

Speech Production

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Introduction

The speech production of foreign language learners is most commonly the measure used to determine their language level; the speaker must be able to make himself understood without placing too great a strain on the listener.

If a person is animated with good non-verbal communication skills, and can pronounce a few words accurately, we assume a higher level of language competence, because we can understand what he/ she is trying to say.

If we have to struggle to make out each utterance we consider their overall level to be low, even though their written competence and comprehension skills might be good.

Adult learners need specific preparation and ongoing assistance to overcome common problems of speech production, which can include some or any of the following:

- Inaudible speech
- Failure to project voice adequately
- Rapid, incoherent speech
- Unclear diction
- Reluctance to speak at all
- Hesitant and faltering speech
- Predominant use of non-English sounds
- Failure to adhere to the intonation patterns of English
- Incorrect word stress
- Lack of stress-timed sentence rhythm

Native Speaker Problems

Many speech problems occur in native speakers. Some people speak too quietly, too fast or unclearly so that they are hard to understand even in their own language. If the habit persists when they speak English, they will find it very difficult to make themselves understood at all.

ESOL teachers must correct the full range of speech production problems in order for their students to reach an acceptable level of competence in English.

- Inaudible speech
- Failure to project voice adequately

Failure to project the voice is often a sign of low self-esteem, or lack of confidence in a certain situation. It can also be caused by nervousness in stressful circumstances. Some women may have been prevented from speaking up for cultural reasons.

Extremely quiet speech can sometimes be improved by creating a relaxed atmosphere and giving plenty of encouragement. Putting the learner on the spot and insisting that she answers or speaks up in front of the group can make the situation worse. When she wants to say

something she is likely to make sure that she can be heard, so teachers should aim at creating the need for her to speak, and interacting on a personal level.

Group vocalising

Exercises which encourage the group to speak in unison will give the less confident members a chance to try saying words without feeling self-conscious. This can be done very simply. For example:

1. *Hold up an object and ask - "What's this?" One or two students will answer.*
2. *Correct pronunciation and say - "Everybody, what's this?" Most of the group will call out the word.*
3. *Say "Again" and ask for further repetitions until everyone is calling out.*

As they get used to the exercise they will all join in more quickly and readily. To prolong the exercise without making it boring, ask them to repeat words in different ways: in a happy or sad voice; slowly then quickly for long words; softly and loudly. This will encourage them all to vary and control the quality of their voice and speech production; it will particularly benefit those who do not usually produce sounds within the acceptable range, and it will prepare the way for the future correction of individuals who speak too softly or too loudly.

- Rapid, incoherent speech
- Unclear diction

Unclear diction and a tendency to speak too fast are also common failings of many people when speaking their native language, and if they occur when the speaker tries to communicate in a foreign language the strain on the listener can be extreme. Speakers who are producing fast, incomprehensible speech in English are sometimes quite unaware of the fact; teachers should not be afraid to make it clear by repeatedly saying "I'm sorry, I can't understand what you're saying. Could you repeat it more slowly, please." This can be a useful exercise for the group, who all need to learn how to signal lack of understanding politely.

Once the 'fast speaker' is aware of the strain she is imposing on the listener, remedial exercises must begin and the problem should be treated in the same way as other pronunciation difficulties. There are various reasons why speech may seem incoherent to the listener, including native language interference with pronunciation and incorrect intonation and stress patterns, which will be dealt with further on.

Problems which stem from the speaker's bad habits in her own language are often caused by a lack of attention to diction. The following tendencies are common :

1. Fast speech with words missing or 'swallowed'
2. Fast speech with incorrect sentence structure, or jumbled words
3. Failure to produce recognisable sounds due to lack of mouth / tongue movement

Learners who display such problems must be encouraged to separate their words first of all. The following strategies can be tried:

1. *Repeating their own sentence slowly after the teacher has corrected it*
2. *Repeating individual words after the teacher, focusing on good diction*

3. *Enunciation exercises (open your mouth, round your lips etc) can be treated in the same way as pronunciation practice, and the whole group can repeat the words together*
4. *Composing ideas in English which the teacher writes down for them, then reading out their own sentences, with attention to detail*
5. *Reading simple sentences aloud clearly, corrected by the teacher with great attention to detail*
6. *Reading very simple books to children for practice*

Cultural Reserve and Student Dependency

- Reluctance to speak at all
- Hesitant and faltering speech

Failure to respond to very simple questions sometimes results from insecurity and unwillingness to interact, rather than lack of language competence. It is quite common in a preliminary interview for students who are accompanied by a more communicative spouse, relative or friend to remain completely silent in their presence. When placed in a group of people with similar language needs and under learning conditions, such students will give a more accurate account of the level of their spoken English.

In community groups, student pairings must be carefully monitored as married couples, relatives and close friends may be attending the same group together. They are likely to influence each other's learning, and the teacher must try to cultivate positive influences and prevent negative ones. For example:

- *The class can be formed into smaller groups, with the teacher choosing who is in each group*
- *Students can be paired with someone of a similar level for particular exercises*
- *Student pairings can be changed after each exercise, to encourage social interaction, develop a good group atmosphere and to give a student who is being dominated by a friend or relative the chance to work alongside someone else.*
- *Students can be paired with their relative or friend for exercises when they need assistance, especially at first.*

This particular problem requires the greatest sensitivity on the part of the teacher. It may be the case that the more dominant partner insists on staying with the weaker learner, while the weaker learner is silently hoping to be separated. It is therefore essential to be aware of the way the weaker student reacts to suggestions which affect her, to notice if she seems genuinely fearful or reluctant to move, and to offer various alternatives during each lesson.

Unattached students may also be feeling reluctant, fearful and self-conscious at first, resulting in extremely hesitant and faltering speech. Until students feel confident and happy it is a good idea not to put them on the spot or insist on individual responses being made in front of the whole group. They are much more likely to try speaking during paired work, and while the teacher is not paying close attention to them. Plenty of opportunity must be given to practise new vocabulary and structures in pairs; as individuals become more confident they can be asked to speak out.

It is worth remembering that anyone who is trying to speak a language they don't know very well is likely to be hesitant and produce faltering speech; some are more hesitant than others by nature and will require more patience and encouragement on the part of the teacher.

Pronunciation

- Predominant use of non-English sounds

The pronunciation exercises which follow do not require previous training in phonetics. However, a basic understanding of the subject is a most useful thing for a language teacher to have, and a self study course such as “English Phonetics and Phonology” by Peter Roach (publ. Cambridge University Press - ISBN 0-521-40718-4) is highly recommended for reference at learning centres.

Learners must be encouraged to produce sounds accurately at every learning session. The least confident group members might happily remain silent for the whole session, content to listen to the teacher and other learners. And yet they are as capable as everyone else of pronouncing English sounds. Often the ‘speakers’ in the group are in the habit of using very poor pronunciation, and it can be a real confidence boost to a ‘non-speaker’ to realise that they have succeeded in producing a more correct sound than someone who they consider to be a high flier in the group.

Perhaps it is for this reason that “repeat after me” exercises have been greeted with the greatest enthusiasm by the members of the pilot study group. The best speakers find that their pronunciation lets them down at times, and so they value this part of the lesson, too.

It's a good way to break the ice. At initial lessons it is essential to create an atmosphere which involves everyone and is relaxed, useful and fun. With all the learners repeating the sounds in unison, even the most inhibited learner will have a go, as no-one else will be able to hear.

Developing ‘Listen and Repeat’

- Teach new vocabulary items, including some common words with difficult sounds
- Let the group listen and repeat each item several times.
- When the group seems confident with the easy items, give additional repetitions of the difficult ones.
- Then call out items at random, and ask them to identify it as they repeat it.
- Finally, point at items at random and encourage the group to call out the word.
- At the next lesson, revise the same items by calling them out one at a time and asking learners to point at the corresponding picture or object.
- Then ask for volunteers to call out a word each, while the rest continue to identify what they hear.
- As confidence builds, everyone will have a go at calling out a word, as long as they can choose which word. In this way you can achieve a first solo and voluntary utterance by even the most withdrawn group members.
- As the course progresses be sure to correct inaccuracies during these exercises, insisting on greater perfection each time.

Insist on Perfection

During pronunciation exercises:

- When a word is mispronounced it is important to say it again and ask the learner to repeat it.
- Identify the particular sound which is incorrect and say it in isolation.

Note that the mistake was probably made in the first place because the learner does not know the correct pronunciation of that particular sound, and so will not recognise it in isolation.

- Try repeating the sound 2 or 3 times in isolation then immediately once in the problem word.

Eg: 'r' 'r' 'rice' or 'c' 'c' 'ac' 'act'.

- With a sound in a final position do it the other way round eg 'hat' 't' 't' 't' or 'which' 'ch' 'ch'
- Separate the sound from neighbouring sounds to assist with difficult combinations eg 'flow' say 'low', 'f' 'low' 'low', 'f' 'f' 'low', 'f' 'f' 'flow'

Problem Sounds

The most problematical sounds for each group of learners will depend on their language of origin. Just as the French have difficulty saying 'th' and the Germans 'w', so each language group will all share the same problem with particular sounds in English. This can be because the sound does not occur in their own language, or because the sound can vary without changing meaning for them while in English we make 2 distinct and separate sounds : eg 'l' / 'r' in Japanese are interchangeable, 'l' / 'n' in Cantonese, so speakers of those languages are likely to interchange the sounds in English, too.

It will quickly become apparent which sounds are causing problems for the group, and it will be necessary for the teacher to demonstrate these carefully and explain how to use the various organs of speech (tongue, lips etc) to create the sound. This is where an understanding of phonetics is useful, and teachers are advised to look up the particular sound if they cannot find their own way of demonstrating its formation.

Consonants

List of English Consonants:

b	as in 'bee'	(bi:)	p	as in 'pet'	(pet)
k	as in 'cap'	(kæp)	r	as in 'red'	(red)
tʃ	as in 'chin'	(tʃɪn)	s	as in 'sit'	(sɪt)
d	as in 'dot'	(dɒt)	ʃ	as in 'shop'	(ʃɒp)
f	as in 'fin'	(fɪn)	t	as in 'top'	(tɒp)
g	as in 'gap'	(gæp)	ð	as in 'this'	(ðɪs)
h	as in 'he'	(hi:)	θ	as in 'thing'	(θɪŋ)
dʒ	as in 'jet'	(dʒet)	v	as in 'van'	(væn)
l	as in 'led'	(led)	w	as in 'wet'	(wet)
m	as in 'mad'	(mæd)	j	as in 'yes'	(jes)
n	as in 'net'	(net)	z	as in 'zip'	(zɪp)
ŋ	as in 'hang'	(hæŋ)	ʒ	as in 'measure'	(meʒə)

There are 24 different consonant sounds in the English language, each represented by the same letter or combination of letters most of the time (but not all the time). It is a useful exercise to

run through a list of words containing each of the sounds, with the students looking at the words and repeating them, to familiarise them with all the sounds and to make them form connections between the sounds and their written representation in English. Picking out the relevant letters in a different colour or bold type will help them to make the connection, and pairing similar sounds will make them easier to remember.

puppy	bubble	tatty	daddy
kick	giggle	fifty	Vivien
thirtieth	the weather	sausage	zoos
sheepish	pleasure	church	judge
lily	roaring	mummy	nanny
singing	hard hat	yoyo	willow

It may confuse the learners to find that the letters 'c' 'g' and 'th' commonly represent 2 different sounds (control / centre, go / gently and this / thin) while the sound in the middle of 'pleasure' and 'vision' has no letter to represent it and can be written in a number of ways. For that reason, each of these circumstances should be dealt with individually when appropriate. It can be pointed out here that a final 's' often sounds like a 'z'.

For pronunciation purposes, first present the words orally, without the students being able to see the written list. Call out one word at a time and ask them to repeat in unison. It may be necessary to say some words several times, but it should be fairly obvious if they are struggling to reproduce a sound by then. Keep a note of the problem sounds; these should be practised regularly, and corrected at every opportunity.

If there are competent readers in the group, this list will be fairly challenging as a reading exercise as the words are not all commonly used, and they stand alone with no context to assist recognition. It will encourage them to try decoding the unfamiliar words by drawing on their understanding of phonics, the use of our alphabet to represent sounds. For anyone who can read the list, it can be used as an individual diagnostic, to see which sounds cause the greatest problems for that student.

Vowels

Checking the learners' ability to produce the various vowel sounds of the English language, is much more complicated than checking the consonants. There are so many different ways of

writing the 12 vowels and 8 diphthongs (sliding vowels like 'air' and 'ow') of the English language that it is better to deal with each sound separately. However, the sounds which correspond to each of the vowel letters of the alphabet are quite constant:

'a' in pat 'e' in pet 'i' in pit 'o' in pot 'u' in putt

NB. These sounds are nearly always represented by the same letter, but the letters do not always represent these sounds. Indeed, the same 5 letters in combination (with the aid of y, w, r) have to represent 20 different sounds.

Each vowel letter has a 'name' which is another sound that the letter commonly represents:

'A' is the sound in 'cake' 'E' is in 'eve' 'I' is in 'fine' 'O' is in 'tone' 'U' is in 'tune'

List of English vowel sounds :

æ	as in 'bat'	(bæt)	(a)	(A)	eɪ	as in 'bay'	(beɪ)
e	as in 'bet'	(bet)	(e)	(E)	i:	as in 'key'	(ki:)
ɪ	as in 'bit'	(bɪt)	(i)	(I)	aɪ	as in 'buy'	(baɪ)
ɒ	as in 'pot'	(pɒt)	(o)	(O)	əʊ	as in 'go'	(gəʊ)
ʌ	as in 'but'	(bʌt)	(u)	(U)	u:	as in 'you'	(ju:)
ʊ	as in 'put'	(pʊt)			ʊə	as in sewer	(sʊə)
ɑ:	as in 'car'	(kɑ:)			ɔɪ	as in 'boy'	(bɔɪ)
ɔ:	as in 'for'	(fɔ:)			aʊ	as in 'cow'	(kaʊ)
ɜ:	as in 'fur'	(fɜ:)			ɪə	as in 'ear'	(ɪə)
ə	in ' a letter '	(ə letə)			eə	as in 'fair'	(feə)

Learners will find some logic to our vowel system if they are introduced to the 2 consistent uses of each vowel letter, one letter at a time. Take 'A' to begin with.

- Think of a list of words with the sound 'a' as in 'cat': bat, sat, that, chat, mat, man, fan, tan, ran etc
- Think of words with the sound of the letter 'A' as in 'cake': bake, mate, mane, fame etc, but only with the spelling as here with the final 'e' (NOT 'rain' for example)
- Try to find matching pairs eg: mat / mate man / mane
- Draw up two lists side by side, 'mat', 'man' 'fat' 'tap' on one side, 'mate', 'mane', 'fate', 'tape' on the other but in a different order
- Pick out the letters which represent the sounds in a *different colour* or in **bold**.
- For learners with literacy problems in their own language, begin with just two words eg: mat / mate, and make sure the learner can identify the individual sounds in the word 'mat' before proceeding with the exercise. Further pairs of words based on the same vowel sounds can be introduced gradually, making sure each time that the consonants have been recognised and produced by the learner.

Further lists can be drawn up for other common letter combinations: eg 'rain, stain, wait, waist,' as long as the words on the list all have the same letters representing the same sound (NOT 'chair' for example); 'law, saw, raw, straw, lawn, drawn' etc (NOT 'born')

Eventually, when learners have grasped the fact that letters represent sounds, and that certain letter combinations are often used for a certain sound, lists can be drawn up which show different spellings which all represent the same sound : eg law, door, floor, oar, war, bore,

caught, ought etc. Such a list could be learnt for a spelling test, at a time when the words are already known and understood; it is only suitable for groups with advanced writing skills.

Some sample [word lists](#) have been produced on this resource CD for classroom use by ESOL teachers. They can be used in the following ways:

In a small group (6 students):

- *Read out items on the list one by one, focusing on the target vowel sound*
- *Correct and give extra repetitions for items which cause difficulty, for example, final 't' in cat, mixing of 'l' and 'r' or 'v' and 'w'*
- *When they all seem confident, go round the group, each saying a word in turn, in list order*
- *Call out one item, and ask students to identify it by pointing*
- *Ask students to call out one word each (any word) ; the others must identify it.*

NB A student might pronounce 'wet' and mean 'vet'; the rest of the group may also identify it as 'vet', but it is important to correct for accuracy on these occasions.

In a larger group (12 students):

- *Students are paired, with one list between them*
- *They take it in turns to call out a word from the list, and their partner has to identify it*
- *Alternatively, they can have half a list each, so one vowel sound each (list A and list B), and they don't look at each other's list*
- *The first student calls out a word from her half (list A), and her partner has to find a word which sounds very similar from list B*

Component Skills

The exercises described above are intended to assist learners in the recognition of symbols representing sounds, introduce common letter combinations, and develop the use of phonic strategies to decode unfamiliar words, as required under the ESOL National Curriculum. Vowel lists help to focus on a particular vowel sound and link it to a letter combination which is frequently used to represent it. At the same time, the exercise draws on the learners' knowledge of consonant sounds and can be used to practise pronunciation of these. Lists should be kept simple, using words with regular phonic representation.

Syllables

An English syllable can be extremely complex with many different consonant sounds clustered around a vowel. Consider the following single syllable words :

1 strengths

2 prompts

3 twelfths

They are each composed of 7 distinct sounds, 6 of them consonants. Students may be able to pronounce each individual sound while finding it impossible to join them together in one syllable. They need practice in order to learn how to get their tongues around difficult combinations of consonants.

Ideally, the students will be able to produce the individual consonant sounds before attempting more difficult clusters. However, in the real world very common and essential words can contain clusters, and students may ask for help with these long before the teacher had planned to introduce them. For example, a student who lives in Brickwall Lane and is unable to

pronounce it clearly will face continual difficulties as a result. Residents of Uxbridge have a difficult consonant cluster to deal with on a daily basis!

In such a situation it may be possible to assist very simply and give great and lasting benefit. The obvious thing to do is to break the first word down into 2 syllables: brick / wall. But is that the way an English speaker would pronounce Brickwall? A final 'k' sound is rarely pronounced and exploded fully, and would be hard to follow with a 'w' if it were. On the other hand 'kw' is not usually difficult to pronounce at the beginning of a word - eg 'quick' - in fact any word beginning 'qu' is likely to make the sound 'kw'. Break the word 'Brickwall' down into 2 syllables : Bri / kwall. It will be much easier to say, and will sound closer to the pronunciation of a native speaker. First check the student's ability to pronounce 'quality' and 'quarter', then try 'kwall' and finally 'Brickwall'.

It can be fun to end a session with a difficult syllable, such as one of the three examples already mentioned (strengths, prompts, twelfths).

1 strengths

- Start with an easy sound: ten : Everyone can say that, but check that the 't' sounds English, made with the tongue position well back, not touching the teeth.
- Proceed to 'teng', then introduce the 'r' : 'teng / treng / teng / treng'.
- If the 'r' is presenting problems, go to a familiar word like 'rang', and then add the 't' : 'trang'
- It may be useful at this point to get them to practise the sound 'treng' before adding any more sounds, so that they are confident with the heart of the word and will focus on it whenever they attempt the full word. This can be done by varying the tone of voice up and down : 'treng, treng, treng' as if singing, or by stressing every alternate articulation of the sound to make something like the sound of a train – this can go faster or slower. Or the sound of a phone ringing 'treng treng, treng treng' etc.
- Some students will find the 'str' cluster particularly difficult, others will find it easy, depending on their native tongue. They should be able to pronounce an 's' on its own, so make them say the two sounds separately: 's / treng' and gradually increase the speed of the repetitions until they form 'streng'
- The above steps can be eliminated if the students are confident with the word 'strong'.
- The greatest difficulty will be adding the final 'th'. First practise 'th' alone, insisting on correct tongue position (touching upper front teeth) and blowing air between teeth and tip of tongue. The tongue can naturally slide backwards at the same time.
- Pronounce the two sounds separately : 'streng / th' and gradually increase the speed of the repetitions until they form 'strength'

2 prompts

* (see note below) The sound of an English 'r' is very unusual, and quite different from the 'r' sounds made by our European neighbours. It is unlikely that non-European students will have the sound in their native language either. However, it is not a difficult sound to make on its own. Just say a very long 'aaah' and close the lower jaw until the bottom of the lip touches the top front teeth. The tongue must be held loose in the mouth, the front of the tongue touching neither the top nor the bottom of the mouth, but curling upwards and well away from the

teeth. While continuing to make the 'aaah' sound, try scratching the inside of the lower lip with the top teeth to develop correct positioning.

Try repeating the word 'very' to feel the difference between a 'v' and an 'r'. In a 'v' the top teeth make contact with the visible part of the bottom lip, and the contact is firm; strong vibration is felt. The 'r' is made by sliding the teeth down the inside of the lip and the skin below it; the natural position of the mouth when it is closed with the teeth clenched shut.

* (Teachers from various parts of Great Britain and America may find that they make quite a different 'r' sound in their natural speech. They should analyse the way they make the sound, and teach it that way. The aim of these exercises is to encourage the students to make acceptable sounds for the English language so that they can be easily understood by other speakers of English.)

Practice exercise: growling! Say 'grrr' like an angry dog. This produces the perfect 'gr' cluster for words like 'great', 'grow', 'green', 'group', 'grand' etc. Vary the sound to 'brrr' (it's very cold!) and you have the correct sound for 'bright', 'brand', 'bring', 'broom' etc. For the word 'prompts' we are aiming for a sound like 'brrr' and made in exactly the same position but with the addition of a slight explosion or puff of air. If students experience difficulty with the 'p' sound it should be practised separately by making silent puffs after tightly closing the lips.

In the word 'prompts' the sound 'p' occurs in two different positions, and will need two sets of practice. For the second 'p' make silent puffs, then develop into 'omp,p,p'. Then make silent puffs followed by silent 't' sounds, which also require a puff, like a tut tut tutting in a whisper. Add the sound to the previous exercise: 'omp,t omp,t' to form the word 'prompt'. However, the final 's' in 'prompts' should be practised with the 't' as one sound 'ts' by forming the 's' position first, then developing it to 'ts', as the 't' is not exploded when followed by 's'.

3 twelfths

The English sound 'w' presents particular problems for speakers of a variety of languages. Most people can say 'oo' with no problem. Follow 'oo' immediately with 'ee' and the 'w' appears in the middle. In this way the word 'we' can be taught, then developed to produce 'well'.

The first part of 'twelfths' is quite a simple matter; the complications are connected with the consonant cluster at the end. Each of the 3 sounds needs to be produced separately: 'f' 'th' 's'. It is then a very good pronunciation exercise to join them together. Tongue, teeth and lips all need to be used, with sliding movement between the sounds. Exercising the speech organs in this way is of lasting benefit, improving the students' ability to produce English sounds accurately.

Teaching Aids

Go to [Consonant Clusters](#) in 'Words, Pictures, Poems' to find a list of words containing all the consonant clusters commonly found in English. Some are more complicated than others, but the most difficult combinations of sounds for each group of students will be determined by their native tongue. The list is not intended to be taught in one lesson, but a few words at a time can be used to diagnose problem combinations for the group. Individual words can then be worked on slowly and carefully, as described above.

Connected Speech

In 'Word Lists' there is also a list of [Tongue Twisters](#), intended for fun, not punishment! Again, some will be more difficult than others for each group. Here are some suggestions for use :

- *Start with sounds that do not pose a particular problem – they will be challenging enough to begin with.*
- *If the group is small (6 students) go round the group with one student saying each word, and increase the speed with each repetition.*
- *With a larger group (12 students) put them in pairs, and they can say one word each, alternating who says the first word with each repetition.*
- *Let them become familiar with the whole phrase, and confident enough to say each of the words in it one at a time, then they can try it all in one go.*
- *Encourage them to go faster and faster, but insist on clarity. The exercise is not beneficial if the final production of the sounds is not clear.*

The matter of 'Brickwall Lane' (see [Syllables](#)) has demonstrated that speech is not always connected in the way that our knowledge of vocabulary and grammar would suggest. There are some points which should be highlighted when appropriate, for example when a pronunciation problem occurs as a result of connections within or between words.

Elision

Elision, or the disappearance of sounds, is widely used in English speech, for example in shortened forms like *he's, I've, aren't* etc. It is essential that students recognise the shortened forms. It is quite common now for non-standard shortened forms to be found, even in writing (Fish 'n' Chips, Li'l Ol' Lady), especially on signs and publicity.

Strong and weak syllables

Strong and weak syllables are what give the English language its rhythm, and they are critical to the comprehension of native speakers. If a learner does not stress the correct syllables, it is unlikely that he will be understood.

Consider where the strongest points of emphasis are in the following common phrases:

It's a quarter to two.

She's older than me.

They're black and white photos.

I've got some tomatoes

How are the underlined words pronounced? They are examples of weak syllables in which the vowel sound is pronounced [ə], the same as the final sound in the word 'quarter' and the first vowel sound in the word 'tomato'.

Additional Sounds

While we soften most unstressed syllables in English, we also strengthen or add extra sounds to assist with pronunciation. Of course, the indefinite article before vowel sounds requires the addition of 'n' (*an* apple), but only if the vowel is pronounced as a vowel (*not* 'an university', for example). We also apply this to initials and letter names if they start with a vowel sound (*an* MP). The definite article is also strengthened before vowel sounds; although the spelling remains unaltered, *the* changes its sound to 'thee' before a vowel (*the* man / *the* other man).

Extra sounds slip into our speech to assist with pronunciation when two vowel sounds are together. Between 'the_ other', a 'y' sound [j] occurs in normal speech, causing some confusion for non-native listeners. Similarly, between 'to_ own', a 'w' appears, and between 'banana_ice' there's the sound of an extra 'r'. These pronunciation points should be explained to students at an appropriate time.

Intonation

Shades of feeling and opinion are conveyed by the speaker through intonation, and students should be able to produce rising tones and falling tones for a specific purpose.

Common intonation patterns

1. Rising intonation for politeness
I'm sorry to bother you... I'm afraid he's no longer with us. It's delicious.
2. Rising intonation for offers and invitations
Let me help. I can look after them for you. Come for lunch!
3. Rising intonation to show the narrative or list continues
First we went to Oxford, then Bath... There were giraffes, elephants, lions, tigers..
4. Rising intonation to elicit understanding or more information
Have you met Prof Smith? No... So, you've sent off the form... And then...?
5. Rising intonation for questions in general, particularly yes/no
Can you see him? Did it hurt? Will you go? Should I ask?
6. Falling intonation is often found with 'wh' questions
Why didn't you tell me? Which one did he take? When is he coming?
7. Falling intonation on complete definite statement
There's nothing more to be said. Are you sure? I'm certain. She'll never pass. Never.
8. Rise-fall: Falling from high tone for surprise, to very low for annoyance, irritation
*I beat him! They all passed! They'll be here on Friday. Friday!?!
I should never have trusted him. Typical! Never again. Why should I?*
9. Rise-fall: Alternative questions: voice rises on the first alternative, falls on the last
Would you like coffee, or tea? Is it blue, or green? Should I turn left, or right?
10. Fall-rise: Falling intonation in first part, rising in second
We went swimming, and met Tim. You said you liked it, didn't you?
11. Fall-rise: uncertainty, doubt
I suppose it's possible.. I'm not really sure.. You could be right..

Intonation exercise

Try expressing each of the attitudes listed in each of the five groups below. Choose phrases from the accompanying list and say them with different intonation to express one of the attitudes.

1 *Being difficult* *Impatient* *Polite* *Angry* *Doubtful*

I might go.
You're too late.
I was sitting there.
Are you sure?
No, it's not.
It's a bit cold.

2 *Surprised* *Sarcastic* *Feeling bored* *Uncertain* *Stating the obvious*

He's very tidy.
Really.
So it is.
It's very old.
I've been here before.

3 *Embarrassed* *Proud* *Irritated* *Insistent* *Pleading*

I need a break.
Yes, I did.
It was my mother.
Don't mention it.
Let me go.
She can't wait.

4 *Trying to please* *Acting superior* *Encouraging* *Miserable*

Have another.
I'll carry it.
It's possible.
Not any more.
You can.
Allow me.

5 *Happy* *Unfinished* *Expecting a reply* *Making a list* *Impressed*

He was on his way to work...
I replied immediately...
So you met him on time...
I'll take this one...
We'll buy the crisps and biscuits...
You should do it again...
He took me to meet his mother...

The Intonation Exercise above uses very basic vocabulary for the set phrases which the students are expected to reproduce using different intonation patterns. Some of the vocabulary used for

defining attitude, or the emotional content requiring the various intonation patterns, would normally be considered for advanced learners. However, they are common human responses and such vocabulary is likely to be introduced in lessons about expressing feelings and opinions. This is a communication skill required at Entry Level 1 in the ESOL National Curriculum. Sessions dealing with feelings and opinions can easily incorporate intonation practice, as described in the Intonation Exercise, or intonation practice can be used to introduce the theme of feelings and opinions.

Each group in the exercise requires 4 or 5 different 'attitudes'. These can be :

- explained by the teacher
- demonstrated by the teacher, using pictures and body language
- explained by a student in the group, who may translate it for the rest
- looked up in a bilingual dictionary

Pictures of famous people, role models or cartoon characters who display the particular attitude are very useful, but students must share an understanding of precisely which attitude is represented by the picture. Very few famous English people are known well enough by the target group to be used in this way; cartoon characters may work better, as Pokemon characters tend to be more recognisable than politicians! Pictures of people who are not famous but who are clearly showing a certain attitude can be used instead. These can be shown at the time the 'attitude' vocabulary is taught, and students can match the picture with the word.



Pictures, drawings, cartoons, etc, like those above can generate a lot of interest and worthwhile discussion as students try to find the best word to describe the 4 attitudes shown. 4 key words can then be taught, for example, 'uncertain' 'miserable' 'angry' 'trying to please', if those are the 4 attitudes to be used in the intonation exercise. Even if the picture looks more like 'happy' than 'trying to please', the teacher can explain that the attitude required for the exercise is 'trying to please' and that this picture is representing that attitude. Key 'attitude' words should be translated and checked in a dictionary if possible, as it is very difficult to be sure that everyone has understood the same thing where attitudes are concerned. More pictures depicting emotions can be found in 'Words, Pictures, Poems' under [Intonation](#).

The 4 key 'attitude' words can be presented in written form, on flash cards for example, and the students can match the correct written card to each picture. It is essential that they can:

- a understand the word
- b match the word to the picture

c recognise the word when the teacher calls it out

Then the exercise can begin, with the teacher demonstrating how to say the word 'really', for example, in the 4 different ways: uncertain, miserable, angry and trying to please. Students can listen and repeat all 4, several times; then one picture can be held up to elicit the word 'really' spoken with the attitude shown in that picture; this can be repeated with individuals trying one at a time to produce the right intonation for the picture; and eventually individuals can call out 'really' for the rest of the group to identify which picture shows the attitude conveyed with that tone of voice.

Body Language

The importance of body language should not be underestimated, especially when it comes to conveying ideas of emotion and opinion. While it is not strictly a language skill and might not merit a place in a section on Speech Production, it is undoubtedly a communication skill which can improve a student's chances of being understood. In any group of people some are better communicators than others, and generally speaking the good communicators use body language to convey their intended meaning. They can do this even in a situation where they have no knowledge at all of the language of the listener. Body language is a powerful tool.

The 4 attitudes - uncertain, miserable, angry, trying to please - can be demonstrated through body language or facial expressions. Students can be asked to show such attitudes themselves, and they can learn from each other. The following common phrases can be practised by all with strong intonation, and the most expressive students can be asked to demonstrate to the others.

- *Do you understand? What's your name?*
- *Can I have coffee, please? Please can you repeat that? (requests)*
- *Sit down. (be my guest) Sit down! (command)*
- *Stop it. Stop it!*
- *(Checking back): Can we meet for lunch on Tuesday? Lunch? Tuesday?*
- *How are you? Fine thanks, and you?*

Stress and Emphasis

Word Stress

English words become incomprehensible if the stress is placed on the wrong syllable. Try saying *important* with the stress at the beginning, and it sounds like *impotent*. Ask for directions to *Ickenham* but stress the middle syllable by mistake and you might be told the way to *Denham* instead. Say *sentence* with the stress at the end and your listener will probably understand *it's intense*.

Students must learn the correct stress with all new vocabulary and it might help them if you tap out the rhythm of longer words with your finger. Bad stress must be corrected just like any other pronunciation error, over-emphasising if necessary until the student shifts the stress to the right position. Additional confusion is caused by word families which have different stressed syllables for the various associated words:

eg *photograph* (noun), *photographic*(adj), *photographer*(noun)
sympathy(noun), *sympathetic*(adj)
fantasy(noun), *fantastic*(adj)
family(noun), *familiar*(adj)

Patterns can be found to assist memory when teaching these word families.

Sentence Stress

Students must be made aware of sentence stress, as it may differ considerably in their own language. Ask them to listen and identify the important words in a sentence:

<i>When does the train leave for Manchester?</i>	<i>When / train / Manchester</i>
<i>My mother gave me this pen for my birthday.</i>	<i>mother / pen / birthday</i>
<i>In fifty years' time all the petrol will be gone.</i>	<i>fifty / time / petrol / gone</i>

Next, give them three key words and ask them to make a sentence; they should put the stress on the key words eg:

need / table / study don't / go / teacher never / see / again

Various sentences can be made for each group of words, so students can use their imagination, as far as their language skills allow:

*I need a **table** to **study** on. Do you **need a table** if you don't **study**?*
***Don't** let me **go** near that **teacher**! I **don't** want you to **go** to see my **teacher**.*
*I'm **never** going to **see** him **again**! I **never** want to **see** those people **again**.*

Rhythm

Strong and weak syllables

As previously mentioned, strong and weak syllables are what give the English language its rhythm, and they are critical to the comprehension of native speakers. If a learner does not stress the correct syllables, it is unlikely that he will be understood.

Consider where the strongest points of emphasis are in the following common phrases:

It's a quarter to two.

She's older than me.

They're black and white photos.

I've got some tomatoes

How are the underlined words pronounced? They are examples of weak syllables in which the vowel sound is pronounced [ə], the same as the final sound in the word 'quarterer' and the first vowel sound in the word 'tomato'.

Rhythm Rhymes

To practise sentence stress and English rhythm patterns, and for a little light relief, students might like to try reading or reciting a simple poem or nursery rhyme. Some rhythmical examples have been produced under [Sentence Stress](#) in 'Words, Pictures, Poems'.