# Pronunciation Practice Activities

A resource book for teaching English pronunciation

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## **Contents**

	Acknowledgements	X
	Introduction	I
	Aims	I
	Organisation	I
	What is pronunciation?	3
	Key issues in pronunciation teaching and learning	10
	Activities	23
1	Developing awareness of English pronunciation	23
1.1	Introducing features of pronunciation	23
1.2	Getting you thinking: a pronunciation questionnaire	25
1.3	Making vowel sounds	27
1.4	Consonant clusters: English and first language	
	differences	29
1.5	Comparing slow and quick speech	30
1.6	Sounding English	31
1.7	Pronouncing names in English	33
1.8	Pronouncing places, products and planets	34
1.9	Impersonations	36
1.10	Intonation in print	38
2	Sounds: vowels, consonants and consonant clusters	42
	Vowels: correcting particular vowels	42
2.1	Matching vowel sounds: a family tree	44
2.2	Finding words including the same vowel sound: word	
	routes	48
2.3	Hearing and saying differences between vowels and between	
	consonants: minimal pairs	51
2.4	Communicating with single vowel sounds	58
2.5	Classifying words according to their first vowel	61

### Contents

	Consonants: correcting particular consonants	63
2.6	Who lives where? Minimal pair names	65
2.7	Lip-reading	68
2.8	Classifying words according to their first consonant	69
2.9	Getting rid of unwanted vowels	71
	Consonant clusters	73
2.10	Word chains	73
2.11	Definitions quiz	74
2.12	Consonant cluster towers	77
3	Connected speech	79
	Links between words	79
3.1	Matching adjectives and nouns: consonant to vowel links	7 <i>9</i>
3.2	Changing sounds: consonant to consonant links	8c
3.3	Predict the linking sounds: vowels linked with /j/ (y) and /w/	82
3.4	Matching opposites and words that go together: vowels	-
J• <del>-</del>	linked with /r/	85
	Contracted forms	87
3.5	Dialogues	87
3.6	Talking about families	89
3.7	Comparing speech and writing	91
	Weak and strong forms of grammar words	94
3.8	Comparing weak and strong forms	94
3.9	Predicting weak and strong forms	96
3.10	Listening to weak forms	98
	Leaving out sounds	99
3.11	Leaving out consonants: /t/ and /d/ in clusters	99
3.12	Leaving out vowels in words	101
4	Syllables, word stress and stress in phrases	103
	Syllables	103
4.I	How many syllables?	103
4.2	The same or different number of syllables?	104
4.3	Eliminating words	105

	Word stress	106
4.4	Demonstrating syllable length	106
4.5	Matching words with their stress patterns	107
4.6	Group the words	108
4.7	Country names	109
4.8	At the supermarket	III
4.9	Stress patterns in -ty and -teen numbers (1): Bingo	113
4.10	Stress patterns in -ty and -teen numbers (2): talking about	
	accommodation	115
4.11	Stress in noun–verb pairs	118
4.12	Rules of word stress in two-syllable nouns, adjectives and	
	verbs	120
	Stress and word formation	122
4.13	Rules of word stress: prefixes and suffixes	122
4.14	Suffixes and word stress: words ending -ian	124
4.15	Suffixes and word stress: words ending -ic and -ical	127
4.16	Stress in phrasal verbs and related nouns	129
4. 17	Rules of stress in compound nouns	131
	Stress in phrases	132
4.18	Same or different stress patterns?	132
4.19	Find your partners	134
4.20	Stress shift in nationality words	137
4.21	Stress shift in compounds	139
5	Intonation	142
	Prominence: highlighting words and syllables	142
5.1	Introducing prominent and non-prominent words:	•
	'James Bond'	142
5.2	Hearing and saying prominent words: 'They're on	
	the table'	144
5.3	Prominence contrasts within words: stalactites and	
	stalagmites	147
	Tone units and tonic placement	151
5.4	Dividing speech into tone units	151
5.5	Tonic word placement: 'At ten to seven, or ten to eight?'	153

#### Contents

	Tones	154
5.6	Choosing tones: fall or rise?	154
5.7	Tone choice in questions	155
5.8	Falling and falling-rising tones: reservation	160
5.9	'News' and 'not news': correcting	
6	Pronunciation and other parts of language: spelling,	
	grammar and vocabulary	165
	Pronunciation and spelling	165
6.1	Grouping English alphabet letters	165
6.2	Pronouncing single vowel letters (1)	166
6.3	Pronouncing single vowel letters (2)	168
6.4	Pronouncing pairs of vowel letters: OU, OA, OE, OI, OO	170
6.5	Pronouncing consonant letters: C and G	173
6.6	Pronouncing consonant pairs: PH, CH, SH, TH and GH	175
6.7	Homographs: a row about rowing?	177
	Pronunciation and grammar	179
6.8	Pronouncing -s in plurals, verbs and possessives	179
6.9	Pronouncing -ed in past tense verbs	181
	Pronunciation and vocabulary	184
6.10	Classifying words	184
6.11	Odd one out	184
6.12	Problem pronunciations	185
7	Testing pronunciation	186
7 <b>.</b> I	General evaluation of pronunciation	186
7.2	Diagnosing particular problems	187
7.3	Testing vowels and consonants	193
7.4	Testing weak and contracted forms	199
7.5	Testing word stress	204
7.6	Testing prominence	206
7.7	Testing tone	209
8	Resources for pronunciation teaching	213
	Using a dictionary	213
8.1	Finding out about word stress	213
8.2	Finding out about secondary stress: shifting stress	215

		Content
	Using phonetic symbols	217
8.3	Finding out about sounds	218
8.4	Relating sounds and symbols	218
8.5	Transcribing words	218
	Using authentic material	219
8.6	'Knock, knock' jokes	219
,	Tongue twisters	221
8.8	Limericks	223
8.9	Poems with features of connected speech	226
8.10	Short texts showing features of pronunciation	228
	Web-based resources	231
	Appendix 1 Key to phonetic symbols	232
	Appendix 2 Common pronunciation problems	233
	Appendix 3 Initial consonant clusters in English	<b>sh</b> 239
	Appendix 4 Some word stress rules	240
	Bibliography	2.42
	Index	2.4.4

## 1

# Developing awareness of English pronunciation

## 1.1 Introducing features of pronunciation

This activity introduces some key terms (vowel, consonant, consonant clusters, word stress and intonation) and gets students thinking about differences between pronunciation in English and their first language.

Focus Key pronunciation terms

Level Elementary

Time 20-30 minutes

Preparation Copy the material in Box 1 onto a handout.

#### **Procedure**

- I Give a copy of the handout to each student and ask them to look at the section on vowels.
- 2 Present the examples in 1. Say the words and explain that vowel sounds are underlined.
- 3 Students do the exercise in 2 and check the answers.
- 4 Give students some time to think about the question in 3. They should talk about their answers to a partner or other students in a small group. (In a multilingual class, students in each pair/group should have different first languages if possible.)
- 5 Finally, discuss the answers with the class as a whole. Highlight similarities and differences between English and the students' first languages, and check that students have understood the key term (vowel) correctly.
- 6 Repeat the procedure for each of the key terms. Note that in the section on intonation, you will need to demonstrate the tones (fall, rise, rise-fall, and fall-rise) on the words in 1 or play the recording. Then say (or play) No with each of the four tones. You could add a step at this point where you get students to repeat, chorally and individually, the four tones on No after you.

#### Note

Consonant clusters are dealt with in more detail in Activity 1.4.

Box 1 Student handout
Vowels
1 Examples: job give good car 2 Underline the vowel sounds in these words:
fall learn way road
3 Does your language have the same vowel sounds? Give example words:
and ordinate notices.
Consonants
1 Examples: my top work this
2 Underline the consonant sounds in these words:
shoe rob good leave
3 Does your language have the same consonant sounds?
Give example words:
Consonant clusters
1 Examples: <u>bl</u> ack <u>dr</u> op <u>tr</u> ip <u>qu</u> een 2 Underline the consonant clusters in these words:
3 Does your language have the same consonant clusters? Give example words:
dive example words
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## **Answer key**

Vowels: fall, learn, way, road

Consonants: shoe, rob, good, leave

Consonant clusters: space, play, climb, strong

Syllables: helicopter (4), some (1), trousers (2), president (3) Word stress: banana, teacher, engineer, alone, chemistry Intonation (as on the recording):

Box 1 continued
Syllables  1 Examples: bad (1 syllable) arrive (2) computer (3) supermarket (4)  2 How many syllables do these words have? helicopter some trousers president  3 Does your language have words with the same number of syllables? Give example words:
Word stress  1 Examples: traffic about terrible tomorrow conversation  2 Underline the stressed syllable in these words:   banana teacher engineer alone chemistry  3 Does your language have words with the same stress pattern?   Give example words:
Intonation  1 Examples: Yes Yes Yes  2 Listen and mark the same tones in the word No. No No No No No  3 What are the words for yes and no in your language? Is it usual to say them with the same four tones?

## 1.2 Getting you thinking: a pronunciation questionnaire

In the early stages of a course, it is useful to encourage students to think about their current English pronunciation and particular problems; how important English pronunciation is to them, and how its importance might vary in different contexts; and what their pronunciation targets are. This can help students clarify their thoughts on important questions they may not have considered before, and it can help you to know where to aim in helping students improve. This questionnaire provides the basis for a discussion. If the terms used in the questionnaire aren't familiar to students, revise or introduce them first using Activity 1.1.



Focus Grading pronunciation and identifying difficulties

Level Elementary+

Time 30 minutes

Preparation Copy the material in Box 2 onto a handout.

## Student handout Box 2 A How good is your English pronunciation? I Circle your answer: I = high, 5 = low. vowels I 2 3 4 5 consonants I 2 3 4 5 consonant clusters (e.g. cl-, fr-) I 2 3 4 5 word stress (e.g. aGO, FOLLow) I 2 3 4 5 intonation (e.g. Yes, Yes) I 2 3 4 5 2 Note any particular problems you have with English. consonant clusters (e.g. cl-, fr-) ..... word stress (e.g. aGO, FOLLow) ..... intonation (e.g. Yes, Yes) ..... B How important is it for you to have good English pronunciation? Circle your answer: 1= high, 5 = low. When you talk to your fellow students? When you talk to your teacher? I 2 3 4 5 When you talk to native speakers of English? I 2 3 4 5 When you talk to other non-native speakers in English? I 2 3 4 5 C Who would you like to sound like when you speak English? Why? © CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS 2004

#### **Procedure**

- I Give a copy of the handout to each student and give them some time to complete it. (This might be best done as a homework activity.) Point out that the person they think of in C doesn't have to be a native English speaker. It could be, for example, someone who shares their first language, who they have heard speaking English.
- 2 Students report back their answers. Encourage comparison and discussion of differences. For example, students might feel they have different problems with English pronunciation, particularly in a multilingual class, or they might have different priorities, and this might become apparent when talking about the answers to question B. If students have selected both native and non-native English speakers for question C, talk about the relative difficulties of having one or the other as a 'target model'. You may also want to discuss which accents of English (again, either native or non-native speaker) they find more or less attractive and why this might be.
- 3 Keep a copy of the students' answers for your own records. You could use the information about particular problems for prioritising teaching.
- 4 Later in the course (if the course is of a reasonable length), ask students to repeat the exercise and compare their answers with those they gave earlier. Talk to them about whether and why their answers have changed.

## 1.3 Making vowel sounds

Focus	Position of organs of speech when making English vowel sounds
Level	Elementary+
Time	20 minutes
-	Make a copy of the vowel chart <sup>1</sup> in Box 3 on an OHT or large piece of paper, and also make a small copy for each student.
	paper, and also make a small copy for each student.

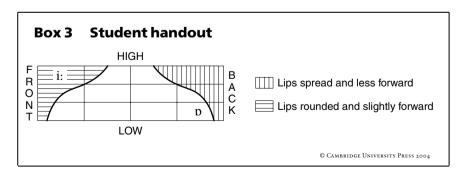
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Source: Underhill, A. (1994, pp. 10 and 15, adapted).

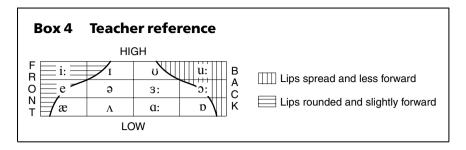
#### **Procedure**

- Display the chart in Box 3. Point to /i:/ and say the word *me* a few times, elongating the vowel. Explain the chart by saying that when we say this vowel the tongue is 'high' in the mouth, nearly touching the roof of the mouth; that the tongue is pushed towards the 'front' of the mouth; and the lips are spread and less forward. Ask students to say the vowel until they become aware of these three features in their own mouths. Next, point to /p/ and say the word *stop* a few times, elongating the vowel. Explain that when we say this vowel the tongue is 'low' in the mouth; that the tongue is pulled towards the 'back' of the mouth; and the lips are rounded and slightly forward. Ask students to say the vowel until they become aware of these three features in their own mouths.
- 2 Write on the board a list of the remaining simple vowels, randomly ordered, and example words which include them:
  - /ı/ sit, /u/ stood, /u:/ you, /e/ pen, /ə/  $\underline{a}$ go, /ɜ:/ bird, /ɔ:/ more, /æ/ hat, /ʌ/ up, /ɑ:/ car
- 3 Students should work in pairs or small groups to try to fill in the remainder of the chart. They should say the words/vowels to each other while they are doing this. During this time you should visit the pairs/groups and say the words/vowels at the students' request. When the pairs/groups have reached their decisions, collect answers from the class, fill in the rest of your chart, and talk about differences of opinion and difficulties. The completed chart, for your reference, is given in Box 4.

#### Note

If students are not familiar with phonetic symbols, use example words in the chart rather than symbols. (A full list of phonetic symbols is given in Appendix 1.)





## 1.4 Consonant clusters: English and first-language differences

The possible consonant clusters at the beginnings of words varies from language to language. This exercise builds awareness of what is possible in English and how this may be different from what is possible in the student's first language.

Focus Comparing consonant clusters in English and students' first language

Level Elementary+

Time 15 minutes

- Write a list of consonant clusters (comprising two or three consonant sounds) on the board. You could write these either as letters or using phonetic symbols. These should be a random mixture of possible and impossible combinations for the beginning of English words. (See Appendix 3 for possible combinations.) For example:
  - *possible*: pl-, fr-, tr-, mu-, dw-, thr- scr-, spl- (*or* /pl/, /fr/, /tr/, /mj/, /dw/, /θr/, /skr/, /spl/)
  - *impossible*: tl-, mr-, vr-, thl-, gw-, pw-, nl-, spw- (*or* /tl/, /mr/, /vr/, /θl/, /gw/, /pw/, /nl/, /spw/)
- 2 Students work in pairs to decide whether the clusters are possible in English, and to give an example word for each, and whether they are possible in their own first language. If you have a multilingual group, you could build up a list of possible and impossible combinations in different languages.
- 3 Write on the board the example English words for each cluster found by students. Students repeat these after you. Correct where necessary.

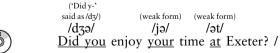
#### **Extension**

If you find clusters that are possible in English but not in a student's first language, it may well be that these will cause them pronunciation difficulties. Use this activity as a diagnostic exercise to identify clusters that may need attention.

## 1.5 Comparing slow and quick speech

1.5 Comparing slow and quick specem			
Focus Noticing differences between the way words are said at conversational speed and their citation forms (i.e. how they wou said in isolation, slowly and carefully)			
Level	Elementary+		
Time	25 minutes		
Preparation	<ol> <li>Record onto a cassette a short extract (15 seconds or so should be enough) of authentic conversation between native English speakers. Recording from radio or TV should give the high-quality recording needed for this activity. Alternatively, you could use the extract given on the recording.</li> <li>Identify short (maximum of about three seconds) sections within the extract used that are 'complete' in that they are either complete utterances or are part of a longer utterance but have a pause at the end. If possible, record these separately onto another cassette, with gaps in between. This makes it easier to play and replay. A 'gapped' extract is given on the recording.</li> </ol>		

- In the class, play the first utterance a couple of times and ask students as a group and then individually to repeat, trying to say it in exactly the same way
- 2 Then ask 'What words did you say?' and write these on the board. Ask students to say how the pronunciation on the recording differs from the pronunciation of the words said slowly and carefully. The following examples are on the recording for this book:





(weak form) /wəz/ Erm. Yes, I did. Erm, because I was I <u>was</u> doing /

 (weak form)
 (glottal stop (weak instead of /t/) form)
 (linking sound between 'very' and 'interested')

 /ðə/
 /ðə?///WəZ/
 /j/

on the whole subjects that I was very interested in doing /

(weak (glottal stop form) instead of /t/)
/ən/ /wen?/
and I'd made up my mind before I went /

(weak (left out (weak form) or 'unreleased') form)
/ja/ /d//ta/
you know what it was I wanted to do /

#### Extension

Repeat the activity using short sections of recordings you use for other purposes (e.g. in teaching listening or as model dialogues), to develop awareness of changes in pronunciation in connected speech.

## 1.6 Sounding English

The aim of this activity is to get students thinking about how other non-native speakers pronounce English and what pronunciations students value highly. If appropriate, you could make this more explicit at the end of the activity by asking why they have chosen particular students as having 'better' English pronunciation. What is it about these students' pronunciation they particularly like?

Focus Identifying good English pronunciation

Level Elementary+

Time Depends on size of class

- I Organise the class into groups of five or six, and get students to stand in a line in their groups.
- 2 First demonstrate the activity with a group at the front of the class. Explain that you are going to find people with the best English pronunciation. Write on the board the letter vowels *A E I O U*. The student at the front of the line (S1) should say these letters to the person behind (S2), who then says them in reply. They should be said loudly

enough for the other members of the group to hear. The rest of the group decides (perhaps by a vote) who has the best English pronunciation of these two students. If S2 'beats' S1, they should move to the front of the line; otherwise, the order stays the same. S2 is then 'challenged' by S3. If S3 beats S2, they should move up the line and then challenge S1. This should continue until everyone has had a chance to challenge for first position or it becomes clear that the person with the best English pronunciation in the group is in this position.

- 3 When the person with the best English pronunciation has been found in each group, they could come to the front and perform. You could take a vote among the class as a whole on which of these 'winners' has the best English pronunciation.
- 4 Do the same for a number of features of English pronunciation:
  - Simple vowels: give students a list of words including simple vowels and ask them to focus their attention on these. Choose four or five from: *car*, *sat*, *bed*, *fit*, *sea*, *lot*, *four*, *book*, *food*, *her*, *sun*.
  - Complex vowels (diphthongs): give students a list of words including complex vowels and ask them to focus their attention on these. Choose four or five from: *my*, *now*, *day*, *bear*, *here*, *go*, *boy*, *sure*.
  - Consonants: give students a list of words beginning with single consonant sounds and ask students to focus their attention on these. Choose four or five from: but, do, fill, good, hat, yes, cat, lose, me, no, but, run, soon, talk, very, win, zoo, ship, sin, cheap, thin, then, June.
  - Consonant clusters: give students a list of words beginning with two consonant sounds, or three consonant sounds, and ask students to focus their attention on these. Choose four or five from: (two consonant sounds) play, pray, pure, tree, Tuesday, twist, clock, cross, cube, quick, blue, brush, drip, glass, grow, news, fly, few, view, throw, slip, sweet, spill, start, snow, huge (note that other consonant clusters are possible); or (three consonant sounds) split, spray, strain, scream (note that other consonant clusters are possible).

If you know that students in your group have particular English pronunciation problems because of interference from their first language(s), make these the focus of activities. (See Appendix 2 for information about this.)

## 1.7 Pronouncing names in English

This activity is intended to raise awareness of pronunciation differences between English and students' first language by focusing on the students' first names.

Focus Pronouncing first names in English

Level Elementary+
Time 15 minutes

#### **Procedure**

- Your students may:
  - have names with an equivalent used in English-speaking countries (i.e. with the same or nearly the same spelling, but different pronunciation); examples of names used in both English-speaking and other countries include David, Laura, Peter, Robert, Elizabeth and Martin
  - have names with no equivalent in English-speaking countries
  - have chosen an English name to use as their name in class.

For all of these groups, make sure that students can pronounce their own and other students' names in an English-sounding way, as if they were English names. Demonstrate, ask students to repeat and correct where necessary. You might want to encourage students to use their English-sounding names in class.

2 Focus on a few of the names and ask students to observe what is different about the first-language pronunciation and the English pronunciation. Box 5 gives some examples involving equivalent names, but you could do a similar activity for names with no equivalent or chosen English names, too.

Box 5	Teacher refere	ence	
Name	English pronunciation	Example first- language pronunciation	What students might observe (and examples of questions you might ask to encourage more general awareness of English/first-language pronunciation)
David	/'dervid/	/dæˈvi:d/	I The /ei/ vowel is different. (Is this vowel used in the students' first language? Can they think of example words where it is?) 2 Stress is different. (Do most English names have stress on the first syllable? Is this different in names in the first language?)
Elizabeth	/ı'lızəbəθ/	/elizæ¹bet/	<ol> <li>The /θ/ consonant is different.</li> <li>Stress is different.</li> </ol>
Laura	/ˈlɔ:rə/	/ˈlaʊræ/	The /ɔ:/ vowel is different.

## 1.8 Pronouncing places, products and planets

The aim of this activity is to compare names (of cities, products, geographical features, etc.) that are often pronounced similarly (and are often written in the same or a similar way) in a number of languages. By comparing the usual (British) English pronunciation with the pronunciation in the students' language(s), more general differences in pronunciation can be highlighted.

Focus Comparing pronunciation of words in English and students' first language

Level Elementary+

Time 20 minutes

Preparation Write on the board or display on an OHT one of the following lists (these are all on the recording): cities/states: Paris, Moscow, Quebec, Budapest, Beijing, Seoul, Johannesburg, Edinburgh, Rio de Janeiro, Brussels, Siberia; products/companies: Coca-Cola, Microsoft, Toyota, Skoda, Ikea, Oantas, Volvo; geographical features: the Himalayas, the Urals, the Sahara Desert, the Pacific Ocean, Asia, Antarctica; the planets: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto; elements: Aluminium, Arsenic, Chlorine, Helium, Hydrogen, Iodine, Neon, Radium, Uranium, Xenon.

- Students work in pairs or groups. In a multilingual class, try to have different first-language students working together. Point to the list on the board/OHT. Ask students to write down how each of the words are written in their first language and to note any differences.
- Tell students to focus on those words that are written similarly or in the same way in English and their first language. Say (or play from the recording) words from the list, one at a time. After each, ask students to note down whether the pronunciation in English and in their language is nearly the same, different or very different for those words written the same or similarly.
- Work with the whole class:
  - Ask elementary students to say the words that are different or very different in pronunciation in their first language and in English.
  - With more advanced students, talk about the differences in pronunciation in the words and whether these reflect more general differences between English and the first language. For example, in British English Moscow is pronounced / mpskəu/, in German it is written Moskau and pronounced close to /'mpskau/ and in Spanish it is written *Moscú* and pronounced close to /mps'ku/. You might note that the vowel sound /əu/ is not found in German or Spanish words. You might also note that while stress is on the first syllable in English, it is on the second in Spanish (although this does not represent a general feature of English and Spanish). In British English (the) Himalayas is pronounced /himəˈleɪəz/, while in French Himalaya is pronounced close to /ɪmæˈlæjæ/. Here you might note that the sound /h/ is not used in French.