

Techniques for Teaching Pronunciation

The following are suggested activities for teaching individual sounds as well as other aspects of pronunciation such as stress, rhythm, and intonation. Resources on pronunciation are listed under **Pronunciation in Classroom Resources**, and pronunciation terms can be found in the **Pronunciation Glossary** at the end of this section.

Individual Sounds

Backward buildup

Learners practice a sentence or phrase by repeating the last word, then adding another word with each repetition until the whole sentence or phrase has been produced

Bingo

Play bingo using words or pictures that demonstrate a particular sound(s)

Brainstorming

Choose a topic and ask learners to think of words containing the sound(s) to be practiced. Follow this with an activity using the words

Categorizing

Learners place words in columns according to the sound(s) being practiced (e.g., *ed* endings)

Chain stories

In turn, learners contribute sentences containing words or phrases with the sounds being practiced to make a story

Dialogues

Learners create dialogues using words that contain the sounds being practiced

Exaggeration

Demonstrate a sound by exaggerating the actions and position of the tongue, teeth, lips, and mouth

Identification

Learners select the words or sentences they hear on a worksheet

Information gap

Learners practice target sound(s) by sharing information to complete a task

Minimal pairs

Learners identify which word of a pair has been spoken, indicate whether the two words spoken are the same or different, or which word in a list is different

Mirrors

Learners note the position of their lips and tongue in a mirror when producing a sound

Pictures

- Learners describe a picture using words containing the target sound
- Create a page containing pictures of objects that contain the sound(s) being practiced. Dictate instructions for learners to follow (*Circle the skirt, Put an x on the shirt, Check the stocking*)

Reference words

Learners associate sounds with words. See **Vowel/Consonant Symbols and Keywords** chart

Rhyming words

Learners create lists of rhyming words containing the sound being practiced

Rules

Provide learners with rules (e.g., pronunciation and spelling of third person, past tense, and plural endings)

Sammy diagrams

Demonstrate the position of tongue, teeth, and lips by using diagrams of a cross-section of a head

Spelling equivalencies

Give examples of different ways of spelling an individual sound (e.g., *we, see, tea, these, piece* for the sound /iy/)

Tongue twisters

Use sentences that are difficult to pronounce quickly and correctly to practice target sounds (e.g., *She sells seashells by the seashore*)

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Stress and Rhythm

Changing the meaning

Read words and phrases using contrastive stress and discuss the meanings (e.g., *green house* and *greenhouse*)

Exaggeration

Encourage learners to exaggerate their production of stress and rhythm

Identification of content and function words

Learners underline content words in sentences

Limericks

Use rhyming verses to teach stress and rhythm

Marking syllables

Read a list of words or sentences and have learners count syllables and mark which syllables are stressed

Nonsense syllables

Substitute a nonsense syllable such as *da* for word syllables

Rules

Provide rules for dividing words into syllables

Tapping

Tap to indicate rhythm or stress

Intonation

Changing the meaning

Read sentences using different stress and intonation to change the meaning

Questionnaires and surveys

Prepare questions for learners to use in pairs and instruct them to ask the questions politely, and ask follow-up questions to keep the conversation going

Directions and instructions

Learners work in pairs or groups and ask for and give directions and instructions

Identifying questions, statements, and lists

- Read a list of sentences that have a declarative word order with yes/no question intonation or as statements. Learners complete sentences on a worksheet with a question mark or period
- Read lists, sometimes stopping before the end, using rising intonation. Learners indicate whether the list is complete or whether there are more items to come
- Read aloud a list of tag questions using rising or falling intonation. Learners indicate whether you are asking a question or stating a fact

Contractions, Reduced Expressions, Linking, and Pausing

Dialogues and role-plays

Learners create their own dialogues or use dialogues provided by the instructor to practice reduced expressions and linking

Dictation

Learners dictate a list of sentences or a dialogue to a partner

Gap fill

Prepare worksheets containing sentences with blanks for function words or contractions. Learners listen to a dictation of the sentences and fill in the blanks

Identification

Dictate pairs of similar sentences and have learners identify which sentence is being read on a worksheet

Word counting

Dictate sentences containing reductions and have learners count the number of words

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Vowel/Consonant Symbols and Keywords¹

Vowel	Keyword	Consonant	Keyword	Consonant	Keyword
/iɪ/	green	/p/	Poland	/ʒ/	Malaysia
/ɪ/	pink	/b/	Bolivia	/tʃ/	China
/eɪ/	grey	/m/	Mexico	/dʒ/	Germany
/ɛ/	red	/f/	Finland	/k/	Canada
/æ/	black	/v/	Venezuela	/g/	Guyana
/uɪ/	blue	/θ/	South Africa	/ŋ/	Hong Kong
/ʊ/	wood	/ð/	The Philippines	/w/	Wales
/oʊ/	yellow	/t/	Thailand	/y/	Yemen
/a/	olive	/d/	Denmark	/h/	Hungary
/ʌ/	mustard	/s/	Singapore		
/aɪ/	sky blue	/z/	Zambia		
/aʊ/	brown	/n/	Norway		
/ɔɪ/	turquoise	/l/	Libya		
/ər/	purple	/r/	Romania		
/ə/	tomato	/ʃ/	Russia		

Pictorial Representations of Sounds

One way of helping learners produce speech correctly is to use a cross-sectional diagram of a head showing the position of the tongue, teeth, and lips for different sounds. These illustrations are called Sammy diagrams and can be found in many pronunciation reference books (e.g., *Teaching American English Pronunciation*).²



Sammy diagram³ showing tongue, teeth, and roof of mouth

Another pronunciation resource is the CALL software, *ELLIS – Master Pronunciation*. The Pronunciation section displays animated graphics of male and female models pronouncing sounds. Learners can choose either vowels or consonants to practice, record, and compare to the computer-generated sound. The Master Tutor section allows learners to choose a sound, see a Sammy diagram, and hear an explanation in different languages of how the sounds are formed.

¹Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, eds., *Teaching American English Pronunciation* (UK: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 183.

²Avery and Ehrlich, 1992.

³The diagram on this page is from Sharon Widmayer and Holly Gray, *Sounds of English*, <http://www.soundsofenglish.org>.

Techniques for Teaching Pronunciation

Teaching Cultural Aspects of Communication¹

Effective communication requires not just the mastery of individual sounds and the accompanying aspects of pronunciation such as stress, rhythm, and intonation. It also depends on speaking habits such as gestures, posture, and eye contact. The following is a list of global aspects of speech to consider when helping learners to understand and to be understood. Point out these features to learners and ask questions to encourage awareness of cultural differences.

Questions for Class Discussion

Speech

- **Silence**
How do people respond to periods of silence in a conversation?
- **Speed**
What does fast speech indicate? What about steady, evenly paced speech?
- **Volume**
What is an acceptable level? What do people think if the volume is very soft? Is this the same in all cultures?

Body Language

- **Eye contact**
What does direct eye contact signify for North Americans? Is the length of eye contact important?
- **Facial Expressions**
What do facial expressions convey? Are they the same in all cultures? Do they matter?
- **Gestures**
What gestures are used (e.g., to beckon, greet, wave goodbye, indicate agreement, non-comprehension, etc.)? How do gestures vary from culture to culture? Should we use gestures to communicate? How often should we gesture in conversation? What happens if we don't use gestures? Do men and women gesture in the same way?
- **Posture**
What attitudes do different postures communicate?
- **Physical Distance**
What is an acceptable distance between people in conversation? What if that distance is too far? What if it is too close?
- **Touching**
What forms of touching are acceptable in North America compared with other countries? Is it acceptable to touch someone when he/she is speaking to another person?

¹ Adapted from Kathryn Brillinger, *Pronunciation Rules: The Accompanying Pragmatics* workshop (Mississauga, ON, June 2001).