thought groups that give old, shared information are often spoken with a rising intonation or a partial fall. This is sometimes called a **referring tone**. The speaker isn’t telling something new; he/she is simply referring to something that is already known. (Brazil 1997) In the following example, old information is in blue letters and new information is in red.



Taking turns

In a conversation, intonation can also help show whether a speaker wants to continue talking or is finished and ready for the listener to have a turn. Speakers often use a falling intonation pattern when they're finished talking, sometimes with an extra-low ending pitch. If the intonation of a statement is rising or fairly flat, the speaker is probably not finished talking. (Of course, if the speaker is asking a yes/no question, rising intonation is normal and he/she is probably finished and waiting for an answer.)

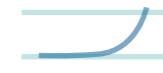
Meaning related to intonation patterns

Some linguists have made generalizations about the basic meaning of different types of intonation when they come at the end of a thought group. We might think of these as a sort of summary of the uses of the intonation patterns that we've already looked at. These are the three main intonation patterns that they have described (Celce-Murcia et al. 2010):

- A final fall:



- A final rise:



- A final partial fall:



A final fall

When the speaker's voice falls low at the end of a thought group, it gives a feeling of finality, completion, and certainty. This matches what we've already read about grammar and intonation patterns, where falling intonation is connected to statements, commands, requests, the last element of a list, or a tag question when the speaker is sure the listener will agree. We can easily see that all of these express certainty. (*WH-* questions and *or* questions don't fit quite so neatly; we're asking for information rather than giving it.)

A final rise

A final rise in intonation expresses uncertainty, surprise, or lack of information. It's used in yes/no questions, tag questions when the speaker really doesn't know the answer, clarification questions, and requests (usually when the speaker feels uncertain about whether he/she should make the request or doesn't feel confident about the listener's reaction).

A partial fall

When the speaker's voice goes down slightly at the end of a thought group, it's a sign of incompleteness. There may be another clause coming, or the speaker may just stop in the middle of a thought group and not finish the sentence. This can mean, "I'm not finished talking, so don't interrupt me."

Intonation “words”

There are several intonation patterns that can convey meaning by themselves, even without real words. The sound a speaker makes might be just a hum or a vowel sound, but its “melody” means something. For example, if we say /m/ with a quick rising intonation, listeners understand that we mean “What?” even if we haven’t actually said the word. Here are some examples in English:

INTONATION PATTERN	SOUND	MEANING	POSSIBLE SPELLING
		Yes.	Mm hmm. Uh huh.
		No.	Huh uh.
		I hear you. I’m thinking about it.	Hmm.
		What? I don’t understand	Huh? Hmm?
		I understand.	Oh!
		I don’t know.	(none)

Some of these patterns are the same across many languages. (For example, the rising intonation that means “What?” is common in many languages). But others vary from language to language, so it’s good for students to be aware of them. A certain intonation pattern may not mean what they expect it to mean.

Does my language have intonation too?

Yes, all languages have some kind of intonation. None are spoken in a flat monotone. But of course, not all languages have the same patterns of intonation. Each language has its own characteristic “melody” to fit different purposes or different kinds of sentences. If you listen to a conversation in your own language and try to hum along with the rises and falls in pitch as the speakers talk, you’ll start to recognize its melody. And if you listen to the speech of someone who is just learning your language, you might notice that their intonation doesn’t sound quite natural.

Sometimes we don’t notice the intonation of our own language. It’s so familiar that we don’t realize it’s there, but it is. Hearing the intonation of your own language is kind of like tasting water. We drink water every day, and we’re so used to its taste that we might think that it has no taste. But if we go to a new place where the water is a little different, maybe with a different mineral content or more or less

chlorine, we immediately notice that the taste is not quite the same. We only notice the taste of our own familiar water in contrast to something a little different. In the same way, we often don't notice familiar intonation patterns until something calls our attention to them.

Sometimes when people hear a language they don't understand, they say that it has a "sing-song" sound—it sounds like music. What's really happening is that they're noticing the melody of the new language because it *is* new and unfamiliar. Their own language may also have a "sing-song" sound to speakers of another language.

Why do learners have trouble with intonation?

In a way, it seems that intonation should be the easiest aspect of pronunciation to learn. After all, intonation is accessible. We can easily hear the "melody" of speech, even if we don't understand what's being said, just as we can hum along with a song without knowing the words. But students often do have trouble using intonation naturally. Here are some factors that might stand in their way:

- **Lack of knowledge:** If students haven't been taught about intonation, or if they haven't been exposed to enough "real" English to hear its typical intonation

patterns, they may simply not have the information they need to produce natural-sounding intonation. After all, intonation has not always received much attention in many traditional language classes.

- **Lack of noticing:** Even if students have received information about intonation from the teacher or a textbook, they may not have noticed or remembered it. Perhaps they haven't been paying attention to the intonation of the models they've heard, or they might have been daydreaming in class, or for many other reasons, they just don't realize it's important. Being given information is not enough; the learner has to notice and pay attention to the information.
- **Habits:** For language learners, the melody of their own language is such an ingrained part of them that it may not have occurred to them that anything different is possible. It's sometimes hard for learners to realize that the teacher really does want them to speak differently, and then to take the steps that are necessary to change. This is especially true for adult learners; their language habits have been with them for a very long time.
- **Overly careful models:** When reading sentences for students to repeat, some teachers are in the habit of saying them extremely slowly and carefully. They may even give each word its own full emphasis with a little

rising intonation, as if the sentence were just a list of individual words. Needless to say, this is not a model that will help students use natural-sounding intonation.

- **Feelings:** Sometimes students feel self-conscious about using strange, new intonation patterns. Adolescent or young adult learners in particular might feel awkward or embarrassed if they sound different from others around them. Even adult learners can feel hesitant about breaking out of familiar intonation habits to try new and unfamiliar “melodies.” For some learners, trying to sound truly different can be as disturbing as being asked to walk around naked. (Well, maybe not quite!)
- **There are too many things to think about.** Learners have to think about a lot of things when they speak in addition to pronunciation—word choice, grammatical forms, politeness, meaning—and these things have not yet become automatic. It’s hard to have any attention left over for intonation. It’s very difficult to concentrate on too many things at once.
- **Motivation:** Some learners just don’t care about intonation. Maybe they’re not convinced that intonation really is important, and so they don’t want to bother with it. Or they might think that if they’re not going to be tested on it, they’ll save their effort for other things that

will be tested. (Is it possible that some teachers also feel this way?)

What can the teacher do about all these problems?

- Make sure to include intonation in your teaching and help students to notice it and understand its function and importance in language.
- Give students lots of exposure to authentic English through recordings and videos, and give them chances to analyze and imitate the intonation of the speakers.
- Encourage students to pay attention to the intonation they hear in these recordings and to form their own generalizations about what it means and how it’s used. This ability to listen and analyze language is a skill that they can use even after they are no longer your students.
- Try to create a warm, unthreatening classroom environment where students can feel comfortable trying out new intonation patterns and new language in general.
- Memorizing rules is usually *not* the most effective way to teach intonation or other aspects of pronunciation. Help students think about rules as guidelines to help them make appropriate choices, not commands that they have to follow. We often learn to use a new bit of language even without being able to quote the rule that fits it.

Internet Links

Here's a video on YouTube of twin babies "talking" to each other. Even before they can say real words, these babies can produce the intonation of questions and answers: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JmA2ClUvUY

Connected Speech

What is connected speech?

Language learners often feel that natural, spoken English is fast and hard to understand. They can't hear each word clearly; instead, all the words sound like one long, confusing stream of sound. This is because when people talk normally, their words naturally blend together and change in predictable ways. (This happens in all languages, not only in English.) We call this **connected speech**.

Connected speech is not sloppy, uneducated, or bad. It's just normal. It happens when people speak quickly and casually, but also when they

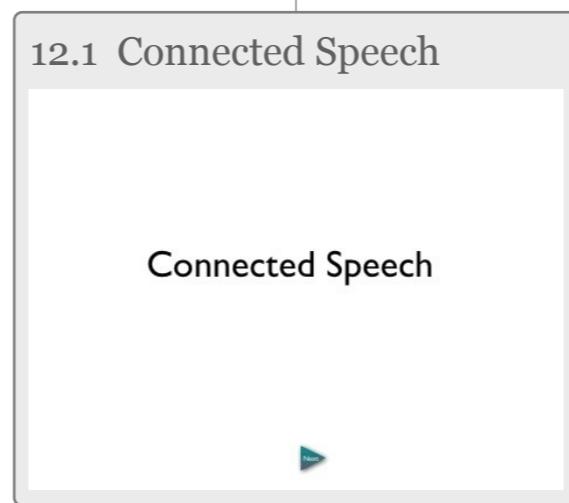
speak slowly and formally. Connected speech is not limited to one geographic area or one variety of English. Native speakers of Standard North American, British, Australian, and New Zealand English all use connected speech, as do speakers of all regional dialects. In other words, any time people speak, they're using connected speech. (Ladefoged 2006 pp. 109-110)

Why is there connected speech?

When people speak, there are usually two parties involved—the speaker and the listener. Both of these want their job to be as easy as possible: The speaker wants to be able to speak easily, and the listener wants to be able to understand easily. But the needs of these two sides are in conflict:

The speaker: The speaker's mouth basically wants to work in the easiest way possible, with the least movement or effort. This leads the speaker's articulatory system to take shortcuts—to move from one sound to the next in the shortest and easiest way, to blend sounds together when it can, and to change and sometimes omit sounds. Our mouths are a little bit lazy.

The listener: On the other hand, listeners need to be able to hear the difference between



sounds, or they won't understand the words that the speaker is saying. For the listener, it would be easiest if all the words were pronounced distinctly and clearly, with not too many sounds omitted or changed. This means that our mouths can't be *too lazy*, or we won't be understood.

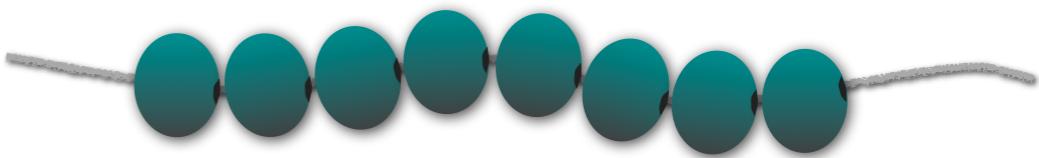
When we speak, we unconsciously find a balance between the needs of the speaker and the needs of the listener. The movements of our mouths have to be comfortable and efficient, but not too lazy to be understood.

Words in connected speech are changed in some predictable ways. These are the three most common types of sound changes, or **phonological processes**, in English:

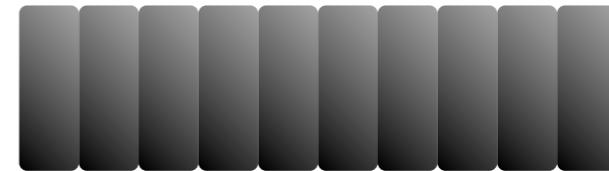
- **Linking** (sounds joining together)
- **Assimilation** (sounds become more similar)
- **Deletion** (omitting a sound)

Linking

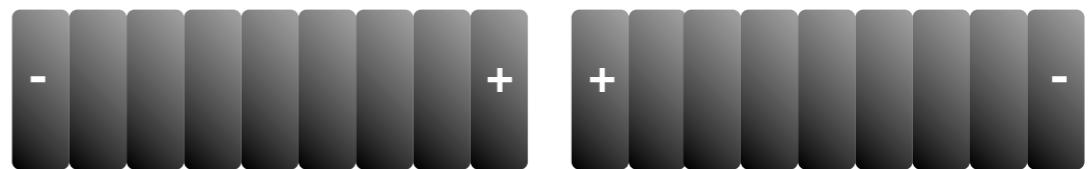
In normal speech, words within each thought group are not pronounced as separate, individual units. Instead, the last sound of one word is linked to or blended with the first sound of the next word. In other words, the words in a sentence are *not* like a string of beads, where the individual shapes can still be seen as separate objects:



Instead, they're like a row of magnets that stick together so strongly that they seem to form one bar. Even though they're actually still individual magnets, it's hard to see the boundaries between them:



This type of "sticking together" happens whenever words are spoken together *within* a thought group. However, it does not happen across the boundaries of thought groups. That is, the last sound in one thought group is not linked to the first sound in the next one because there is typically a short pause between thought groups that prevents linking. A sentence with two thought groups is more like two separate sets of magnets arranged with similar poles together so that they don't attract—there has to be a space between them.



There are several kinds of systematic changes that happen when certain sounds are linked between words. Here are the most typical types:

Consonant + vowel

When a word ending in a consonant is followed by a word beginning with a vowel, the final consonant is linked to the following vowel. It sounds like it has become a part of the following word. (In the following diagrams, *C* means any consonant and *V* means any vowel sound.)

$$\text{xxxC} + \text{Vxxx} \Rightarrow \text{xxx} + \text{CVxxx}$$

Stop it. \Rightarrow Sto pit.

Run away. \Rightarrow Ru naway



Similarly, when a word ending in a consonant cluster is followed by a word beginning with a vowel, the last consonant in the cluster is linked to the following vowel:

$$\text{xxxCC} + \text{Vxxx} \Rightarrow \text{xxxC CVxxx}$$

She likes art. \Rightarrow She like sart.

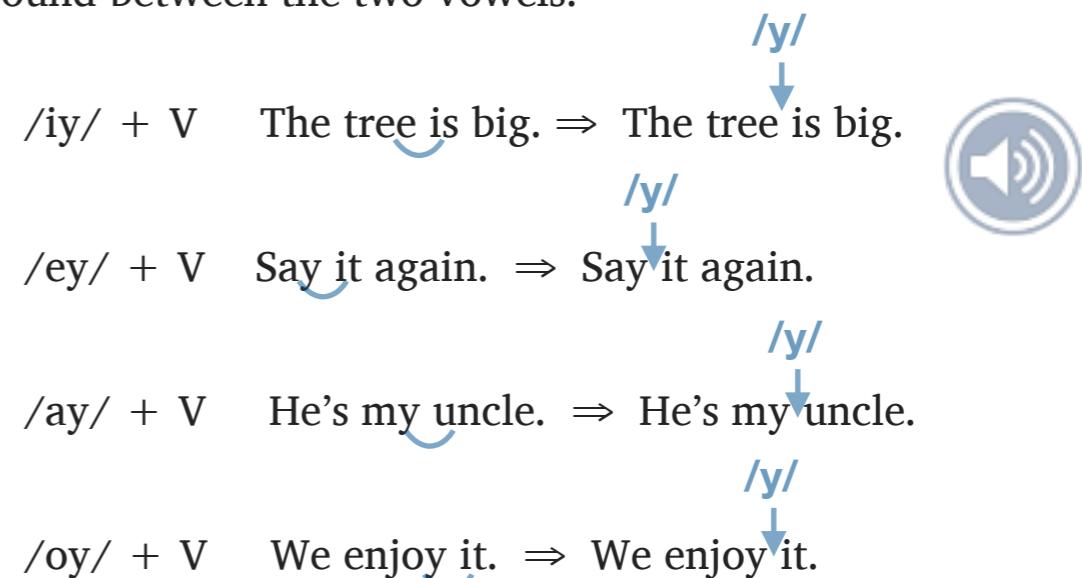
The world is big. \Rightarrow The worl dis big.



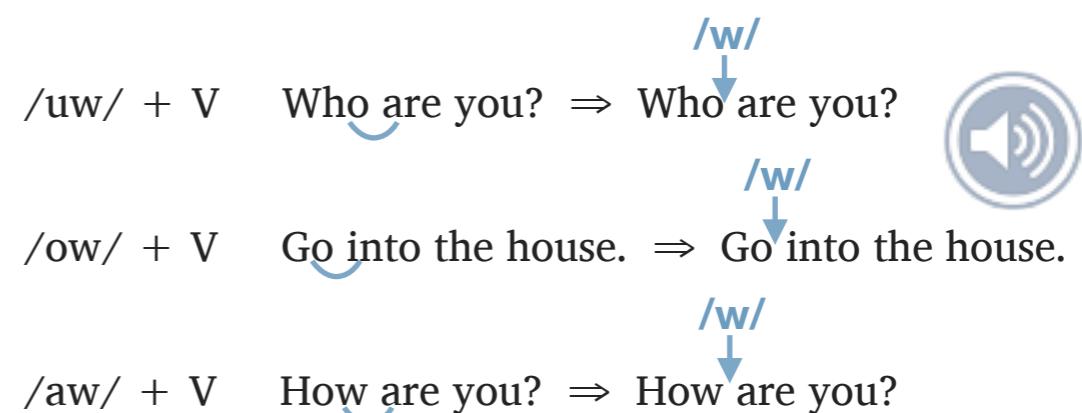
Vowel + vowel (linking with glides)

This type of linking happens when a vowel that ends in a glide (/y/ or /w/) is followed by another vowel.

/y/-type vowels: The vowels /iy/, /ey/, /ay/, and /oy/ all end in the /y/ glide. When a word ending in one of these sounds is followed by another vowel, we can hear a definite /y/ sound between the two vowels.



/w/-type vowels: the vowels /uw/, /ow/, and /aw/ all end in the glide /w/. When a word ending in one of these sounds is followed by another vowel, we can hear a definite /w/ sound between them.



Consonant + consonant

Two identical consonants: When a word ends in a consonant sound and the next word begins with the same sound, we don't pronounce two separate sounds. Instead, two identical consonants blend into one longer consonant. (However, this rule doesn't work with affricates. If we say *orange juice* or *rich children*, we hear two separate affricates.)

If the two sounds are **continuants**, they simply continue longer. (Continuants are sounds in which the air stream continues through the vocal tract without being completely blocked off: fricatives, nasals, liquids, and glides.)

/m/ + /m/ Give him more. ⇒ Give himmore.



/s/ + /s/ Miss Smith ⇒ MissSmith

/l/ + /l/ I feel like singing. ⇒ I feellike singing.

If the sounds are stops, the stop is held longer. That is, the tongue or lips block off the air stream and stay in place a bit longer than usual, and then the sound is released. We don't hear two separate stops.

/p/ + /p/ the top part ⇒ the toppart



/d/ + /d/ a good dog ⇒ a gooddog

/g/ + /g/ big grapes ⇒ biggrapes

/k/ + /k/ bake cakes ⇒ bakecakes

Two similar consonants: When a word ends in a stop sound and the next word begins with a stop or affricate, the first stop is not released, and the two sounds blend together. We often don't pronounce them as two separate sounds.

/t/ + /k/ pet cat ⇒ petcat



/g/ + /b/ big building ⇒ bigbuilding

/p/ + /t/ top tier ⇒ toptier

/t/ + /dʒ/ get juice ⇒ getjuice

Linking within words

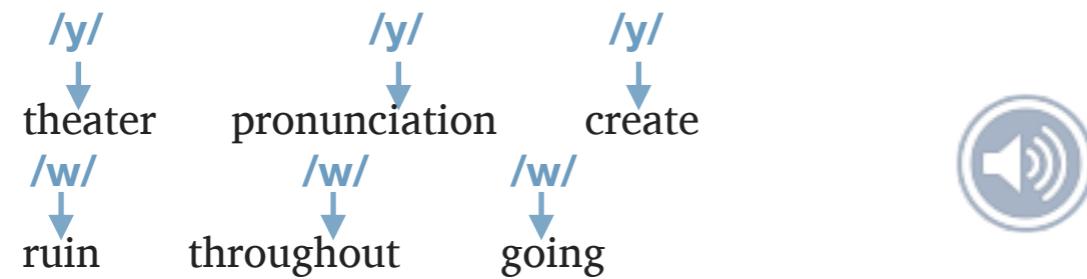
These same types of linking can also happen between sounds in the middle of a word, as well as between words. For example:

Consonant +vowel: A consonant joins the following syllable.

attend omit pepper party



Vowel + vowel: When two vowel sounds come together, a /y/ or /w/ glide can sometimes be heard:



Consonant + consonant: Sequences of two identical consonants, or of a stop plus a stop or affricate, are often found in compound words. Then the two sounds blend together and become longer.

Same consonant: bookcase roommate house-sitter



Stop + stop or affricate: hotdog background



seatbelt eggplant shopkeeper

cute child good judge keep checking



Assimilation (sounds become similar)

We talked earlier about speakers' natural tendency to find easier ways to pronounce words—to say sounds using smaller and more efficient movements of the articulators. Because of this tendency, a sound sometimes becomes more similar to a sound that comes before or after it. This process is called **assimilation**. (It comes from the same root as the word *similar*.) Assimilation makes words easier to pronounce by

bringing about easier movements of the tongue, lips, and other articulators from one sound to the next. Every language has some kind of assimilation, although not all languages use assimilation in exactly the same way.

Assimilation often changes the place of articulation of a sound to match a sound next to it. The phoneme /n/ often assimilates to a sound after it. For example, in the following phrases, we can hear differences in the last sound in the preposition *in*:

We're **in** America. /ɪnə'merɪkə/

We're **in** Nevada. /ɪnnə'vedə/

We're **in** Mexico. /ɪm'meksikow/

We're **in** Canada. /ɪŋ'kænədə/



We expect *in* to sound like /ɪn/—that's its citation form—but this is not always the case. When *in* comes before a bilabial sound, it can also become the bilabial sound /m/. Before a velar sound, it can become the velar sound /ŋ/. (Note: This type of assimilation happens with /n/, but not with /m/. For example, *something* is never pronounced /sʌnθɪŋ/.)

In the previous example, when two sounds came together, the second sound caused the first sound to change. This is the most common situation in assimilation. However, in a

smaller number of cases, the first sound causes the second sound to change. For example, when we add *-s* and *-ed* endings, the endings are voiced after a voiced sound, and voiceless after a voiceless sound. The voicing of the first sound affects the voicing of the following sound. (See Chapter 6 for more details on these endings.)

In still other cases, two sounds blend together to make a new sound. For example, when we say *Don't you?* it often sounds like *Doncha?* or when we say *Did you?* it sounds like *Didja?* This type of assimilation is called **palatalization** because an alveolar sound (/t/, /d/, /s/, or /z/) becomes a palatal sound (/ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, or /dʒ/) when there's a /y/ after it. Here are the combinations of sounds that can cause this change:

/t/+/y/ ⇒ /tʃ/ Is that your dog?

/d/+/y/ ⇒ /dʒ/ It made you angry.

/s/+/y/ ⇒ /ʃ/ I'll miss you.

/z/+/y/ ⇒ /ʒ/ Is your brother here?



None of these types of assimilation has to happen; people can also pronounce these combinations of sounds without the changes described here. However, assimilation happens constantly in real English, and spoken language sounds much more natural if assimilation takes place.

Deletion (losing a sound)

In normal connected speech, sounds may disappear or not be clearly pronounced in certain contexts. This is called **deletion** or **omission** of a sound. It's important to remember, though, that we can't leave out sounds just anywhere. Omitting sounds at random makes language hard to understand. The kind of deletion we're talking about happens only in certain specific situations and in certain sound environments.

Contractions and blends

The most familiar example of deletion is the shortened forms called **contractions**. These are words like *can't*, *I'm*, and *we're* that lose a whole syllable when two words are combined. Many of these forms, like the examples just mentioned, are so common and well-accepted that they have standard written forms, using an apostrophe (') to replace the missing parts. Other shortened forms are just as common in speech, but are not often written as contractions. For example, when we shorten *we are*, we say /wɪər/, and it's acceptable to write it as *we're*. However, when we shorten *teachers are*, we can say /'tiytʃəzə/, but we don't usually write it as *teachers're*. These shortened forms that are usually not represented as such in writing can be called **blends**. For pronunciation purposes, contractions and blends are the same

thing. The only difference is whether or not they have standard written forms replacing the “lost” sounds with an apostrophe.

12.2 COMMON CONTRACTIONS		
Verb + Not	Be	Isn't, aren't, wasn't, weren't
	Do	Doesn't, don't, didn't
	Have	Hasn't, haven't, hadn't
	Modals	Can't, couldn't, won't, wouldn't, mustn't, shouldn't
Pronoun + Be		I'm, you're, he's, she's, it's, we're, they're, that's. There's (although it's not a pronoun)
Question word + verb	Be will	What's, where's, when's, who's, why's, how's, what'll, who'll
Pronoun + Auxiliary Verb	Will Would Have	I'll, you'll, he'll, she'll, it'll, we'll, they'll I'd, you'd, he'd, she'd, it'd, we'd, they'd I've, you've, he's, she's, it's, we've, you've

Simplification of consonant clusters

In Chapter 4, we've already learned about another example of omission: Speakers often simplify clusters of three or more consonants by omitting a middle consonant, but not the first or last consonant. This happens most often when the middle consonant is a stop, /θ/, or /ð/. The remaining consonants can be stretched out to last a little longer (if they're both the

same) or linked together following the rules described earlier in this section. For example:

The tests seem hard. /stss/ ⇒ /ss/ 

He's a kind man. /ndm/ ⇒ /nm/ 

The facts seem clear. /ktss/ ⇒ /kss/ 

Three months /nθs/ ⇒ /ns/ 

This type of omission is normal and accepted, although most speakers are not consciously aware that it's happening. It's fine to teach it as a way of coping with difficult consonant clusters, but it's not necessary to force students to follow it.

Loss of /t/ after /n/

When the sounds /nt/ come between syllables and the first syllable is stressed, /t/ is sometimes omitted:

winter ⇒ /wɪnə/ (sounds the same as *winner*) 

dentist ⇒ /dənist/ wanted ⇒ /wanəd/ 

Unlike the changes described in the previous section, some listeners might notice and disapprove of this sound change. It's good to be able to recognize words with the missing /t/, but it's best not to encourage students to use this particular sound change.

Common words and expressions

As we saw in Chapter 9, sounds are deleted in some very common expressions. For example:

Going to ⇒ *gonna* /'gʌnə/ or /'gɔnə/



Want to ⇒ *wanna* /'wanə/

Could have ⇒ *coulda* /'kudə/

Should have ⇒ *shoulda* /'ʃudə/

Some common words can also have sounds or whole syllables omitted. (See Chapter 8 for a longer list of words with “disappearing syllables.”) Here are a few examples:

Missing sounds:

governor ⇒ /'gʌvənər/ surprise ⇒ /sə'prayz/



because ⇒ 'cause /kəz/ about ⇒ 'bout /baut/

Missing syllables:

chocolate /tʃaklət/ vegetable /'vɛdʒtəbəl/



family /'fæmliy/ restaurant /'restərənt/

Segmentation (dividing sounds into words)

Because of all the blending and changes that take place in connected speech, it's sometimes difficult to know where to divide a stream of sound into individual words, but this is a skill that listeners need in order to understand spoken

language. The ability to hear spoken language and mentally divide it into understandable words is called **segmentation**.

Learners who hear connected speech may sometimes not understand the words at all, or they may divide the words up incorrectly and misunderstand what was said. An often-heard example is the story of a waiter in a restaurant who asks, “Do you want soup or salad?” and the customer, interpreting it as “Do you want super salad?” answers, “Yes, please.”

Differences in segmentation are also the source of jokes. In the credits at the end of every episode of *Car Talk*, a humorous radio program in which two brothers give callers advice about car repairs, the names of some of the program’s (fictitious) staff members are given at the end of each program. If you say the names quickly, they sound like phrases related to their imagined jobs.

- Lighting Expert: Shanda Lear (Chandelier)
- Speechwriter: Audrey Marx (Odd remarks)
- Audience Estimator: Adam Illion (Add a million)
- Chief Benefactor: Myra Chunkle (My rich uncle)
- Weather Forecaster: Windsor Calm (Winds are calm)
- Optometrists: Ike and Zeke Leerly (I can see clearly)

(You can see more *Car Talk* Staff Credits at <http://www.cartalk.com/content/staff-credits>.)



How much connected speech do learners need?

When learners listen to authentic English, they'll hear connected speech constantly. If they can't understand connected speech, they won't be able to understand spoken English. Therefore, it's very important to help students become aware of connected speech in authentic English and practice hearing and understanding it.

It's less urgent for students to learn to produce connected speech themselves. They can usually communicate well even without using all the sound changes we've talked about. But to help students prepare for real world English, we need to help them understand the changes that take place in connected speech.

Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation

Suprasegmentals: Squishy, but fun

In teaching students about suprasegmentals—word stress, rhythm, thought groups, prominence, intonation, and connected speech—we often find that the subject matter is less clear and exact than when we teach individual phonemes. After all, it's not hard to get teachers to agree on how we produce sounds and what learners need to know about pronouncing them. But with suprasegmentals, the content is harder to define, and in many language classes, it gets very little attention.

Fortunately, there are plenty of ways to use **auditory**, **visual**, and **kinesthetic** methods to practice the musical

aspects of pronunciation, and there's plenty of room for imagination and creativity in finding new tools and activities. And some suprasegmentals—especially intonation and rhythm—are actually more accessible to beginners than individual sounds are. It's easy to hear the melody of speech, even if you can't quite catch the sounds and don't understand the words.

In introducing and practicing suprasegmentals, we can still think in terms of the communicative teaching framework we looked at in Chapter 7, with some adjustments to fit the difference in subject matter. (Celce-Murcia 2010) The stages of practice in that framework are:

- Description and Analysis (Introduction of the feature)
- Listening
- Controlled Practice
- Guided Practice
- Communicative Practice

In the next sections, we'll look at ways of introducing and practicing each type of suprasegmental feature. We'll see that with some of these features, especially thought groups, prominence, and intonation, context is very important—even more so than with individual sounds. After all, using these features well depends on understanding the situation and the

meaning the speaker wants to convey. We often can't predict the best intonation or prominence for a sentence without knowing the whole story of what's happening.

In teaching suprasegmentals, it's important not to forget the first stage, the introduction and explanation of the new features. Students don't intuitively know all this. We need to give plenty of examples with some simple, clear explanations to guide students toward noticing and understanding how they work. Textbooks or teachers sometimes suggest, for example, eliciting examples of connected speech from students, or asking them to predict where the prominent syllable in a sentence will be. However, we can't expect students to come up with these examples on their own too soon. You can't elicit what isn't there yet, and students can't make predictions without some knowledge or experience to guide their guesses. As the teacher, you need to provide a source of information and some general principles before students can be expected to apply what they've learned. Don't jump into the middle of the sequence of activities and expect students to know what they haven't yet learned.

Now let's look at some ways to introduce and practice each of the suprasegmental features we've talked about. Practice activities are listed roughly in order from simpler to more complex or from more controlled to less controlled.

Syllables and word stress

Introducing syllables and word stress

Syllables are hard to define or explain, but easy to illustrate. Say several simple words with two or three syllables, clapping with each syllable. Encourage students to clap or tap their fingers on their desks too. First count the syllables yourself as students count along with you, and then have students try counting syllables on their own. Clapping or making other gestures along with syllables helps students understand what they are and count them more accurately.

To introduce the concept of word stress, explain that in English, one syllable in a word is louder, longer, and higher in pitch than the others. Say some simple, familiar words, exaggerating the stressed syllable, and ask students which syllable was stressed. They'll usually be able to recognize it.

To further emphasize the importance of word stress, say a familiar word with the correct stress and then again with incorrect stress so students can hear the difference. For example, say *PENcil*, and then *penCIL*. Ask students which one sounds more like the word they've learned. Point out that with incorrect stress, even words they know sound odd and unfamiliar. The well-known comment that "You put the emPHAsis on the wrong syllAble" also helps to point out that words with incorrect stress can be difficult to understand.

Listening to syllables and word stress

Same or different? Have students listen to pairs of words and decide if the number of syllables is the same or different. After learning about word stress, have them listen to pairs of words and decide if they have the same or different syllable pattern, including the number of syllables and the placement of stress.

Listen and mark: Give students a list of familiar words. Have them listen to the words and mark the stressed syllables with circles, accent marks, stars, or some other mark.

Comparing syllables: To build awareness of the difference between syllables in English and their own language, give students a few words that are very similar in English and in their language, but with different numbers of syllables. For example, the English word *chocolate* has two syllables in its most common pronunciation: /'tʃak•lət/, but the equivalent word in German has four: Scho•ko•la•de. In French, it has three: cho•co•lat. In Spanish it has four: cho•co•la•te. Comparing related words like these focuses students' attention on syllables.

Practicing syllables and word stress

Physical actions: As students say words, have them do one of the following during the stressed syllable:

- Clap their hands, tap the table, snap their fingers, nod their heads, or stomp their feet.
- Stay sitting during unstressed syllables and stand up on the stressed syllable.
- Open their eyes wider on the stressed syllable.
- Stretch a thick rubber band on stressed syllables (but only if you trust your students not to misbehave with rubber bands).

Any of these actions can be done while saying individual words or whole sentences or dialogs. The movements will help students remember to emphasize the stressed syllables.

Pattern matching: Make two sets of cards—one with common stress patterns represented by circles of different sizes (**Oo**, **oO**, **ooO**, **oOo**, etc.) and the other with categories of meaning (food, plants, jobs, countries, etc.). Ask students to think of as many words as possible with a given stress pattern in a given category within a time limit. This can be done as a pair or group activity or as a competition between teams involving the whole class.

As a variation, make one set of cards with stress patterns and another set with words that the students know. Have students match the patterns with the words.

Syllable scavenger hunt: Ask students to look for and list objects whose names have a certain number of syllables or a certain stress pattern, using real objects in the classroom or objects shown in a detailed picture or photograph from a magazine.

Make syllable models: Use large and small glass or plastic shapes, beads, beans, or **Cuisenaire rods** to represent stressed and unstressed syllables. To help students feel the difference between the two types of syllables most clearly, choose bigger, heavier, more interesting pieces for stressed syllables and small, smooth, plain pieces for unstressed syllables. Have students arrange the objects to represent the syllable and stress patterns of words.

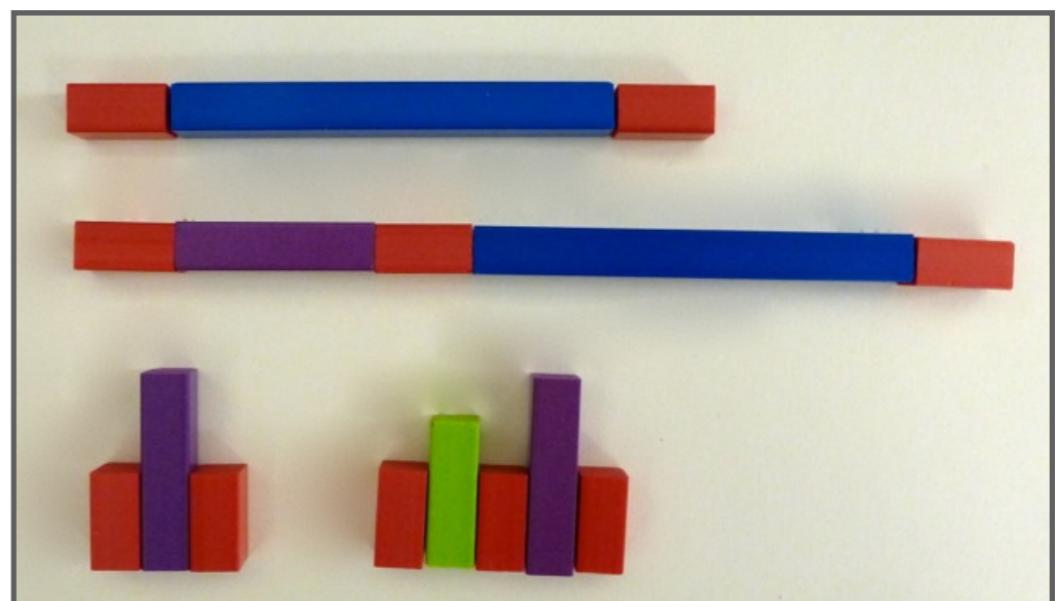
For example, the words *po'tato*, *re'peated*, and *sin'cerely* have this pattern:



The words *communi'cation*, *enthusi'astic*, and *appreci'ation* have this pattern:



Here are the same two syllable patterns illustrated using Cuisenaire rods. These don't give the impression of loudness, emphasis, and "weight" as well as glass blobs, but when they're placed horizontally, they help students see that stressed syllables last longer than unstressed syllables. If we place them vertically, they emphasize that stressed syllables are higher in pitch.



Throw a ball: Seat students in a circle. Give a very soft ball (not a softball; that's something else entirely) to a student and ask him/her to think of a word with more than one syllable. The student says the word slowly, throwing the ball to another student (who is paying attention and ready to catch the ball) when the stressed syllable begins. He/she must keep saying the stressed syllable until the other student catches the ball. This encourages students to stretch out the stressed syllables and make them sound longer than the unstressed syllables. (Of course, you should avoid this activity if throwing things in the classroom is frowned on by your school's administration.)

Matching syllable patterns: Have students work in pairs. One student says a word, and the partner answers with a different word with the same syllable pattern—the same number of syllables and the same position of stress. Partners take turns being first. For example, if the first partner says '**father**', the other might answer with '**table**', '**textbook**', or '**paper**'.

Growing syllables: In a group, the first person says a one-syllable word, the next says a two-syllable word, the next, a three-syllable word, and so forth, until someone can't think of a longer word. Then that person starts again with a one-syllable word. The same activity can be done with phrases.

Noun/verb pairs with different stress: Give students a list of sentences or a story containing noun/verb pairs like '**produce**' and **pro'duce** or '**record**' and **re'cord** and have them practice reading with correct stress. Mix in some words that have same stress as a noun or verb, like '**travel**', **re'port**, or '**pressure**', to remind students that this noun/verb stress change happens with some, but not all words that can be used as both nouns and verbs.

Suffixes and stress: This activity works best as a competition between small teams. Give the teams some time to prepare first, brainstorming words that can add a suffix to make a new word, for example, *nation* and *national*, *easy* and *easily*, or *communicate* and *communication*. Tell the teams to be sure they know where the stress should be in each word. After brainstorming, one team says a base word (with correct stress). The other team has to make it into a new word by adding a suffix, and say the new word with correct stress. If the second team can't think of a suffix to add, the first team has to tell them one. For example, if the first team says '*nation*', the second could say '*national*' or '*nation'ality*' or '*nationalize*'. Points can be given to teams that say a word successfully.

Rhythm

Introducing rhythm

Squeeze the syllables: The important point in introducing the rhythm of English is to help students hear and feel that some syllables are emphasized and last longer, and other syllables are unstressed and are shortened and reduced so that they squeeze in between the stressed syllables.

Start with a simple sentence with three one-syllable words, such as *Cake tastes good*. Have students repeat, clapping on the stressed words. (In this short sentence, they'll clap on all the words.) Then add extra unstressed syllables, showing how the stressed syllables remain about the same distance apart, and the unstressed words are reduced. For example:



CAKE



TASTES



GOOD.



The CAKE

TASTED GOOD.

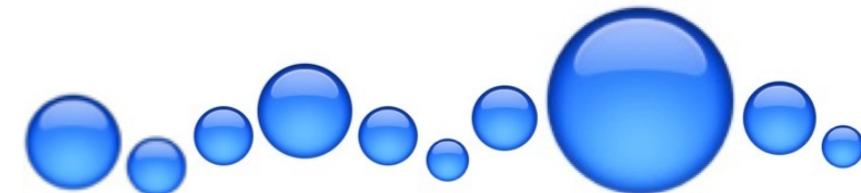
The CAKE might have TASTED GOOD.

The CAKE might have TASTED deLicious.

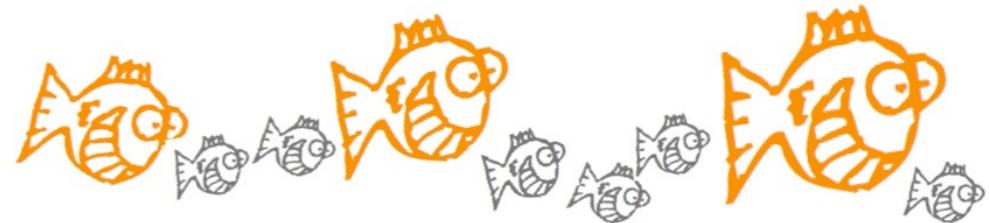
The CAKE shouldn't have TASTED so deLicious.

(Variations of this activity are found in Celce-Murcia et al. 2010, Avery and Ehrlich 1992, and many other sources.)

Syllable symbols: In introducing rhythm, we can use symbols or pictures of various sizes to represent syllables and rhythm patterns and help students visualize rhythm:



Everyone studied in the library.



Everyone talked about the party.

Listening to rhythm

Move with the rhythm: As students listen to sentences, a poem, or a nursery rhyme, have them clap, tap their fingers, or stomp their feet on the stressed syllables to show the rhythm. Simple musical instruments, such as a xylophone, small drum, or tambourine, can be used in the same way.

Word and phrase matching: Help students connect the rhythm of a phrase to the rhythm of a familiar word with the same pattern. For example, the sentence *I gave it to her* has the same rhythm pattern as the word *re'frigerator*. The process of noticing and recognizing the similarity of patterns

helps prepare students to pay attention to the rhythm of language and to imitate it well.

Practicing rhythm

Walk the rhythm: Have students walk around the room as they read or recite sentences or a dialog, taking bigger steps on stressed syllables and shorter ones on unstressed syllables. As an alternative, have them take a step only on stressed syllables and stand still on the others. (Miller 2007 p. 82)

Using a metronome: A metronome is a device that makes clicking sounds at regular intervals. Metronomes are usually used by musicians to help them keep the rhythm of music, but they can also be used to help students feel the rhythm of language. If you set the speed rather slow, it's possible to speak so that the stressed syllables coincide with the clicks of the metronome. If you don't have a metronome, you can find an online version at <http://www.metronomeonline.com/>.

Use a metronome thoughtfully, however. Not all language is regular enough to speak along with such a perfectly regular beat. You'll need to choose the sentences you say carefully so



Metronome:
Touch to listen

that they will sound right when spoken with the metronome's beat. (Simple poems and chants are good.) Also, don't set the metronome too fast, or students (and even teachers) won't be able to keep up. Start out slowly and build up a bit more speed after practicing.

Poems and children's rhymes: Reading or reciting simple poems or **limericks** can help students practice rhythm, especially if they clap their hands along with the beat.

A limerick is a kind of humorous poem with a particular pattern of rhymes and beats. In this example, the main beats are in *italics*:

There *once* was a *fat* old judge
Exceedingly *fond* of fudge.
He *grew* so enormous
Our sources inform us
He *now* is not able to *budge*.



Nursery rhymes and other children's rhymes are simple ways to help students practice rhythm. Jump rope rhymes can be especially effective because they are meant to be chanted along with the rhythm of jumping rope. If it's not practical to jump rope in class, children can clap their hands while they say the rhymes. Here is a popular jump rope rhyme. You can

see a video of it here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4Cx58njydI>

Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn around.

Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch the ground.

Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn off the light.

Teddy bear, teddy bear, jump out of sight.



Chants: Chants are rhythmic sets of normal English sentences that can be repeated to practice pronunciation, stress, and rhythm. They have a strong rhythm, but they usually don't rhyme. They give students a chance to repeat new sounds in a way that seems natural and interesting, rather than boringly repetitious. Chants are especially popular with children, who respond well to rhythm and love to repeat favorite lines again and again, especially with gestures and body movements. Chants and rhymes can also be used with adults, but only if the teacher and students feel comfortable with them. If the teacher feels self-conscious or uncomfortable, or if adult students think the activity is too childish, then it's best to choose another form of practice.

Although poems and chants have been used by language teachers for many years, Carolyn Graham, an ESL teacher and jazz singer in New York, created the idea of Jazz Chants in the 1970s as a way to help her students practice English

through the rhythm of jazz. In addition to the many books she's written, her website, <http://jazzchants.net/>, is a great resource that offers examples and information about using chants effectively and writing your own chants.

Here's an example of a simple chant:

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

Bowls and spoons

Now we're ready. Let's all eat!



When you hear a chant, it sounds like natural, unplanned language, but not all English sentences can be good jazz chants. To write a chant, you have to plan and choose sentences that work. For advice about writing chants, a good source is Carolyn Graham's book *Creating Chants and Songs*. (Graham 2006)

Thought groups

Introducing thought groups

Fast talker: To show students why thought groups are necessary, take a deep breath and start talking or reading aloud without pausing until you run out of breath. It doesn't matter what you say; just keep talking. Ask the students if it was easy to understand you. Then start speaking again, but a bit slower and with normal pauses. Ask the students why the second way was easier to understand. They'll surely remark on the difference that pauses make. This helps students see how difficult it is to understand a speaker who doesn't divide words into thought groups.

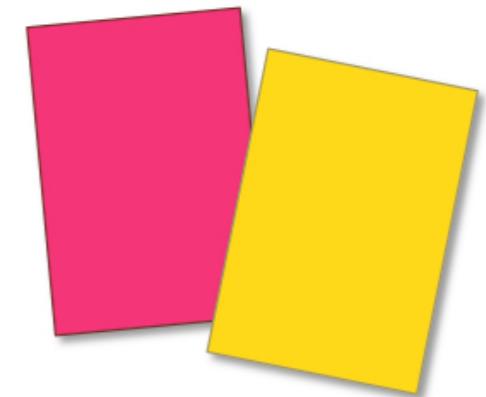
Listening to thought groups

Mark the pauses: Have students listen to a story, dialog, or paragraph while following along with a written script. Ask them to draw slash marks or other symbols to show the pauses that divide thought groups. For an easy start, write the story with normal punctuation. (Punctuation often occurs where thought groups are divided.) To make the activity more challenging, print the story without punctuation. Have students listen again and mark the pauses they hear. After some practice, students can be asked to predict on their own where pauses should be. Then have them read the story aloud with appropriate division into thought groups.

Practicing thought groups

Hand gestures: Have students read or recite a dialog or story, using a “chopping” hand gesture to indicate the pauses that divide sentences into thought groups, or have students wave their hands to show thought groups—up at the beginning of a thought group and down at the end.

Red card, yellow card: Give each student two small cards or pieces of paper, one red and one yellow. Ask them what the colors remind them of. Some students might think of red and yellow



traffic lights: Red means stop, and yellow means slow down. Others might think of penalty cards used in soccer games: Yellow for a warning and red when a player is sent out of the game. Either analogy will work. The idea is that the yellow card represents a short pause (for example, between clauses), and the red one represents a longer pause (usually at the end of a sentence).

As students read a story or dialog aloud, have them hold up the yellow card to show a partial pause and a red card to show a complete stop. Here's an example of a joke that works well for this:

Patient: Doctor I have a pain in my eye whenever I drink tea

Doctor: Next time take the spoon out of the cup before you drink



Sentence matching: Write or find sentences that can be divided into two or three thought groups. Write sentences using the language students have been studying, or use proverbs or famous quotations. Give students lists of the first and last halves of the sentences in mixed-up order. Have them match the sentence parts to make good sentence. Then practice reading the sentences, pausing between the thought groups. (Grant 2010 p. 107)

A penny saved	easy go.
An apple a day	lifts all boats.
Easy come,	must come to an end.
A rising tide	is a penny earned.
All good things	keeps the doctor away.



Prominence

Introducing prominence

Explain to students that in English, there is one word that is emphasized more than the others in every thought group. Give examples of a sentence that could have different intentions, depending on which word is emphasized. For example have students think about the difference between these three sentences:

Bob didn't do his HOMEwork.

(A normal sentence)

BOB didn't do his homework.

(Someone else did it for him.)

Bob DIDN'T do his homework.

(You thought he did it, but he really didn't.)



Listening to prominence

Mark it up: Have students listen to short sentences first, and then longer dialogs or stories, following along on a written script. Ask them to notice and mark how the sentences were divided into thought groups. Then ask them to listen again and mark the word in each thought group that was the loudest, highest in pitch, and most emphasized. It's important for students to hear and work with plenty of examples before they're expected to predict on their own where prominence should go.

Practicing prominence

Make models: Many of the methods that we used for word stress can also be adapted to draw attention to prominent syllables. Have students use beads, beans, or glass shapes again, but this time each one will represent a whole word instead of a syllable. Use a larger shape to represent each prominent word. The picture below uses large and small magnets to represent the sentence “We’re planning a picnic in the park,” with one magnet for each word.



We’re planning a picnic in the PARK.

For a simpler exercise, have students place a marker only on the prominent word in each thought group in written sentences.

Rubber bands. While saying a sentence, have students stretch a thick rubber band vertically on prominent syllables. This emphasizes that the intonation (usually) goes up on that syllable. If you’d rather not use rubber bands, substitute a different movement, like raising their hands on the prominent syllable.)

Corrections: To practice using contrastive stress in correcting false information have students work in pairs. One student says a false statement, and the partner gives the correct information, using appropriate contrastive stress. For example:

- A: Sydney is in Austria.
- B: No, it’s not in AUStria. It’s in AuSTRALia.

- B: There are eight days in a week.
- A: No, not EIGHT days. There are only SEVen days in a week.

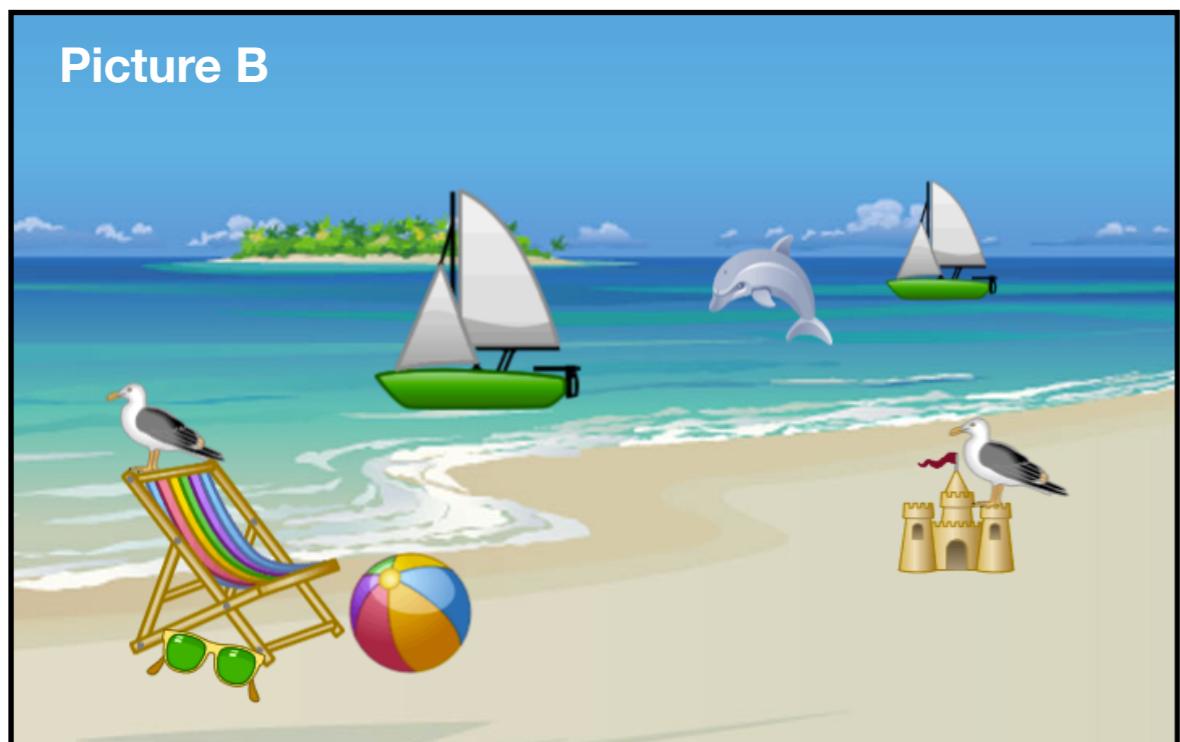


“Find the difference” pictures: This is another activity to practice contrastive stress. Find or make two pictures that are almost the same except for some details. The differences should be easy to see—if you look at both pictures, the differences should be obvious. Put students in pairs and give a different picture to each partner. Without looking at their partner’s picture, students try to discover the differences between the two pictures by telling each other about their picture and asking each other questions. As they talk about the differences, they should emphasize words that are being contrasted or information that is a correction to a mistake.
(Celce-Murcia et al. 2010)

Picture A



Picture B



“Find the difference” pictures

Here's an example conversation about the two pictures on the left, with prominent syllables in capital letters:

- A: I see a SAILboat in my picture.
B: Oh! I see TWO sailboats in my picture. Do you see a BIRD standing on a SAND castle?
A: No, I see a SAND castle, but there's no BIRD on it.



There are many sources of these pictures in books and on the Internet; search for “find the difference pictures.” You can also draw or make your own pictures. The pictures shown here were made with a free iPad app called Doodle Buddy. It includes several backgrounds to choose from and a selection of small pictures to add.

Predicting prominence: After students have had a chance to practice a lot and have a good feel for the places where prominence falls, you can ask them to predict where they think prominence will occur. Give them a dialog or story, with or without punctuation, and ask them to mark probable thought groups and prominence. Discussing their choices with a partner can help clarify their reasons.

It's important to realize that predicting prominence may be difficult for students if the examples are complicated, so start with simple sentences that obviously fit the patterns they've learned. When you check students' predictions, allow for the

possibility that there could really be more than one possible way to say the sentence and more than one possible location for prominence.

Intonation

Introducing intonation

To help students see that intonation is important and can change meaning, say a simple sentence with falling intonation and then with rising intonation:



Ask students if the two sentences have the same meaning. They'll usually realize that they don't; the first is a statement, and the second is a question. It's OK to exaggerate your intonation during practice to make it easier for students to hear the patterns. They're not likely to carry the exaggerated intonation over into their own speaking.

Listening to intonation

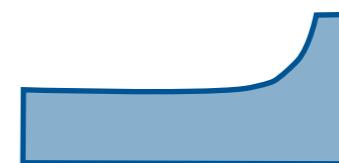
Marking intonation: Listen to a dialog or story while following along on a written script. Have students mark intonation patterns over the words to show how the speakers' voices rise and fall. Help students notice when the speakers'

voices rise or fall at the ends of sentences and explain why. Then have students practice and imitate what they've heard.

Intonation blocks: This is another way to practice recognizing intonation patterns. Cut shapes out of thick paper or foam sheets to represent bits of intonation. You can make bigger ones to use on a whiteboard or blackboard with magnets attached or smaller ones for students to use on their desks. Use the pieces to assemble models of the intonation of sentences, or have students add appropriate blocks above sentences written on the board. For example:



Falling intonation:



Rising intonation:



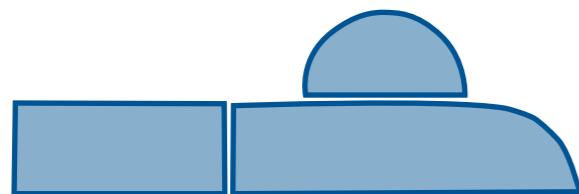
Flat intonation:



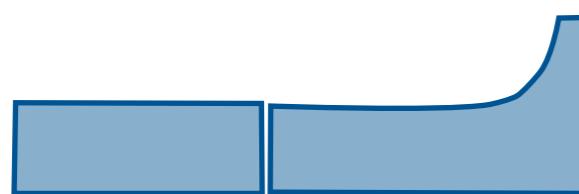
Partial fall:



Extra bump on top to mark prominence:



My dictionary is missing.



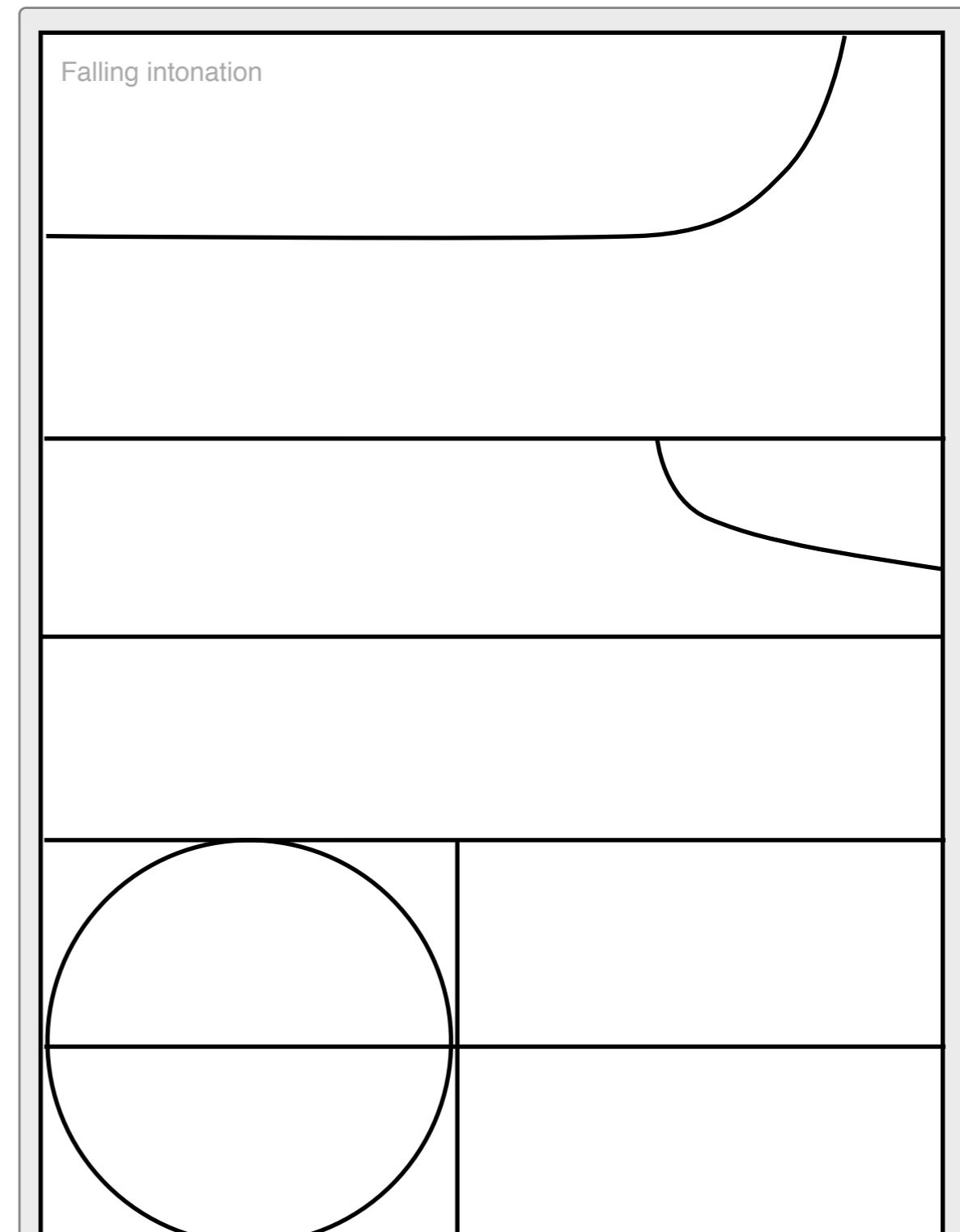
Have you seen my dictionary?



If you find my dictionary, please bring it to me.

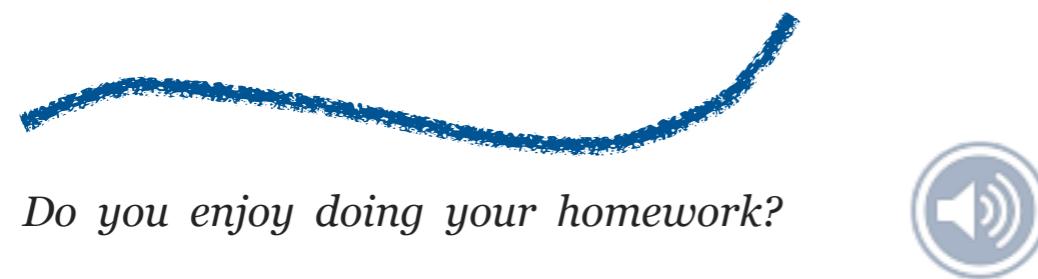
Practicing intonation

Modeling intonation: Give students something long and flexible, like a pipe cleaner, string, or ribbon, and ask them to shape it to match the intonation of sentences. (A pipe cleaner is a piece of wire covered with fuzzy threads. When you bend it, it keeps its shape. Pipe cleaners are sometimes called *chenille stems*.) The shape doesn't have to be exact; the important thing is to have the correct intonation at the end of the sentence or thought group: Rising, falling, or staying fairly flat. This is similar to drawing intonation contours above written sentences, but in three dimensions.



Pattern for cutting intonation blocks out of cardboard, thick paper, felt, or foam sheets. The shape at the top (falling intonation) should be flipped vertically after cutting.

For example:



Do you enjoy doing your homework?



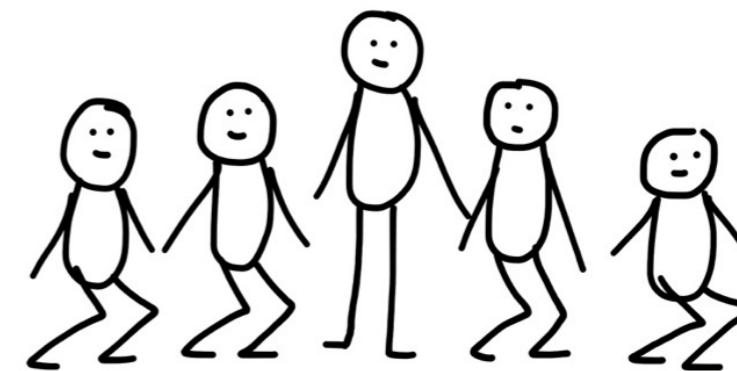
Yes, I love doing my homework.

Conduct an orchestra: Use your hands, a pencil, or any long, thin object as a baton to show intonation as if you were conducting an orchestra. Move the baton up when the intonation rises and down when it falls. The teacher or a student can be the conductor with other students following along as they say sentences, or all the students can be conductors together.



Human intonation model: Choose a sentence and have several students stand in a row, with each person representing one word or one syllable in the sentence. Let the students discuss how the intonation should sound and then have each person stand up tall or crouch down to represent the pitch of his/her word. (This activity is better for children than for adults.) Here's a representation of the intonation of

"How are you today?" with one person representing each syllable:



How are you today?

Use a kazoo: A kazoo is a simple musical instrument that is played by putting the larger end in your mouth and humming a melody. The kazoo makes the sound of your voice louder and adds a buzzing quality to it. It's different from many instruments because you *hum* into it; you don't blow, as you would with a recorder or flute. Students can easily imitate intonation patterns with a kazoo. The advantage of using a kazoo (rather than repeating actual sentences with the correct intonation) is that the learner can concentrate only on the melody of intonation without having to think about individual sounds, vocabulary, and other details. If kazoos aren't available, students can simply hum.



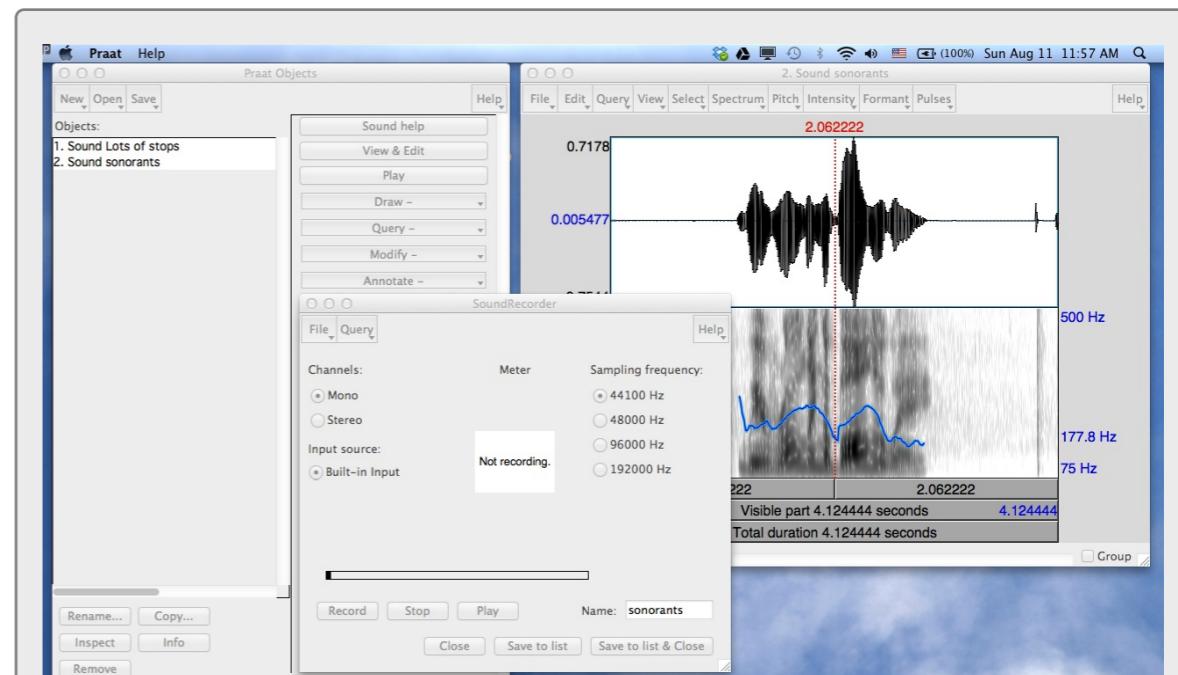
Kazoos: Touch to listen.

As a variation, have two students practice and perform a conversation with kazoos or by humming. Ask other students to identify questions and answers and to try to guess what they're saying.

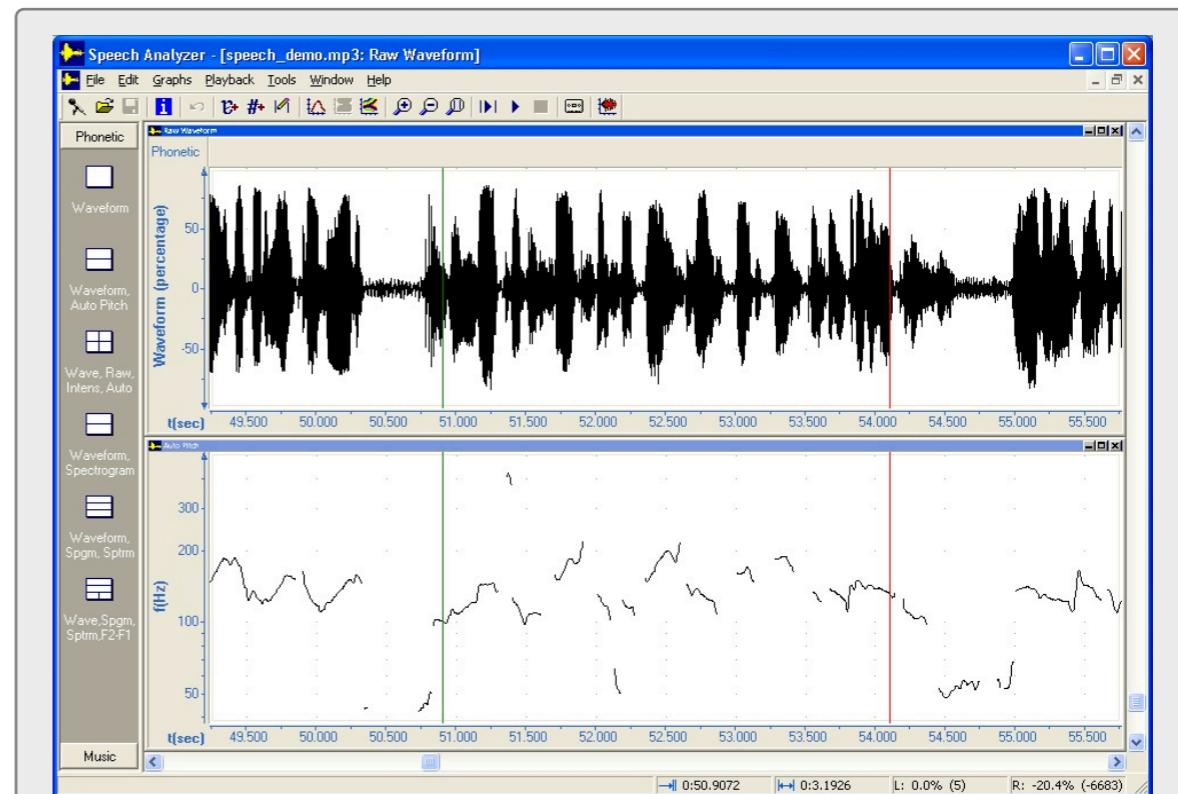
Computer software: There are several software programs that allow you to record your voice and see a diagram showing the intonation pattern of what you've said. These sometimes come as part of a larger pronunciation practice package and can be expensive. However, here are two free software programs that can analyze intonation patterns.

- **Praat** was created by two Dutch phoneticists at the University of Amsterdam, Paul Boersma and David Weenink. Praat is useful, but it can take some effort to learn to use. Video and print tutorials are available online. (Google “Praat tutorials.”) You can download the program for free at <http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/> for either Windows or Mac.
- **Speech Analyzer** was developed by SIL International (the Summer Institute of Linguistics), and is available only for Windows. It can be downloaded at <http://www-01.sil.org/computing/sa/index.htm>.

When using one of these programs to look at intonation contours, you can see the patterns best with sentences that



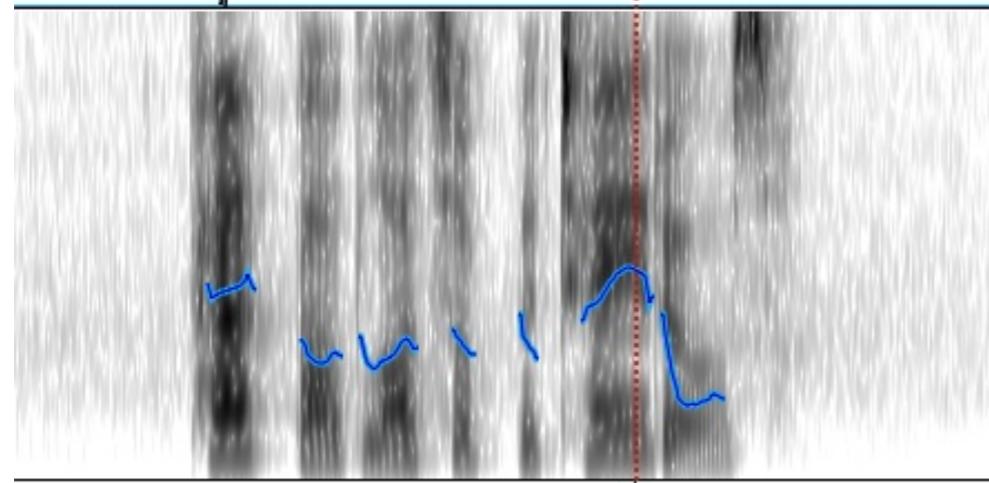
Screen shot of Praat (Mac version)



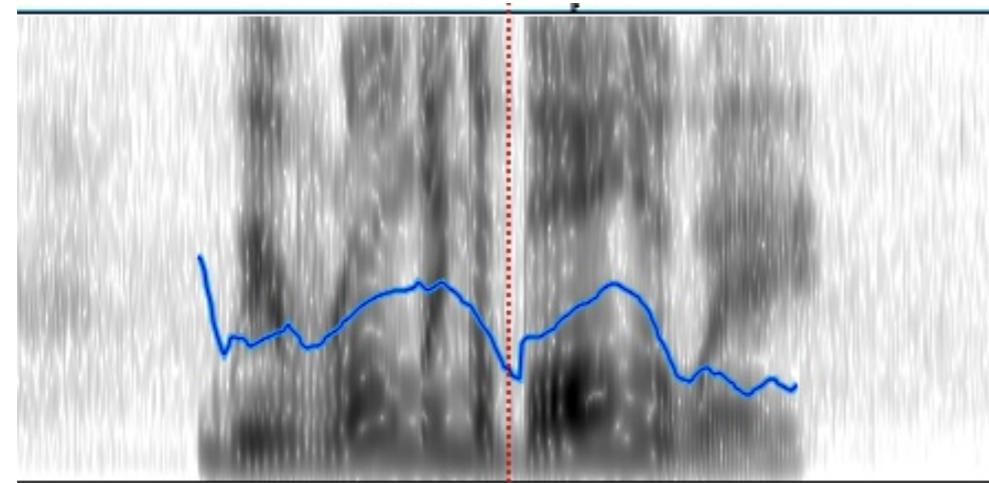
Screen shot of Speech Analyzer (Windows)

don't have any stops, fricatives, or affricates, especially voiceless ones. Those sounds result in blank spots in the intonation line. Choose sentences that have lots of sonorants: Vowels, nasals, liquids, and glides. Look at the difference in the intonation lines of these two sentences, analyzed using Praat:

Pat bought lots of potatoes. (*Lots of stops*)



We're rolling a ball away. (*Only one stop—a voiced one*)



Questions and answers: Many simple speaking activities also give provide practice with intonation. For example, give partners a picture and have them ask and answer questions about it, either about what they can see in the picture or about what they imagine the story behind it to be. Remind them that *yes/no* questions typically have rising intonation, while *WH-* questions typically have falling intonation.

Dialogs, skits, and shadowing: These provide good practice with intonation because they set up a particular context for language and encourage students to use the intonation that fits that context. More discussion of these techniques is coming later in this chapter.

Predicting intonation: After students have had many chances to hear and practice typical intonation patterns, they can be asked to predict the intonation for a conversation they have seen in writing but haven't heard yet. Predicting intonation can be difficult unless you stick to simple, obvious examples. Don't make the task too challenging at first. If it's not obvious what the intonation for a particular dialog should be, make sure students have a chance to hear the dialog first before they're expected to know what the intonation should be.

Connected speech

Introducing connected speech

Compare: A good way to introduce the concept of connected speech is to present a simple sentence and read it very carefully, using the citation form of each word. Ask students if people really talk that way and if it sounds like normal English. (If they’re not sure, tell them that this is certainly not normal. Real people are not that careful and precise.) Then read the sentence again, using normal connected speech. For example:

I am going to write you a letter.

Carefully: /ay æm gowɪŋ tuw rayt yuw ə letə/

Normally: /aymɡənəraytʃuwəletə/



Let students listen to both versions a few times and see if they can point out which sounds are changed or omitted. Reassure them that this is a normal way of speaking, and it isn’t sloppy or uneducated. Real people talk this way in all but the most formal and careful speech.

Listening to connected speech

Mark the script: As students listen to spoken or recorded sentences, draw attention to sounds that are linked and have students draw lines or circles to connect them on a written script. After doing some examples as a group, have students

listen and mark linked sounds on their own or with a partner. It’s normal to have some disagreement about exactly where linking was heard. At the beginning, try to use sentences that are spoken somewhat slowly, but with normally connected speech, then gradually speed up to a normal speaking speed. Students might mark sentences in one of these ways:

When did you meet Tom?

I put a bag of chips in my backpack.



Dictations: Dictations are useful for practicing connected speech, just as they are for practicing individual sounds. Prepare several sentences or a dialog to highlight the types of connected speech you’ve been practicing. Have students listen to the sentences using normal reduced forms and “translate” them into their citation forms, writing the full forms of the sentences. Then check what they’ve written and discuss why certain combinations of sounds were hard to hear or had unexpected sounds. It’s very important for the dictated sentences to use normal connected speech, not overly careful pronunciation (even if the students ask you to speak more slowly and carefully).

Skeleton dictations: Give students a handout showing the sentences that will be dictated, omitting only certain words that involve connected speech. (A “skeleton” of the

sentences.) Students listen and fill in the blanks with the full forms of the words they heard. Finally, discuss why certain words were hard to hear and how their sounds changed compared to their citation forms. For example:

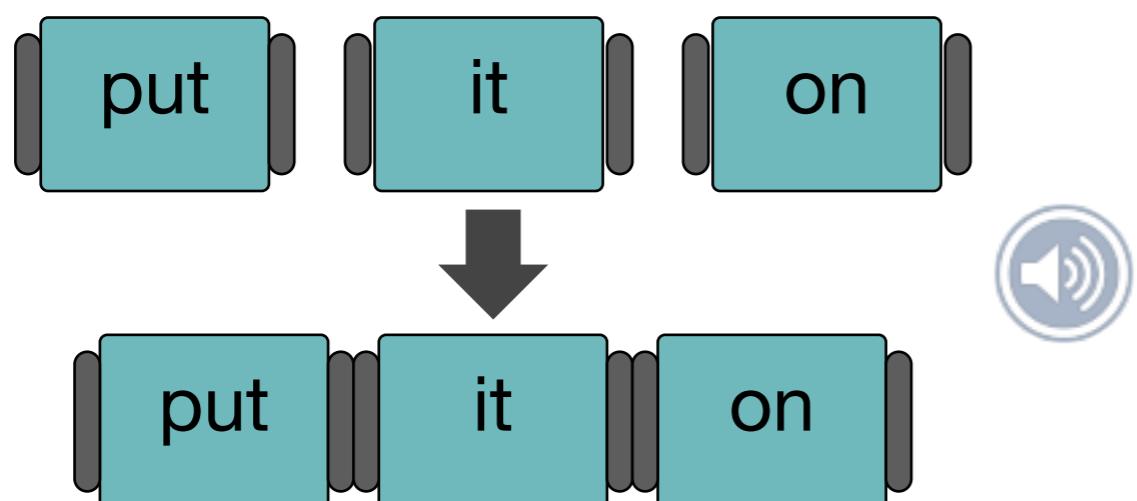
What do you want to do today?



I have to do my homework.

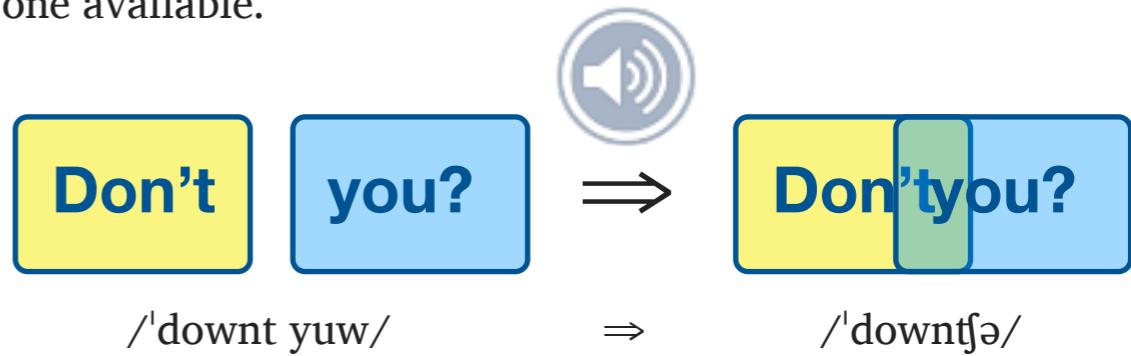
Practicing connected speech

Sticky blocks: To show how words “stick together” in connected speech, write words on small wood or plastic blocks. Attach a small magnet to one end of each one and a piece of steel to the other. While saying phrases or sentences with linking, put the blocks together to show that words join together, just like magnets. Velcro can also be attached to the ends of the blocks instead of magnets. (Celce-Murcia et al. 2010)



Modeling clay shapes: In a similar way, have students make shapes of modeling clay, such as Plasticine or Play-Doh, to represent individual words. The shapes can be simple balls, or if your students are feeling creative, they could be shaped like the things the words represent. While saying phrases or sentences using linking, students push the clay shapes together to illustrate how words are linked together. (This activity can be a bit messy.)

Transparent overlays: Write words in large letters on rectangles of transparent plastic in different colors. Overlap the edges of the words to show how the sounds blend, just as the colors of the pieces blend. This is especially good for palatalization, which makes a new sound out of two original sounds, just as two colors blend to make a new color. This works especially well on an overhead projector, if you have one available.



Sheets of thin, transparent plastic can be found in many hobby shops. Transparent vinyl in light colors is also sold in some fabric shops to be used as tablecloths or protective

covers. File folders, binder dividers, plastic envelopes, or report covers are sometimes also made of a suitable plastic.

Brainstorm words: Ask students to list adjectives and nouns that fit a particular sound pattern, for example, adjectives that end with a consonant sound and nouns that start with a vowel sound. Working in pairs, students choose adjectives and nouns that make sense together and write phrases, adding articles where appropriate. Then they practice saying the phrases with appropriate linking. If students choose the words that they'll practice, the activity can be more interesting and meaningful than if they simply read phrases from a textbook. (Hewings 2004)

Adjectives ending with consonant sounds <i>big</i> <i>difficult</i> <i>intelligent</i> <i>orange</i> <i>expensive</i> <i>bright</i>	Nouns beginning with vowel sounds <i>apples</i> <i>umbrella</i> <i>anteater</i> <i>idea</i> <i>elephant</i> <i>eyes</i>
Phrases with linking <i>Expensive apples</i> <i>Bright eyes</i> <i>A broken umbrella</i>	<i>An intelligent anteater</i> <i>A big elephant</i> <i>The Big Apple</i>

Using authentic materials to practice suprasegmentals

Written or spoken materials from real life, such as stories, jokes, proverbs, songs, and movies, can provide useful material for practicing suprasegmental features. However, since these authentic materials were not created with the needs of language learners in mind, they need to be chosen and presented carefully so that they won't overwhelm students. Even materials that have great interest in themselves will lead to frustration and boredom if they're far beyond the understanding of a particular group of students. Still, if we choose and use them wisely, they can be a great addition to pronunciation lessons.

Jokes and riddles can provide good practice material, as long as students "get" the humor. In addition to practicing thought groups, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, humorous materials are also good for practicing intonation, prominence, and linking. Have students practice reading jokes aloud and telling them to each other, emphasizing pausing and intonation to make the jokes effective. The biggest challenge here is finding jokes that students will understand and consider funny. Humor in a new language is often hard to understand, so choose carefully.

Proverbs and famous quotations not only provide good pronunciation practice, but let students compare words of wisdom in different languages. Give pairs or small groups of students a list of proverbs or quotations in English. Before practicing pronunciation, ask them to try to guess what they mean and think of proverbs or sayings in their own language that have a similar meaning. With the whole class, supply the actual meanings of the sayings, and see what similar proverbs they've found in their own language. Now that students understand the meanings of the proverbs, have them practice reading them with appropriate pauses, prominence, and intonation. Finally, give the class a role play situation in which one person has a problem and another chooses an appropriate proverb to offer as advice.

Using drama and puppets

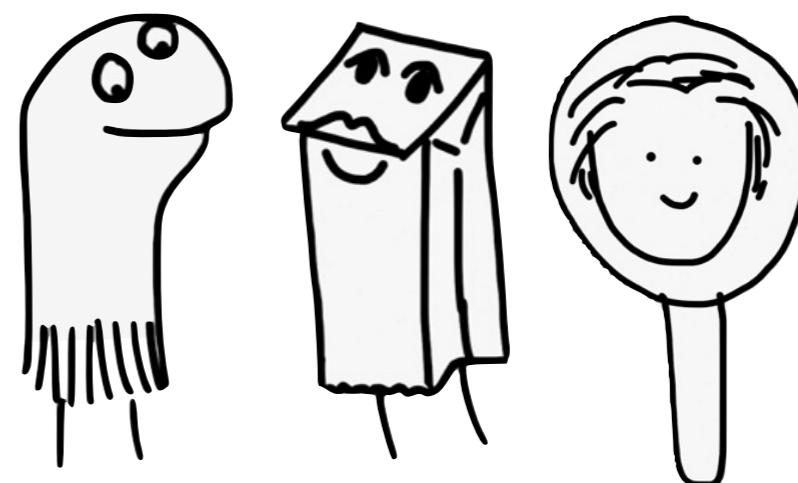
Dialogs, short skits, role plays, and puppet shows are simple forms of drama that put language in context and make it easier for students to speak with more natural intonation, pauses, and connected speech. When students pretend to be someone else in role plays, skits, and puppet shows, it can be easier for them to forget their shyness and try to imitate new intonation patterns.

Puppets are especially useful when teaching children, who enjoy pretending to be someone else. Be sure to keep scripted

materials at a level that the students can understand, and aim for natural-sounding language.

Puppets can be bought in toy stores or school supply stores, but it's also easy for children to make their own puppets:

- **Sock puppets:** Make a face on the toe of a sock using buttons, thread, puffy paint, markers, or bits of cloth or paper. Put the sock over your hand and push the sock over your fingers and thumb to make a moveable mouth.
- **Paper bag puppets:** Draw eyes on the bottom of a paper bag and a mouth lower down on the bag. Put your hand inside the bag and move the bottom flap up and down to make the mouth move.
- **Stick puppets:** Draw a picture of a character on thick paper and cut it out. Tape or glue the picture to a popsicle stick, drinking straw, or other stick-like object.



Puppet Pals: For a more high-tech approach to puppets, an iPad app called Puppet Pals lets students choose backgrounds and characters, then record short movies with them. They can make the characters move around and record their own voices to add dialog. The app is free, but for a small cost you can buy more backgrounds and characters.



Screenshot of Puppet Pals

Using shadowing and mirroring

Shadowing is one of the most valuable and versatile ways of practicing suprasegmental features. It is a technique in which learners repeatedly listen to and imitate the speakers in a

short video clip or sound recording. Then they try to speak the lines of the dialog with or slightly after the characters in the clip. Mirroring is very similar, except that students also try to imitate the gestures and body movements of the speakers. Here's one way to do shadowing:

1. Find a short film clip (less than two minutes) with a simple, natural-sounding, self-contained conversation. Find or write a transcript for the clip. A list of websites that have video clips is at the end of this chapter.
2. In class, give the students some background about what's happening in the scene. Don't just jump into the video. Students need to understand what's going on.
3. Play the clip. The first time, the students should just watch and get the general idea of the characters, the situation, and the meaning of the dialog.
4. Hand out the transcript. Go over any unfamiliar words and expressions. Talk about what's happening and make sure the students understand the dialog.
5. Watch the clip again. This time, give students something specific to listen for—pauses, intonation, linking, etc.—and have them mark that feature on their script. It works best if you give a specific focus; don't expect students to notice everything at once. If you want, play the clip again.

6. Have the students compare their markings with a partner, then talk together as a class about what they found and why it sounded that way. (For example, they might find that a speaker's intonation on a *WH*- question went up instead of down because she was asking the question for the second time. She didn't hear the man's answer the first time.)
7. Have students practice reading the conversation with a partner. Encourage them to try to say it just the way the characters in the video did, with the same pauses, intonation, emotions, etc.
8. Play the clip again. Ask students to try to read the dialog along with the characters in the film. (This will work best if the characters are speaking slowly.) Do it again if there's time.
9. Review the conversation in a later class by practicing it again.

It's important not to rush the process of shadowing. Students will need to listen to the video clip several times, so short clips work best. Repeatedly watching and listening to the clip gives learners a chance to absorb the sounds and intonation patterns they're hearing and make them a part of their own language use. With repeated listening, they'll notice things that they didn't hear the first time.

Using songs and music

It seems logical that if we're teaching the musical aspects of pronunciation, music should be a good tool. Teaching pronunciation through songs has several advantages:

- Music often tells interesting stories in natural-sounding language that contain plenty of linking and other examples of connected speech. If we choose songs carefully, they can also reflect the rhythm of natural speech.
- Songs give us a painless way to do repetition. Saying sentences over and over can get a little dull, but singing a song many times is much more enjoyable, as long as the students and the teacher like the song.
- Sounds stay in our minds better when we sing them than if we just say them aloud. We've probably all had the experience of having a song stuck in our heads, but spoken sentences just don't have the same staying power.
- Carefully chosen music can help students relax and lower the affective filter in the classroom. This indirectly helps them learn not only pronunciation, but language in general.

Songs can certainly be valuable in teaching suprasegmentals, but we need to use them carefully. Music has its own

characteristics and requirements apart from those of language, and a song is not *always* or necessarily a good model. Here are some points to consider when you're preparing to teach pronunciation with music:

Choosing songs

Choose songs and recordings carefully. Of course, you'll want to look for a song that both you and your students will enjoy listening to and singing, and one that contains the pronunciation feature you want to practice—particular sounds, types of linking, or rhythm patterns.

The singer in a recording should have clear pronunciation that's easy to hear and understand, and the words should not be drowned out by noisy instruments. Songs with one singer are often easier to understand than songs sung by a group. When more people sing, the sounds are sometimes muffled and hard to distinguish. The more singers, the harder they are to understand.

Avoid songs that don't provide an appropriate language model. If the singer's pronunciation is strongly nonstandard or hard to understand, the song is probably not a good choice. For example, Bob Dylan may be a brilliant songwriter, but he tends to mumble, so he's probably not the best pronunciation model.

Also think about the grammar used in the song. One or two nonstandard or very casual bits of grammar might be all right, but you probably don't want your students to learn to say "You ain't nothin' but a hound dog" after listening to the Elvis Presley song by that name. Of course, also avoid obscene language or topics that are not appropriate for school use.

Choose a song with a simple melody that's easy to sing and remember, especially if you're going to ask students to sing along. Some melodies are more complex than others, and some song styles have so many "wobbles" that their melodies are hard to follow. Choose a melody that students can learn quickly and sing easily, even if music is not their strong point. Keep the pitch range realistic for your students—not too high or too low for their voices.

Activities to use with music

Sing along: This is the easiest and most obvious activity. As students sing along with a recording, they'll start to imitate linking and other aspects of connected speech. In effect, it's a very pleasant form of "repeat after me."

Listen and mark: Give students written lyrics and ask them to find and mark examples of the features that they've been studying—linking, contractions, reduced forms, and so forth.

Ask them to think about thought groups—do the breaks in the melody match the places where we would expect to find thought group boundaries? Sometimes they do, and sometimes they don't.

Cloze listening: In a cloze listening activity, students try to fill in missing words in printed lyrics as they listen to a song. This is a good way to help students focus on the sounds of connected speech and to “translate” reduced forms into standard spelling. If you use this type of activity, make sure the blanks you choose are words that can be heard fairly easily. Spread the blanks out a bit. It takes time to write the missing words, and it's very hard if there are too many blanks too close together. Also, give students plenty of space to write the required words. Here's an example cloze activity:

Row, row, row your _____ **boat** _____

Gently down the stream.

Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily.

Life is but a _____ **dream** _____.

Retell the story: Choose a song that tells an interesting story. Have students listen and go through the meaning,

making sure they understand the plot. Have students retell the story to a partner, using some of the same phrases, reduced forms, and connected speech forms that they heard in the song.

Find the mistakes. Give students the lyrics to a song, but change some words to incorrect words with similar sounds. The new words don't have to make sense. For example, “I want to hold your hand” might become “I want a folder hand.” Ask students to listen to the song, find the mistakes, and write the real words. With more advanced students, ask them to think about the examples of connected speech that they heard. (Murphey 1992 p. 70)

Write your own lyrics. Give students the lyrics to a verse of a familiar song—one whose rhythm is like that of natural English. Ask students to change the words or write their own lyrics to express a new meaning, being careful to match the rhythm of the song by choosing words with the right number of syllables and stress pattern. (Murphey 1992 p. 74)

Songs are not good for teaching intonation

Finally, here's a word of caution: Songs have their own requirements that are often different from what we find in natural language. Sometimes syllables are stretched out in a song when they wouldn't be emphasized in normal speech, if

that works best with the melody and rhythm of the song. In particular, songs are *not* good for teaching intonation. Songs have their own melody, and it seldom matches the intonation of English or any other language. Songs are great for practicing linking, individual sounds, word stress, and sometimes rhythm, but not for intonation.

Pronunciation software and the Internet

There are many good software programs, websites, and even series of YouTube videos for learning about and practicing pronunciation, but be careful! Not all of these are of good quality. Some are amateurish and give inaccurate or misleading information. Some are disguised advertisements that try to get you to buy a more expensive product later. Check and judge materials carefully before you have students use them. If you're not sure a website is good, use something else.

Websites for recording pronunciation practice

Computers come with simple programs that allow users to record sound—the details depend on the type of computer. Students can use these to record their pronunciation practice. If you want, they can also submit it to you for comments by email or other means. Check your computer's owner's manual (if it has one) or the manufacturer's website for instructions on recording sound.

In addition, some websites provide a more organized way for students to record and listen to their voices and for teachers to leave recorded comments about the practice recordings. Here are two good ones that I've used. Both have free versions.

Voxopop (<http://voxopop.com>) is a website where people can record their voices in a series of related messages. You can use it to:

- Have students record themselves reading a passage for homework practice. This can be a class pronunciation practice page where all the students can leave recordings for you to check and respond to with your own recorded comments and suggestions.
- Create a recorded discussion on a topic related to your class or your students' interests. Students can record their comments and responses to other students' messages.

Voicethread (<http://voicethread.com>) also allows students to record their voices. Choose a picture that you'd like students to respond to, upload it to your page, and it will appear in the middle of the screen. Students record or type comments about the picture, and icons appear around the central picture representing all the comments. Users can click the icons to hear or read the comments of others. The teacher

can record additional comments about pronunciation or simply respond to the ideas the students have expressed.

The screenshot shows the Voxopop website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for HOME, EXPLORE, START A TALKGROUP, HELP, ABOUT, BLOG, and CONTACT. A user profile for 'marlayo' is shown, with a 'LOG OUT' option. Below the navigation, a category 'Category: Education & Language' is selected. The main content area features a talkgroup titled 'teaching pronunciation'. It includes a brief description: 'This is a Talkgroup for Teaching Pronunciation Skills. It will give you a place to talk to your fellow students and also to practice your own pronunciation.' Below the description, it says 'teachingpronunciation.pbworks.com'. There are sections for 'DISCUSSION ZONES' (with a link to 'Welcome to Teaching Pronunciation Skills!'), 'TALKGROUP ADMINS' (listing 'marlayo'), and 'NEWEST MEMBERS' (showing small profile pictures). On the right side, there's a sidebar with a message about location settings and a 'SEARCH talkgroup' bar.

Screenshot of Voxopop

The screenshot shows the Voicethread website interface. At the top, a banner reads 'This is a good place for practicing pronunciation...'. Below the banner is a large world map with country names like Canada, United States, Russia, China, Australia, and Brazil. The bottom of the screen has a dark footer with icons for a camera, a video player, a comment section, and a navigation bar with arrows and a search icon.

Screenshot of Voicethread

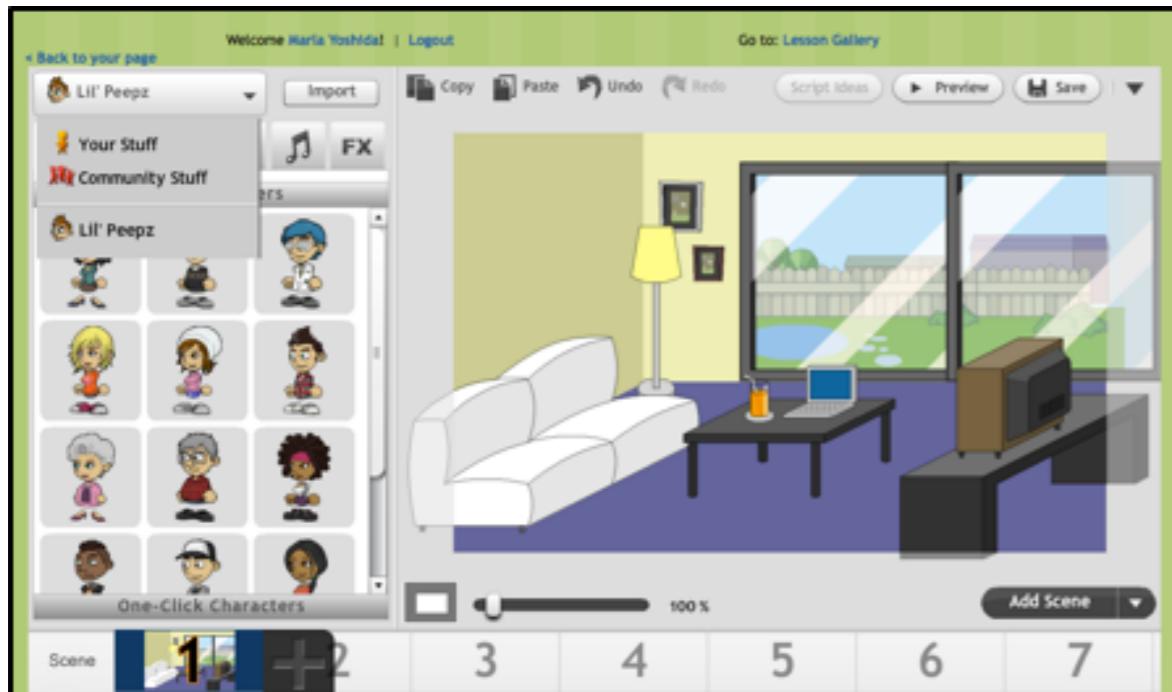
Websites for creating animation or “talking heads”

Using **Voki** (<http://voki.com>), you can make cartoon characters called “avatars,” choosing from many different heads, hair styles, facial features, accessories, and backgrounds. The characters can speak in two ways: You can type in words and they’ll speak with an artificial voice, or you can record your own voice (better for pronunciation practice). The website has ideas for lesson plans using Voki.

The screenshot shows the Voki creation interface. On the left, a preview window shows a cartoon character with brown hair and green eyes, standing in front of a city skyline. Below the preview are buttons for play/pause and volume. To the right, a panel titled 'Give It A Voice' contains icons for a phone, a microphone, and a file folder. Below these are fields for 'Type Your Text' ('Hi people.') and 'Accent/Language' ('Basque') and 'Voice' ('Arantxa'). A color palette and a 'tweak' slider are also present. A speech bubble at the bottom right says 'Sometimes, you need to spell words fo-net-ic-ly'. At the bottom right of the panel are 'FX' and 'DONE' buttons.

Screenshot of Voki

GoAnimate (<http://goanimate.com/>) is a website that lets you create simple animation, adding your own narration or typing text to be spoken by a digital voice. You choose the background and characters, record the dialog or narration, add music if you want, and the website produces an animated movie. It's similar to Puppet Pals, but the characters have more ability to move.



Screenshot of GoAnimate

Reminders when using technology

If you're using any type of technology, have a back-up plan. Sooner or later, something will go wrong. Your computer will crash, the website you wanted to use will disappear or be down for repairs, there will be an electrical blackout—anything can happen. Don't rely too much on everything

working perfectly. Plan for what you would do in case of a technological disaster, and have a low-tech back-up plan ready.

Even if everything is working fine, remember that technology will never replace a good teacher. Technology is just a tool. Use it well, but don't let it become the main focus of your lesson. A computer program, website, or video can't teach your class for you. Computers are not *necessarily* interesting or fun for students; if they're designed or used badly, they can be just as dull as a lecture. People need human contact, and your human presence and caring are more important to your students than any flashy technology. Use technology; don't let it control you.

Responding to students' pronunciation practice

When students record a sample of their pronunciation or read to you for pronunciation practice during a lesson, how will you respond? Deciding what to say can be overwhelming, especially if the student is making many mistakes. It's best not to try to comment on everything at once. You might start by focusing on these things:

- One or two things that seriously interfere with the speaker's intelligibility

- Just the thing you're practicing now, whether it's a particular sound or a suprasegmental feature
- Things that are easiest to fix, like the pronunciation of a particular word, as opposed to a mistake with a common sound that occurs many times
- Mistakes that this student has been making again and again.

When giving comments, be kind and respectful, but honest. Harsh criticism won't help, but neither will empty praise or easy acceptance of everything the student says. When making a correction of a mispronunciation, give a correct example for the student to hear and repeat, or pronounce both the correct and incorrect ways so that the student can hear the contrast. Praise students for specific things that they're doing well, especially if it's an improvement over the past. A little honest, specific praise can keep students from feeling that improving their pronunciation is hopeless.

Be alert for new ideas

Look around you and try to find spoken or written materials from everyday life that could be useful in teaching suprasegmental features. Use your imagination to find new ways to explain, illustrate, and practice the musical aspects of English pronunciation.

Sources of video clips

- English Central: <http://www.englishcentral.com>
- Teacher Tube: <http://www.teachertube.com/>
- School Tube: <http://www.schooltube.com/>
- YouTube <http://www.schooltube.com/>
- YouTube Teachers: <http://www.youtube.com/teachers>
- ESL Video: <http://www.eslvideo.com/>
- Neo K12: <http://www.neok12.com/>
- EFL Classroom 2.0: http://community.eflclassroom.com/video?xg_source=msg_mes_network
- Learn English Feel Good: <http://www.learnenglishfeelgood.com/eslvideo/>
- Videojug: <http://www.videojug.com/>
- Dotsub (Videos with subtitles in many languages): <http://dotsub.com/view/>

Different Places, Different Learners

One size does not fit all

Teaching is not like buying a pair of socks. One size does *not* fit all. There isn't just *one* best way to teach pronunciation—or any other subject, for that matter.

We need to ask ourselves: “What's the best way I can help *my* students, in their particular situation, to reach their goals and make their pronunciation more intelligible?”

Planning and teaching a lesson is a complex undertaking that requires teachers to make lots of choices,



and you'll need to consider many factors before deciding what to do in class. For example:

- How old are the learners?
- What is their skill level in English overall?
- What language or languages do they speak?
- What are their goals? What are your goals for them?
- What resources are available in terms of time, textbooks, and equipment?
- What else do you have to fit into your necessarily limited class time to meet the needs of your students and your curriculum? How can you fit pronunciation in with everything else?
- What requirements, constraints, or limits are put on your teaching from outside—from the school administration, the local school board, or the national Ministry of Education?
- What is the setting of your teaching? Are you in an English-speaking country where students will need to use English in their daily lives (ESL) or in a country where English is not commonly spoken and your students seldom use English (EFL)?

You'll also find that every group of students you teach is a little different, even if they're closely matched in age, skill

level, and goals. What works with one group might not work as well with another.

To meet the needs of all the students you might teach, you need to stay flexible and build up a supply of resources, techniques, and activities that you can adapt to fit various teaching situations and groups of learners.

How old are the learners?

Of course, you wouldn't teach ten year olds in the same way you'd teach 40 year olds. Learners of different ages require different approaches, methods, and activities.

Children learn best through simple, concrete means—through demonstrations, imitation, movement, and rhythm. Songs with movements and gestures are excellent activities for children. If they like a song, chant, or simple game, they won't mind repeating it again and again. Young children are willing to do things just for fun. The joy of learning and a sense of accomplishment are strong motivators for them.

Young children have an amazing ability to learn new languages, as long as they have plenty of chances to hear them and to try using them on their own. But even young children can't learn pronunciation immediately. They also need time and lots of practice to be able to say new sounds with consistent accuracy. In fact, very young children may

still be in the process of learning all the sounds of their own language. For example, many native English-speaking children don't completely master sounds like /r/, /l/, /s/, and /v/ until they are five or six years old. (Goldman Fristoe Test of Articulation-2)

As children reach middle school or high school age, they are better able to understand verbal explanations and abstract concepts. However, it still works better to keep explanations short, simple, practical, and nontechnical. Most teenagers also enjoy songs and games, as long as they don't seem too childish, and competition can be a strong motivator for them. They can learn well from pair and group work if it's structured, introduced, and conducted carefully.

Adults have a stronger ability to understand explanations and consciously analyze sounds, but this does *not* mean that all we need to do is lecture. Adults also benefit from learning through demonstrations, models, and pictures, not just verbal explanations and "repeat after me." Gadgets like listening tubes, dental models, feathers, and rubber bands also work well with adults.

Adults learn well in pair- and group-work activities that are geared toward their interests and level of maturity. Many adults also enjoy songs and purposeful games, although it's

good to get to know your students' feelings about these before you get in too deep. With any of these activities, however, be sure to present them confidently and explain how they will help your students improve their pronunciation. Most adults accept having fun for the sake of learning, but if they don't see the purpose of an activity, they may feel that their time is being wasted.

What is the learners' skill level?

Learners of all levels, from beginning to advanced, need continued pronunciation practice. Sometimes teachers are hesitant to teach pronunciation to beginning students for fear that it will make them feel overwhelmed and discouraged. However, beginning learners may be the ones who need pronunciation teaching the most. If we can get beginners started on the path toward clear, understandable pronunciation and help them see that it's important, they'll be more likely to develop good pronunciation as they continue to learn. If we can prevent or at least limit the fossilization of bad pronunciation habits, our students will have an easier time being understood later.

On the other hand, more advanced learners need pronunciation review and remediation too. Some students with good fluency and a very strong knowledge of grammar and vocabulary still have serious pronunciation problems that

interfere with intelligibility. It's important to keep practicing in appropriate ways that match these students' abilities, interests, and goals.

Students' skill level will also affect the choices we make when writing or finding language for practice materials. The words and grammar used in minimal pairs, sentences, dialogs, and activities must fit what the students have learned. Having students repeat words and sentences that they don't yet understand is just an empty tongue exercise; it won't seem like real language. Students need to learn to use the words and phrases they're practicing in real communication, but if they're too far beyond their understanding, this is impossible.

What language(s) do the learners speak?

A learner's native language has a strong influence on how he/she will learn pronunciation in a new language. (See Chapter 1.) We can often predict the problems students will have, particularly with individual sounds, if we know what their first language is. It's helpful to understand the sound system of your student's language or languages so you can predict what aspects of English pronunciation are likely to give them trouble. Summaries of "trouble sounds" for speakers of some languages can be found in several books, including Swan & Smith 2001, Avery & Ehrlich 1992, Lane 2010, and Kenworthy 1987.

To some extent, teaching pronunciation in a monolingual class, in which all the students share the same native language, is simpler than teaching it in a class whose students speak many different languages. It's easy to choose the topics to address, based on the students' common needs.

In a multilingual class, however, we have to face the fact that different people will have different problems. If you choose an activity to address a problem that some students are having, it may be something that other students are already able to do easily. If your students are old enough, talk about this with them. Explain that sometimes the things you practice might seem too easy, but they might be hard for someone else. At other times, the shoe will be on the other foot, and different students will have trouble. Encourage students to be patient and help each other so everyone can learn and improve.

What are the learners' goals?

Different learners have different goals for learning English and for trying to improve their pronunciation. Some are or will be living in an English-speaking country and need to be able to speak clearly in order to survive and work. Others will be using English in other ways: To travel abroad, to study in an English-language university, or to do business with native or nonnative speakers of English when English is

the only language they have in common. Some need to pass a test, such as the iBT TOEFL or IELTS, that includes a speaking component. Some just want to pass their English class so they can get on with more important things.

It's important to try to understand the goals of your particular group of learners. Along with more general pronunciation activities, include practice aimed specifically at helping them meet their goals. For example, if your students are working in a particular profession, they'll need to learn to pronounce the vocabulary of that field. If they're preparing for a test, they'll need to do practice similar to the tasks they'll be asked to do on the test. If they'll need to give presentations at professional conferences or business meetings, they'll need to pay special attention to appropriate pausing, prominence, and intonation along with individual sounds.

Constraints on your teaching

In the real world, we don't always have total freedom to teach the way we want. The factors that put constraints on what and how we teach might include:

- **Time:** Few teachers have the luxury of teaching a class devoted only to pronunciation; it will usually be just one topic in a broader English class. Class time is limited.

How can you find a place for pronunciation along with all the other things you have to teach? (This will be discussed in the next section.)

- **Resources:** Someone else may have already chosen the textbooks and other materials that you will use, and you seldom have control over the technology that's available in the classroom. You have to find the strong points in what you have and be resourceful in using it.
- **Outside forces:** Depending on where you're teaching, school administrators, the local Board of Education, or the national Ministry of Education may specify what is to be taught. Parents and others in the community often have expectations about what will be included and emphasized in teaching. Even standardized achievement or entrance tests can influence what and how you teach.
- **Tradition:** In some teaching situations, the traditional ways of teaching don't emphasize pronunciation. Other teachers may not appreciate it if you try to make changes. They may feel that by trying something new you'll undermine their authority or make them look old-fashioned, or they may honestly believe that the traditional way is best. Whatever the reason, trying to change well-established teaching styles can be difficult. Tact and cooperation will usually get better results than lectures and confrontation.

In some cases we may be able to change these limitations by working with school administrators, parents, and others. In other cases, however, we'll just have to learn to accept limitations that we can't change and figure out how to work around them. If computer equipment isn't easily available, we can substitute low-tech methods. If the textbook doesn't include much pronunciation practice, we can supplement with bits of pronunciation practice as a part of reading, listening, speaking, or grammar lessons.

Finding time for pronunciation teaching

Teachers sometimes say, "I don't have time to teach pronunciation. There's too much in the curriculum already!" Teaching pronunciation really is important—too important to ignore because we're busy. Pronunciation practice doesn't have to take a lot of time if you combine it with other parts of your language lessons. Here are some ideas for fitting pronunciation in with other types of practice.

Starting or ending a lesson: Do a quick bit of pronunciation practice as a warm-up at the beginning of class, as a closing activity, or for a change of pace between other activities. Many of the activities in Chapters 7 and 13 can be adapted for a quick pronunciation review. For example:

- Review the pronunciation of some new words by having students say the words in chorus and identify the stressed syllable. Use flash cards or spoken words as a “trigger.”
- Do a quick minimal pair practice. Write a minimal pair on the board and label the words “1” and “2.” Say one of the words and have students hold up one or two fingers to tell which word they heard. Then have them practice the words with a partner.
- Practice a song, chant, tongue twister, or poem that the students have learned, paying attention to sounds, rhythm, linking, or other features.
- Show a picture and have students ask and answer questions about it with a partner. Use a picture that has objects containing sounds you want to practice, or concentrate on intonation, rhythm, and thought groups in the questions and answers themselves.
- Do a quick dictation of one or two sentences using familiar material containing sounds you’ve been practicing. For this purpose, keep the sentences short. Dictate and have students write, then show the correct sentences and have students check their own work.

When teaching vocabulary: When you introduce new words, make pronunciation a part of your practice. It’s not enough for students to recognize the written form of a new

word and memorize its meaning; they need to be able to say it correctly and recognize it when it’s said by others, especially if it has a common reduced form. Try these ideas:

- Have students repeat the new word several times when they first come across it. This is important at all proficiency levels—for beginners because students are still unfamiliar with sounds and stress patterns and need extra practice, and in more advanced classes because the words they’re learning are likely to be longer, more complex, and trickier to pronounce. There might also be interference from similar words in their native language, especially academic words.
- Encourage students to associate the word with its stress pattern—not just with its spelling. Ask them to listen and tell you how many syllables the word has and where the stress is. Have them mark syllables and stress in their notes, flash cards, or other learning materials.
- Help students notice the spelling of new words as it relates to sounds. What vowel and consonant sounds are represented by the letters? What spelling patterns are similar to those in other words? Are there any silent letters or unusual spellings? Are there any related words that have similar spellings but different stress patterns and sounds? (*electric/electricity, nation/nationality*)

- Make sure students hear the word in the context of whole sentences, not only by itself. Give them chances to get used to hearing reduced forms and linked pronunciations. Hearing words in their “natural habitat” will also help give students a deeper understanding of their meaning and use.
- Review the pronunciation of new words often when you come across them in reading, listening, or other activities. Don’t assume that hearing a new word once is enough to give students a clear memory of how it sounds. On a chart or a corner of the whiteboard or blackboard, keep a list of words whose pronunciation the class has been practicing and review them often. The more often students hear and say the pronunciation, the more likely they’ll be to remember and produce it accurately.

When teaching reading: When we think of practicing pronunciation during a reading lesson, the first method that comes to mind is undoubtedly reading aloud. It seems like a natural combination—students read a passage aloud, paying attention to how they pronounce words. Many teachers do “**round robin reading**” or “**popcorn reading**” in which the teacher calls on students, in seating order or at random, to take turns reading aloud from the textbook. Although this is a common classroom activity, it’s often *not* effective for improving either reading skill or pronunciation. (Wilson

2010, Redpath 2011) Reading aloud requires students to think about many things simultaneously—decoding written symbols, pronouncing words, and understanding the meaning of the text. This is too much for learners to process all at once. In addition, if only one person is reading, we wonder what the rest of the class is doing. Too often they’re daydreaming or looking ahead to see what they’ll have to read when their turn comes.

If you want to use reading aloud for pronunciation practice, here are some suggestions to make it more successful:

- Be sure the students understand the vocabulary and meaning of the passage *before* they have to read it aloud. Reading a passage “cold” is not effective pronunciation practice.
- Make sure the difficulty level of the reading is well within the students’ reach. To make practice meaningful, students should read familiar material that they don’t have to struggle with.
- Keep the reading short—two or three sentences at most. It’s better to read a short passage several times than a long passage just once. (Redpath 2011)

Here are other ways to practice pronunciation during a reading lesson:

- Read the text to the class (or play a recording, if one is available) before you ask students to read aloud. Give them a good model of what it's supposed to sound like.
- Think about suprasegmentals as well as individual sounds and words. What thought groups, intonation, and linking should be used?
- As they listen, have students mark up the text, indicating pauses, intonation, or linking. Give them careful instructions beforehand about what they should be listening for. It's difficult to try to hear everything at once. After listening, have students compare their markings with a partner. Knowing that they'll have to check their work with a classmate helps keep students more accountable.
- Have students read aloud to a partner instead of to the whole class. This is less public and much less stressful, and it gives more learners a chance to practice.
- Have students read to themselves using listening tubes. These let students hear their own voices while reducing the noise they can hear from the rest of the class. (See Chapter 7 for information about listening tubes, sources, and instructions for making your own.)
- If the class is reading something that includes realistic conversation, such as a play or a story with lots of dialog,

use it as an opportunity for students to act out the play or reenact the conversation from the story. Emphasize not only the pronunciation of individual words, but also the way words are linked, where pauses naturally occur, and what kind of intonation fits the grammar, meaning, and emotion of the conversation.

- Take some time to talk about **phonics**—the systematic relationship between written letters and spoken sounds—when particular spelling patterns or problems come up. Especially in lower-level classes, this can help students make sense of the complex spelling system of English so they can predict the pronunciation of new words better.

When teaching speaking: In Chapter 7 we looked at some examples of speaking activities that we can use to practice pronunciation. We can use these same types of activities—information gaps, questions and answers, logic puzzles, role plays, and many more—to practice pronunciation during a speaking lesson. If you plan a practice activity so that it contains vocabulary with particular sounds, words that link together in a particular way, or grammatical patterns that match the intonation you want to practice, students will be practicing pronunciation of those things as they speak. Draw attention to these pronunciation points when you give instructions for the activity so students will notice them as

they practice. It's important to emphasize suprasegmentals too, especially pausing in appropriate places, emphasizing key words, and using natural-sounding intonation patterns.

During speaking activities, correcting students' pronunciation errors can be awkward and break up the flow of the activity. Instead, take notes during speaking practice of pronunciation mistakes made by several people and do some quick practice with these afterwards.

When teaching listening: Learners need to be able to recognize sounds and words when they hear them, especially in everyday language using lots of connected speech. When your class is doing listening practice with recorded materials, take some time to point out examples of linking, deletion, assimilation, and other sound processes and have students do some practice with them. Here are some ways to do it:

- Before or after listening to a recorded passage, do some practice with the words it contains. In addition to making sure students understand the meaning, have them practice saying the words, counting the syllables, and identifying the stressed syllables.
- In the same way, use some sentences taken from the listening to focus on thought groups, prominence, and intonation. Have students listen, mark these features on a

transcript of the passage, and imitate the chosen sentences. Talk about why certain words are emphasized and why particular intonation patterns were used. What meaning or feeling is conveyed by the intonation?

- Encourage students to use context in deciding what word they heard, even if they aren't sure about the sounds. This is a real-life skill that they'll need in understanding spoken language.
- Find a recorded dialog and prepare a script with no punctuation—just spaces between thought groups. Play a recording of the dialog and ask students to use intonation to identify questions and statements or finished and unfinished thoughts, and to add appropriate punctuation to the script: question marks, periods, and commas. (It's best to avoid less familiar punctuation like colons or semicolons.) To force students to focus on the intonation instead of just grammar, include some questions that have statement word order but rising intonation: *It's raining? You ate twelve hot dogs?*
- Dictations are useful in pronunciation lessons, as we saw in Chapter 7. We can also use dictations during listening practice to make sure students understand sentences similar to those they've already heard and can segment a stream of sound into familiar, written words. We can use

dictations to check students' comprehension of individual sounds, words, and reduced forms.

When teaching grammar: Keep the pronunciation of grammar forms in mind as you teach—both sounds and intonation patterns—and give students practice in using new grammar with appropriate pronunciation.

- When we think of the connection between grammar and sound, the pronunciation of -s and -ed endings comes to mind immediately. When you teach these grammatical endings, be sure to emphasize the three sound forms of each and give students plenty of practice in using them in speaking. Don't let students confuse sound patterns with spelling patterns, since both of these are a little complex and follow separate rules.
- When teaching grammatical structures that have common reduced forms, like *going to* for future time, modals followed by *have* (*should have* > *shoulda*, *would have* > *woulda*, *could have* > *coulda*), or expressions with *to* (like *want to* > *wanna*, *have to* > *hafta*), be sure students know and practice the sounds of the reduced forms. When giving examples, try not to pronounce them too slowly and precisely; this will only give students a false idea of what the forms will sound like in real life. (See the end of Chapter 9 for lists of common reduced forms.)

- In teaching the affirmative and negative pair *can* and *can't*, be sure to point out the usual differences in stress and vowel clarity. A similar difference in stress occurs with pairs like *are* and *aren't*, *were* and *weren't*, although the vowels in these don't change.
- When teaching the formation of questions (yes/no, *WH*-, or tag questions), be sure students know and use appropriate intonation patterns for each type. For commands and requests, illustrate the difference that intonation can make in the tone and feeling of these forms.
- Finally, include some listening practice with the sounds of new grammatical forms. It's not enough for students to learn to use grammar themselves—they also need to recognize it when someone else uses it. Practice by letting students listen to sentences using the forms they're learning and identify whether they're present or past tense, affirmative or negative, and so forth.

Teaching pronunciation in a large class

In an ideal world, all language classes would be small, and teachers would have plenty of time to give individual attention to each student's pronunciation. However, this is often not the case. How can we teach pronunciation in a large class of 30, 40, or more students?

- **Choral repetition:** When you have students repeat after a model, do it in different ways—sometimes with the whole class repeating together, sometimes only the left or right half of the class, only the boys, only the girls, only people whose birthdays are in a certain month, or whatever rule you can think of. This makes it a little easier to hear how well the smaller groups are doing, and the variety keeps students more alert.
- **Pair work:** This can range from very simple to more complex activities—reading sentences to a partner, practicing a dialog together, or doing information gap or communicative activities. (See Chapters 7 and 13 for examples.) Students can also work in larger groups, for example, with two people practicing a dialog or role play as a third listens and checks on a certain aspect of their pronunciation.
- **Go low-tech:** Use low-tech tools such as listening tubes during student practice. This helps students hear their own voices while cutting down on the noise they hear from the many students around them. To lower the cost of using these in a big class, have students cut and assemble their own listening tubes from heavy paper (See Chapter 7 for instructions.)
- **Go high-tech:** Have students record their pronunciation practice for you to listen to and evaluate. To prevent this from taking an impossible amount of your time:
 - Don't do it all at once. Have just some of the students record their practice for each class, eventually getting around to all the students.
 - Keep the recordings short—maybe 30 seconds each.
 - Give your comments efficiently by circling problem areas on a script of the practice passage and adding quick notes. Don't try to respond to every aspect of the recording—just a couple of points that you've told the students to concentrate on.
 - Use a website that collects all the students' recordings in one place where you can easily listen to them, such as Voxopop (<http://www.voxopop.com>) (See Chapter 13.) Just click on the recordings one after another to listen. I've found that this is much less complicated and time consuming than having students email recordings.

Teaching in an ESL or EFL context

The location of your teaching—in a country where English is a commonly spoken language or one where it's seldom heard—makes a big difference in your teaching. In ESL classes in countries such as the U.S., Canada, Britain, or Australia, students can more easily see the usefulness of having good

pronunciation. If they're old enough to need to do things on their own, they've probably had the experience of being misunderstood at work, at school, or while shopping. One international student in our ESL program told this story:

The first day I arrived at my host family's house, I asked my host father, "How can I take a bath? " He answered, "Where are you going?" He thought I said "bus" instead of "bath."

Learners who have lived in an English-speaking country for a while, maybe even for many years, might feel a stronger motivation for improving their English. On the other hand, many people in this situation feel that since they've been able to get by so far with the pronunciation they have, there's no need to improve.

Learners in an ESL setting usually have more chances to hear English spoken in daily life than learners in an EFL setting. Even those who speak mostly their native language at home and with friends can't avoid hearing a certain amount of English in the wider world. Assuming they pay attention to what they hear around them, this gives them additional input on what English sounds like.

Learners in an EFL environment have a variety of motivations for learning pronunciation. Some know that they need to

speak English for business, education, or other purposes, and they feel motivated to work toward intelligible pronunciation. Others, however, are learning English only because they are required to, and not because they feel any need to master the language.

In particular, students in middle school and high school are often very concerned about their grades and future entrance exams for the next level of their education. These tests often have an English component, but pronunciation is seldom a part of it. When students start to focus more strongly on these outward measures of success, they're less concerned with their overall ability to use English, and their motivation to achieve good pronunciation is lost. When they think about pronunciation, they might ask themselves, "What's in it for me? Will this be on the standardized tests that I have to take?"

Other students in this age group aren't motivated much at all in studying English, either for its own sake or as a tool for their future. Some may even reject the idea of having "nativelike" pronunciation, feeling that it will make them stand out from their peers and seem "stuck up." If we can teach pronunciation in an interesting and engaging way, we're more likely to keep these students involved, even if they're not interested in the subject matter for its own sake.

Providing a pronunciation model

Choose the variety of English you'll use as a model

Many varieties of English are spoken in the world: Standard varieties of American, British, Australian, Canadian English and others, along with regional or nonstandard varieties of each of these “national Englishes.” There are also many well-established ways that nonnative speakers in particular countries speak English. We hope that our students will learn to understand many of these varieties when they hear them, but most teachers will use just one variety as a model in pronunciation teaching. Which kind of English will you use as a model for your students?

If you’re teaching in an English-speaking country, you’ll almost certainly use the variety that is an accepted standard in that country. After all, it would seem silly to teach students American English if they’re studying in Australia or British English if they’re studying in the US.

If you’re teaching in a country where English is not widely spoken, these are some paths open to you:

- Use the variety that you can most reliably produce—the one you grew up speaking (if you’re a native speaker) or the one you feel most comfortable speaking (if you’re not a native speaker).

- Use the variety that you’ve been told to use. In reality, many teachers don’t have a choice about what variety of English to use as a model. That choice has been made by a school board, national Ministry of Education, or other authority.
- Think about the types of English your students will need to understand in the future and choose your model based on your predictions. (Celce-Murcia et al. 2010)
- Your model might not be a native-speaker variety at all. Some researchers recently have pointed out that since English is used as an international language in business, science, and many other fields, it’s not necessary or even desirable to try to get students to sound like native speakers of a standard national variety of English. Walker (2010) suggests that we should concentrate on teaching the **Lingua Franca Core**—those aspects of pronunciation that help most in increasing intelligibility when nonnative speakers communicate with each other.

Whatever variety you choose, help your students get used to hearing and understanding other accents too, even if you use only one as a model for imitation.

Provide a natural-sounding model

Whether the pronunciation examples that students hear come from your own voice or from recordings, it’s important to

give students plenty of opportunities to listen to natural-sounding English, including normal connected speech. You're not helping your students if you let them hear *only* extremely clear, careful pronunciation. This may be all right as a very first step; after all, hearing something slowly helps listeners catch the sounds more accurately. However, it should soon be followed by more natural speech.

I once observed an English class in a Japanese junior high school in which the teacher spoke very slowly, deliberately adding extra vowels after final consonants and within consonant clusters, and intentionally making other changes that Japanese learners typically make. I knew from talking to this teacher earlier that this was not his normal way of speaking; in conversation outside of class his pronunciation was smooth and without these added vowels. I asked him why he spoke that way in class. He told me, "My students can't understand 'real' English. Why shouldn't I speak very slowly and clearly and use the kind of pronunciation they expect? It helps them understand." The simple answer is that this may make it easier for students to understand the teacher now, but it won't help them understand "real" English outside of the classroom. We can't shield students from the real world of language unless we plan to keep them in our own classroom forever.

However, it's not only nonnative speakers who fall into the trap of speaking too slowly and carefully. Many native-speaker teachers also do this (consciously or unconsciously) to try to help their students understand more easily. (I'll have to admit that I sometimes find myself doing this too.) It's not helpful for native speakers to talk at full speed with full reduced forms unless students are at a very advanced level, but we also shouldn't speak with artificial care. All teachers should try to provide a natural, realistic pronunciation model for our students.

Using technical language in explanations

How much technical language should you use in teaching pronunciation? Should you use terms like *fricative* or *aspiration* in your explanations? Is it necessary for students to remember the names of the parts of the articulatory system?

If the students are children, then certainly not; they won't understand technical language, even in their own language. The best advice for introducing sounds to children is "Show, don't just tell." For junior high- or high school-age learners too, technical language is often hard to understand and may bore and discourage learners. If you can give students the knowledge and guidance they need through demonstrations,

pictures, or simple explanations, then there's no need for technical language.

If the students are adults, though, the situation is a little different. Some adults, especially those who enjoy analytical thinking or perhaps have a scientific or medical background, appreciate knowing the “official” names of things. Others find technical language confusing or burdensome—just one more obstacle that’s preventing them from reaching their language-learning goals. If you get to know your adult students and their backgrounds and preferences, you’ll have a better idea of how much technical language to use.

For students of any age, it’s more important for them to *feel and understand* what’s happening inside their mouths when they pronounce a sound than to remember technical terms. Knowledge about the articulatory system and categories of sounds is a tool to help students reach their pronunciation goals, not a goal in itself.

It’s often helpful to introduce and practice some classroom English expressions that you and your students can use in talking about pronunciation. For example:

- How do you pronounce —?
- How many syllables does — have?

- Which syllable has the stress? Which syllable is stressed? Where is the stress?
- Does the intonation go up or down?

If you take the time to introduce and practice these expressions, students will have an easier time talking about pronunciation during class.

Should you use phonemic symbols in teaching?

A related question is whether you should use a phonemic alphabet in teaching pronunciation. Again, it depends on your students. For some students it’s valuable, but for others it’s confusing and scary. You’ll need to think about your students—their age, expectations, and learning styles—before making this decision. Here are some things to think about:

Age: Young children who are just learning to read and write in their own language will probably just be confused if we ask them to learn not only the regular English alphabet, but also a set of phonemic symbols. For children, it’s better to use other ways of reminding them of sounds, such as gestures, key words for each sound, colors, or pictures of animals or objects that contain the sounds.

Teenagers and adults, on the other hand, are mentally more mature and better able to handle a new system of abstract

symbols. Some people have a more analytical mindset than others, and learning to use phonemic symbols will feel natural and comfortable for them. Others might feel threatened by the prospect of having to master a new and unfamiliar system.

Expectations: Even among adults, individuals react to a phonemic alphabet in different ways. Many find the symbols reassuring. They seem comfortingly academic and familiar, since many people have seen them before in dictionaries or textbooks. The student thinks, “Ah, good. This is what pronunciation lessons are supposed to look like!” Others who have never used a phonemic alphabet might feel confused or frustrated.

Learning styles: People learn new things in different ways —through seeing, through hearing, and through doing. (They use **visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning modalities**.) Written symbols are especially valuable for learners whose strength is visual learning. They need to see something to really understand it. People whose strength is auditory learning may not need this visual reinforcement as much. Learners who favor kinesthetic learning might respond better to gestures, hand signals, or other movements than to phonemic symbols for representing sounds.

Requirements: In some teaching situations, you might be required or expected to use phonemic symbols. If so, of course you’ll need to follow your school’s expectations, but introduce the symbols gradually. Explain why the symbols are useful, and let students see and use them often enough so that they’ll be comfortable using them.

Is the phonemic alphabet outdated? We might wonder if it’s still necessary to use a phonemic alphabet in these days of electronic dictionaries, cell phones, tablets, and other devices that can pronounce words for us. Has the phonemic alphabet become obsolete?

I think that there is still great value in using written symbols to represent sounds. Recorded words are helpful, but they slip by quickly and their sounds can be hard to catch, especially if the sound quality from tiny speakers is not clear, if there’s background noise, or if the user of the device must keep the volume turned low to avoid disturbing others.

Written symbols are more permanent than sounds. We can take our time to look at them, think about them, and try to say them to ourselves. Phonemic symbols also help learners to pin down the sounds and connect them to a particular phoneme that they’ve learned. If we only hear a new word, we might think, “What were those sounds? Did I hear this

sound or that sound?” Phonemic symbols give us a way to check our hearing.

Should you use phonemic symbols or not? You’ll have to make that decision based on your students’ needs and abilities. If you think they’ll be helpful, give them a try. If you find that they do more harm than good, don’t use them.

If you do decide to include a phonemic alphabet in your teaching, don’t try to introduce all the symbols at once or make students memorize them all in a day. Introduce unfamiliar symbols little by little as students learn and practice the sounds they represent. Emphasize symbols that represent sounds that don’t have a clear, unambiguous spelling in English, like /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, or /ŋ/. Vowel symbols are especially useful since the spelling of vowel sounds in English is complicated and inconsistent. It’s useful to have a consistent way to identify vowel sounds that doesn’t depend on spelling.

In conclusion

In planning your pronunciation teaching, you’ll need to think about your own students, their goals, abilities, and preferences, and all the other aspects of your teaching situation. All of these will guide you in deciding what methods and activities to use in teaching pronunciation.

How Can I Improve My Own Pronunciation?

Why?

If English is not your native language, you know that your pronunciation may never be mistaken for that of a native speaker. That's normal, and that's all right. On the other hand, as a teacher of English, you want to have the best pronunciation possible, both to serve as a reliable model for your students and to be understood easily when you speak to others. So what can you do?

How?

First, realize that this is going to be a long process. You've been studying and speaking English for a long time—maybe for decades—and your pronunciation habits are well

established. Changing habits isn't easy or quick, and it can be frustrating. In fact, in some ways, it's like going on a diet. You start out with good intentions to eat only healthy, low-calorie foods, and you look forward to the wonderful results of your diet. At first you stick to your plan, but as the days go by, it's easy to fall back into old eating habits. After a while you're eating hot fudge sundaes and potato chips again. It's hard to change established habits.

It's hard to change pronunciation habits, too. But don't be discouraged. If you approach pronunciation improvement seriously, recognizing that it's a long-term project that will require daily attention and practice, you can make good progress. Here are some suggestions:

Make a plan and practice often. Practicing for a few minutes every day will give you better results than practicing for hours every couple of weeks.

Choose a specific model to imitate. Think of someone whose voice you really like—an actor, singer, news announcer, or someone you know. It can be more effective to choose a specific target instead of a general one—"I want to sound like Denzel Washington" or "I want to sound like Julia Roberts" instead of "I want to sound like an American native speaker."

Learn to listen. Of course you might say, “I already know how to listen. I do it all the time.” But to improve your pronunciation, you need to take listening to a whole new level—to hear all the details of the individual sounds and the whole music of pronunciation without the “filter” of your own language. When you listen to a sound, don’t just think, “Oh, that’s an /l/ sound.” Ask yourself what kind of /l/ it is. Is your tongue up close to your teeth, or farther back? Is your tongue tip flat against the roof of your mouth, or more upright with just the tip touching? There are infinite

variations of sounds, and after a while, you’ll start to hear things that you’ve never noticed before.

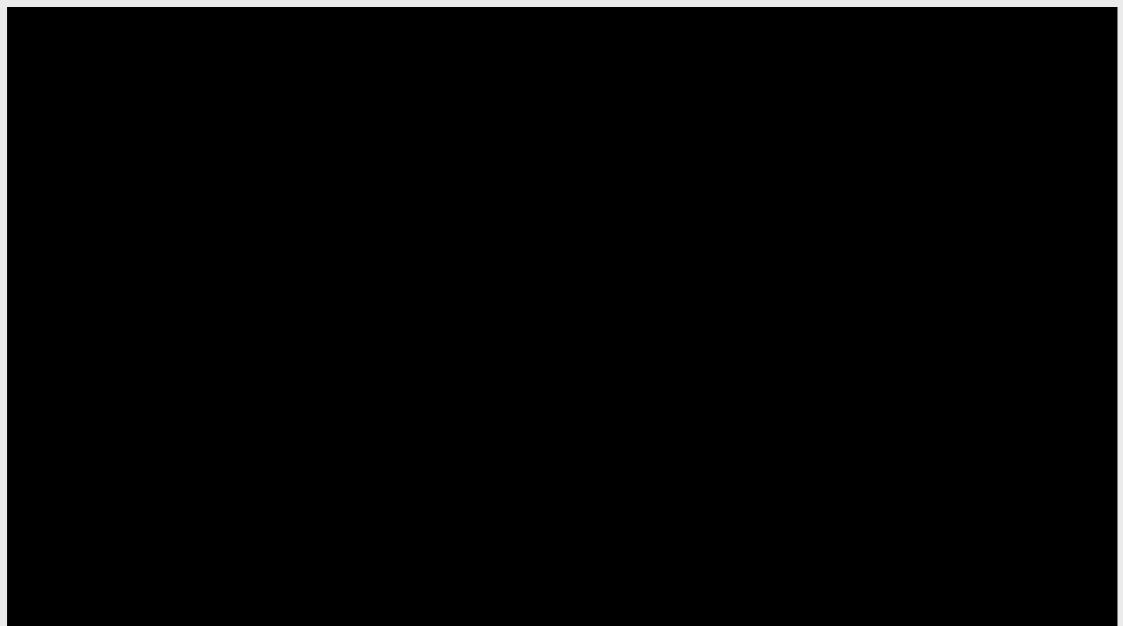
Listen intensively. Choose a scene from a favorite movie or TV program on DVD or a short video clip from YouTube. Start with a recording that’s slow and clear, like those on the VOA Special English (<http://learningenglish.voanews.com/>). It helps if you can also find or create a transcript for the clip.

Listen to the clip once or twice, following along with the transcript. Underline words that contain the sounds you want to practice. Mark pauses, intonation, and linking. Listen again many times, paying special attention to the words or other things you’ve marked.

Listen to the clip again and again. This will help the sounds of the language become ingrained in your mind. Try to say the dialog along with the characters. Repeat the words exactly the way the speakers said them. Sometimes this might give you a funny feeling, as if you’re mocking or making fun of the speakers, but for your purpose, that’s OK. The speakers can’t hear you anyway.

As you practice, the sounds and melodies of English should start to sound and feel clearer and more distinguishable. They’ll gradually work their way into your consciousness so that you can hear and say them more accurately. You’ll start

VIDEO CLIP: DON’T WAIT FOR A MIRACLE.



This is an excerpt from a panel discussion held at UCI Extension in July, 2010. The speaker is Safineh Tahmassebi, a long-time ESL and TEFL instructor at UCI Extension. Her native language is Farsi.

to hear differences that you didn't notice before, and your pronunciation will become more like that of your model.

Listen extensively. Listen to as many different kinds of English as you can, whenever you can. Surround yourself with the sounds of English, even if you don't understand everything. Listen to news and talk sources on TV, radio, or the Internet. (National Public Radio is one of my favorites.) Find podcasts on topics that interest you. You have to hear the language a lot in order to have enough "sound data" for your brain to work with—to build up a sense of its sounds, rhythm, and intonation patterns. Just listening to textbook "repeat after me" sentences isn't enough (although it's not a bad way to practice). You need to hear real people speaking real language for a long time. The more exposure you have to the sounds and music of authentic English, the more they'll feel natural.

Don't try to practice everything at once. Choose a sound that causes you the most trouble and concentrate on improving that first. Listen for it when you're watching TV or listening to someone talk, and monitor your own pronunciation of it. When you can produce that sound more comfortably and accurately, move on to another sound. This often works better than trying to improve everything at the same time.

Start slowly, then speed up. If you've ever learned to dance or play a musical instrument, you know that you can't do it at full speed right from the start. You have to go slowly at first, thinking consciously about each movement, how they fit together, and what comes next. After you've practiced for a while, the movements start to feel more comfortable and automatic, and you can do them more quickly and smoothly. Pronunciation is the same way. Practice reading a passage or saying a difficult word slowly at first, and then gradually speed up as it becomes more comfortable.

Carry a small notebook to write down words that give you trouble or interesting words that you notice and want to practice later. You could use a smart phone to keep a list of these or to record interesting new words that you hear. Keep a dictionary (paper or electronic) handy to look up new words and check their pronunciation.

Practice reading aloud. Find something to read: a news story, a page from a novel, a dialog, even a page from a textbook. Mark pauses, intonation patterns, and words that you particularly want to work on. Practice reading out loud, and then...

Record your voice. Listen to the recording and self-monitor. Try to hear which sounds aren't quite right, then

experiment with how to adjust your pronunciation to make it sound better. Play the recording for someone else and ask for their opinion and suggestions. Practice again, concentrating on those challenging sounds.

Practice in front of a mirror. Watch the movement of your mouth, lips, and tongue and notice how far you're opening your mouth and how much you're rounding your lips. If you're imitating a video, compare your mouth movements with those of the characters in the video. Try whispering or saying words without making any sound at all. This helps you really concentrate on the movements of your mouth.

Get help from a friend whose pronunciation you trust, but be careful who you ask for advice. Not everybody knows what they're talking about, even if they're a native speaker. Unless your friend is an experienced English teacher or phonologist, he or she probably won't be aware of how pronunciation really works and might not know what to do to help you. You can provide some guidance by asking specific questions. For example, you might make a list of words that you have trouble with or need to use often and ask your friend to model them for you. Then check your pronunciation as you say them.

You can also ask a friend to help you by correcting your mistakes when you talk, but this doesn't always work well. Your friend may be paying attention to the meaning of what you're saying and not notice *how* you say it. Or they may be reluctant to hurt your feelings by making corrections, even if that's what you really want. It's not realistic to expect anyone to catch every detail of your pronunciation.

Let go of old habits. To be really good at pronunciation in a new language, you have to be willing to let go of old pronunciation habits, and this can be difficult. Aside from the physical challenge of changing the way your mouth, tongue, and lips move, there's also a mental challenge. You have to be willing to sound different and sometimes even act in a different way than you're used to, and this can be a little bit scary. Your voice and pronunciation are such a deeply rooted part of you that many people feel uncomfortable or threatened when they start to change their pronunciation. It can almost seem like you're losing a part of yourself or becoming a new, strange person. It helps to remember that this new voice you're creating doesn't have to be permanent. You can go back to your old way of speaking if you want, or if it might be advantageous in a particular situation.

You don't have to use all, or in fact, any of these suggestions. Choose the ones that seem right for you. If you try a new

technique and it just doesn't work for you, even after giving it a fair chance for a couple of weeks, just don't do it. You'll also probably find some new ways that aren't listed here.

Don't give up!

Finally, don't be too hard on yourself if you don't get the results you want right away. Remember that improving your pronunciation is a long-term effort that will always be in progress. Stay positive and enjoy the journey.

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Wilson, K. (2010). Reading Aloud in Class Is a Complete Waste of Time—Discuss. Ken Wilson's Blog. <http://kenwilsonelt.wordpress.com/2010/10/14/reading-aloud-in-class-is-a-complete-waste-of-time-discuss/>. Accessed September 2, 2013.

Yavaş, M. (2011). *Applied English Phonology, Second Edition*, Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Suggested further reading

If you want to read more about pronunciation teaching, try some of the books in this section. The order of books in the list is roughly from more general to more specific, and within each type, in order of my personal preference.

- *Teaching Pronunciation: A Course Book and Reference Guide, Second Edition*, Marianne Celce-Murcia, Donna M. Brinton, and Janet M. Goodwin, with Barry Griner. Cambridge University Press, 2010. ISBN #978-0521729765. This book is very detailed and

sometimes difficult to read, but it has many, many good ideas for teaching activities. There are thorough explanations of the pronunciation of individual sounds and of suprasegmental features. It makes a wonderful resource and includes two CDs of examples and exercises. Based on American English pronunciation.

- *Tips for Teaching Pronunciation: A Practical Approach*, Linda Lane, Pearson Longman, 2010. ISBN #978-0-13-813629-1. Simple, clear explanations about the main points of many facets of pronunciation. It includes a CD of examples and has a chapter on typical pronunciation problems of particular language groups. Based on American English pronunciation.
- *Teaching American English Pronunciation*, Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, Oxford University Press, 1992. ISBN #0-19-432815-5. This book is compact and explains concepts well, but has few example teaching activities. It has a chapter on typical pronunciation problems of particular language groups. Based on American English pronunciation.
- *How to Teach Pronunciation*, Gerald Kelly, Pearson Longman, 2000. ISBN #0-582429-75-7. A short, simple book, but with few ideas for teaching activities. Includes

a CD with examples from the book. Based on British English pronunciation.

- *Pronunciation*, Clement Laroy, Oxford University Press, 1995. ISBN #0-194370-87-9. Lots of ideas about using psychology, drama, and similar techniques in teaching pronunciation. The techniques apply equally to American or British pronunciation.
- *Teaching Pronunciation*, John Murphy, TESOL, 2013. A short, easy-to-read booklet, concentrating mainly on thought groups and prominence.
- *The Book of Pronunciation*, Jonathan Marks and Tim Bowen, Delta Publishing Company, 2012. Includes many examples of activities for raising students' awareness of aspects of pronunciation, with a very heavy reliance on the use of phonemic transcription. Based on British English pronunciation.
- *English Phonology and Pronunciation Teaching*, Pamela Rogerson-Revell, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011. ISBN #978-0-8264-2403-7. The main emphasis is on teaching pronunciation for EIL purposes (English as an International Language). It doesn't offer many ideas on how to teach pronunciation—it's more about the content of teaching than methods for teaching.

It has a chapter on problems of particular language groups, but very few languages are represented. No CD, but there's a companion website with audio files and an answer key. Based on British English pronunciation.

- *Perspectives on Teaching Connected Speech to Second Language Speakers*, James Dean Brown and Kimi Kondo-Brown, University of Hawai'i, National Foreign Language Resource Center, 2006. ISBN #978-0-8248-3136-3. The chapters cover research and methods of teaching and testing connected speech (linking, stress, rhythm, reductions, etc.), especially related to the teaching of English and Japanese. Some chapters are very theoretical, but others offer more practical suggestions.
- *Teaching the Pronunciation of English as a Lingua Franca*, Robin Walker, Oxford University Press, 2010. ISBN #978-0-19-442200-0. This book takes a different approach than the others. It suggests that since English has become an international language, students shouldn't be expected to imitate any one national variety of English as their target (Standard American English, Standard British English, etc.) Instead, the author suggests a "Lingua Franca Core" of pronunciation features that are most necessary in producing speech that is intelligible to the widest range of native and non-native speakers of English, and not worrying much about the rest. It's an

interesting approach, though it may not be easily accepted by most teachers, Boards of Education, parents, etc. Not based on either American or British English pronunciation, of course!

- *Pronunciation Contrasts in English, Second Edition*, Don L. F. Nilsen and Aileen Pace Nilsen, Waveland Press, 2010. The purpose of this book is very narrow and specific, but if you're looking for minimal pairs, this is a fantastic resource. The authors have collected lists of minimal pairs for every imaginable sound contrast in English. This is a big time-saver if you're making practice activities that require minimal pairs.

Books of activities for teaching pronunciation

These are books of activity and game ideas for teachers, not textbooks that would be used directly by students.

- *Pronunciation Games*, Mark Hancock, Cambridge University Press, 1995. Lots of photocopiable games, mainly at a beginning to intermediate level. Based on British English pronunciation.
- *Pronunciation Practice Activities*, Martin Hewings, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Comes with a CD of exercises. Based on British English pronunciation.

- *Primary Pronunciation Box*, Caroline Nixon and Michael Tomlinson, Cambridge University Press, 2005. Aimed at younger learners. Comes with a CD. Based on British English pronunciation.
- *New Ways in Teaching Connected Speech*. James Dean Brown, Editor, TESOL International Association, 2012. Lots of suggestions for teaching linking, assimilation, and other aspects of connected speech.
- *New Ways in Teaching Speaking*, Kathleen M. Bailey and Lance Savage, editors, TESOL, 1994. Has a chapter about pronunciation practice activities.
- *New Ways in Teaching Listening*, David Nunan and Lindsay Miller, editors, TESOL, 1995. Has a chapter about activities for teaching pronunciation through listening.
- *Pronouncercizing, Millicent Alexander*. (available from New Readers Press: <http://www.newreaderspress.com/Items.aspx?hierId=0450>.) Describes the author's way of using gestures and body movements to represent sounds and help students practice pronunciation.

Books about phonetics and phonology

These are more theoretical books about phonology in general and the sounds of many languages in addition to English.

- *A Course in Phonetics, Fifth Edition*, Peter Ladefoged, Thomson Wadsworth, 2006. Discusses both American and British English.
- *Vowels and Consonants, Second Edition*, Peter Ladefoged, Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- *English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course, Third Edition*, Peter Roach, Cambridge University Press, 2000. Based mainly on British English.
- *Applied English Phonology, Second Edition*, Mehmet Yavaş, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Based mainly on American English.

Internet Links

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list—just some of my favorites.

- Phonetics Flash Animation Project of the University of Iowa: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/> Includes videos and animated sagittal section diagrams for each of the phonemes of American English, German, and Spanish.

- Website of recordings to go with Peter Ladefoged's *Vowels and Consonants*: <http://www.phonetics.ucla.edu/vowels/contents.html>
- World Atlas of Language Structures Online: <http://wals.info/>
- *Using Your Hands to Teach Pronunciation*, a teacher training video from Sunburst Media. See a short demo video at <http://www.sunburstmedia.com/UsgHands-demo.html>
- Jazz Chants: <http://jazzchants.net/home>. Carolyn Graham's website with examples of Jazz Chants and information and advice about using them effectively.
- Praat: Doing phonetics by computer: <http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>. Download free software to record and analyze speech. (For Mac and Windows)
- Speech Analyzer by SIL International: <http://www-01.sil.org/computing/sa/index.htm>. Download free software to record and analyze speech. (Windows only)
- Teaching Pronunciation Skills: <http://teachingpronunciation.weebly.com>. This is the website that goes with my Teaching Pronunciation Skills class. Please leave a message on the website if you have comments about this book or about the website itself.

Accentedness

This describes listeners' judgment of whether a speaker's pronunciation fits into the norms of standard pronunciation that they expect to hear. (We ask, "Does this person have a noticeable accent?") Many people are easy to understand, even if they have a nonnative accent.

Related Glossary Terms

Communicability, Intelligibility or comprehensibility

Index

[Find Term](#)

Accuracy

Correctness in pronunciation. The degree to which someone's pronunciation matches an accepted norm.

Related Glossary Terms

Fluency

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation

Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation

Affricate

A type of sound that is a combination of a stop followed by a fricative—an explosion with a slow release. The affricates in English are /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. Each of these symbols is made up of two parts—a stop symbol and a fricative symbol. This reminds us that the sounds also have two parts.

Affricate is one of the manners of articulation.

Related Glossary Terms

Manner of articulation, Sibilant

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

[Section 6 - Pronunciation of Some Word Endings](#)

[Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation](#)

Allophones

Variations of a phoneme that are still heard to be the same sound are called allophones of the same phoneme. They're different sounds that function as the same sound. Changing from one allophone to another doesn't change meaning, although it may make the word sound strange.

Related Glossary Terms

Flap, Phonemes

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Alphabetic Principle

The understanding that written words are composed of letters, and the letters represent the sounds of spoken words.

Related Glossary Terms

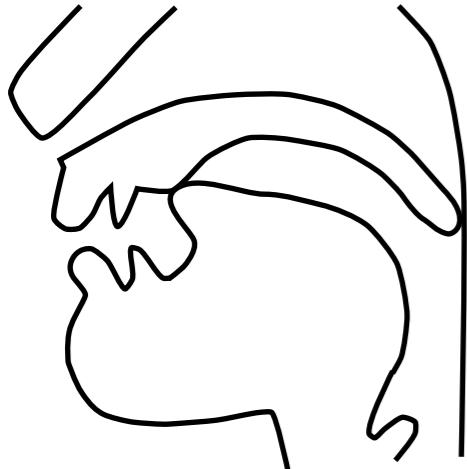
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Find Term

Alveolar

A place of articulation that describes sounds pronounced with the tip of the tongue touching or almost touching the alveolar ridge.



Related Glossary Terms

Alveolar ridge, Place of articulation

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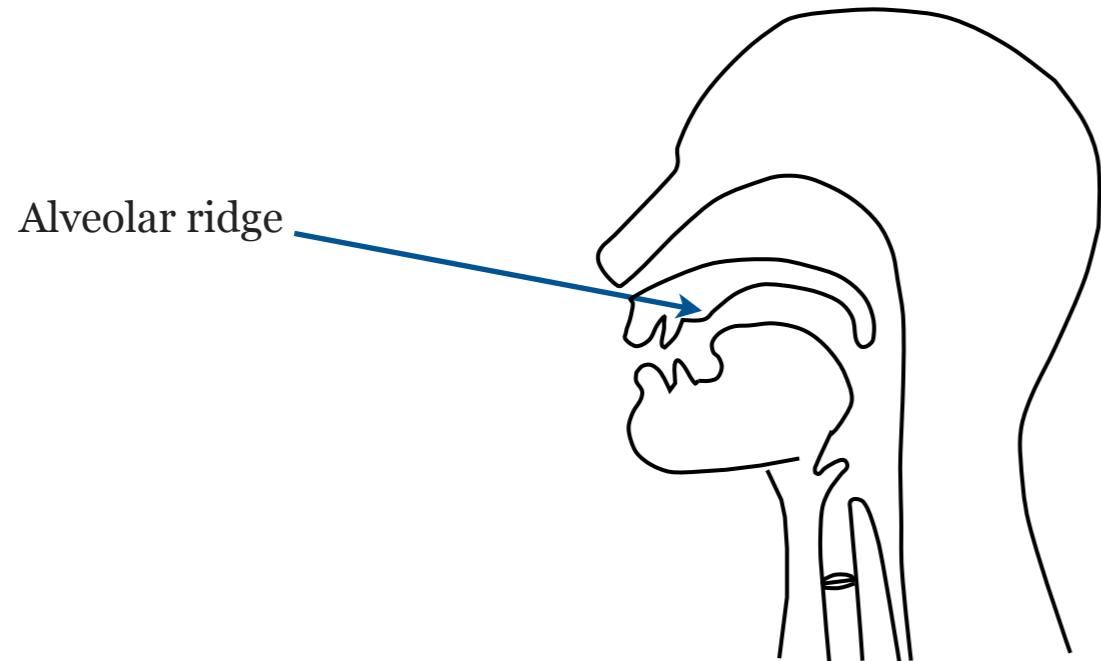
[Find Term](#)

Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Section 12 - Connected Speech

Alveolar ridge

The rough area just behind the top teeth. It can also be called the tooth ridge or the gum ridge



Related Glossary Terms

Alveolar, Sibilant, Tapped /t/ (or flapped /t/)

Index

[Find Term](#)

[Section 3 - The Articulatory System](#)

[Section 3 - The Articulatory System](#)

Articulation

The way of pronouncing sounds; how we move our tongue, lips, etc. in pronouncing sounds.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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[Find Term](#)

Articulators

The parts of the vocal tract that move in various ways to change the size and shape of the open part of the vocal tract and produce all the sounds of English, or any other language. They include the lips, teeth, and tongue.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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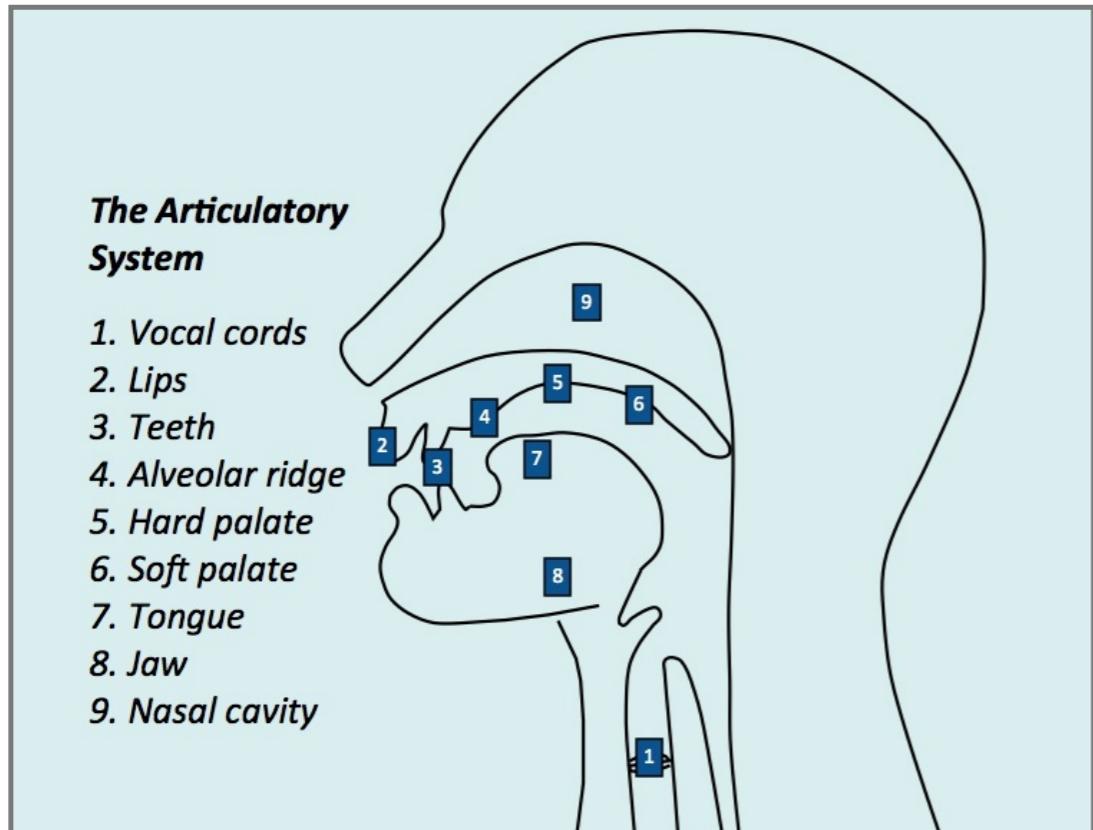
Section 3 - The Articulatory System

[Section 12 - Connected Speech](#)

[Section 12 - Connected Speech](#)

Articulatory system

The parts of the body that are used in producing sounds. Its parts are illustrated below:



Related Glossary Terms

Lungs

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 3 - The Articulatory System

Aspiration (noun) Aspirated (adjective)

The puff of air that is produced with some sounds. In English, voiceless stops are aspirated at the beginnings of words.

- Sounds that are pronounced with this puff of air are called aspirated sounds.
- Sounds that are pronounced without this puff of air are called unaspirated sounds.

Related Glossary Terms

Unaspirated, Voiceless sound

Index

[Find Term](#)

[Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology](#)

[Section 4 - The Consonants of American English](#)

Assimilation

A sound change in which one sound becomes more similar to a sound that comes before or after it. This makes the words easier to pronounce.

Related Glossary Terms

Palatalization, Phonological processes

Index

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[Section 4 - The Consonants of American English](#)

[Section 12 - Connected Speech](#)

[Section 12 - Connected Speech](#)

[Section 12 - Connected Speech](#)

Auditory learning modality

Learning through hearing.

Related Glossary Terms

Kinesthetic learning modality, Visual learning modality, Visual, auditory, kinesthetic learning modalities

Index

[Find Term](#)

[Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels](#)

[Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation](#)

Authentic materials

Materials that were created for “real life” purposes, not for teaching, such as newspapers, magazines, TV or radio programs, movies, advertisements, and poems.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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[Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels](#)

[Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation](#)

Bilabial

A place of articulation that describes sounds pronounced with the lips touching or almost touching each other.



Related Glossary Terms

Place of articulation

[Index](#)

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Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

[Section 12 - Connected Speech](#)

[Section 12 - Connected Speech](#)

Blends and contractions

Two words that blend together to make a shorter word. If the two-word combination is written as one word with an apostrophe, we call it a contraction, such as *isn't*, *that's*, or *I'm*. If the combination is not commonly written as one word, we can call it a blend, such as /watəl/ for *what will* (usually not written *what'll*).

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Section 12 - Connected Speech

Bottom-up processing

When we listen to individual sounds to figure out what words we're hearing and decode the meaning of the message, we're using bottom-up processing.

Related Glossary Terms

Top-down processing

Index

[Find Term](#)

Chants

A set of rhythmic lines that are repeated over and over again, such as *Jazz Chants*, made popular by Carolyn Graham. A chant might rhyme, or it might not.

(A chant is different from a song. A song has a melody, but a chant doesn't.)

Related Glossary Terms

Choral repetition

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation

Choral repetition

Pronunciation practice in which a group of students repeat after a model, all speaking together. The traditional “repeat after me” practice is a form of choral repetition.

Related Glossary Terms

Chants, Individual repetition

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels

Section 14 - Different Places, Different Learners

Citation form of a word

The pronunciation of a word when it is said carefully, and usually alone. For example, the citation form of *and* is /ænd/, and the citation form of *to* is /tuw/.

In contrast, the reduced form of a word is its pronunciation when it is said in normal speech at a normal speed, and it is not being stressed. For example, the reduced form of *and* is /ən/ or /n/, and the reduced form of *to* is /tə/.

Related Glossary Terms

Reduced form of a word

Index

[Find Term](#)

[Section 5 - The Vowels of American English](#)

[Section 5 - The Vowels of American English](#)

[Section 9 - Rhythm](#)

[Section 12 - Connected Speech](#)

Closed syllable

A syllable that ends in a consonant sound, like *sun*, *bat*, *made*, or the last syllable in *return*.

Related Glossary Terms

[Open syllable](#)

[Index](#)

[Find Term](#)

Section 5 - The Vowels of American English

Cloze listening

A practice activity or test in which learners are asked to fill in missing words in a written text. For example, students might listen to a song and try to fill in missing words in written lyrics.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

[Find Term](#)

Communicability

This describes how well a speaker's pronunciation lets him/her function and communicate in the real-life situations he/she faces. (We ask, "Can this person communicate?")

Related Glossary Terms

Accentedness, Intelligibility or comprehensibility

Index

[Find Term](#)

Communicative language teaching

An approach to language teaching that emphasizes these principles:

- Students learn a language best through using it, not just by learning about it and memorizing rules and vocabulary.
 - In the classroom, students should participate in real communication about their own interests and experiences by using the target language.
 - Language learning should be linked to the kinds of communication students will need to do outside the classroom.
 - Teachers should use authentic texts and real-life language as much as possible.
 - Students should focus not only on the language itself, but on how they are learning it.
 - It's all right to take chances and make mistakes. That's how we learn.
-

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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[Find Term](#)

Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

Complementary distribution

When we don't have a choice of which allophone of a phoneme to use in a particular situation, we say the two allophones are in complementary distribution. The environment of the sound—the sounds around it—determine which allophone will be used.

Related Glossary Terms

Free variation

Index

[Find Term](#)

[Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology](#)
[Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology](#)

Compound nouns

Combinations of two words that together make a new noun, such as *newspaper*, *motorcycle*, or *post office*.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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[Find Term](#)

Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

Compound verb

A combination of two words that together make a new verb, such as *put on*, *print out*, or *get on*. Many compound verbs are also called *two-word verbs* or *phrasal verbs*.

Related Glossary Terms

Two-word verb or phrasal verb

Index

[Find Term](#)

Connected speech

The changes in pronunciation that happen when words come together and are linked to the words around them.

Related Glossary Terms

Consonant

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[Find Term](#)

[Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation](#)

Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

[Section 12 - Connected Speech](#)

[Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation](#)

Consonant

A sound in which the air stream meets some obstacles in the mouth on its way up from the lungs. Words like *big*, *map*, and *see* begin with consonants. The chart below shows the consonants of English.

4.4 CLASSIFICATION OF AMERICAN ENGLISH CONSONANT PHONEMES							
Manner of Articulation	Place of Articulation						
	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop Voiceless Voiced	/p/ /b/			/t/ /d/		/k/ /g/	
Fricative Voiceless Voiced		/f/ /v/	/θ/ /ð/	/s/ /z/	/ʃ/ /ʒ/		/h/
Affricate Voiceless Voiced					/tʃ/ /dʒ/		
Nasal Voiced	/m/			/n/		/ŋ/	
Liquid Voiced				/l/	/r/		
Glide Voiced	/w/				/y/		

Related Glossary Terms

Connected speech, Syllable, Voiced sound, Voiceless sound, Vowel

Index

Find Term

Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Consonant blends or consonant clusters

Combinations of letters that represent a sequence of sounds, such as “str” in “street” or “mp” in “lamp.”

Related Glossary Terms

Consonant cluster

[Index](#)

[Find Term](#)

Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Consonant chart

A table that shows all the consonants of a language, categorizing them by place of articulation, manner of articulation, and voicing. This is a consonant chart for English.

4.4 CLASSIFICATION OF AMERICAN ENGLISH CONSONANT PHONEMES							
Manner of Articulation	Place of Articulation						
	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop Voiceless	/p/			/t/ /d/		/k/ /g/	
Voiceless Voiced	/b/						
Fricative Voiceless		/f/ /v/	/θ/ /ð/	/s/ /z/	/ʃ/ /ʒ/		/h/
Voiceless Voiced							
Affricate Voiceless					/tʃ/ /dʒ/		
Voiceless Voiced							
Nasal Voiced	/m/			/n/		/ŋ/	
Liquid Voiced				/l/	/r/		
Glide Voiced	/w/				/y/		

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Consonant cluster

Combinations of letters that represent a sequence of sounds, such as “str” in “street” or “mp” in “lamp.” Also called a “consonant blend.”

Related Glossary Terms

Consonant blends or consonant clusters

[Index](#)

[Find Term](#)

Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Section 12 - Connected Speech

Content words

Words that have lexical meaning rather than grammatical meaning, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and question words. The chart below shows the kinds of words that are considered content words, with examples.

CONTENT WORDS	
Category	Examples
Nouns	book, teacher, responsibility
Main verbs	read, eat, study, examine, report
Adjectives	big, beautiful, tired, many
Possessive pronouns	mine, yours, his, hers, theirs
Demonstrative pronouns	this, that, these, those
Questions words	who, what, where, when, why, how
Not and ~n't	not, isn't, don't, hasn't, can't
Adverbs	often, always, easily, happily

Related Glossary Terms

Function words

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[Section 9 - Rhythm](#)

[Section 9 - Rhythm](#)

[Section 9 - Rhythm](#)

[Section 10 - Thought Groups and Prominence](#)

[Section 10 - Thought Groups and Prominence](#)

[Section 10 - Thought Groups and Prominence](#)

Continuants

Consonant sounds that continue out of the vocal tract without being completely blocked off: fricatives, nasals, liquids, and glides. (In other words, all the consonants except stops and fricatives are continuants.)

Related Glossary Terms

Obstruent, Sonorant

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[Find Term](#)

Section 12 - Connected Speech

Section 12 - Connected Speech

Contractions and blends

Two words that blend together to make a shorter word. If the two-word combination is commonly written as one word with an apostrophe, we call it a contraction, such as *isn't*, *that's*, or *I'm*. If the combination is not commonly written as one word, we can call it a blend, such as /watəl/ for *what will*.

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Section 12 - Connected Speech

Contrastive analysis

Comparing the sound systems of L1 and L2 to determine what sounds might be most difficult for learners. The idea is that sounds that are different in the two languages can cause more problems and need more teaching time than sounds that are the same. (The focus is on sounds.)

Related Glossary Terms

Distinctive feature analysis

Index

[Find Term](#)

Contrastive stress

When prominence is given to two words that are in contrast in order to bring attention to the difference between them. For example:

*Hamburgers **TASTE** good, but they're not **nuTRItious**.*

*The students in the **FRONT** of the room were paying attention, but the ones in the **BACK** were half asleep.*

Related Glossary Terms

Emphatic stress

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 10 - Thought Groups and Prominence

[Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation](#)

Critical period hypothesis

A theory in linguistics that suggests that there is an ideal time for children to learn language lasting up to the age of about 12 to 14. Children learn the sounds of language more naturally than adults during this time and can approach native speaker pronunciation if they are surrounded by the language and have many chances to hear its pronunciation.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

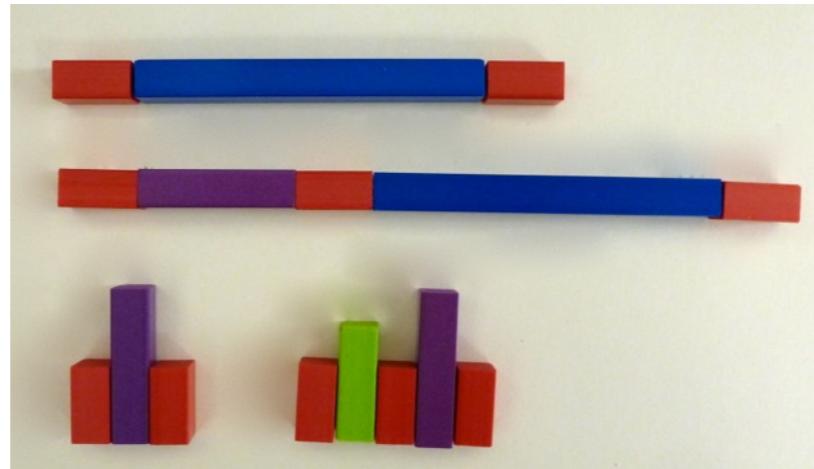
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Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation

Cuisenaire rods

Rectangular rods of various lengths and colors. They are often used to teach math to children, but they can also be useful in teaching languages. They're usually made of wood or plastic, and come in lengths from one to ten units long, with each length a different color.



Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation

Decoding skills

The ability to recognize written words that follow predictable spelling patterns—to “sound out” words by putting together the sounds represented by their letters.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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[Find Term](#)

Section 14 - Different Places, Different Learners

Deductive teaching

The teacher explains a rule, pattern, or generalization, and then students practice using what they've learned.

Rule → Examples and practice

The opposite approach is called *inductive teaching*.

Related Glossary Terms

Inductive teaching

Index

Find Term

Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels

Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels

Deletion

A sound change in normal connected speech in which a sound may disappear or not be clearly pronounced in certain contexts. Deletion is also called *omission*, *elision*, or *ellipsis*.

Related Glossary Terms

Phonological processes

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 12 - Connected Speech

Dental model

A model of the teeth like those used by dentists to teach children how to brush their teeth. This is a very useful tool in showing students the parts of the mouth and the position of the tongue in producing sounds.



Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 3 - The Articulatory System

Dental or interdental

A place of articulation that describes sounds pronounced with the tip of the tongue softly touching the back or bottom edge of the top teeth.



Related Glossary Terms

Place of articulation

[Index](#)

[Find Term](#)

Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Descriptive rules

Language rules that are written to describe how people talk and to make generalizations about how language works. Descriptive rules don't tell what a language *should* be like; they're a summary of what it *is* like.

Related Glossary Terms

Prescriptive rules

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Dialect or variety of a language

A form of a language that is associated with a particular place or social group. A dialect can have its own pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

When linguists use the term “dialect,” it does not necessarily mean an unusual or “lower” way of speaking. A language can have both standard and nonstandard dialects.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology
Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Digraph

A combination of two graphemes (letters) that together represent one sound. In English, “sh” is a digraph that represents /ʃ/.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

[Find Term](#)

Diphthongs, simple vowels, and glided vowels

Categories of vowels based on whether the tongue moves during the pronunciation of the vowel.

- If the tongue stays in one position during a vowel, it's a simple vowel.
- If the tongue position changes just a little, it's a glided vowel.
- If the tongue position changes a lot, so it sounds like two separate vowels mashed together, it's a diphthong.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Discourse

A connected set of sentences or utterances, such as a conversation, a speech, an essay, or a story. We can use the term discourse in talking about either spoken or written language.

Related Glossary Terms

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[Find Term](#)

Section 11 - Intonation

Section 11 - Intonation

Distinctive feature analysis

A way of analyzing two languages to determine which sound features are different, to determine what to emphasize in pronunciation teaching. (The focus is on features that might affect many different sounds, such as voicing, aspiration, or nasalization, rather than on single sounds.)

Related Glossary Terms

Contrastive analysis

Index

[Find Term](#)

Drama techniques in teaching pronunciation

Techniques borrowed from acting, such as breathing practice exercises, voice warm-ups, role play, and skits.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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[Find Term](#)

Duration

The length of time that a sound lasts.

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 5 - The Vowels of American English

Elision

A sound change in normal connected speech in which a sound may disappear or not be clearly pronounced in certain contexts. Elision is also called *omission*, *deletion*, or *ellipsis*.

Related Glossary Terms

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Ellipsis

A sound change in normal connected speech in which a sound may disappear or not be clearly pronounced in certain contexts. Ellipsis is also called *omission*, *elision*, or *deletion*.

Related Glossary Terms

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Emphatic stress

When prominence is given to a word to emphasize its importance. For example:

*You have to believe me. I **DID** do my homework.*

Related Glossary Terms

Contrastive stress

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Section 10 - Thought Groups and Prominence

Section 10 - Thought Groups and Prominence

English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

English as a Foreign Language (EFL): English is being taught to learners who don't already speak it in a country where English is not commonly spoken.

Related Glossary Terms

English as a Second Language (ESL), English as an International Language (EIL)

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Section 14 - Different Places, Different Learners

English as a Second Language (ESL)

English as a Second Language (ESL): English is being taught to people who don't already speak it in a country where English is the main language.

Related Glossary Terms

English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as an International Language (EIL)

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Section 14 - Different Places, Different Learners

English as an International Language (EIL)

English instruction designed for learners who will need to communicate with people from many different backgrounds, both native and non-native speakers.

Related Glossary Terms

English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as a Second Language (ESL)

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Environment

The sounds that occur around a given phoneme and sometimes affect how it sounds.

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Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Epenthesis

The process of adding an extra sound--either a vowel or consonant--to an existing string of sounds is called *epenthesis*.

Related Glossary Terms

Epenthetic vowel

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Epenthetic vowel

An extra vowel sound that is added between other sounds. In this case, its purpose is to separate two sounds that are very similar.

The process of adding an extra sound--either a vowel or consonant--to an existing string of sounds is called *epenthesis*.

Related Glossary Terms

Epenthesis

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Feedback

Information given to learners by a teacher or other source about what they're doing right or wrong so that they can improve. Feedback can be either spoken or written.

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels

[Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels](#)

Final position

Occurring at the end of a word. For example, in the word *cat*, the sound /t/ is in final position.

Related Glossary Terms

Initial position, Medial position

Index

[Find Term](#)

Flap

A sound in which the tongue taps the alveolar ridge very quickly, so that it sounds like a quick /d/. In American English, this sound is often found as an allophone of /t/ or /d/ between vowels in words like *city*, *water*, and *middle*.

Related Glossary Terms

Allophones, Flapped /t/ (or tapped /t/), Tapped /t/ (or flapped /t/)

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Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Flapped /t/ (or tapped /t/)

A sound made when the tongue taps the alveolar ridge very quickly, so that it sounds like a quick /d/. This is called an *alveolar flap* or *tap*, and it is represented by this symbol: [ɾ]. It's a voiced sound.

Related Glossary Terms

Flap

Index

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[Section 4 - The Consonants of American English](#)

[Section 4 - The Consonants of American English](#)

[Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress](#)

Fluency

The ability to produce language and pronounce sounds smoothly and easily, even if it might not always be accurate.

Related Glossary Terms

Accuracy

Index

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Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation

Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation

Focus, sentence stress, or prominence

The word or syllable in each thought group that receives more stress than the others is called the *prominent word*, the *focus*, or the word with *sentence stress*. It is often the stressed syllable of the last content word in the sentence or thought group. It can also be the stressed syllable of a word that is being emphasized or contrasted with another word.

Related Glossary Terms

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Fossilization

A process that occurs when a language learner progresses to a certain point but then has a hard time making further progress on a particular point. The learner keeps making the same mistake again and again. The mistakes seem frozen in time, like a fossil of an ancient animal.



A fish



A fish fossil

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation

Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation

Free variation

When we have a free choice of which allophone of a phoneme to use in a particular situation, we say the two allophones are in free variation. It's fine to use either one.

For example, we usually say the phoneme /p/ this way: Our lips come together, air pressure builds up behind our lips, and then we release the air with a little “pop.” But when /p/ comes at the end of a word, we might say /p/ in a different way: Our lips come together, air pressure builds up behind our lips, and that's all—no release. We have a free choice of which kind of /p/ to use at the end of a word; either one is all right.

Related Glossary Terms

Complementary distribution

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Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Fricative

Sounds in which the air stream is compressed and passes through a small opening in the mouth, creating friction—a hissing sound. The air stream is never completely blocked, so the sound can continue. The fricatives in English are /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, and /h/.

Fricative is one of the manners of articulation.

Related Glossary Terms

Manner of articulation, Sibilant

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[Section 6 - Pronunciation of Some Word Endings](#)

[Section 12 - Connected Speech](#)

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Function words

Words that have grammatical meaning rather than lexical meaning, such as prepositions, articles, pronouns, and conjunctions. They don't have much meaning in themselves; instead, they show the relationship between other words. The chart below shows which kinds of words are considered function words.

FUNCTION WORDS	
Category	Examples
Articles	a, an, the
Auxiliary verbs	does, did, has, had, am, is, can
Personal pronouns	I, you, he, she, me, him, her
Possessive adjectives	my, your, his, her, its, their
Demonstrative adjectives	this, that, these, those
Prepositions	in, on, under, with, to, in, for
Conjunctions	and, or, but, so, because, before, while
Relative pronouns	which, who, whom, whose, that

Related Glossary Terms

Content words

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Functional load

A way of measuring how important the contrast between two sounds is in a language. If there are many minimal pairs with two sounds, the contrast between those sounds has a high functional load. If there are few minimal pairs with those two sounds, then the contrast has a low functional load. It's usually more useful to teach contrasts with a high functional load than those with a low functional load.

Related Glossary Terms

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Glide

A sound that is like a vowel, but shorter. The glides in English are /y/ and /w/. They can be used:

- As consonants, as in *yes* /yɛs/, *beyond* /biyand/, *well* /wɛl/, or *away* /əwey/.
- As the last part of a glided vowel or a diphthong, as in *see* /siy/, *say* /sey/, *boy* /boy/, *by* /bay/, *too* /tuw/, *toe* /tow/, or *cow* /caw/.

Glides are also called semivowels, or “half-vowels.”

Glide is one of the manners of articulation.

Related Glossary Terms

Manner of articulation

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Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

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Glided vowels, simple vowels, and diphthongs

Categories of vowels based on whether the tongue moves during the pronunciation of the vowel.

- If the tongue stays in one position during a vowel, it's a simple vowel.
- If the tongue position changes just a little, it's a glided vowel.
- If the tongue position changes a lot, so it sounds like two separate vowels mashed together, it's a diphthong.

Related Glossary Terms

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[Section 5 - The Vowels of American English](#)

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Glottal

A place of articulation that describes a sound produced with friction in the glottis (the space between the vocal cords). The only phoneme in this group in English is /h/.

(The glottal stop is also pronounced in this area, but it's not a separate phoneme.)



vvv The sound is produced here, in the glottis.

Related Glossary Terms

Place of articulation

Index

[Find Term](#)

Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Glottal stop

A sound produced by closing the vocal cords tightly and releasing them quickly, like the beginning of a small cough, or the middle sound when we say “huh-uh” to mean “no.” It’s represented by this symbol: [?].

Related Glossary Terms

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Glottis

The opening between the vocal cords.

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 3 - The Articulatory System

Grammatical meaning

A word that has grammatical meaning can show the grammatical relationship between other words in a sentence. It doesn't have a lot of meaning in itself.

Related Glossary Terms

[Lexical meaning](#)

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Section 5 - The Vowels of American English

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Grapheme

A written symbol that represents a sound. In English, the letters of the alphabet are graphemes.

Related Glossary Terms

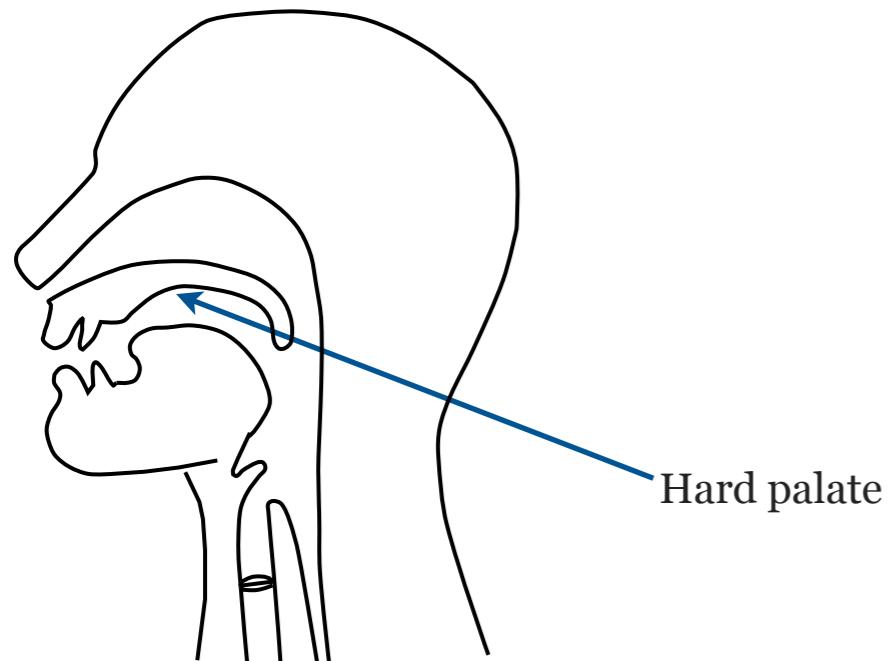
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Hard palate

The hard part of the top of the mouth, beginning just behind the alveolar ridge. It can also be called the roof of the mouth.



Related Glossary Terms

Sibilant

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[Section 3 - The Articulatory System](#)

[Section 3 - The Articulatory System](#)

[Section 4 - The Consonants of American English](#)

Heart, peak, or nucleus of a syllable

The central part of a syllable. It's usually a vowel, but it could also be a syllabic consonant. For example, in the one-syllable word *cat*, the heart of the syllable is the vowel /æ/. In the second syllable of the word *button*, the heart can be a syllabic consonant /n/.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Homonyms or homophones

Words that sound alike, but they're spelled differently, such as *meet* and *meat* or *write*, *right*, and *rite*.

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Homophones or homonyms

Words that sound alike, but they're spelled differently, such as *meet* and *meat* or *write*, *right*, and *rite*.

Related Glossary Terms

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Hypercorrection

An error that happens when someone is being very careful to avoid a different error, or when they make a false analogy with a correct form.

For example, if someone usually has trouble pronouncing /v/ and says /b/ instead, they might try so hard to say /v/ that sometimes they say /v/ even when /b/ is correct. (They say /voy/ for *boy*.)

Related Glossary Terms

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In contrast (Two sounds are in contrast)

Sounds that are heard by native speakers to be separate sounds are said to be *in contrast*. They are separate phonemes. For example, /b/ and /v/ are in contrast in English. They are considered to be separate sounds. However, /b/ and /v/ are not in contrast in Spanish. Changing from one to the other does not make a different word in Spanish, but it does in English.

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Individual repetition

Pronunciation practice in which individual students repeat after a model (the teacher or a recording), one at a time.

If many students repeat together, it's called choral repetition.

Related Glossary Terms

Choral repetition

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[Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels](#)

Inductive teaching

The teacher presents many examples of a rule, pattern, or generalization, and leads students to figure out the pattern.

Examples → Rules

The opposite approach is called *deductive teaching*.

Related Glossary Terms

Deductive teaching

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Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels

Inflections

Forms of words that change to show a grammatical category, such as tense or number. In English, these are inflectional suffixes, or endings that have some grammatical meaning (as in *want/wanted*, *cat/cats*, *eat/eating*, or *hot/hotter*).

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Initial position

Occurring at the beginning of a word. For example, in the word *cat*, the sound /k/ is in initial position.

Related Glossary Terms

Final position, Medial position

Index

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Intelligibility or comprehensibility

Both of these terms describe whether it is easy for listeners to understand what a speaker is saying. They both imply that the speaker's accent does not distract or cause problems for listeners. (We ask, "Can people understand this person?")

Related Glossary Terms

Accentedness, Communicability

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Interference

The influence of the learner's native language on the way a new language is learned.

The influence of the system of L1 affects the way the learner speaks L2. It is also called native language interference or language transfer.

Related Glossary Terms

Language transfer

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[Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation](#)

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International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)

A system of symbols developed in the late 1800s to represent all the sounds that are used in human languages. Variations of IPA are used in many dictionaries and textbooks, although most of them are not exactly like “real” IPA.

Related Glossary Terms

IPA

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Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Intervocalic

In a position between two vowels. For example, the /t/ in *water* and the /m/ in *among* are in intervocalic position.

Related Glossary Terms

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Intonation

The pitch pattern of a sentence—the up-and-down “melody” of your voice as you speak.



Related Glossary Terms

Pitch

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- [Section 11 - Intonation](#)
- [Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation](#)
- [Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation](#)

Intonation unit

A group of spoken words that has its own intonation contour. Because these usually also form a grammatical and semantic unit, such as a sentence, a clause, or a phrase, and usually express a small unit of thought, they are also called *thought groups*.

Related Glossary Terms

Thought group

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Section 10 - Thought Groups and Prominence

Invisible /y/

When the letter *u* represents the sound sequence /yuw/, as in *cube* or *music*, we say there's an "invisible /y/." We hear the sound /y/, even though there's no separate letter that represents it.

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 5 - The Vowels of American English

IPA

The abbreviation for the International Phonetic Alphabet (or for the International Phonetic Association, the organization that created the alphabet.)

Related Glossary Terms

[International Phonetic Alphabet \(IPA\)](#)

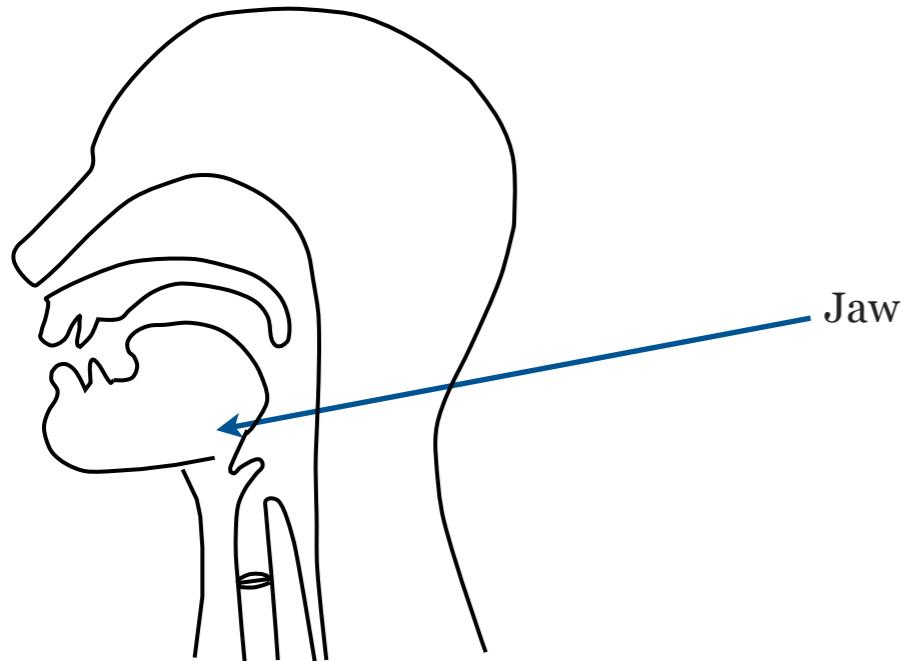
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Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Jaw

The lower part of the mouth that moves up and down to let the mouth open and close.



Related Glossary Terms

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Section 3 - The Articulatory System

Kinesthetic learning modality

Learning through doing—through body movements and manipulating objects and tools.

Related Glossary Terms

Auditory learning modality, Visual learning modality, Visual, auditory, kinesthetic learning modalities

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[Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels](#)

[Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation](#)

L1 (first language)

The learner's first language, or native language; the language that the learner feels most comfortable speaking.

Related Glossary Terms

L2 (second language)

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Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation

L2 (second language)

The learner's second language; the foreign language that is being learned.

Related Glossary Terms

[L1 \(first language\)](#)

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Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation

Labiodental

A place of articulation that describes a sound in which the upper teeth softly touch the lower lip. The sounds in this group are /f/ and /v/.



Related Glossary Terms

Place of articulation

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Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Language transfer

The influence of the learner's native language on the way a new language is learned.

The influence of the system of L1 affects the way the learner speaks L2. It is also called native language interference.

Related Glossary Terms

Interference

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Lateral

A description of a sound that is produced with the sides of the tongue open, like /l/.

Related Glossary Terms

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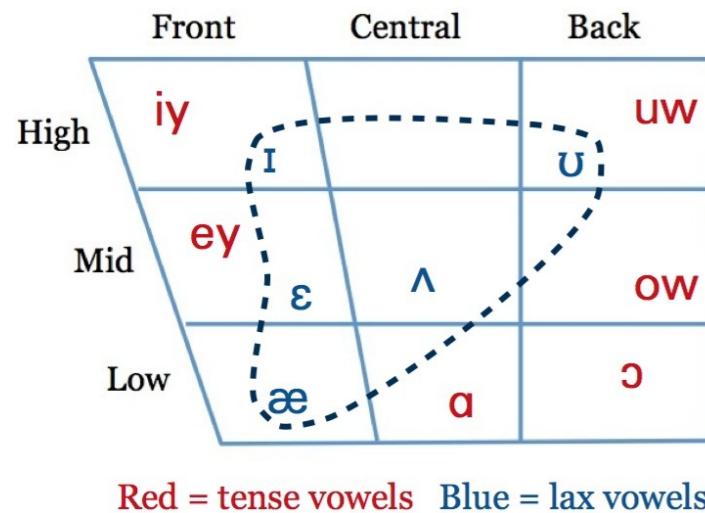
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Lax and tense vowels

A description of whether the muscles of the tongue and mouth are relatively tense or more relaxed when we say a vowel sound. Although this is not an entirely accurate physical description, it can be a useful way of thinking about these sounds.

The chart below shows the tense and lax vowels in American English.



Related Glossary Terms

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Learning modalities

Different ways that people learn and understand new information:

- Auditory: Learning through hearing.
- Visual: Learning through seeing.
- Tactile: Learning through touching.
- Kinesthetic: Learning through doing—through body movements and manipulating objects and tools.

Related Glossary Terms

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[Find Term](#)

Lexical meaning

A word that has lexical meaning has meaning in itself. It refers to objects, actions, or ideas in the real world, rather than showing grammatical relationships between other words in the sentence.

Related Glossary Terms

Grammatical meaning

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Section 5 - The Vowels of American English

Section 9 - Rhythm

Limerick

A short, humorous poem with five lines, with a syllable and rhyme pattern like this one by Edward Lear:

There was an old man with a beard (Longer line)
Who said, “It is just as I feared. (Longer line)
Two owls and a hen, (Shorter line)
Four larks and a wren (Shorter line)
Have all built their nests in my beard.” (Longer line)

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation

Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation

Lingua Franca Core

Those aspects of pronunciation that are most necessary in producing speech that is intelligible to the widest range of native and non-native speakers of English. The features that research has shown help most in increasing intelligibility when nonnative speakers communicate with each other.

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 14 - Different Places, Different Learners

Linguistics, linguist

Linguistics is the systematic study of language and how it works. Linguists are people who study linguistics. (They're not necessarily people who speak a lot of languages.)

Related Glossary Terms

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Linking

In normal speech, the last sound of one word is often linked or blended with the first sound of the next word so that the two words sound like one unit.

Related Glossary Terms

Phonological processes

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Lip rounding

A description of whether the lips are rounded, relaxed, or stretched a bit wide when a vowel sound is pronounced.

Related Glossary Terms

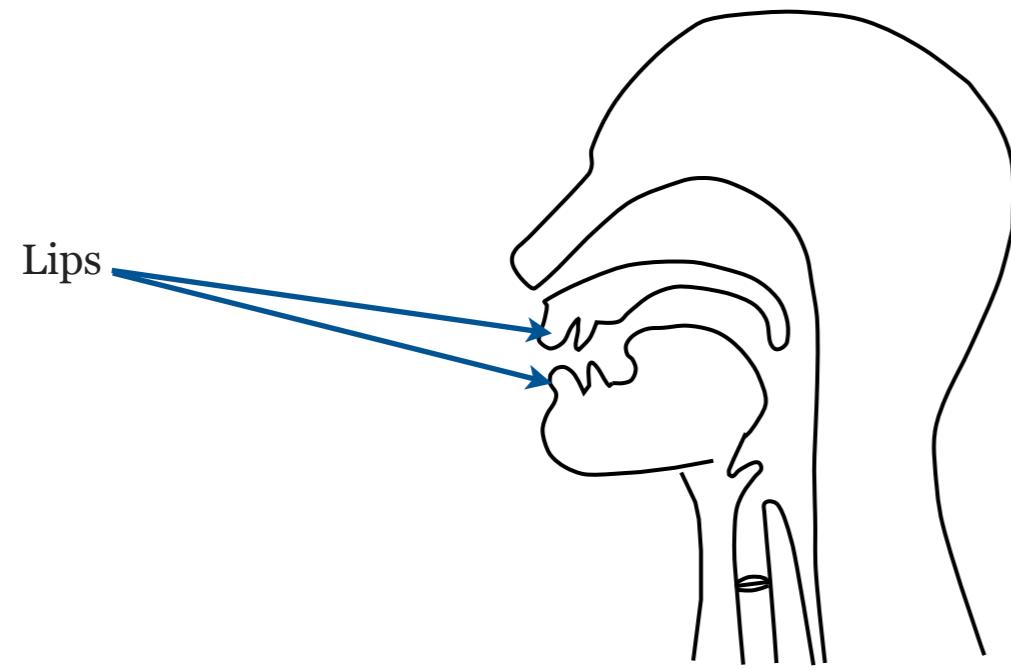
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Section 5 - The Vowels of American English

Lips



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Section 3 - The Articulatory System

Section 3 - The Articulatory System

Liquid

A sound that is pronounced very smoothly, like water flowing in a river. The air stream moves around the tongue in a relatively unobstructed manner. The liquid sounds in English are /l/ and /r/.

Related Glossary Terms

Manner of articulation

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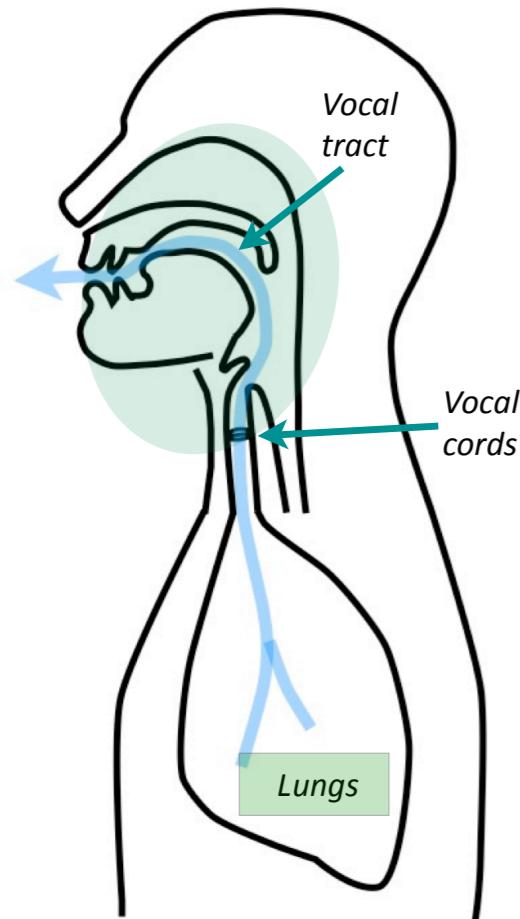
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Lungs

Two bag-like organs in the chest that allow us to breathe and talk. When we talk, we pull air into our lungs and then push it back out through the vocal tract.



Related Glossary Terms

Articulatory system, Vocal tract

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Section 3 - The Articulatory System

Main stress

One syllable in every polysyllabic word is pronounced with more emphasis than the others. This syllable has the main stress. It can be longer, higher, louder, and clearer than the other syllables. Main stress is also called *primary stress*.

For example, the word *congratu'lations* has five syllables, with the primary stress on the fourth syllable

Related Glossary Terms

Secondary stress

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Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

Manner of articulation

A description of how we produce a particular consonant sound:

- Stop/plosive: The air stream is blocked completely before it is released, like a tiny explosion.
- Fricative: The air stream is compressed and passes through a small opening, creating friction—a hissing sound.
- Affricate: A combination of a stop followed by a fricative—an explosion with a slow release.
- Nasal: The air passes through the nose instead of the mouth.
- Liquid: The air stream moves around or over the tongue in a relatively unobstructed manner.
- Glide/semivowel: The sound is like a very quick vowel.

Related Glossary Terms

Affricate, Fricative, Glide, Liquid, Nasal, Stop

Index

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Section 4 - The Consonants of American English
Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Medial position

Occurring in the middle of a word. For example, in the word *cat*, the sound /æ/ is in medial position.

Related Glossary Terms

Final position, Initial position

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Merging

1. When a learner can't hear or pronounce the difference between two similar sounds in a new language, he/she may pronounce both sounds in the same way, so that both of them sound like a familiar sound in his/her first language.
2. When a language originally has two separate sounds, but native speakers of the language gradually start pronouncing the two sounds in the same way, the difference between them can be lost. For example, the /w/ and /hw/ sounds in English have merged for most speakers, and only /w/ is left.

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 5 - The Vowels of American English

Minimal pair

Two words that differ by just one sound, for example, *late* and *rate*, *beat* and *bit*, *sat* and *sap*.

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels

Mirroring and shadowing

Pronunciation practice techniques in which students mimic a video or audio recording, trying to speak in exactly the same way as the actors. In shadowing, students imitate only the words of the recording. In mirroring, they also imitate the gestures and facial expressions of the recording.

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Monosyllabic word

A word with only one syllable.

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Morphology

The study of the forms of words and the different parts that are put together to make words. (In English, these are prefixes, suffixes, and word roots.) Morphology includes:

- Inflectional morphology: Adding grammatical endings to words to make a different form of the same word. (For example, *work + ing = working*, *class + es = classes*.)
- Derivational morphology: Putting word parts together (roots, prefixes, suffixes) to make new words. (For example, *work + er = worker*, *un + happy = unhappy*, *class + room = classroom*.)

Related Glossary Terms

Prefix, Suffix, Word root

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Muscle memory

An increased ability to do some physical activity more easily after practicing many times. Your muscles “remember” how to do something because they’ve done it so often.

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation

Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels

Nasal

A sound in which the tongue or lips block off the vocal tract so air can't go out through the mouth. Instead, the passage leading up into the nose opens so that the air stream can go out through the nose. The English sounds in the nasal group are /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/.

Related Glossary Terms

Manner of articulation

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Section 3 - The Articulatory System

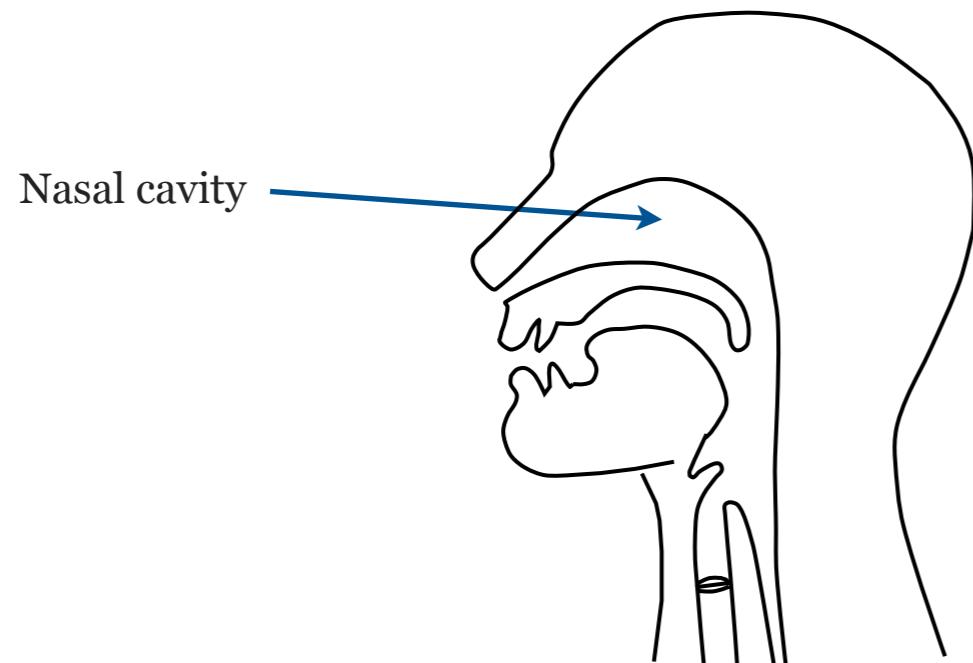
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[Section 13 - Teaching the Musical Aspects of Pronunciation](#)

Nasal cavity

The space inside the nose where air passes in and out when we breathe through our nose. It can also be called the nasal passage.



Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Section 3 - The Articulatory System

Native English-Speaking Teacher

(Abbreviated NEST) Someone who is teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language and who is a native speaker of English.

Related Glossary Terms

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NEST

An abbreviation for Native English-Speaking Teacher. Someone who is teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language and who is a native speaker of English.

Related Glossary Terms

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New information

Information, facts, or opinions that the speaker wants to tell the listener for the first time.

Related Glossary Terms

Old information

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NNEST or Non-NEST

An abbreviation for Nonnative English-Speaking Teacher. Someone who is teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language, but who is not a native speaker of English. The majority of English teachers worldwide are NNESTs.

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Welcome! - Welcome!

Nonnative English-Speaking Teacher

(Abbreviated NNEST or Non-NEST) Someone who is teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language, but who is not a native speaker of English. The majority of English teachers worldwide are NNESTs.

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Welcome! - Welcome!

North American English (NAE)

The standard form of English spoken in the United States and Canada. (There are slight differences between standard U.S. and Canadian English, but overall they are very similar). It is often called simply *American English*, although in reality there are many varieties of English spoken in North America.

Related Glossary Terms

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Obstruent

A sound that is made with some obstruction in the mouth. Stops, fricatives, and affricates are all types of obstruents. Sounds that are not obstruents are called *sonorants*.

Related Glossary Terms

Continuants, Sonorant

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Old information

Something that has already been mentioned in the conversation, or something that the speaker assumes the listener knows about already.

Related Glossary Terms

New information

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Omission

A sound change in normal connected speech in which a sound may disappear or not be clearly pronounced in certain contexts. Omission is also called *deletion*, *elision*, or *ellipsis*.

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Open syllable

A syllable that ends in a vowel sound, like *go*, *eye*, *through*, or the last syllable in *party*.

Related Glossary Terms

[Closed syllable](#)

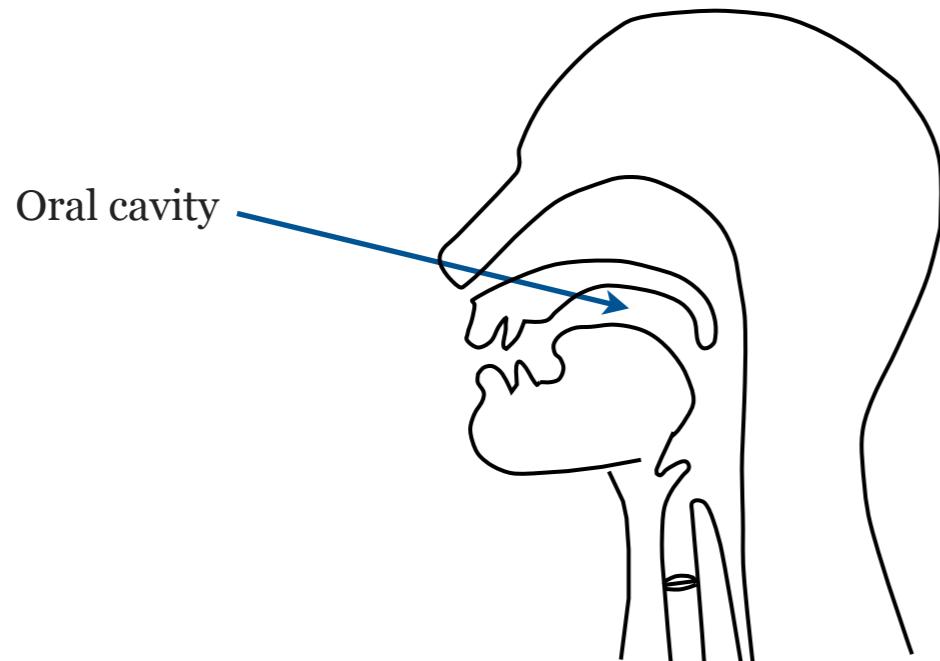
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Section 5 - The Vowels of American English

Oral cavity

The space inside the mouth.



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Palatal or alveopalatal

A place of articulation that describes sounds in which the blade of the tongue touches or almost touches the hard palate. The sounds in this group are /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /r/, and /y/.



Related Glossary Terms

Place of articulation

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Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

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Palatalization

A type of assimilation in which an alveolar sound (/t/, /d/, /s/, or /z/) becomes a palatal sound (/ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, or /dʒ/) when there's a /y/ after it. Here are the combinations of sounds that can cause this change:

/t/ + /y/ ⇒ /tʃ/ Is that **y**our dog?

/d/ + /y/ ⇒ /dʒ/ It ma**d**e **y**ou angry.

/s/ + /y/ ⇒ /ʃ/ I'll miss **y**ou.

/z/ + /y/ ⇒ /ʒ/ **I**s **y**our brother here?

Related Glossary Terms

Assimilation

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Part of speech

A grammatical category for describing words based on their form and function. In English, there are nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, articles, and interjections.

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Phonemes

The distinctive sounds of a language—the sounds that native speakers of the language consider to be separate sounds. Changing from one phoneme to another changes the meaning of the word, or sometimes it makes a word meaningless.

(A sound feature) is phonemic: This means that changing this feature makes a difference in sound and meaning. It changes one sound into another. For example, aspiration of stops is not phonemic in English. (An aspirated /t/ is still /t/.) It is phonemic in Korean, Thai, and many other languages.

Related Glossary Terms

Allophones

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Phonemic alphabet

A set of symbols that represent the phonemes (sounds) of a language, with one symbol representing exactly one phoneme. A phonemic alphabet is different from the ordinary spelling system. Many textbooks and dictionaries use phonemic alphabets to represent the pronunciation of words.

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Section 14 - Different Places, Different Learners

Phonemic awareness

The understanding that words are made up of individual sounds that can be separated, counted and rearranged.

Related Glossary Terms

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Phonetic alphabet

A set of symbols, such as the International Phonetic Alphabet, that is intended to represent all the possible sounds of human languages, not just the sounds of one language. A full phonetic alphabet would be too complex to use in language textbooks and dictionaries.

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Phonetics

The study, description, and classification of the sounds of human speech—not just the sound system of one language.

Related Glossary Terms

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Phonics

The study of the systematic relationship between written letters and spoken sounds.

Also, a way of teaching people to read that emphasizes the systematic relationship between written letters and spoken sounds of the language.

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 14 - Different Places, Different Learners

Phonological filter

The way our brains let us hear the sounds of our own language very efficiently, but ignore or “filter out” unfamiliar, unnecessary sounds.

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Section 1 - Introduction to Teaching Pronunciation

Phonological processes

Sound changes that happen naturally to make combinations of sounds easier to pronounce. The most common phonological processes in English are:

- Linking: The last sound of one word is often linked or blended with the first sound of the next word so that the two words sound like one unit.
- Assimilation: A sound change in which one sound becomes more similar to a sound that comes before or after it.
- Deletion: A sound change in which a sound may disappear or not be clearly pronounced in certain contexts.

Related Glossary Terms

Assimilation, Deletion, Linking

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[Section 12 - Connected Speech](#)

Phonology, phonologist

The study of speech sounds in language—the sounds themselves, how they are produced, and how they work together as a system in a particular language.

A person who studies phonology is called a *phonologist*.

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Phrasal verb or two-word verb

A verb with two or more parts that work together to form a compound verb, such as *put on*, *get up*, *turn off*, and *take over*.

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Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

Pitch

A measure of how high or low the voice is at a particular point in time. (This means high or low in the sense that a musical note is high or low; it doesn't mean a high or low volume or loudness.)



Related Glossary Terms

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Place of articulation

A description of which parts of the vocal apparatus are working when we produce a particular consonant sound.

- Bilabial: Both lips touch or almost touch.
- Labiodental: The upper teeth touch the lower lip.
- Dental/Interdental: The tip of the tongue touches the teeth/between the teeth.
- Alveolar: The tip of the tongue touches or almost touches the alveolar ridge (tooth ridge).
- Palatal/alveopalatal: The body of the tongue touches or almost touches the hard palate.
- Velar: The back of the tongue touches the soft palate.
- Glottal: There is friction in the glottis (the space between the vocal cords).

Related Glossary Terms

Alveolar, Bilabial, Dental or interdental, Glottal, Labiodental, Palatal or alveopalatal, Velar

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Polysyllabic word

A word with more than one syllable. (“Poly” means “many.”)

Related Glossary Terms

[Unstressed syllable](#)

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Popcorn reading

A teaching technique in which the teacher calls on students, in seating order or at random, to take turns reading aloud from the textbook. Sometimes each student reads a sentence, or sometimes a paragraph. It's also called *round robin reading*.

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Round robin reading

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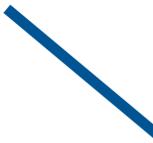
Section 14 - Different Places, Different Learners

Positive and negative slope

A line with a positive slope is lower on the left and higher on the right. It goes uphill:



A line with a negative slope is higher on the left and lower on the right. It goes downhill:



Related Glossary Terms

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Prefix

A word part that is placed before a word root to change its meaning (as in *happy*/
unhappy or *port*/*transport*).

Related Glossary Terms

Morphology, Suffix, Word root

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Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

Prescriptive rules

Rules that are written to try to tell people how they should talk or how language should work. These rules are not always based on a clear understanding of language and how it got to be the way it is.

Related Glossary Terms

Descriptive rules

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Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Primary stress

One syllable in every polysyllabic word is pronounced with more emphasis than the others. This syllable has the primary stress. It can be longer, higher, louder, and clearer than the other syllables. Primary stress is also called *main stress*.

For example, the word *congratu'lations* has five syllables, with the primary stress on the fourth syllable

Related Glossary Terms

Secondary stress

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Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

Proclaiming tone

A pitch pattern used to mark new information in a thought group. New information, which most often comes near the end of a thought group, has a “bump up” in pitch on the prominent syllable, followed by falling intonation. Some authors refer to this pitch pattern as a proclaiming tone; the speaker is proclaiming, or announcing some new and important information.

Related Glossary Terms

Referring tone

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Prominence, focus, or sentence stress

The word or syllable in each thought group that receives more stress than the others is called the *prominent word*, the *focus*, or the word with *sentence stress*. It is often the stressed syllable of the last content word in the sentence or thought group. It can also be the stressed syllable of a word that is being emphasized or contrasted with another word.

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Prosody

The patterns of intonation and stress in a language (some of the suprasegmental features). The term prosody is often used in talking about poetry.

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Received Pronunciation (RP)

The standard form of British English pronunciation, based on educated speech in southern England. It is also called *The Queen's English*, *The King's English*, or *BBC English*. (Actually, relatively few people in the UK really speak RP.)

Related Glossary Terms

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Reduced form of a word

The pronunciation of a word when it is said in normal speech at a normal speed, and it is not being stressed. For example, the reduced form of *and* is /ən/ or /n/, and the reduced form of *to* is /tə/.

In contrast, the pronunciation of a word when it is said carefully, and usually alone, is called its *citation form*. For example, the citation form of *and* is /ænd/, and the citation form of *to* is /tuw/.

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[Citation form of a word](#)

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Reduced syllable

Vowels in unstressed syllables can become weaker, quicker, and less clear. They often (but not always) become /ə/ (schwa). These weaker syllables are called *reduced syllables*.

Related Glossary Terms

[Unstressed syllable](#)

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[Section 10 - Thought Groups and Prominence](#)

Referring tone

A pitch pattern used to mark a thought group giving old information. Thought groups that give old, shared information are often spoken with a rising intonation or a partial fall. The speaker isn't telling something new; he/she is simply referring to something that is already known.

Related Glossary Terms

Proclaiming tone

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Restrictions on rules

Limits on how the rules of a language apply. These are based on observation of what actually happens in the language, not on someone's decision about what the rules should be.

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Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Resyllabification

A way of making consonant clusters easier to pronounce by splitting up a consonant cluster so that the last consonant is pronounced with the syllable after it.

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Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Retroflex

A description of a sound that is made with the tongue curled slightly backwards, as in some pronunciations of /r/.



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Rhotic and nonrhotic dialects

If speakers pronounce the phoneme /r/ after a vowel in words like *car* and *butter*, the dialect is called *rhotic*. Most varieties of American and Canadian English are rhotic.

If people don't pronounce /r/ after a vowel in words like *car* and *butter*, the dialect is called *nonrhotic*. Many varieties of British, Australian, and New Zealand English are nonrhotic.

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Rhythm

The characteristic pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables when people speak a language, made up of syllables that are longer or shorter, faster or slower, and more or less emphasized.

Related Glossary Terms

Stress-timed language, Syllable-timed language

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Round robin reading

A teaching technique in which the teacher calls on students, in seating order or at random, to take turns reading aloud from the textbook. Sometimes each student reads a sentence, or sometimes a paragraph. It's also called *popcorn reading*.

Related Glossary Terms

Popcorn reading

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Sagittal section diagram

A picture of a cross-section of the vocal tract showing the positions of the tongue, teeth, and lips in pronouncing sounds. They are also sometimes called *Sammy diagrams*.

The sagittal section diagram below shows the sounds /f/ or /v/.



Related Glossary Terms

Sammy diagram

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Sammy diagram

A picture of a cross-section of the vocal tract showing the positions of the tongue, teeth, and lips in pronouncing sounds. They are also called *sagittal section diagrams*.

The diagram below shows the sounds /f/ or /v/.



Related Glossary Terms

Sagittal section diagram

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Section 5 - The Vowels of American English

Schwa

A mid-central, lax vowel represented by the symbol /ə/. The vowel sounds in many unstressed syllables change to /ə/.

Related Glossary Terms

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Secondary stress

In words of four or more syllables, there is often a syllable that receives a little stress, but not as much as the primary-stress syllable. We say this syllable has *secondary stress*. For example, the word *congratu'lations* has five syllables, with the primary stress on the fourth syllable and secondary stress on the second syllable.

Related Glossary Terms

Main stress, Primary stress

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Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

Segmental features of pronunciation

The individual sounds (phonemes) of a language—the vowels and consonants.

Related Glossary Terms

Suprasegmental features of pronunciation

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Segmentation

Breaking up a stream of sounds so that we can understand the words that are being said. For example, when we hear /ə'tæks/, we might interpret it as *attacks* or *a tax*, depending on the context.

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 12 - Connected Speech

Sentence stress, prominence, or focus

The word or syllable in each thought group that receives more stress than the others is called the *prominent word*, the *focus*, or the word with *sentence stress*. It is often the stressed syllable of the last content word in the sentence or thought group. It can also be the stressed syllable of a word that is being emphasized or contrasted with another word.

Related Glossary Terms

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Shadowing and mirroring

Pronunciation practice techniques in which students mimic a video or audio recording, trying to speak in exactly the same way as the actors. In shadowing, students imitate only the words of the recording. In mirroring, they also imitate the gestures and facial expressions of the recording.

Related Glossary Terms

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Sibilant

A type of fricative or affricate produced with the tongue near the alveolar ridge or hard palate: /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, and /dʒ/ are the sibilants in English. This group of sounds may seem louder and harsher than other fricatives like /θ/ or /f/.

Related Glossary Terms

Affricate, Alveolar ridge, Fricative, Hard palate

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Section 6 - Pronunciation of Some Word Endings

Sight words

Words with spellings that do not follow predictable patterns and therefore have to be memorized individually, like *eye*, *eight*, or *would*.

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Silent letter

A letter that is seen in the spelling of a word, but does not represent a sound, such as *k* and *e* in the word *knife* or *gh* in the word *night*.

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Simple vowels, glided vowels, and diphthongs

Categories of vowels based on whether the tongue moves during the pronunciation of the vowel.

- If the tongue stays in one position during a vowel, it's a simple vowel.
- If the tongue position changes just a little, it's a glided vowel.
- If the tongue position changes a lot, so it sounds like two separate vowels mashed together, it's a diphthong.

Related Glossary Terms

Vowel

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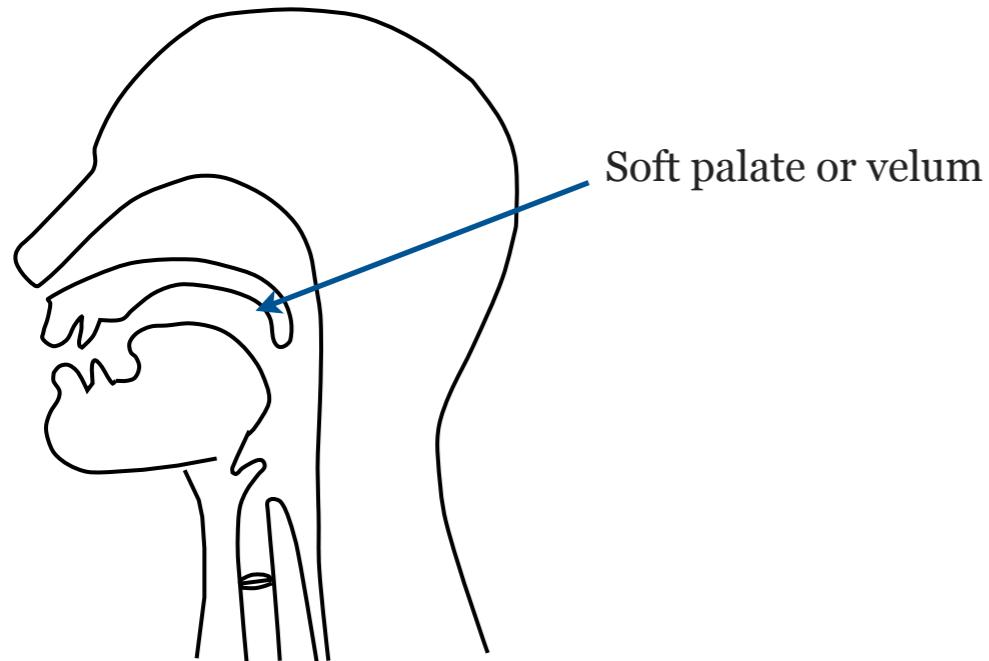
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Soft palate

The softer part of the roof of the mouth, farther back than the hard palate. It is also called the *velum*.



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Sonorant

A sound that comes out of the mouth smoothly, with no obstruction or friction.

Nasals, liquids, glides, and vowels are all kinds of sonorants. Sounds that are not sonorants are called *obstruents*.

Related Glossary Terms

Continuants, Obstruent

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Squishy

Literal meaning: Soft and wet, not holding a definite shape, like soft mud or oatmeal.

Figurative meaning: Vague, indefinite, hard to define, imprecise, variable.

Related Glossary Terms

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Stop

A sound in which the air stream is blocked completely somewhere in the mouth, air pressure builds up, and then it's released, like a tiny explosion. The stops in English are /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, and /g/. Stops are sometimes called *plosives*.

Related Glossary Terms

Manner of articulation, Unaspirated, Unreleased stop

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Stress-timed language

A language in which the time between stressed syllables remains fairly steady, and the unstressed syllables are shorter and crowd in between them. English is considered to be a stress-timed language. Stress-timed languages are sometimes called *stress-based languages*.

Related Glossary Terms

Rhythm, Syllable-timed language

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Stressed syllable

One syllable in a word that is emphasized more than the others. It can be longer, louder, clearer, and higher in pitch than the others. It stands out from the other syllables. In English, the syllables of a word may have one of three degrees of stress:

- Strongly stressed (also called primary stress)
 - Lightly stressed (also called secondary stress)
 - Unstressed (also called tertiary stress)

Related Glossary Terms

Unstressed syllable, Word stress

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Substitution

When a learner can't pronounce an unfamiliar sound in a new language, he/she may substitute a similar sound from his/her first language. This sometimes leads to misunderstanding by listeners.

Related Glossary Terms

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Suffix

A word part that is placed after a word root to change its meaning or grammatical category (as in *open/opened* or *nation/national*).

Related Glossary Terms

Morphology, Prefix, Word root

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[Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress](#)

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Suprasegmental features of pronunciation

Aspects of pronunciation that affect more than just one sound segment, such as stress, rhythm, linking, and intonation—the musical aspects of pronunciation.

Related Glossary Terms

Segmental features of pronunciation

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Syllabic consonant

A consonant that is lengthened so that it becomes a whole syllable, even without a vowel. The consonants /n/, /l/, and /r/ can sometimes be a full syllable by themselves. This most often happens after a stressed syllable that ends in an alveolar consonant.

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Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

Syllable

A rhythmic unit in speech—a unit of sound that gets one “beat” in a word. A syllable must have a vowel (or a syllabic consonant). It might also have one or more consonants before the vowel and one or more consonants after it. For example, the word *banana* has three syllables: *ba-na-na*. The word *strong* has one syllable: *strong*.

Related Glossary Terms

Consonant, Vowel

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[Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress](#)

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Syllable-timed language

A language that gives each syllable about the same amount of time. Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Spanish are considered to be syllable-timed languages. Syllable-timed languages are sometimes called *syllable-based languages*.

Related Glossary Terms

Rhythm, Stress-timed language

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Tapped /t/ (or flapped /t/)

A sound made when the tongue taps the alveolar ridge very quickly, so that it sounds like a quick /d/. This is called an *alveolar flap* or *tap*, and it is represented by this symbol: [ɾ]. It's a voiced sound.

Related Glossary Terms

Alveolar ridge, Flap

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Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

Teaching English or training teachers to teach English in areas where English is not the primary language. It's similar to TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language), except that TESL concentrates on teaching in areas where English is the primary language.

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Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL)

Teaching English or training teachers to teach English in areas where English is the primary language. It's similar to TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), except that TEFL focuses on teaching in areas where English is not the primary language in the community.

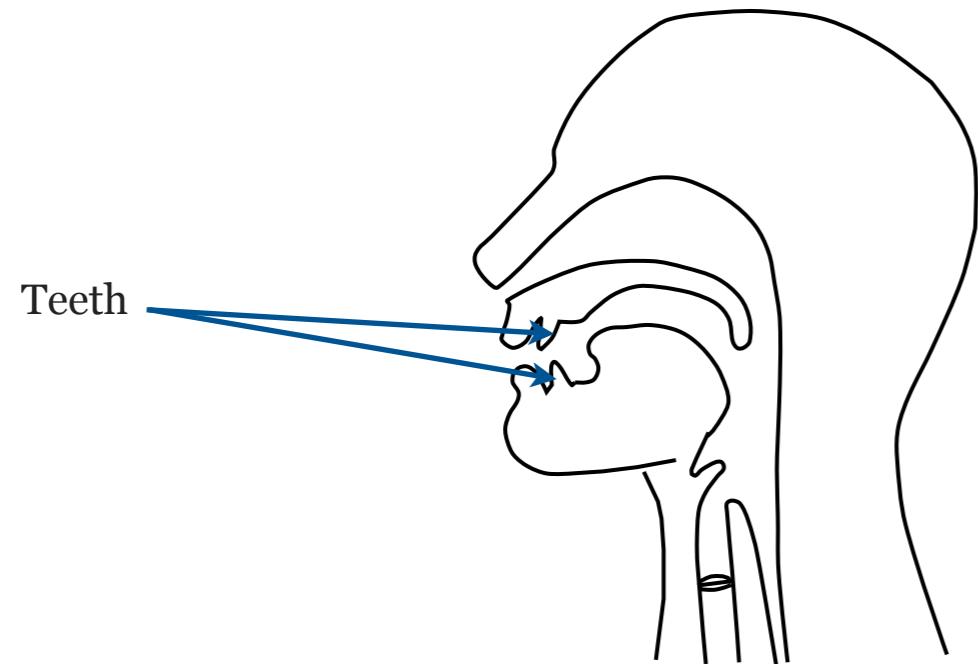
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Teeth



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Section 3 - The Articulatory System

TEFL

Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Teaching English or training teachers to teach English in areas where English is the primary language. It's similar to TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), except that TEFL focuses on teaching in areas where English is not the primary language in the community.

Related Glossary Terms

TESL

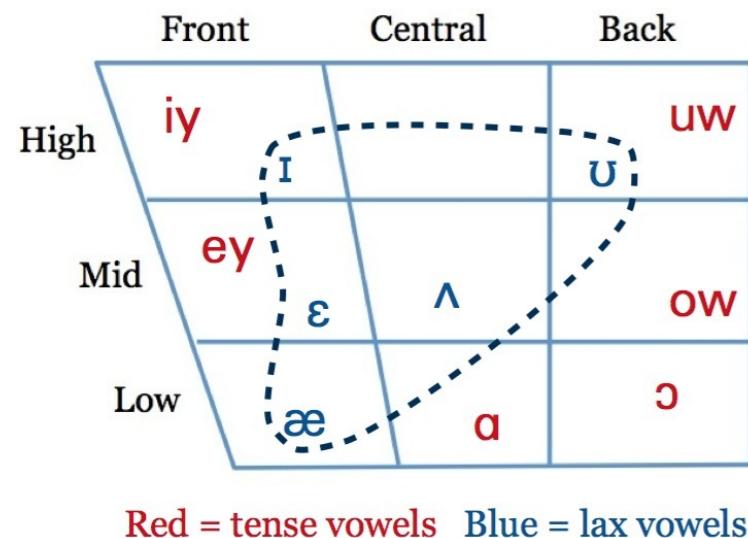
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Tense and lax vowels

A description of whether the muscles of the tongue and mouth are relatively tense or more relaxed when we say a vowel sound. Although this is not an entirely accurate physical description, it can be a useful way of thinking about these sounds.

The chart below shows the tense and lax vowels in American English.



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TESL

Teaching English as a Second Language. Teaching English or training teachers to teach English in areas where English is the primary language. It's similar to TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), except that TEFL focuses on teaching in areas where English is not the primary language in the community.

Related Glossary Terms

TEFL

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Thought group

A group of spoken words that form a grammatical and semantic unit. It is often a sentence, a clause, or a phrase—a chunk of language that feels like a logical unit. Because each thought group has its own intonation contour, a thought group can also be called an *intonation unit*.

Related Glossary Terms

Intonation unit

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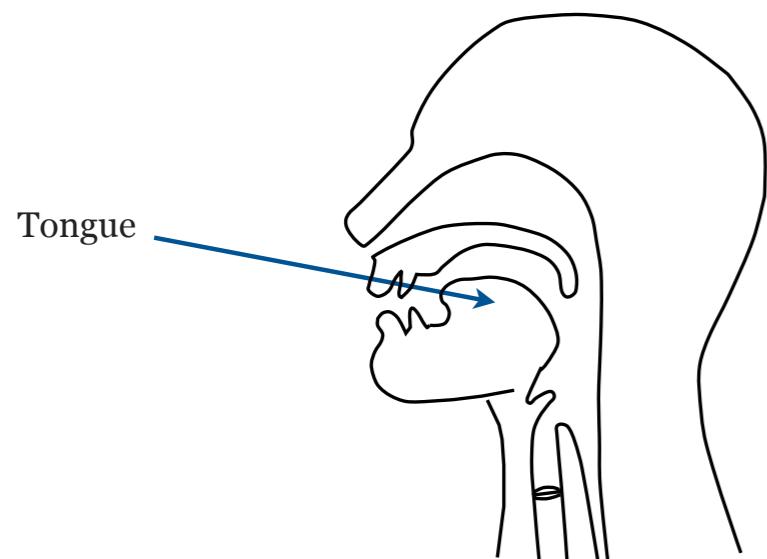
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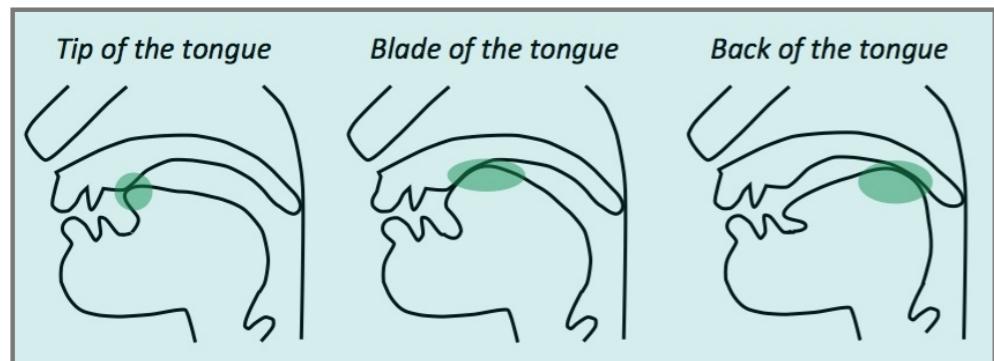
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Tongue



Parts of the tongue:



Related Glossary Terms

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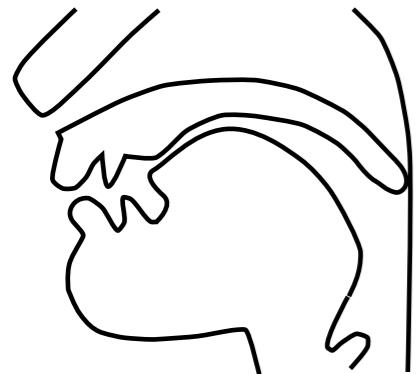
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Tongue position

A description of where the highest, tensest, or most active part of the tongue is when we pronounce a vowel sound. We describe:

- Vertical position: High, mid, or low
- Horizontal position: Front, central, or back

For example, here is a diagram of the tongue position for the vowel /iy/, a high front vowel.



Related Glossary Terms

Vowel

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Top-down processing

When we listen for the overall meaning of what we hear, using our background knowledge of the topic to create expectations about what it must all mean, we're using top-down processing.

Related Glossary Terms

[Bottom-up processing](#)

Transliterate

To change words from one writing system to another by substituting the closest possible symbols in the other language. For example, the name of the country of Japan is written “日本” in Japanese, and transliterated as “nihon” or “nippon” in English.

Related Glossary Terms

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Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

Trill

A consonant sound that is produced with rapid vibration of the tongue against some part of the mouth. In some languages, a sound represented by the letter *r* is an alveolar trill.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Two-word verb or phrasal verb

A verb with two or more parts that work together to form a compound verb, such as *put on*, *get up*, *turn off*, and *take over*.

Related Glossary Terms

Compound verb

Index

Find Term

Unaspirated

Pronounced without an extra puff of air. In English, voiceless stops are unaspirated when they come after /s/ at the beginnings of words (e.g. *store*)

- Sounds that are pronounced with this puff of air are called *aspirated sounds*.
- Sounds that are pronounced without this puff of air are called *unaspirated sounds*.

Related Glossary Terms

Aspiration (noun) Aspirated (adjective), Stop, Voiceless sound

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Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Unreleased stop

When we start to say a stop by blocking off the flow of air in our mouth, but we don't release the air, it's called an *unreleased stop*. Stops are often pronounced this way at the ends of words in English.

Related Glossary Terms

Stop

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- [Section 4 - The Consonants of American English](#)
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- [Section 6 - Pronunciation of Some Word Endings](#)

Unstressed syllable

A syllable in a polysyllabic word that does not receive stress. In English, vowels in unstressed syllables often become weaker, quicker, and less clear than vowels in stressed syllables. For example, in the word '*dictionary*', the first syllable is stressed, and the last three syllables are unstressed.

Related Glossary Terms

Polysyllabic word, Reduced syllable, Stressed syllable, Word stress

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Section 5 - The Vowels of American English

Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

Section 10 - Thought Groups and Prominence

Variable word stress

In some cases, the position of stress in a word can change if this will help maintain a more comfortable overall rhythm. Having two stressed syllables together makes an awkward rhythm, so the stress sometimes moves to create an alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. For example:

When we say a -teen number alone, we stress it on the last syllable:

seven'teen

When we say the same number with a noun after it, we stress it on the first syllable:

'seventeen 'years

Related Glossary Terms

Word stress

Index

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Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

[Section 9 - Rhythm](#)

Velar

A sound pronounced with the back of the tongue touching the soft palate. The sounds in this group are /k/, /g/, and /ŋ/.



Related Glossary Terms

Place of articulation

[Index](#)

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Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

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Velarized

Pronounced with the tongue raised toward the velum, or soft palate.

Related Glossary Terms

Velum

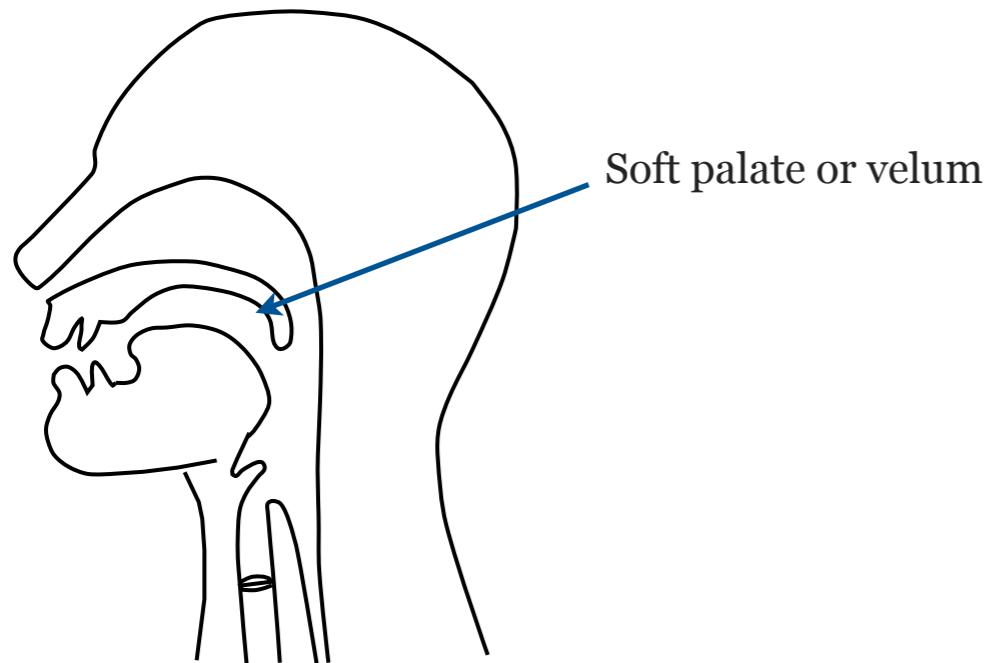
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Section 4 - The Consonants of American English

Velum

The softer part of the roof of the mouth, farther back than the hard palate. The velum is also called the *soft palate*.



Related Glossary Terms

Velarized

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Visual learning modality

Learning through seeing.

Related Glossary Terms

Auditory learning modality, Kinesthetic learning modality, Visual, auditory, kinesthetic learning modalities

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[Section 7 - Teaching Consonants and Vowels](#)

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Visual, auditory, kinesthetic learning modalities

- Visual learning modality: Learning through seeing.
- Auditory learning modality: Learning through hearing.
- Kinesthetic learning modality: Learning through moving and doing.

Related Glossary Terms

Auditory learning modality, Kinesthetic learning modality, Visual learning modality

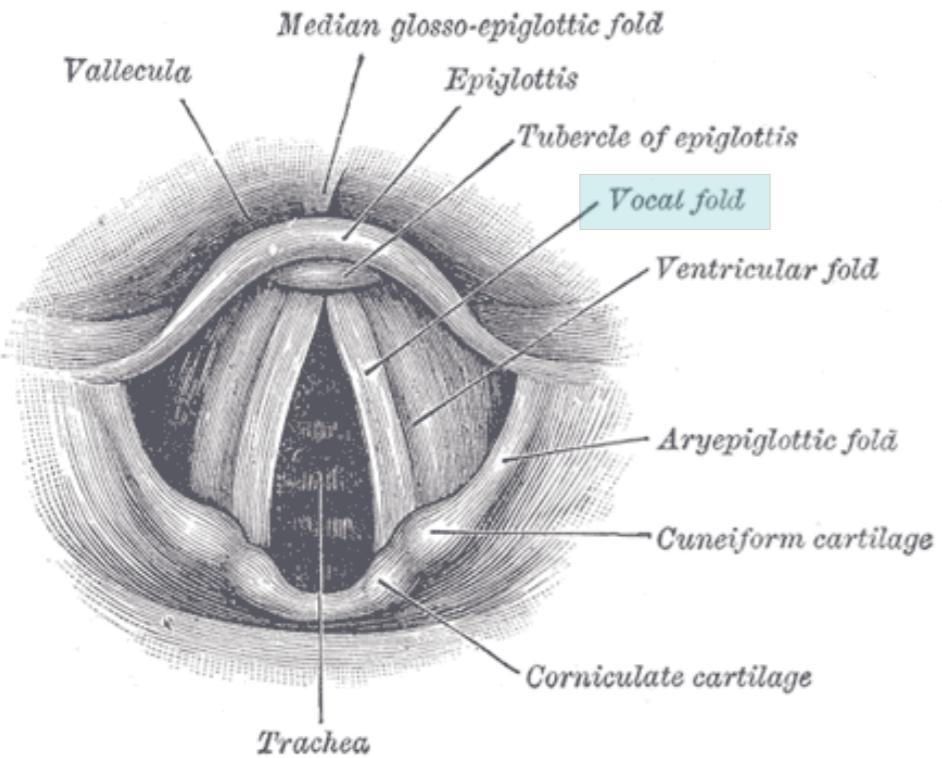
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Section 14 - Different Places, Different Learners

Vocal cords or vocal folds

Two small membranes in the throat that vibrate together to produce the sound of the voice.



A drawing of the vocal cords from *Gray's Anatomy*, published in 1918. This drawing is in the public domain.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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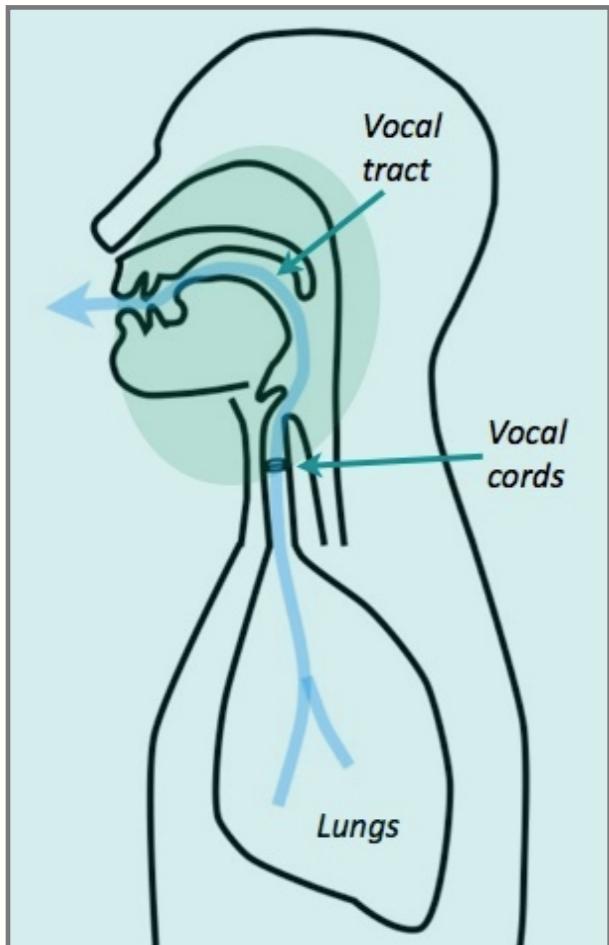
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Section 3 - The Articulatory System

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Vocal tract

The space in the throat, mouth, and nose where sounds are produced.



Related Glossary Terms

Lungs, Vowel

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[Section 3 - The Articulatory System](#)

Voice quality

The overall characteristics of a speaker's voice, such as average pitch, tenseness of the muscles of the throat and vocal tract, or whether the speaker's voice sounds breathy, nasal, etc.

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

[Find Term](#)

Voiced sound

A sound that is produced with vibration of the vocal cords.

In English, some consonants are voiced, and all vowels are voiced.

Voiced Consonants in English	
/b/	<i>b</i> ig
/d/	<i>d</i> og
/g/	<i>g</i> ive
/v/	<i>v</i> ote
/ð/	<i>th</i> is
/z/	<i>z</i> oo
/ʒ/	<i>beige</i>
/dʒ/	<i>j</i> uice
/m/	<i>m</i> an
/n/	<i>n</i> ow
/ŋ/	<i>sing</i>
/l/	<i>l</i> ove
/r/	<i>r</i> un
/w/	<i>w</i> et
/y/	<i>y</i> es

Related Glossary Terms

Consonant, Voiceless sound, Voicing, Vowel

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[Section 4 - The Consonants of American English](#)

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Voiceless sound

A sound that is produced without vibration of the vocal cords.

In English, some consonants are voiceless, but no vowels are voiceless.

Voiceless Consonants In English	
/p/	pen
/t/	top
/k/	cat
/f/	food
/θ/	thick
/s/	sun
/ʃ/	ship
/h/	house
/tʃ/	chip

Related Glossary Terms

Aspiration (noun) Aspirated (adjective), Consonant, Unaspirated, Voiced sound, Voicing, Vowel

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Voicing

A quality of a sound that depends on whether the vocal cords are vibrating when it is pronounced.

A sound that is produced with vibration of the vocal cords is called a voiced sound.

A sound that is produced without vibration of the vocal cords is called a voiceless sound.

Some consonants are voiced, and some are voiceless. All vowels in English are voiced.

VOICED AND VOICELESS CONSONANTS IN ENGLISH			
Voiced Consonants	Voiceless Consonants		
/b/ <i>big</i>	/p/ <i>pen</i>		
/d/ <i>dog</i>	/t/ <i>top</i>		
/g/ <i>give</i>	/k/ <i>cat</i>		
/v/ <i>vote</i>	/f/ <i>food</i>		
/ð/ <i>this</i>	/θ/ <i>thick</i>		
/z/ <i>zoo</i>	/s/ <i>sun</i>		
/ʒ/ <i>beige</i>	/ʃ/ <i>ship</i>		
	/h/ <i>house</i>		
/dʒ/ <i>juice</i>	/tʃ/ <i>chip</i>		
/m/ <i>man</i>			
/n/ <i>now</i>			
/ŋ/ <i>sing</i>			
/l/ <i>love</i>			
/r/ <i>run</i>			
/w/ <i>wet</i>			
/y/ <i>yes</i>			

Related Glossary Terms

Voiced sound, Voiceless sound

Vowel

A sound in which the air stream moves out through the vocal tract very smoothly.

Words like *apple*, *east*, *over*, and *out* begin with vowels. The chart below shows the vowels of American English:

5.1 VOWELS OF AMERICAN ENGLISH			
Example	Symbols	Example	Symbols
beat	/iy/ /i:/	boot	/uw/ /u:/
bit	/ɪ/ /i/	book	/ʊ/ /u/
bait	/ey/ /eɪ/	boat	/ow/ /ou/
bet	/ɛ/ /e/	bought	/ɔ/ /ɔ:/
bat	/æ/ /æ/	box	/ɑ/ /a/
but	/ʌ/ /ə/	by	/ay/ /ai/ /aɪ/
sofa	/ə/ /ə/	cow	/aw/ /au/ /əu/
her	/ə/ /ɜ/ /ər/ /ər/	boy	/oy/ /ɔy/ /ɔɪ/ /ɔɪ/

Related Glossary Terms

Consonant, Simple vowels, glided vowels, and diphthongs, Syllable, Tongue position, Vocal tract, Voiced sound, Voiceless sound

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Section 2 - Some Very Basic Concepts of Phonology

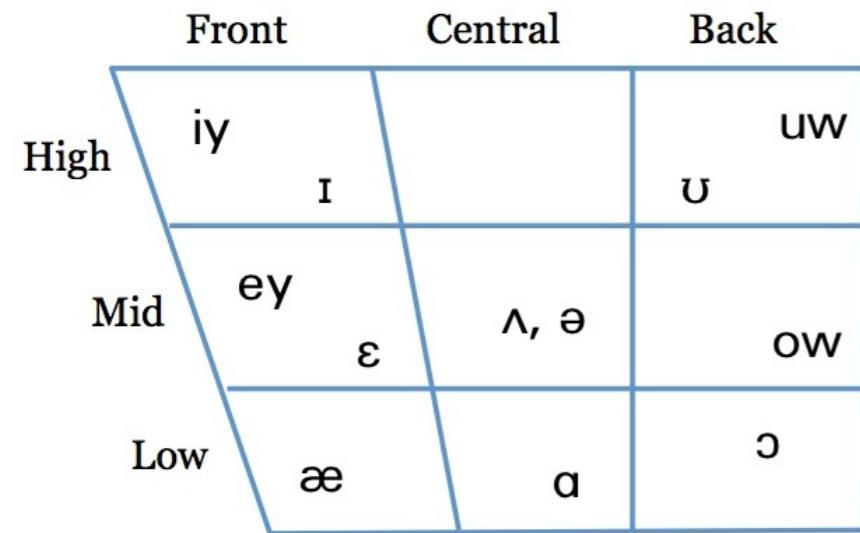
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Vowel quadrant

A diagram showing the approximate tongue positions for the vowels of a language.

Here is a vowel quadrant for the vowel sounds of American English (not including diphthongs):



Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Section 5 - The Vowels of American English

Word root

A part of a word that carries its basic meaning. It might occur alone (as in dog, care, or cover, or with one or more prefixes or suffixes (as in dogs, careful, carefulness, uncover, or discoverer.)

Related Glossary Terms

Morphology, Prefix, Suffix

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Section 8 - Syllables and Word Stress

Word stress

When a word has more than one syllable, one of the syllables is emphasized. It can be longer, louder, clearer, and higher in pitch than the others. It stands out from the other syllables. In English, the syllables of a word may have one of three degrees of stress:

- Strongly stressed (also called *primary stress*)
- Lightly stressed (also called *secondary stress*)
- Unstressed (also called *tertiary stress*)

Related Glossary Terms

Stressed syllable, Unstressed syllable, Variable word stress

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