



# Pronunciation

LVCA Tutor Retreat / Paige Zelikow

June 10, 2017



# Agenda



- The importance of practicing pronunciation
- Some basic principles for teaching pronunciation
- Assessing pronunciation problem areas
- Tips and activities for teaching sounds, syllable stress, and the “music” of English
- Ways to encourage students to speak more



# What is pronunciation?

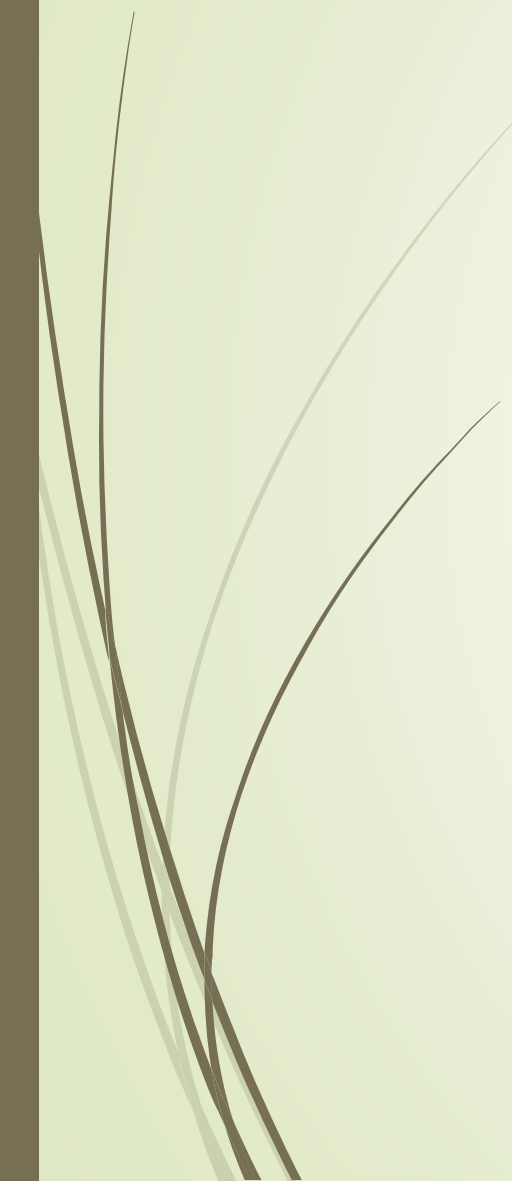
**A way of speaking a word, especially a way that is accepted or generally understood.**

It includes:

- ▶ Segmentals: any discrete unit that can be identified, either physically or auditorily, in the stream of speech. For example, the /b/ sound in “boy” or /l/ sound in “land.”
- ▶ Suprasegmentals: the musical qualities of rhythm, stress, and intonation that carry the sounds along and help to convey emphasis and coherence.




# Why is pronunciation so hard for non-native speakers?

- ▶ Because non-native speakers tend to carry the intonation, sounds, speech patterns, and pronunciation rules from their first language into the second language.
  - ▶ Some research indicates that after around age 12, it will be almost impossible for most people to learn to speak a second language and sound like a native speaker.
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**If improving pronunciation is so hard, why bother incorporating pronunciation practice into our lessons?**



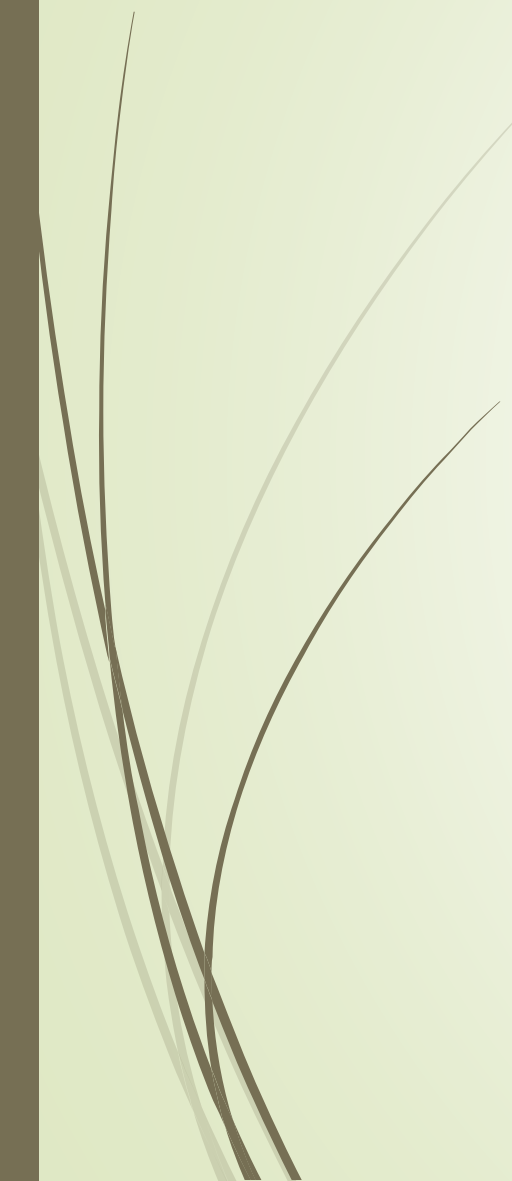



# Why should we incorporate pronunciation instruction into our lessons?

- ▶ *Our pronunciation immediately conveys something about ourselves to the people around us. Second to our outward appearance, our way of speaking creates an impression of who we are, where we are from, perhaps even our level of education.*



# Why should we incorporate pronunciation instruction into our lessons?


- ▶ Many English language learners (ELLs) have very high levels of “classroom” abilities. They can read and write English competently and have a good grasp of English grammar. However, if their pronunciation makes it difficult for others to understand them, their perfectly structured sentences will be of little use in day-to-day interactions.
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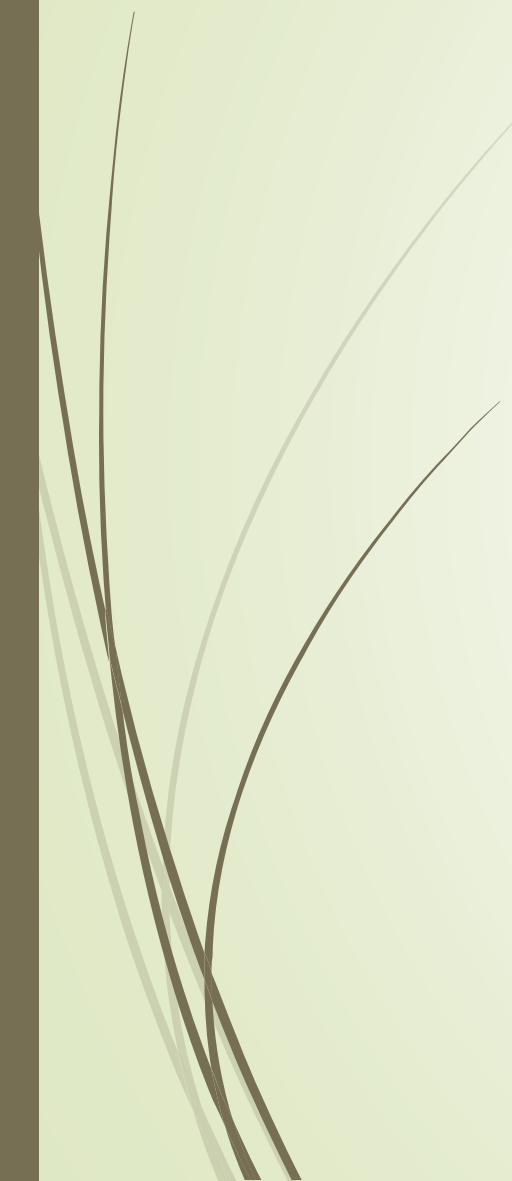
# Why should we incorporate pronunciation instruction into our lessons?


- ▶ It is uncomfortable and embarrassing to have to struggle to make oneself understood and may result in the ELL avoiding using English and becoming isolated and segregated, further impeding successful integration into life in the U.S.



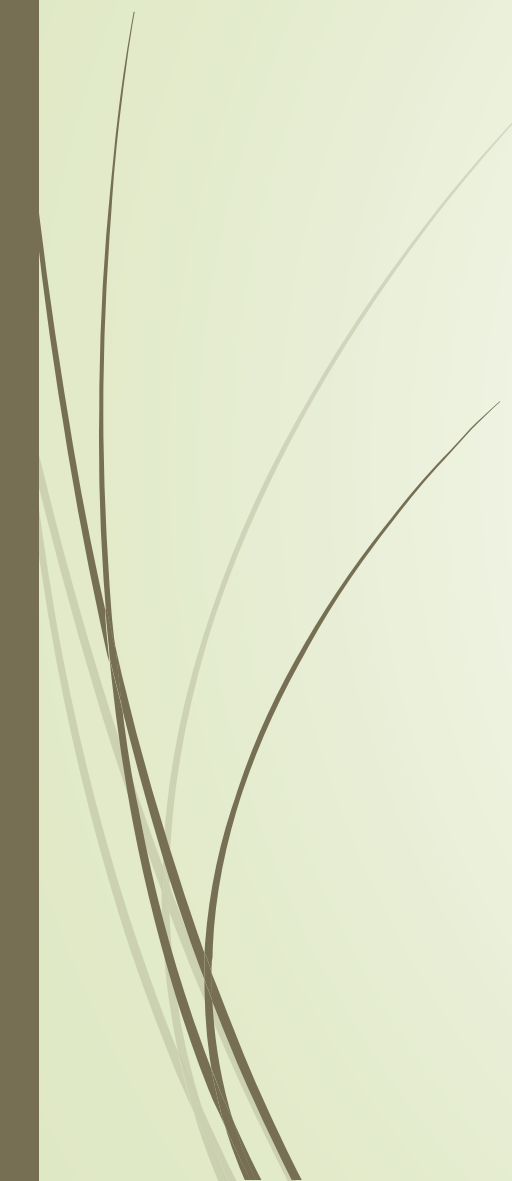



# Why should we incorporate pronunciation instruction into our lessons?

- ▶ We often judge people by the way they speak, and so learners with poor pronunciation may be judged as incompetent, uneducated or lacking in knowledge, even though listeners are only reacting to their pronunciation.
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# Why should we incorporate pronunciation instruction into our lessons?

- ▶ Many adult learners find pronunciation to be one of the most difficult aspects of English to acquire and master. They look to us to help them to gain the skill and confidence they need to improve both their speaking and listening skills so they can successfully function in the U.S.
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# Some Basic Principles for Teaching Pronunciation

- ▶ Assess and understand your student's pronunciation weaknesses.
- ▶ Provide interesting, authentic, relevant materials for studying and improving skills with an emphasis on actually speaking rather than just learning the "rules." Try to incorporate some specific pronunciation practice into each session's lesson.



# Some Basic Principles for Teaching Pronunciation

- Help your ELL understand that communication is a two-way street. No one expects him/her to speak with native fluency but the goal should be comfortable intelligibility.
- Help your student understand that improving pronunciation takes an enormous amount of practice, especially in the early stages. It is not unreasonable for learners to repeat a particular phrase or sentence twenty times or more before being really comfortable with it. Assure your student that this is part of the process and not a personal shortcoming or inability to learn on his/her part.
- **And, finally, practice, practice, practice and patience, patience, patience!**




# Assessing Your Student's Pronunciation Problem Areas

Each student is different. So, as tutors, we need to identify where our student's pronunciation weaknesses lie. For some, it may be producing the "th" sound (ting rather than thing). For others, distinguishing between short and long vowels: saying "sheep" instead of "ship".

Here are common problem areas made by speakers of different languages:

- ▶ Spanish speakers: sounds "j", "y", and "th",
- ▶ Chinese speakers: sounds "r", "i", "ld" and the final "l",
- ▶ Korean speakers: sounds "p" and "f", "r" and "l" and "th",
- ▶ Japanese speakers: sounds "v" and "b", "r" and "l" and "th",
- ▶ Russian speakers: "h", "th" and "r"
- ▶ Arabic speakers: "p"



# Assessing Your Student's Pronunciation Problem Areas

## Techniques for assessing your student:

- ▶ Listen. After even one session with your ELL, you will most likely pick up on specific, recurring patterns of incorrect pronunciation. Have your student read a short passage from something appropriate to his/her level. Jot notes to yourself so that you will be able to begin finding and gathering practice and drill materials that are specific to your student's needs.
- ▶ Use a test: Listening and speaking tests are included in Clear Speech.
- ▶ Have your student record herself reading a short passage. This can help with assessing a student's pronunciation problems and serve as a benchmark for measuring improvement over time.

**Once you have identified your student's recurring problem areas, you are then able to gather materials and develop strategies to give your student lots of ongoing practice and repetition in those areas.**



# The Basics: Vowels

- ▶ Make sure your student understands that, in English, we have five vowel letters: A, E, I, O, U. However, these vowels and combinations of vowels make many more sounds. Understandably, this can be very challenging for your student.
- ▶ **Activity:** Practice pairs of words that contrast vowel sounds.
- ▶ **Activity:** Keep a running list of problem sounds. Go back frequently to review. Use words to make sentences and simple dialogues and practice until fluent.



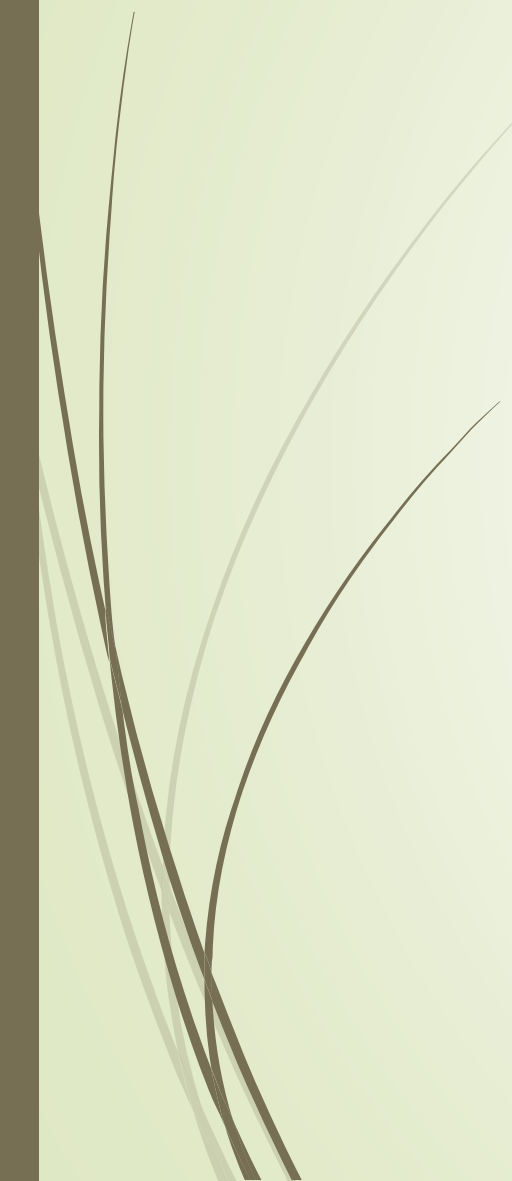
# The Basics: Consonants

- **Activity:** Practice words and sentences that compare and contrast consonants sounds. Ask your student to write sentences using some of these words and practice reading aloud.
- **Activity:** Use diagrams of the mouth and tongue such as the ones presented in Clear Speech. A mirror may also be helpful.
- **Activity:** Minimal pairs are words that have one phonological element that is different. For example, bit/bat or math/path. Practicing minimal pairs can help students localize the often minute differences in pronunciation between one word and another.





# Identifying Syllables and Syllable Stress



Make sure that your ELL understands that the basic unit of English words and rhythm is the syllable. Though this seems very obvious to us, it is sometimes difficult for students to hear individual syllables, especially when people speak in a natural, rapid manner.



# Identifying Syllables and Syllable Stress

- ▶ **Activity:** Have students “tap out” syllables. For example, read a list of words such as:

fun      radish      continue      terrifying

Then have the student repeat the words as you read each one individually. As the student repeats each word, he/she should use fingers to tap out each syllable. (You can use almost any printed material of an appropriate level for this exercise. Just choose a short sentence or two and go through each word while the student repeats and taps out the syllables.)



# Identifying Syllables and Syllable Stress

- ▶ **Activity:** Give the student a category such as food or countries or cities. Ask your student to think of as many words as she can that have one, two, three and four syllables. For example, using the food category: Fish, melon, potato, avocado. Countries: Spain, Jordan, Portugal, Bulgaria, Lithuania.



# Identifying Syllables and Syllable Stress

**Stressed syllables:** Students need to understand that:

- ▶ In every English word of more than one syllable, one syllable is stressed the most.
- ▶ The vowel in the stressed syllable is extra long.



# Identifying Syllables and Syllable Stress

Mistakes in word stress are a common cause of misunderstanding. Stressing the wrong syllable in a word can make the word very difficult to hear and understand.

- ▶ Give the teacher a **message**.
- ▶ Give the teacher a **massage**.
  
- ▶ Are you a permanent **resident**?
- ▶ "I carried the b'tell to the hottle."
- ▶ "They will desert the desert by tomorrow."

# Identifying Syllables and Syllable Stress

- ▶ **Activity:** Use a sturdy rubber band and have your student stretch it as he/she says the stressed and lengthened vowel sound in a word.

- ▶ For example:

Ba **na** na

a **maze**

con **fuse**

e **lec** tric

**pun** ish

# Identifying Syllables and Syllable Stress

- ▶ **Activity:** Because of their pronounced rhythmic pattern, limericks can be a way of helping students hear and understand stressed syllables. For example:

There was an Old Man in a tree,  
Who was horribly bored by a Bee;  
When they said, 'Does it buzz?'  
He replied, 'Yes, it does!'  
'It's a regular brute of a Bee!'

- Edward Lear

# Identifying Syllables and Syllable Stress

- ▶ Activity: Students can use stress patterns as another way to organize and sort their vocabulary. For example, they can create sections in a notebook for words with the same patterns:
  - ▶ Oo (letter, parent, member)
  - ▶ oO (forgive, amount, success)
- Or,
- ▶ Ooo (animal, exercise, family)
  - ▶ oOo (computer, December, example)





# Identifying Syllables and Syllable Stress

- ▶ A personalized way to hear the importance of stress is by using people's names as examples.
- ▶ How many parts/syllables are there in this name?
- ▶ Which is the strongest?
- ▶ Is it **Emma** or Emma?
- ▶ For example, Barack Obama / Hillary Clinton / Donald Trump
- ▶ Or, use your student's name and your name.

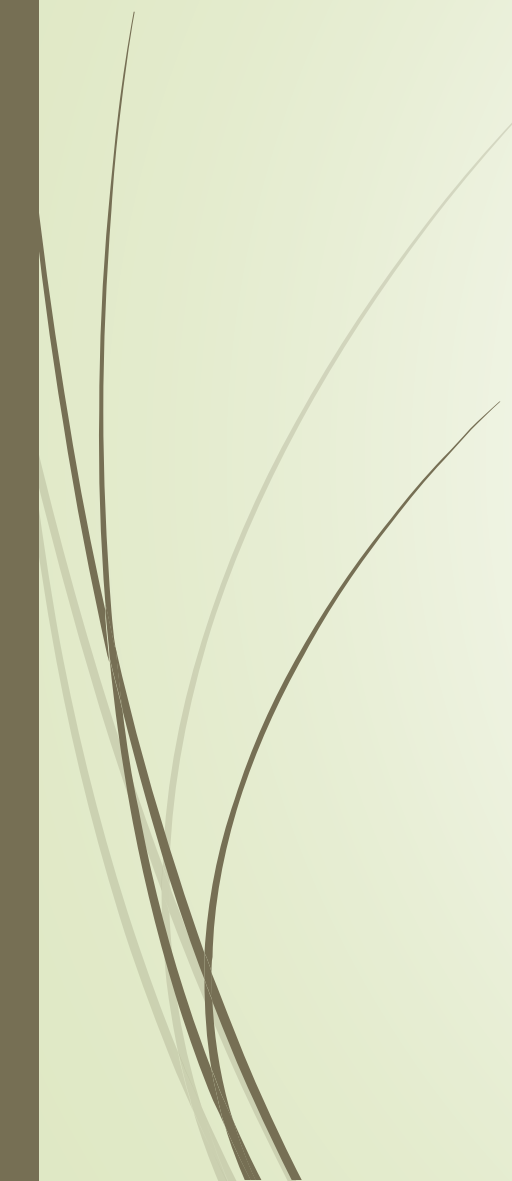


# The Music of English / The Importance of Rhythm, Stress, Intonation

- ▶ Learning a new language requires us to learn, internalize, and reproduce not only a host of new sounds and words but also a new and different pattern of rhythm and intonation. At the same time, we must set aside some of the patterns of speech in our native language that we learned from birth.




# The Music of English / The Importance of Rhythm, Stress, Intonation

- ▶ It is very important that ELLs recognize that patterns of rhythm, stress and intonation are integral parts of the English language and that being able to reproduce these patterns in their own speech is crucial if they wish to be understood when speaking English.
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# The Music of English / The Importance of Rhythm, Stress, Intonation

- ▶ In English sentences, there are **focus** words that are stressed or emphasized. Focus words are usually content words. Content words are words that carry the most information in a sentence. For example, nouns, main verbs, adverbs, adjectives and questions words are content words.



# The Music of English / The Importance of Rhythm, Stress, Intonation

- ▶ **Activity:** Every time you meet with your student, prepare a short dialogue. Here are three examples:

Did Richard go to the bank?

No, he went to the supermarket and the library.


I can't find my car keys.

Oh, I know where they are. You left them on the table.

Do you know the teacher's phone number?

Yes, it's 434-555-1212.

- ▶ Model and then have your student repeat until he/she is approximating the correct English speech patterns. Keep these dialogues in a notebook and practice the new one along with a couple from past every time you meet.



# The Music of English / The Importance of Rhythm, Stress, Intonation

**Activity:** Make up some phrases that English speakers might use in everyday, casual conversation. Then, work with your student to notate the stress patterns within the sentence. For example:

- ▶ You'll have to wait until you are old enough.
- ▶ I'd love to go to the **party** on Thursday but I have to work.



# Thought Groups and Pauses

In addition to emphasizing certain words, English speakers help their listeners to understand them by pausing between thought groups. Each thought group contains a focus word. Here is an example:

- ▶ We **make** our speech **easier** to understand/ by **organizing** what we **say** into **smaller** pieces/ called **thought groups**/ and **stressing** certain **words** with more **emphasis**. // These **thought** groups are like short **songs**/ **each** with a **melody** and a **focus** word.// **Signal** the **end** of a **thought** group by **changing** the **pitch**/ and **pausing**.// **Speakers** with more **melody**, /**emphasis**/ and **pauses** are **easier** to understand.



# Thought Groups and Pauses

- ▶ **Activity:** Take a short paragraph from the daily newspaper. Read it aloud and then have your student read it. Using underlining to designate emphasis and slashes to indicate pauses, notate the passage as in the example above.





# Thought Groups and Pauses

► **Activity:** Use math problems to illustrate the importance of pauses. For example:

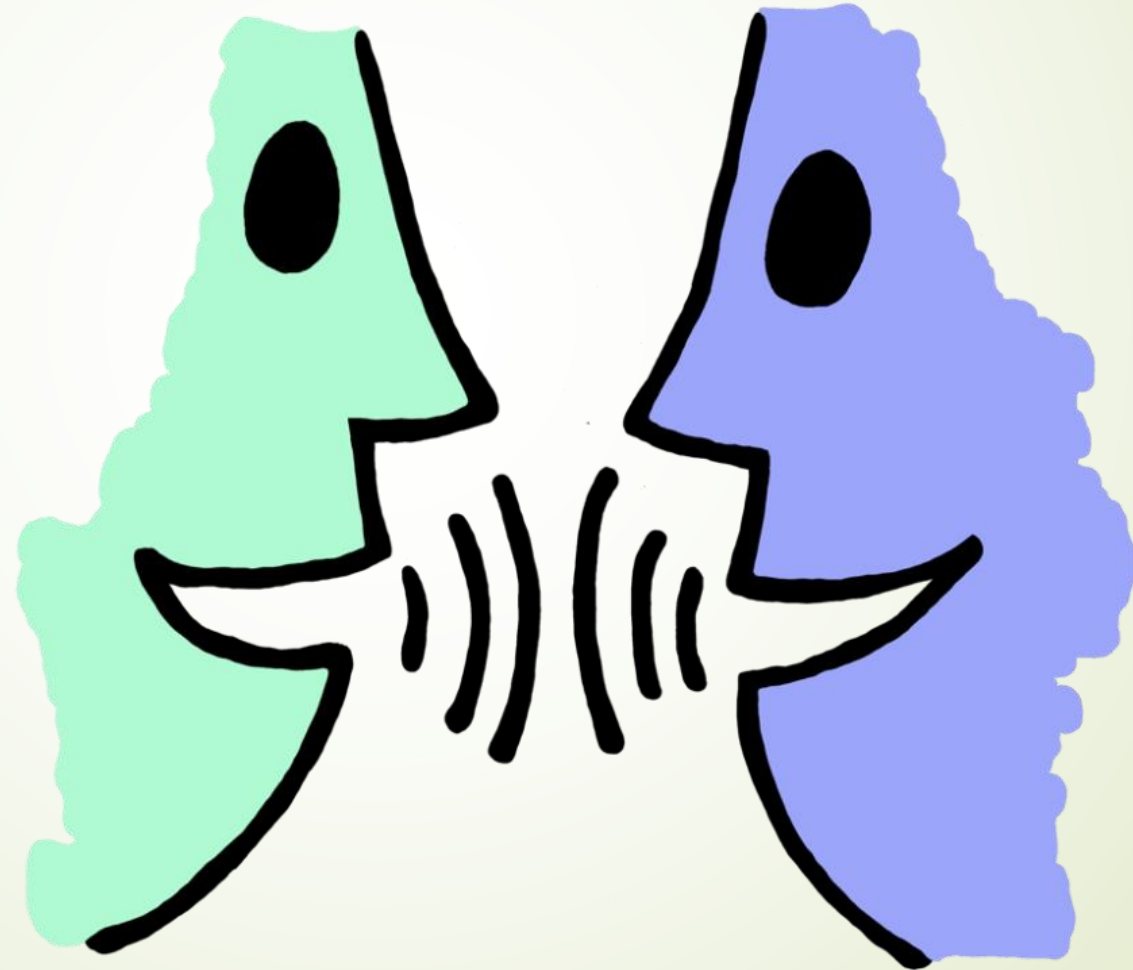
►  $(4 \times 4) + 2 = \text{what?}$

$(2 \times 2) + 3 = \text{what?}$

►  $4 \times (4 + 2) = \text{what?}$

$2 \times (2 + 3) = \text{what?}$

# Strategies for Encouraging Students to Speak Outside Tutoring Sessions





# Helpful Pronunciation Resources

- ▶ Gilbert, Judy. Clear Speech: Pronunciation and Listening Comprehension in North American English: Student's Book. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- ▶ **Rachel's English** : <http://www.rachelsenglish.com> - excellent videos demonstrating pronunciation, sounds in American English, and mouth positions. Useful for higher-level students with computer access.
- ▶ **Sounds of English:** <https://www.soundsofenglish.org/lessonsactivities> - some ideas here for pronunciation lessons and activities.
- ▶ **Voice of America Let's Learn English:** <https://learningenglish.voanews.com/z/4729/> videos and transcripts showing lives of Americans with instruction in speaking, vocabulary and writing.