

Pronunciation activities

Practical activities to help students with English pronunciation.

Rhyming pair game

Kate Joyce, British Council

This activity is a pronunciation and memory game. It works best if you split the class into small groups. You will need to produce a set of cards for each group with one word on each card. The sets of cards should be made up of lots of rhyming pairs of words. For example:

- **house, mouse**
- **die, cry**
- **cook, book**
- **wheat, sheet**

(Annexe pairs.pdf)

Procedure

- Ask each group to place all of their cards face down on the table.
- Students must take it in turns to turn over two cards. They must say the two words out loud to see if they rhyme. If the two cards rhyme, they can keep them.
- When there are no cards left on the table, each student counts how many cards they have to see who is the winner.
- For this activity students need to recognise that some words have a similar pronunciation even though the spelling is very different. For higher levels, include lots of difficult pairs of words. For example:
 - **town, noun**
 - **turn, earn**
 - **though, low**
 - **square, air**
 - **paw, store**
 - **some, thumb**
 - **lake, break**
- You can also play this game with homophone pairs instead of rhyming pairs. Begin by explaining what a homophone is. You can give examples in the students' own language and in English, emphasising that the words have the same sound, but not the same spelling or meaning. For example:
 - **some, sum**
 - **threw, through**
 - **so, sew**
 - **pair, pear**
 - **right, write**
 - **hare, hair**

The tongue twister game

Kate Joyce, British Council

All levels and ages enjoy tongue twisters. They work well as a warm-up to get students speaking, and they help students to practise pronouncing difficult sounds in English.

Procedure

Write some English tongue twisters on the board or on pieces of paper to distribute to students. Ask them to read the tongue twisters aloud. Then faster. Then three times in a row. Here are some examples:

- ***She sells sea shells on the sea shore***
 - ***A proper copper coffee pot***
 - ***Around the rugged rocks the ragged rascal ran***
 - ***Red lorry, yellow lorry, red lorry, yellow lorry***
 - ***A big black bug bit a big black bear***
 - ***Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?***
- Ask the students if they have any tongue twisters in their L1. Have a go at saying them yourself. This usually causes a good laugh, and makes the activity more two-way and interactive.
 - Now ask the students to have a go at creating their own tongue twisters. This activity is a variation of the famous 'Consequences' game. Write the following questions on the board:
 1. Write your first name
 2. What did she/he do?
 3. Where?
 4. When?
 5. Why? Because...
- Now give students the following instructions:
 - Get into teams of about 5 people
 - On a piece of blank paper write your answer to question 1.
 - Pass the paper to the person on your right. Write an answer to question 2 on the paper you have just received. Your answer must begin with the first sound in the person's name (e.g. Bob - bought a bike)
 - Pass the paper on again and write an answer to question 3 again using the sound at the beginning of the name.
 - Continue until all the questions have been answered.
 - Pass the paper back to the person who started with it. Read all of the tongue twisters aloud.
 - It might help if you give the students some examples before they begin the exercise:
 - ***Bob bought a bike in Bali on his birthday because he was bored***
 - ***Susan sang a song at the seaside on the 6th of September because she saw some sunshine***

- ***Laura laughed in the laundrette at lunchtime because she lost her laundry***

Homophones dictation

Shaun Dowling, Teacher trainer, Cultura Inglesa, Brasilia

Homophones can be one of the reasons students spell or hear something incorrectly. By raising learners' awareness of these types of words in an open and fun manner, teachers can help learners understand why they have difficulty with a particular listening activity or even with spelling a word wrongly. This materials light activity needs little preparation and allows students to notice these problems.

Procedure

- Choose from 8 to 10 homophones to dictate.
 - Tell your students you are going to say about 10 words and for them to write them down.
 - Ask students to stay silent while you dictate and not to check with a partner.
 - Dictate each word clearly and allow students time to write
- Here are the 10 I usually choose with their homophone in brackets

band (banned)	I'll (aisle, isle)
nose (knows)	right (write)
there (their, they're)	sun (son)
past (passed)	cell (sell)
flu (flew)	knot (not)

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- In pairs, have students check what they have written down. As students check the write the words (not in brackets) up on the board.
- After the pairs have finished they may see a difference in their lists. Ask the whole group if they have written down the same as the list on the board. Note that many students may feel they have written down the wrong words if their own words are different from the list on the board.
- Now as you write the second similar sounding word (these are the homophones in brackets), ask students if their list was similar to these other words. Some discussion may take place here as students laugh and smile about what they have written, so ask students if they can ask you what is the difference between the two words. They should say the spelling and also the meaning.
- Now elicit from students the similarities of the words. If they disagree that the sounds are not the same then it is a good idea to drill the words for students to hear and ask them if the homophones sound different.
- Now elicit again what differences there are between the words. You can write these differences and similarities on the board for clarity.
- Now introduce the word 'homophone' and see if students know of any other English homophones.

Homophone game

Shaun Dowling, Teacher trainer, Cultura Inglesa, Brasilia

This game is a natural follow on from the [Homophone dictation](#) and can be used to help the students practise and remember homophones.

Procedure

- Ask 3 volunteers to sit in a chair facing the board (about 2 to 3 meters away is fine). Each should have a piece of chalk or marker.
- Then tell learners they are going to run up to the board and write two versions of the homophone from the word you read out. The one who is the slowest stays seated and the other two can sit back in their original places.
- Read out any homophone you feel will be easy for the first 3 participants, for example **'one / won'**.
- The students should run up and write **'one'** and **'won'**. The slowest sits back down and the quickest go back to their places. Now 2 other people should come up and the game is repeated.

Note: The game is a competition and should be played in a light-hearted spirit. You don't really want one person losing all of the time so I like to cheat and show the student who is always losing the word so they have a chance of winning.

This game also helps to highlight some sounds which may be particularly difficult for students to hear and write, for example my learners have difficulty when I say the homophone *'heel/heal'* / **hi:l**/ and tend to write *'hill'* / **hil**/ or I may say **'there'** and they write **'dare'**

Apart from the homophones mentioned in the dictation activity. Here is a further list of homophones I have found particularly useful with my intermediate students.

read / red	steel / steal	tour / tore	rose / rows
weather / whether	mist / missed	hi / high	cereal / serial
scent / cent / sent	which / witch	dye / die	Board / bored
not / knot	site / sight/	higher / hire	mind / mined
sawed / sword	would / wood	break / brake	tire / tyre
heard / herd	some / sum	air / heir	groan / grown
piece / peace	none / nun	allowed / aloud	road / rowed
be / B / bee	root / route/	whale / wail	so / sew / sow
he'll / heal / heel	flower / flour	toes / tows	soul / sole
which / witch	bear / bare	deer / dear	bite / byte
here / hear	bread / bred		

Remembering the phonemes

Paul Kaye, British Council, Syria

Learning and remembering the phonemic symbols can be quite a challenge. Here are some ideas and activities which can help even lower levels with this.

Symbols

This activity focuses on some of the easier symbols and works towards the more difficult vowel sounds. It then helps students to record and remember them.

- Cut up the words and symbols in worksheet A (annexe pron match)
Ask learners to match the individual sounds in the first column to the words in the second column.
- Next ask them to match the words to the complete phonemic script of each word in the third column.
- Give learners worksheet B, their record sheets, and explain that this is a record of the symbols they learn in class. (annexe pron rec)
Discuss the first example given, and emphasise how important it is to underline the correct letters in the words.

Word	Vowel
Van	æ

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- Ask them to find at least three more from the exercise.

Hangman

This is a fun, non-threatening way to finish the class. It relies on you to produce the symbols and the learners to produce the sounds. It helps learners understand that phonetic script is made up of sounds, not letters. It also gives them instant transcription of sounds into symbols.

- Think of a word and the phonetic script for it, for example fish
- Like normal Hangman, write up on the board a series of spaces, but each one representing a sound, i.e. for fish: _____
- Ask learners to give you sounds that they think may be in the word. As they say them, write up the corresponding symbol on the board so they can see it.
- When they give you a sound that is already on the board, point to the corresponding symbol as you correct them.
- Learners continue until they guess the word.

Shadow reading

Lucy Baylis, UK

This activity uses a text from the course book, and involves listening and

pronunciation practice. This task is challenging and motivating and can be used at any level.

Procedure:

1. Teacher reads the text aloud and students follow, marking the text for stress
2. Teacher reads the text a second time and the students mark for linking
3. Individual chunks that show good examples of linking or problematic pronunciation can then be drilled
4. Students practice these aspects of pronunciation by reading the text to themselves before the teacher reads the text aloud again and they listen
5. Then the students read the text with the teacher and they have to start and finish at the same time as the teacher, who reads the text at normal speed

This works well after some exposure to the rules of pronunciation - connected speech, stress and intonation.

C for consonant, V for vowel

Alan Stanton, teacher trainer and materials writer

This is an activity to be carried out before introducing phonemic symbols. It is designed to teach students:

- The difference between sounds and letters
- The difference between vowel sounds and consonant sounds
- The difference between one sound and two sounds

Procedure:

1. Choose ten words that students already know. It is important that they are familiar words.
2. Choose four or five other familiar words as examples.
3. Demonstrate on the board that the word 'cat', for example, can be written CVC, Consonant sound, Vowel sound, Consonant sound. This is a very easy example but there are more difficult ones. 'Caught' is CVC, 'through' is CCV, 'breakfast' is CCVCCVCC, 'brother' is CCVCV, 'hour' is VV, 'carrot' is CVCVC.
4. Ask students to do the same with the ten words you have chosen. You can ask them to do this by looking and writing, by looking, listening (to you) and writing, by listening, saying (to each other) and writing - whichever combination seems valuable and necessary.
5. If you are not sure about a word, check the phonemic symbols in a dictionary.
6. Check students' answers and explain any difficulties.

This activity will clarify many points for students. For example, that 'br' is two sounds but 'th' is one, final 'er' is one and 'rr' is one. It will show that 'h' is sometimes silent and sometimes not and that final 'r' is silent. Note that diphthongs count as one vowel sound. This activity is good preparation for learning phonemes because it focuses on sounds and not letters.

Same sound, different sound

Alan Stanton, teacher trainer and materials writer

This is an activity for more advanced students. It is diagnostic because it reveals the mental picture of English sounds that students have. When you do this, you will feel as if you are looking inside students' brains. You will gain valuable information about their knowledge.

Procedure:

1. Begin by explaining what a homophone is. You can give examples in the students' own language and in English, emphasising that the words have the same sound, but not the same spelling or meaning. Obviously, homophones are written with exactly the same phonemic symbols.
2. Show students a list of pairs of words, some homophones, some not and ask them to identify the homophones. Choose the words according to the level of the students. 'See' and 'sea' are a lot easier than 'sword' and 'soared'. If students think that 'caught' and 'court' are not homophones (they are) or that 'pull' and 'pool' are homophones (they are not), this will give you valuable information about how students are thinking about English phonology.
3. This activity is best done in pairs and groups because students do not necessarily agree and the discussion can be useful.
4. When you check the answers, you can practise minimal pairs with the words that are not homophones. Write up the phonemic symbols to show that they really are different. If the words are in columns headed 1 and 2, you can ask students to say 'One' or 'Two' when you say each word. If they make mistakes, you need to repeat until they improve.
5. If students are doing well, you can reverse the minimal pair exercise and ask individual students to say one word of the pair that you then identify as 1 or 2. Do not proceed to this stage unless students are performing well.
6. An extension to this activity is to ask students, in pairs or groups, to produce pairs of homophones of their own. Ask them to say the pairs. They will also need to spell them or show what they have written (they can write in large letters on cards). If they have produced genuine homophones, write them up in one colour. If they are not homophones write them up in another colour - these are the sounds they need to practise. This activity will give you valuable insights into students' pronunciation problem areas.

The Silent Sounds Game

Liz Oldham

This game is a good way to practice the vowel and diphthong sounds, and it is particularly enjoyed by young learners.

In 'Silent Sounds' you mouth a sound silently and the children guess the sound from the shape of your mouth. Use the game to contrast sounds that are often confused such as /æ/ and /e/ - found in words like 'mat' and 'met'.

Before you start, divide the board into two halves - left and right. On one side write the phonemic symbol for one of the two sounds - for example /æ/, or a word containing the sound - such as cat. On the other side of the board, write the other sound - so for example /e/ or the word 'bed'. Now mouth one of the two sounds, the children should watch your mouth closely and then identify the sound by shouting the correct sound, or - with a small class, by jumping left or right! You can then get the children to work in pairs and test each other in the same way.

Sound pictures

Liz Oldham

Sound Pictures exploit young learners' love of drawing, associating pictures with sounds and spelling. This also helps students who have a visual learning style.

With sounds which are more difficult for your class - for example /eə/, ask the children to make a sound picture. The children draw an object that has this sound such as 'chair'. Inside the picture of the chair they can write other words with the same sound such as hair, wear, scared.

This can be an ongoing activity with posters on the walls which they can add to. It's a useful way of familiarising children with some of the sound / spelling rules.