Handouts for Conversation Partners: Pronunciation

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Why learn the phonetic alphabet?

You can use this packet (and most pronunciation resources) without learning the phonetic alphabet. However, the phonetic alphabet is beneficial when learning English. It offers a consistent way to know how a word is pronounced even if the spelling isn’t phonetic. It is a universal system for understanding pronunciation. For example, if we know the phonetic alphabet, we know that all of these words have the same vowel sound:

Bow   thou    loud    crowd

Here’s how these words would be written in the phonetic alphabet:

bao   dao    laod    kraod

Now it’s easy to tell that the words all have the same diphthong (blended vowel sound).
Here are some useful terms to know when thinking about pronunciation. If you know where to put your tongues, lips, and teeth, it helps distinguish similar sounds.

Linguistics Vocabulary:

Voiced sounds (usually sounds that vibrate in your throat): v, z, dg, dʒ, ð, ʒ

Nasal sounds (vibrate in your nasal cavities): m, n, ŋ

Labio-dental (teeth touch the bottom lip): f, v

Interdental (teeth touching between the teeth): th, ð

Bilabial (both lips move): m, w, b, p

Flap: “t” as in “butter”

Glottal: “uh-oh”

Diphthongs: These are blended vowel sounds, such as: boy, how, loud, day, beer, cure. Diphthongs are long vowel sounds.
Mouth Movements: A Visual Guide
The vowels below progress from high to low:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/ɪ/</td>
<td>as in “beet” and “sleep”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɛ/</td>
<td>(see below; it’s a nearly identical sound in American English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɛ/</td>
<td>as in “bet” and “egg”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɑ/</td>
<td>as in “wait” and “play”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here are some (but not all) vowel and consonant sounds and their corresponding mouth movements:

- u as in “boot” or “blue”
- ah as in “lot” and “otter” and “water”
L as in “love” and “live”  R as in “road” or “harbor”

Source: www.learnenglish.de

θ as in “thin” and “think”  n as in “need” and “bone”

www.speechtalk.com  www.indiana.edu
**L/r Minimal Pairs List**

*Pronunciation Tip:* For the /l/ sound, the tongue goes on the ridge behind your upper teeth. Your lips do not move. For the /r/ sound, your tongue does NOT touch the roof of your mouth. Your lips move inward.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fleas freeze</td>
<td>Blues bruise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glow grow</td>
<td>Dial dire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake rake</td>
<td>Leer rear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lip rip</td>
<td>Loaves roves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loot root</td>
<td>Jelly Jerry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laid raid</td>
<td>Holler horror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyal royal</td>
<td>Splint sprint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 or more syllable words:

- Hologram
- Allergic
- Allegory
- Gregarious
- Folklore

*Tongue Twister:*

*Rory the warrior and Roger the worrier were reared wrongly in a rural brewery.*
/tʃ/, /ʃ/, and /dʒ/ Minimal Pair List

/tʃ/ ch as in “cheese” or “chop”

/ʃ/ sh as in “she’s” or “shop”

/dʒ/ j or g sound as in “gym” or “judge”

**Pronunciation Tip:** If you are having trouble with /ch/, try saying “meet ship” really fast. Eventually, it will sound like “me chip.”

**Intermediate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>/ch/</th>
<th>/ʃ/</th>
<th>/dʒ/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chore</td>
<td>shore</td>
<td>George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chop</td>
<td>shop</td>
<td>job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chip</td>
<td>ship</td>
<td>jip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cheap</td>
<td>sheep</td>
<td>Jeep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>batch</td>
<td>bash</td>
<td>badge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chair</td>
<td>share</td>
<td>Jared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cheer</td>
<td>shear</td>
<td>jeer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leach</td>
<td>leash</td>
<td>ledge (vowel sound is different)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watch</td>
<td>wash</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Advanced**

2 or more syllables: satchel shackle jackal

cherry sherry Jerry

cheese she’s jeez (slang used to show annoyance or surprise; sometimes spelled “geez”)

**studentsuccess.temple.edu**
Difficult Words: In the words below, /ʃ/ acts as /ʃ/ (in other words, the “ch” becomes an “sh” sound)

- Crochet
- Niche
- Pistachio
- Quiche
- Michigan
- Michelle

Ch as /k/:

- Chemistry
- Choir
- Psychology
- Ache
- Chrome

Other Exceptions: Loan words from foreign languages (such as Italian) might not follow typical English pronunciation patterns.

Ch:

- Cello
- Cappuccino

Tongue Twister:

If Charlie chews shoes, should Charlie choose the shoes he chews?
/b/ and /p/ Minimal Pair List

Pronunciation Tip: Hold a piece of paper lightly in front of your face. When you say “b,” the paper should not move. When you say “p,” which is a voiced sound, the paper will move.

Intermediate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Braille</th>
<th>pail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batch</td>
<td>patch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bit</td>
<td>pit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunch</td>
<td>punch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bore</td>
<td>pore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowl</td>
<td>poll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bane</td>
<td>pane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advanced

2 or more syllables:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barbara</th>
<th>Penelope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embezzled</td>
<td>puzzled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able</td>
<td>apple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tongue Twister:

Betty Botter had some butter,
"But," she said, "this butter's bitter.
If I bake this bitter butter,
it would make my batter bitter.
But a bit of better butter--
that would make my batter better.
/θ/, /ð/, and /t/ Minimal Pairs List

/θ/ “th” as in “thin” or “think”

/ð/ “th” as in “there” or “brother”

Pronunciation Tip: The “t” sound requires you to place your tongue on the ridge of your mouth. The “th” sound requires you to put your tongue on the edges of your top front teeth.

Intermediate

Thank  tank
Path  pat
Panther  banter
Three  tree
Thought  taught

Advanced

Voiced and unvoiced “th”:

(əl)though  through
This  thistle
Rather  wrath
Double “t” (hard and soft “t” in English): How does the sound change for double “t”?  
The “t” sound changes to a flap (see page 2) or soft, fast “t.” If you’re having trouble with the flap, try substituting the double “t” for /d/.

Let letter
Bet better
But butter
Set setter

The hard “t” sound usually happens if the “t” is next to a consonant or at the beginning or end of a word

• After
• Actor
• Practice
• Shift
• Can’t
• Take
• Tint
• Lift

The soft “t” sound usually happens if words are linked together or if the /t/ is between vowels, especially in words with “er” endings.

Do you want to come over? Want to → wan’to or wanna

Waiter
Water
Cater
S, Z, and /ʒ/ sounds in English

The English /s/ sound can also occur with /c/ as in words like lice, mice, science, or cyst.

The English “zh” sound is represented in the phonetic alphabet as /ʒ/

**S patterns:**

vowel-consonant-vowel:

Ice, lice, mice, vice

Mace, lace, pace

Before or after unvoiced (non-vibrating) consonants:

Books: /k/ is unvoiced

Spoke: /p/ is unvoiced

At the beginning of most words before a vowel:

Sat, save, set, see, sit, site, sod, soap, soup, sunk

Before “c”:

Science, scissors

Other exceptions:

Receive, deceive, perceive, reception, deception, perception

Center, cycle, civics, cyber

**Z patterns:**

Usually with plurals after a long vowel sound or a diphthong (blended vowel sound):

/ɑɪ/   Ties, lies, cries, surprise, rise, demise

/ɔɪ/    boys, toys, ploys, noise

/iː/     cheese, please, bees, measles

/ʊː/    choose, lose

/oʊ/    goes, pose, chose, close
After voiced (vibrating) consonants (especially vowel-consonant-vowel pattern):  
Judges: /dʒ/ is a voiced sound  
Loves: /v/ is a voiced sound and it follows the vowel-consonant-vowel pattern (O-V-E). So does drives and lives.  

After vowels (except for silent “e”):  
Buys, cries, snows, has, etc.  

/ʒ/ patterns with common suffixes:  
“ual” endings  
Visual, casual (but NOT sensual)  
“ure” endings  
Measure, pleasure, treasure, closure, seizure  
Some “ge” endings (particularly French loan words):  
Beige, rouge, garage (but not age, rage, or cage)  
“sion” endings:  
Delusion, illusion, vision, derision, supervision  

Advanced:  
Note that these are not minimal pairs, but words with similar vowel sounds or vowel-consonant-vowel patterns.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>/s/</th>
<th>/z/</th>
<th>/ʒ/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>caustic</td>
<td>causal</td>
<td>casual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vice</td>
<td>visor</td>
<td>visual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mace</td>
<td>maze</td>
<td>measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lace</td>
<td>laze</td>
<td>leisure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tongue Twisters

She uses scissors to construct visual illusions.

You can choose beige, rouge, or azure colors for your drivers.
Short and Long vowels

Short and long “e”
Help heap
Bet beat
Bled bleed

Short and long “I”
Pick pike
Lift alive
Rift rife

Short and long “a”
Lack lake
Rack rake
Black brake

Short and long “o”
Hog home
Bond bone
On own

Short and long “u”
Cut cute
But brute
Hug huge
/w/ and /v/ Minimal Pairs List

Pronunciation Tip: For /v/, the two front teeth should touch the bottom lip (similar to /f/, but with vibration). For /w/, the teeth do not touch anything.

wail          veil
wane          vane
wiper         viper
wine           vine
while          vile

Tongue Twisters

*Wild vines make fine vintage wines.*

*Which is worse verse, Wendy’s verse or Wayne’s verse?*
“rl” sounds

Other common words with “rl”:

Carl       curl       earl       girl       gnarl       hurl
pearl      snarl      squirrel   surly      twirl      unfurl
world      whorled    whirled*

Note: Whorl usually refers to a swirling pattern, such as a fingerprint. “Whirl” refers to movement, such as a dancer whirling around on the dance floor.

Other tongue twisters:

She whirled around the world.
Which wristwatches are Swiss wristwatches?
Freshly fried flying fish.
Clean clams crammed in a tin can.
A big black bug bit a big black bear, made the big black bear bleed blood.
Please pay promptly.
Homonyms
Homonyms include words that are identical in spelling and/or pronunciation but have different meanings. There are two main types of homonyms:

- Homophones
- Homographs

**Homophones** are words that sound *exactly* the same but are spelled differently. Below are some common examples from each letter of the alphabet:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homophones</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bear/bare</td>
<td>hear/here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dear/deer</td>
<td>I/eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eight/ate</td>
<td>jeans/genes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fur/fir</td>
<td>know/no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meet/meat</td>
<td>pear/pair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see/sea</td>
<td>too/two/to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eight/ate</td>
<td>Q/queue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see/sea</td>
<td>where/wear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dear/deer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/eye</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pear/pair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>too/two/to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Homographs** are words that are spelled the same. Many of them share the same pronunciation, but some do not.

Shared spelling and pronunciation:

- baseball *bat*  vampire *bat*
- Bank of America *riverbank*
- Turn *left*.  He *left* the building.

Same spelling and different pronunciation:

- Tie your shoes in a bow. (“bow” sounds like “low”)
- Please bow to your hosts. (“bow” sounds like “cow”)
- The Sahara Desert receives minimal rainfall. (stress on first syllable: *desert*)
- If a soldier deserts the army, it is considered a grave offense. (stress on second syllable: *desert*)
- He didn’t shed a tear at the funeral. (“tear” sounds like “ear”)
- If you tear that dress, you can’t return it. (“tear” sounds like “wear”)

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Exercise 1: Which words are homophones or homographs? Which words are neither? (answers on p. 18)

whirled—world    hair—hare    breathe—breath    peer—pair
fought—thought    set—seat    rare—rear    threw—through

Exercise 2: In each sentence, change the incorrect words to their correct homonyms. (Answers on p. 18)

1. Read Riding Hood stopped and picked sum flours.

2. Snow White eight the read apple.

3. The princess could knot sleep at knight on the lumpy mattress.

4. The Prince kissed Sleeping Beauty and asked her if she wood merry him.

5. Independence Hall is the cite where the original Declaration of Independence was signed hear in Philadelphia.

6. The Emperor was to vane two admit he could knot sea his knew close.

7. The which tried to fatten up Hansel and Gretel two put sum meet on there bones.

8. The wolf blue down the houses of the first too pigs.

9. Their was a bare sitting on root 95.

10. The peace of pi is four my grandmother.
Answers to Exercise 1:

Homonyms include: whirled/world, hair/hare, threw-through

These words are not homonyms because one sound is different in each pair: fought and thought, breathe and breath, set and seat, rare-rear, peer-pair

Answers to Exercise 2:

1. red, some, flowers
2. ate, red
3. not, night
4. would, marry
5. site, here
6. too, vain, to, not, see, new, clothes
7. witch, to, some, meat, their
8. blew, two
9. there, bear, route
10. piece, pie, for
Syllable Stress

Some words look the same and have the same pronunciation, but the stress changes. Below are some common examples.

For nouns: stress is on the first syllable

For verbs: stress is on the second syllable

- convict (noun): He’s an ex-convict.
- convict (verb): He was convicted of a crime.
- Convert (noun): He’s a Jewish convert.
- Convert (verb): He converted from Christianity to Judaism.
- Conflict (noun): the Syrian conflict, the drug conflict, etc.
- Conflict (verb): He has conflicting priorities.
- Record (noun): He keeps the employee records in a filing cabinet.
- Record (verb): Are you going to record the opera on TV tonight?
- Permit (noun): Do you have a driver’s permit?
- Permit (verb): I can’t permit anyone beyond this area due to safety hazards.
- Object (noun): The object was round and small, but I couldn’t identify it.
- Object (verb): Does anyone object to me eating the last slice of cake?

Other examples:

Rebel recall insult combat compress
Reject contract project extract commune refuse
Produce contest present desert indent
Suspect content*(adjective) subject insert

Read these sentences for practice.

1. They will rebel against the rebels.
2. She contracted a virus at the workplace, but she can’t sue the company due to their contract.
3. They projected that the project would be finished in three months.
4. I object to her being the object of your affections.

5. This country can’t produce enough produce to keep up with the demand.

Now, try without the stress in italics.

6. I can’t present a present at Christmas this year.

7. I recalled that her memory recall was superb.

8. The results of the contest were contested.

9. Vanilla extract is made by extracting the flavors from vanilla beans.

10. The soldier deserted the army in the desert after engaging in hand-to-hand combat.

11. She lives in a hippie commune, where she regularly communes with artists and freethinkers.

12. Throw the old papers in the refuse pile.

13. I suspected that she was a suspect in the crime.

14. Did you insert this sales insert in the newspaper?

Other Resources:

Sounds of English (www.soundsofenglish.org)


Tongue Twisters: 50 Tongue Twisters to Help Improve English Pronunciation