

Teaching English Pronunciation



Easy to Use
Drills and Exercises

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Why is pronunciation important? The obvious reason is that if a speaker doesn't pronounce words (or even sentences) correctly the listener will have difficulty understanding what is being said. In addition, some research indicates that if a speaker can't produce the differences between sounds, they may not be able to hear them either. If that is indeed the case, their listening abilities may be also curtailed.

When teaching pronunciation, teachers are giving feedback to their student about how they are saying things. This feedback includes what the problem is and what they need to do to correct it. This feedback may include where to place the tongue in the mouth to say particular words, or how the lips should be formed, or the action of the tongue when making specific sounds.

That's basically all there is to teaching pronunciation- giving feedback and ensuring that the student uses the feedback to improve their speaking skills. That along with providing adequate practice to the students to hear the sounds AND practice making the sounds. Remember (as some research implies) if a student can't create a sound, they won't be able to comprehend it either.

Teaching pronunciation is a matter of exposing students to a large variety of words that contain the sounds of the English language. In addition to this exposure, students need the opportunity to reproduce these sounds, not just listen for the differences. This book contains drills and exercises that address both of these issues.

Individual sounds may occur at the beginning, the middle, or the end of a word. When possible the words in the exercises and drills contain words that have the sound at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the word to expose the student to as much variety as possible. Of course this is not possible for all sounds- for example, there are no words that end in 'q' in English.

This book provides teachers with pronunciation drills and exercises that expose the students to the different sounds used in English words. There are exercises for each of the individual sounds - 15 vowel and diphthong sounds and 24 consonant sounds.

In addition to the individual vowel and consonant sounds there are also sections on other pronunciation issues including the sound changes as a result of the flap and glottal stop, contractions, stress, intonation, rising and falling pitch, and linking.

There are several kinds of exercises that include:

- Listening to two words and deciding whether one or both contain the target vowel sound
- Listening to three words and selecting one word that does not contain the target vowel sound
- Listening to individual words and selecting the syllable that the target sound occurs in
- Listening to two words and deciding whether they are the same or different
- Listening to individual words and deciding which consonant sound is being produced
- Filling in the blanks in sentences

- Oral drills to practice reproducing sounds and sentences

The exercise and drill sheets contain the target sounds that are read to the student. In addition to the exercise sheets, there are answer sheets that students can use to complete the exercises. The answer sheets can be copied and handed out to the students.

Using the Material

Teachers can read the words on the exercise sheet as they are done or some may want to record the exercises first on a cassette and play the tapes to the students instead of reading. This option may improve the quality and consistency of the material that the students hear, as the teacher can

re-record the material if problems occur. (Remember, every one gets tongue-tied from time and time and if reading, a teacher may inadvertently mispronounce words, or pronounce the same word differently when repeated). It also allows the teacher the freedom to walk around the room and note any difficulties the students may be having so corrective action can take place.

The number of times each word is repeated will depend on the students and the purpose of the activity. If it is used as a testing vehicle less repetition is generally used than when used as a learning exercise.

Production of Sounds

At times it may be necessary to analyze what is happening with the tongue, lip movement, and expiration of air when producing sounds. The teacher may have to demonstrate to the students where their tongues should be in their mouths or the placement of the lips. For example, the words *'berry'* and *'very'* are similar, but the placement and movement of the lips are different. When saying *'berry'* the lips are closed at the beginning of the word. When saying *'very'*, the lips are apart and the top front teeth should be placed on the lower lip to start the word.

Teachers should not just tell the students where to place their tongues, but show them. For example, a student may be having problems producing the *r* sound- it may come out sounding like an *l*. In this case the teacher should show the student (by opening his or her mouth wide) and letting the student see that the tongue is placed against the back of the top front teeth when producing an *l*, but the tongue is in the middle of the mouth (not touching any teeth) to produce an *r*.

One thing to keep in mind when completing these drills and exercises with students- speak normally! When speaking and saying the words use conversational pronunciation- don't speak too slowly, over enunciate, or use additional stress.

It is important that students hear they words and sounds as they are usually said in conversation- not artificially reproduced for a lesson. If this is done the students will have a much more difficult time of discriminating the sounds when in conversations with others. Of course, as an initial teaching method a teacher may need to over pronounce some difficult words or sounds- until the students 'get it'. Just be sure to start speaking normally again once the have it.

Vocabulary

Many of the words in the exercises are common words- used daily in conversation. Many are not that common and are seldom used in normal conversation, but are included because they have a particular target sound. Because the words are not that common students may not know the meaning of the word. Fortunately for pronunciation purposes they don't need to.

However, there is nothing to stop a teacher from also providing a vocabulary lesson at the same time. Teachers may find some words that they consider important for the students to know and can use these words to expand the student's vocabulary. Other words can be ignored. Just remember that the words are there primarily for pronunciation development, not vocabulary development.

Phonetic symbols

Unfortunately for both students and teachers, there is not a uniform symbolic system to represent the sounds in the English language. (Actually there is the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)- but it incorporates the sounds made from a number of languages that are derived from the Latin alphabet and contains over 107 symbols to represent these sounds.)

Each dictionary or phonetic book seems to have their own symbols to represent the different sounds. Also, not all books have the same number of symbols to represent the sounds. For example, some books and dictionaries have a symbol to represent the sound of a **vowel + R** (ar, er, ir) and other do not. This lack of uniformity is very confusing and frustrating to students and teachers alike.

Many of the symbols used by the IPA and most dictionaries are strange looking markings that are difficult to remember or relate to specific sounds. This manual attempts to simplify things a bit by using regular letters to represent the sounds.

The symbols used in the Merriam-Webster's Dictionary are included for those interested. These symbols are in parenthesis after the sound symbols.

◆◆◆ The Vowel Sounds ◆◆◆

There are 15 vowel sounds covered in this manual. Each includes a letter representation for the sound, the various spellings that the sound can be made with, sample words with the sounds in them, and finally the drills and exercises that can be used.

Before beginning the drills and exercises the teacher can use the sample words that contain the target sound to introduce the students to the sound they will be listening for or reproducing in the

drill and exercises.

1. The schwa sound (/ə/)

The **schwa** is the most common sound in the English language; however, the schwa is

Spellings for this sound can be formed from all of the vowels.

about	ambulance	believe	often	divorce
responsible	collateral	become	up	concur

not a Vowel per say. In words of two or more syllables, one of the syllables is strong and the others are weak (see section on syllables). The vowels in the weak syllables are usually reduced with the schwa sound. The schwa sounds like uh.

Exercise 1 (vowels)- The schwa sound

Instructions: Read the sets of words to the students. Students should listen carefully to the two words. On the answer sheet, students should mark (circle or underline) A if the first word has the **schwa sound** or mark B if the second word has the **schwa sound**. If both words have the **schwa sound** in them- mark both.

<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>
1. balance	bloody
2. dumpy	dimple
3. drummer	damage
4. grounding	grumpy
5. jumpy	jaguar
6. mother	machine
7. paradox	permit
8. tactic	thorough
9. furniture	fungus
10. gerund	general
11. career	coffee
12. ferment	fudge
13. entity	early
14. humpback	hunter
15. lavender	laundry
16. naughty	nervous
17. register	relative
18. buggy	building
19. modem	method
20. kinfolk	kerchief

Note: In the list of words below, the word(s) with the *schwa sound* are printed in **bold**.
Use answer sheet 1 for this exercise. (in appendix)

	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>
1.	about	anode	abound
2.	bacon	become	blinked
3.	crowded	camper	copper
4.	damage	debilitate	dumpster
5.	economics	emaciate	ebony
6.	fragment	fragile	fledgling
7.	gamble	gangster	grandiose
8.	hamster	hurrah	handsome
9.	inundate	iconic	imbecile
10.	jumper	justice	jenny
11.	ladder	linguistics	longitude
12.	maniac	medicine	mandible
13.	northern	nipple	neonatal
14.	opera	oppose	opening
15.	pliers	prankster	passively
16.	reactive	rambler	randomize
17.	silhouette	silicone	siney
18.	transpire	traitorous	transom
19.	vaccinate	valet	varnish
20.	wagon	windbag	wrangle
21.	yonder	yellow	yesterday

Exercise 2 (vowels)- The schwa sound

Instructions: Read the three words to the students. Two words in the list have the *schwa*

sound, one does not. On the answer sheet, students should mark (circle or underline) the word **without** the **schwa sound** (A, B, or C).

Note: In the list of words below, the word printed in **bold** is the word without the **schwa sound**. Use answer sheet 2 for this exercise. (in appendix)

Syllable Number

1. abduct	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. bachelor	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. communicate	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. disaster	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. effigy	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. fatigue	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. gelatin	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. heliport	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. inexcusable	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Japanese	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. knavery	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. lieutenant	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. manuscript	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. negligence	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. oratory	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. parsimony	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. quantitative	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. rejuvenate	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. sentimentality	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. tolerate	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. vacillate	1	2	3	4	5	6

Exercise 3 (vowels)- The schwa sound

Instructions: Read each word to the students. All of the words below have the **schwa sound**. On the answer sheet, students should mark (circle or underline) the number of

Spellings for this sound are: ai, ay, a, eigh

ache	rate	aid	bait
participate	Saturday	freight	weight

the syllable that contains the **schwa sound**. If the word has more than one syllable with the **schwa sound**, mark all syllables

Note: In the list of words below, the number of the stressed syllable is in **bold**.
For information on syllables and syllable stress see page 143.
Use answer sheet 3 for this exercise. (in appendix)

A

1. ate
2. balance
3. candle
4. **Danish**
5. **elongate**
6. **fragrance**
7. gigantic
8. **hearsay**
9. **irate**
10. jackal
11. **knave**
12. lamb
13. **mandate**
14. **naval**
15. pearl
16. **quake**
17. **radar**
18. **satiate**
19. travel
20. **venerate**
21. **wake**

B

1. **ambulate**
2. **bang**
3. **cadence**
4. damper
5. **elate**
6. fragile
7. **greater**
8. **holiday**
9. irregular
10. **jail**
11. kilowatt
12. **ladle**
13. **manipulate**
14. nearer
15. **pair**
16. quiet
17. **rake**
18. satisfy
19. **travail**
20. veneer
21. woke

2. The ā sound (a)

Exercise 1 (vowels)- The ā sound

<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>
1. apple	ailment	application
2. bakery	became	balance
3. candle	crayon	capitalization
4. dandelion	debilitate	dangerous
5. elation	emery	emanate
6. fragrance	favorite	familiar
7. gain	granular	glacier
8. hay	hairy	handy
9. insulate	identify	inoculate
10. jaybird	January	jade
11. ladle	litigate	ladder
12. manicure	mayday	migration
13. navigate	nibble	negation
14. operation	obituary	obligation
15. primary	palpitate	prayer
16. restaurant	radiology	reagent
17. sensational	standardization	stamina
18. tremble	trains	traitor
19. vaccination	valor	vacation
20. wreckage	waken	wage
21. yea	yesterday	yelp

Instructions: Read the sets of words to the students. Students should listen carefully to the two words. On the answer sheet, students should mark (circle or underline) A if the first word has the **ā sound** or mark B if the second word has the **ā sound**. If both words have the **ā sound** in them- mark both