



Improving student pronunciation

Literacy Volunteers Charlottesville/Albemarle

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The basics

- Make sure your student knows this isn't something that happens overnight
- Practice, every lesson
- Repetition: it's not unreasonable to think something will need to be practiced dozens of times to get it locked in.

When to correct

- When the error drastically affects communication
- When the error creates a wrong word, particularly if it creates a potentially embarrassing situation for the student
- When first learning the new word
- When the focus of the lesson is on pronunciation

When NOT to correct

- When correcting would interrupt the flow of pair or group discussions
- When the error is significantly beyond the student's current capabilities
- When the error is engrained (your student is aware of it and correcting it would only add to frustration)
- When correcting the student in front of peers would harm the student's confidence

What to look for

- Mouth positions
- Vowel pronunciation and placement
- Consonant pronunciation
- Stress patterns

Mouth positions

- Where is the sound vibrating?
- How much is the sound vibrating?
- What are your lips doing?
- What is your tongue doing?
- What are your teeth doing?

Vowels

- A vowel is a speech sound that is made without significant constriction of the flow of air from the lungs.
- The tongue can be at various heights in the mouth (e.g., high, mid, or low) and at various positions (front, central, or back).
- The lips can be variously rounded (cf. a long *O* and *E*).

Vowels

Phonemic Symbol ¹	AHD Symbol ²	Examples	Phonemic Symbol	AHD Symbol	Example
/æ/	/ǎ/	can, hat	/ɔ: /	/ô/	caught
/eɪ/	/ā/	cane, bait	/ɔr/	/ôr/	north
/ɛər/	/âr/	air, hare	/ɔɪ/	/oi/	joy, noise
/ɑ: /	/ä/	father	/ʊ/	/oö/	took
/ɑr/	/är/	arm	/ʊər/	/oör/	tour
/ɛ/	/ě/	bet, head	/u: /	/oo/	soon
/i: /	/ē/	meet, beat	/aʊ/	/ou/	out
/ɪər/	/îr/	here	/ʌ/	/ÿ/	cut
/ɪ/	/ĩ/	pit	/ɜr/	/ûr/	word
/aɪ/	/ī/	my, light	/ə/	/ə/	about, the
/ɒ/	/ö/	hot	/ər/	/ər/	butter
/oʊ/	/ō/	no, know	/jʊ: /	/yoō/	view

¹American Heritage Dictionary

²While the IPA symbol for this sound is /j/, I will use the AHD symbol of /y/

Vowel placement

	Front	Middle	Back
Closed	heat /i:/		hoot /u:/
Half closed	hit /i/		hook /ʊ/
	hate /ei/	hum /ʌ/	home /oʊ/
Half opened	head /ɛ/		haunt /ɔ:/
Opened	hat /æ/	the /ə/	hot /ɒ/
	Unrounded		Rounded



Diphthongs

Diphthongs (also called “Sliding” or “Gliding” vowels) are two vowel sounds connected together.

- /aʊ/ as in “brown”
- /oʊ/ as in “know”
- /aɪ/ as in “might”
- /eɪ/ as in “they”
- /ɪə/ as in peel
- /ɔɪ/ as in “boy”
- /eə/ as in “where”
- /ʊə/ as in “pure”

R-colored vowels

These are vowels that are followed by [r], which changed the pronunciation of that vowel.

- /ə/ as in "her"
- /ɑr/ as in "cart"
- /ɔr/ as in "store"
- /ɛr/ as in "air"

Consonants

A speech sound produced by:

- occluding with or without releasing (p, b; t, d; k, g),
- diverting (m, n, ng),
- or obstructing (f, v; s, z, etc.)

the flow of air from the lungs

Consonants

Phonemic Symbol ¹	AHD Symbol ²	Examples	Phonemic Symbol	AHD Symbol	Example
/b/	/b/	boy, cabin	/p/	/p/	pink, hip
/tʃ/	/ch/	cheer, itch, cello	/r/	/r/	rest, far
/d/	/d/	dog, bed	/s/	/s/	sink, mess
/f/	/f/	fill, phone, life	/ʃ/	/sh/	she, special
/g/	/g/	go, log	/t/	/t/	tiny, little
/h/	/h/	his, cohort	/ð/	/th/	the, bathe
/dʒ/	/j/	joy, giant, budge	/θ/	/th/	thin, bath
/k/	/k/	cat, king, lack	/v/	/v/	view, weave
/l/	/l/	long, ill	/w/	/w/	win, when
/m/	/m/	my, team	/j/	/y/	you, mayor
/n/	/n/	no, knife	/z/	/z/	zoo, rise
/ŋ/	/ng/	sing, thing	/ʒ/	/zh/	leisure, beige

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Digraphs

Two consonants written together that make one sound.

- Ch
- Sh
- Th
- Wh
- Ph
- Kn
- Wr
- -ck
- -ss
- -tch

Blends

- Bl

- Br

- Cl

- Cr

- Dr

- Fr

- Fl

- Gl

- Gr

- Pl

- Pr

- Sl

- Sm

- Sp

- St

- Tr

- Scr

- Spl

- Spr

- Str

Stress patterns

- **Stress the first syllable of:**
 - Most two-syllable nouns (examples: CLimate, TAbble)
 - Most two-syllable adjectives (examples: CLEver, SPAcious)
- **Stress the last syllable of:**
 - Most two-syllable verbs (examples: reQUIRE, deCIDE)
- **Exceptions:**
 - hoTEL
 - exTREME
- **Follow these rules when the word is both a noun and a verb**
 - PROgress and proGRESS
 - RECord and reCORD

Stress patterns

- **Stress the second-to-last syllable of:**
 - Words that end in *-ic* (examples: ecSTATIC, geoGRAPHic)
 - Words ending in *-sion* and *-tion* (examples: exTENSion, retriBUtion)
- **Stress the third-from-last syllable of:**
 - Words that end in *-cy*, *-ty*, *-phy* and *-gy* (examples: deMOCracy, unCERTainty, geOGRAPHy, radiOLOGy)
 - Words that end in *-al* (examples: exCEPTional, CRItical)
- **Stress the first syllable in three syllable words ending in –er or –ly**
 - HAP-pi-ly
 - MA-na-ger

Stress patterns

- **Stress the first syllable of compound nouns**
 - FOOTball
 - KEYboard
- **Follow the stress pattern of the second word in compound verbs**
 - air-CONditioned
 - underSTAND
- **Follow the stress pattern of the second word in compound adjectives**
 - old-FAshioned
 - bad-TEMPered

General advice for improving pronunciation

- Slow down
- Listen carefully
- Repeat what you hear
- Practice, practice, practice

Tools for practicing pronunciation

- Minimal pairs
 - bat/bet,
 - sit/set
 - major/mayor
- Record and listen
- Odd one out
 - with vowels: heat/seat/hit
 - with consonants: plays/place/space
- Tongue Twisters



Questions?