

# **Improving Pronunciation**



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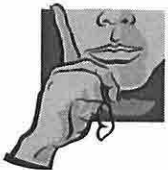
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# Improving pronunciation

You should be proud that you speak English with an accent. A “foreign” accent tells people that you speak at least two languages. And the world would be very dull if we all sounded the same.

Unfortunately, the disadvantage to having a “foreign” accent is that it may hinder effective communication in your nonnative language and cause you to be misunderstood.

*(English Pronunciation Made Simple, page ix)*



## Self-analysis of basic pronunciation problems

Think about the answers to the following questions to help you analyze your pronunciation problems.

- Which English sounds do you have difficulty with?
  - a. Do you make a difference between the vowels in *sit* and *seat*, *good* and *food*?
  - b. Do you make a difference between *sheep* and *cheap*, and *rice* and *lice*?
- Do you pronounce consonants at the end of words? How do you pronounce *ask* and *first*?
- Do you pronounce <s> and <ed> endings? How do you pronounce *cats*, *cars*, and *buses*, and *stopped* and *started*?
- Do you pronounce all words with the correct number of syllables? How many syllables are in *school* and *student*?
- Do you stress the correct syllable in a word? Which syllable is stressed in *excellent*, *interesting*, and *engineer*?
- Does your voice rise and fall enough so your meaning is clear, or does it remain flat and monotonous?
  - a. He’s coming.
  - b. He’s coming?



## Spelling and pronunciation

Do not confuse **pronunciation** of words with their **spelling**!

- ♦ Different letters may represent the same sound:

to   too   shoe   glue   through

- ♦ The same letter represents different sounds:

cake   mat   any   sofa   call

- ♦ Combinations of letters may represent one sound:

rough   physics   head

- ♦ Letters may represent no sounds:

bomb   cake   knee   debt   though



Learn to practice what you **hear**, not what you **see**.

## Sounds of English

**A. Vowels:** find words that have the same vowels as the examples in each line.

heat	sheep	leave	_____
hit	ship	live	_____
pain	tail	taste	_____
pen	tell	test	_____
pool	food	full	_____
pull	good	fool	_____
hat	pan	bag	_____
part	arm	father	_____
us	come	does	_____
oat	nose	toe	_____
all	loss	law	_____
ice	eye	style	_____
cow	out	owl	_____
toy	oil	join	_____



**Exercise:** In pairs, say each word aloud and circle the word in each group that is *not* pronounced with the same vowels as others.

1. gym win teen been
2. peas bread wheat leaf
3. dead guess red hate
4. friend pain weight safe
5. mean meant met men
6. group shout loud count
7. hood room book foot
8. come nut calm does

**B. Consonants:** find words that have the same consonants as the examples in each line.

- |      |       |       |        |          |       |
|------|-------|-------|--------|----------|-------|
| pet  | map   | _____ | bed    | cab      | _____ |
| tap  | cat   | _____ | die    | sad      | _____ |
| can  | pack  | _____ | get    | bag      | _____ |
| fan  | safe  | _____ | van    | save     | _____ |
| thin | bath  | _____ | then   | bathe    | _____ |
| sad  | class | _____ | zoo    | rose     | _____ |
| shoe | wash  | _____ | vision | pleasure | _____ |
| chip | watch | _____ | jump   | page     | _____ |
| hen  | have  | _____ | men    | come     | _____ |
|      |       |       | new    | sun      | _____ |
|      |       |       | sing   | singer   | _____ |
|      |       |       | love   | oil      | _____ |
|      |       |       | rice   | marry    | _____ |
|      |       |       | win    | view     | _____ |
|      |       |       | you    | yes      | _____ |





## Problem sounds for Thai speakers of English

### s and z

I said "c".	I said "z".
Is she fussy?	Is she fuzzy?
What's the price?	What's the prize?
I'd like some peace.	I'd like some peas.

### sh and ch

They are sheep	They are cheap.
We've washed it.	We've watched it.
He took my share.	He took my chair.
We should cash it.	We should catch it.

### th and t

It's thin.	It's tin.
I gave him a bath.	I gave him a bat.
He thought about war.	He taught about war.

### TH and t

You'll see her mother.	You will se her mutter
He threw the leather away.	He threw the letter away.

### th and s

Her mouth is pretty	Her mouse is pretty.
He's the tenth child.	He's the tense child.
He has a strange faith.	He has a strange face.

### TH and d

They began early.	Day began early.
Did you see her then?	Did you see her den?
He was there to do it.	He was dared to do it.

### f and v

I want a fan.	I want a van.
I'd like a few.	I'd like a view.
They want a leaf.	They want to leave.

### v and w

That's a nice vine.	That's a nice wine.
The veil was enormous.	The whale was enormous.
What happened to the veal?	What happened to the wheel?

### r and l

That's a big rock.	That's a big lock.
I want some rice.	I want some lice.
She bought a red pencil.	She bought a lead pencil.
He's reading them.	He's leading them.

## Pronouncing final consonants sounds (the last sound in a word)

1. cat	cap	can	cab
2. bow	bowl	bold	bolt
3. rag	rack	rat	rap
4. ten	tense	tent	tend
5. bill	bin	build	built

## Pronouncing consonant clusters (two or more consonant sounds grouped together)

Common errors:

- dropping one of the consonant sounds in a cluster

*drink flat likes ask fact east*

- inserting a vowel sound in between

*spy school student screen spray*



What is the difference between the sounds **p**, **t**, and **k** in the *left* and the *right* columns?

park	spark	top	stop	can	scan
peak	speak	tool	stool	care	scare
pit	spit	team	steam	kin	skin

## Pronouncing the -s ending

The s-ending is pronounced three ways according to the end of the word:

<b>-s = /s/</b> when the word ends in <b>-f</b> <i>graph</i> → <i>graphs</i> <b>-k</b> <i>park</i> <i>parks</i> <b>-p</b> <i>cup</i> <i>cups</i> <b>-t</b> <i>hat</i> <i>hats</i>	<b>-s = /ɪz/</b> when the word ends in <b>-s</b> <i>box</i> → <i>boxes</i> <b>-sh</b> <i>bush</i> <i>bushes</i> <b>-z</b> <i>blouse</i> <i>blouses</i> <b>-j</b> <i>page</i> <i>pages</i>	<b>-s = /z/</b> when the word does <b>NOT</b> end in the sounds in the two lists: <i>dogs, letters, apples</i>
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**Exercise:** Say the words in each group aloud and decide which one has a different –s sound.

- |             |         |          |
|-------------|---------|----------|
| 1. cups     | plates  | spoons   |
| 2. belts    | hats    | ties     |
| 3. dishes   | gates   | pages    |
| 4. dogs     | cats    | birds    |
| 5. eyes     | toes    | noses    |
| 6. shoes    | dresses | blouses  |
| 7. teachers | doctors | dentists |

### Pronouncing the –ed ending

The ed-ending is pronounced three ways according to the end of the word before adding *-ed*.

**-ed = /t/** when the word ends in

- ch** watch → watched
- f** laugh laughed
- k** talk talked
- p** stop stopped
- s** miss missed
- sh** push pushed

**-ed = /ɪd/** when the word ends in

- t** want → wanted
- start started
- protect protected
- d** need → needed
- hand handed
- decide decided

**-ed = /d/**

when the word does NOT end in the sounds in the two lists.

*played, listened, lived*



**Exercise:** Say the words in each group aloud and decide which one has a different –ed sound.

- |            |         |         |
|------------|---------|---------|
| 1. stopped | started | stated  |
| 2. loved   | looked  | liked   |
| 3. tasted  | traded  | talked  |
| 4. wanted  | needed  | desired |
| 5. cooked  | cleaned | baked   |
| 6. lifted  | skipped | hopped  |
| 7. ended   | added   | danced  |



## Word stress

In English, we do not say each syllable with the same strength. We say **one** syllable very **loudly** and **all the other syllables** very **quietly**.



TEACHER                      JaPAN                      CHIna  
converSAtion                INteresting                imPORtant

How do you know which syllable is stressed in a word?

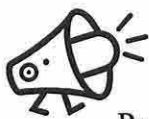
- The best way to learn is from experience.
- Look in a dictionary for the phonetic spelling of a word.
- Notice how someone else says that word.
- When you learn a new word, you should also learn its stress pattern.

☞ Many common nouns and adjectives are stressed on the first syllable.

**breakfast**      **father**      **building**      **carrot**  
**lovely**          **funny**      **stupid**      **yellow**

☞ Two-syllable nouns and verbs: stress on the **first** syllables when they are nouns and on the last syllable when they are verbs.

1. The band **recorded** a new **record** yesterday.
2. He **presented** his wife with a beautiful **present**.
3. The **desert** is so dry that it is usually **deserted**.



### More than words: sentence stress

Pronouncing **every** word in a sentence leads to poor pronunciation! Good pronunciation comes from stressing the right word(s) in each sentence. Don't focus on pronouncing each word.

Listen.

What **time** is it?

It's a beautiful **day**.

I **need** something to **eat**.

I **bought** a new **car**.





## Tips for improving pronunciation

- Watch English language news on TV or listen to radio news in English as often as you can. Practice saying common words and phrases after the announcer.
- Whenever you have the opportunity to talk to an English speaker, try to include things you have practiced.
- Ask your listener how a specific word is pronounced. (*How do you say this word? Is this word pronounced “ \_\_\_\_\_ ”?*)
- Look up a word and its pronunciation in an English dictionary (e.g. Longman, Oxford)
- Practice your pronunciation using various resources on the Internet, for example:
  - <http://www.soundsofenglish.org/pronunciation/index.htm>
  - <http://international.ouc.bc.ca/pronunciation/>
  - <http://evaeaston.com/pr/home.html>
  - <http://www.manythings.org/pp/>



## Just for fun

How do you pronounce these words?

apple	sugar	singer	juice	paper	future	jam
computer	debt	onion	cassette	busy	oil	camera

Where do you put stress in these words?

banana	hamburger	salad	money	comfortable	September
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