



HOW TO TEACH ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English pronunciation is a challenging task with different objectives at each level. This guide on how to teach pronunciation provides a short overview of the main issues to be addressed at each level, as well as pointing to resources on the site, such as lesson plans and activities, that you can use in class to help your students improve their English pronunciation skills. Following each level are a few suggestions for level appropriate activities. Finally, the best way to help students improve their pronunciation skills is to encourage them to speak English as much as they possibly can.

KEY WORDS : vowels, sounds, grammar, pronunciation, consonants

Every ESL student should have a pronunciation element to their language studies. Sometimes, though, a student may need more than one strategy for tackling English pronunciation.

By making sure you use variety in your pronunciation lessons, your students will be more successful with English pronunciation and gain the confidence that comes with it.

Correct pronunciation leads to effective communication and the reason why it's essential to equip your students with the necessary tools to speak and listen, right from the beginning of their lessons.

How to Teach Vowel Pronunciation in English

1. Listen and repeat

This will be the first and most common method of teaching sound specific pronunciation in English. You say the target sound and have your students repeat it after you. If you are teaching a long word with multiple syllables, start with the final syllable of the word and have your class repeat it. Then add the penultimate syllable and say the two together having your class repeat after you. Work backwards in this manner until your students are able to pronounce the entire word correctly.

2. Isolation

When working on a specific sound, it may help your students to isolate that particular sound from any others. Instead of presenting a certain sound as part of a complete word in English, you can simply pronounce the sound itself repeatedly. When you do, your students can repeat it along with you, focusing on the small nuances in the correct pronunciation and also engraining the sound pattern into their minds. This is especially helpful when you have several students struggling with a specific sound delineation.

3. Minimal pairs

Minimal pairs are a great way to focus pronunciation on just one sound. If you are not familiar with linguistics, a minimal pair is two words that vary in only one sound. For example, rat and rate are minimal pairs because only the vowel sound differs between the two words. Additional minimal pairs are pin and pen, dim and dime, and bat and pat. You can use minimal pairs to help your students with their pronunciation by focusing on one particular sound. In addition to the pronunciation benefits, your students will also expand their vocabularies when you teach minimal pairs.



4. Record and replay

At times, your students may think they are using correct pronunciation when in fact they are saying something quite different. By using a device to record what your students are actually saying, you have empirical data to play back for each person. Encourage him or her to listen to what they actually said rather than what they think they said. You may also want to compare their recording to that of a native speaker. In this way, your students will have a more objective understanding of their true pronunciation and be able to take steps to correct it.

5. Use a mirror

Giving your students a chance to view their own physical movements while they are working on their pronunciation can be of great value. You can always encourage them to look at your mouth and face as you pronounce certain sounds, but they will also benefit from seeing what movements they are making as they speak. Sometimes, becoming aware of the physical movements involved in pronunciation is all your students need to correct pronunciation issues of which they are unaware.

Correct pronunciation means effective communication. Students on all levels need to learn the correct pronunciation of certain key sounds or they'll be misunderstood by other English speakers. This skill extends to listening too. Miscommunication and uncertainty in pronunciation can demotivate students and undermine their self-confidence.

6. Phonetics

When your students are facing a pronunciation challenge, it could be that English spelling is adding to the mystery of the spoken word. Instead of spelling new vocabulary out on the white board, try using phonetic symbols to represent the sounds (rather than the alphabet to represent the spelling). If you were to use phonetic symbols, the word seat would be written /si:t/ and eat would be written /i:t/. You can find a list of the phonetic symbols on several websites or in introductory linguistics books. Once you teach your students the International Phonetic Alphabet, you can use those symbols any time you introduce new vocabulary to your students.

7. Show a vowel diagram

If you are using phonetic symbols to help you teach vowel pronunciation, a diagram of where each English vowel sound is produced can be eye opening for your students. Print copies to distribute in class or show your students where they can find this diagram online. When students know which area of the mouth in which they should be making their sounds, they may have an easier time distinguishing between similar sounds because they are produced in different areas of the mouth.

8. Sing

Surprisingly enough, singing can be a good way for your ESL students to practice their vowel pronunciation. Because singing requires a person to maintain vowel sounds over more than just a moment, it can give your students a chance to focus in on the target sound and adjust what sound he or she is making.

9. Tongue twisters

Though tongue twisters are probably more popular for practicing consonant pronunciation, they are still a valuable resource for vowel practice. Not only are they a challenge to your students' pronunciation abilities, they add an element of fun to the classroom that can help your students relax and therefore free them to be more daring in their attempts at English. See our 'Top 20 Tongue Twisters' classroom poster.

10. Target language specific sounds

Some pronunciation patterns are found consistently in students with the same native language. Being aware of these patterns is helpful in addressing problems your students may not even know they have. You can find practice exercises to target specific pronunciation patterns, or you can write your own to target the specific needs of your class. Either way, making students aware of pronunciation patterns of speakers of their native language can be the biggest help in eliminating the mispronunciations.

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