

Do you sometimes feel unsure about teaching pronunciation? Do you wonder when you should teach it and how to go about it? This lesson aims to explore these issues by investigating general principles associated with the teaching of pronunciation and then looking at ideas of when and what to teach.

### Task 1 – A difference of opinion.

The following discussion took place in the staffroom between Tom and Liz:

**Tom:** I was doing a pronunciation lesson and most of my students just couldn't get it.

**Liz:** Couldn't get what?

**Tom:** Just the right sound.

**Liz:** How right did you want them to sound?

**Tom:** As near as possible to a native speaker.

**Liz:** Why bother? So long as they can be understood.

**Tom:** But they just sound so foreign.

**Liz:** I don't agree.



**Whose opinion do you agree with, and why? Jot down your answer on a note pad, then check the answer in the key below.**



### Task 1 Feedback



Tom seems to want his students to sound like native speakers of English, while Liz thinks that intelligibility is a more acceptable standard. Many students find it hard achieving a native-speaker like sound, and many have no wish to lose their accent. Current thinking on this topic suggests that Liz's point of view is preferable because it is more realistic and takes into account learners' wants and needs to a larger degree.

### Key Skill

While aiming to get students sounding like native speakers may be an unrealistic goal, ensuring that you have some explicit focus on pronunciation is a key (and often neglected) aspect of an English language programme. Areas to focus on are: sounds, word stress, sentence stress, connected speech and intonation.

### Task 2 – Some general principles



Numbers 1 to 6 outline some general principles associated with the teaching of pronunciation. Letters a to f are a series of rationales for the principles. Match the rationales to the principles.

General Principles	Rationales
1. In a pronunciation lesson it is a good idea to get students listening before they speak.	
2. Teachers need to model pronunciation features clearly before they ask students to repeat.	
3. It helps students if you provide a white board model of the features that you have practised.	
4. Sometimes it is a good idea to get learners to analyse the pronunciation of an utterance in pairs.	
5. Having heard or analysed a pronunciation feature, students need plenty of oral practice.	
6. Teachers need to give students plenty of feedback on their pronunciation.	

### Rationales

- a. This might lead to students being able to work out a rule that is applicable to other language.
- b. This encourages students to listen carefully to sounds.
- c. This means that you are able to target very specific problems that individual learners of different nationalities have.
- d. Some learners need this kind of visual support because they do not have an 'aural memory'.
- e. Pronunciation is something that learners need to actively do rather than passively study.
- f. At low levels there are some sounds and intonation patterns that non-native speakers cannot hear so they need plenty of exposure to them.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

### Key Skill

Pronunciation is something that students need to experience rather than think about too much. Teachers can help them do this by ensuring that they focus strongly on listening and speaking skills in pronunciation lessons. Some written analysis is useful, but it should always lead to productive practice.

### Task 3 – When to teach pronunciation



Numbers 1 to 5 describe different situations in which teachers can focus on pronunciation. Letters a to e briefly describe classroom activities associated with the teaching of pronunciation. Match the activities to the situations.

Situations	Activities
1. The teacher includes a separate pronunciation spot within a normal lesson.	
2. The teacher focuses on pronunciation at the same time as they are teaching grammar or vocabulary.	
3. The teacher gets students to focus on a feature of pronunciation in a text after doing listening skills practice.	
4. The teacher devotes an entire lesson to some aspect of pronunciation.	
5. The teacher gives feedback on some language that students have produced.	

### Classroom activities

- a. Students read and listen to a short excerpt and mark features of connected speech on the audio script.
- b. After a freer communication activity the teacher notes pronunciation problems on the white board for students to correct.
- c. The teacher does a 20-minute warmer activity that focuses on the difference between two sounds e.g. /i:/ vs. /I/.
- d. The teacher uses prompts to elicit, model and drill the target structure.
- e. Students listen to, analyse and do a variety of practice activities, focusing on different intonation patterns.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

### Key Skill

The different situations outlined in task 3 can be summarised under two headings – whether pronunciation should be taught in isolation or whether it should be integrated into other lessons. Ideally teachers should try to include both approaches in their teaching programmes.

Task 4 – Specific activities



Numbers 1 to 5 in the box are features of pronunciation. Letters a to j are specific activities. Match the activities to the features. Each feature has two activities.

Features of Pronunciation	Activities
1. sounds	
2. word stress	
3. utterance or sentence stress	
4. connected speech	
5. intonation	

**Activities**

- a. Drilling students in ways of making requests and ensuring that they sound polite.
- b. A student gives another student an incorrect piece of information. The second student corrects the first student by repeating the initial sentence with the correct information.
- c. The teacher shows students a diagram of the mouth and different positions for the speech organs.
- d. The teacher asks students to listen to three sentences from a listening text and count the number of weak forms /ə/ they hear.
- e. The teacher models and drills new vocabulary.
- f. The teacher gives students a series of messages in note form. Students have to practise saying these as fully formed utterances.
- g. Students have to listen for the difference between minimal pairs of words, for example, 'ship' versus 'sheep'.
- h. The teacher asks the students to listen for the speaker's attitude in a dialogue.
- i. The teacher models and drills a new utterance, highlighting sounds that disappear and run into each other.
- j. The teacher asks students to sort vocabulary into different categories according to their pronunciation.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

#### **Thinking about your teaching ...**

Over the course of a term, note how often you focus on teaching pronunciation. Also consider whether your focus on pronunciation is mostly integrated into language lessons or whether it is isolated. Evaluate whether you think you are doing enough pronunciation. Do you need to integrate more? Or, do you need to do more one-off pronunciation lessons?

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

#### **Taking it to the classroom ...**

Often teachers forget to analyse the pronunciation of new grammar structures or functions that they teach. Try doing this on a regular basis. Look at your example sentences and work out the main stresses, look for features of connected speech and decide whether intonation is important or not. It sometimes helps to do this together with a colleague. It might make your drilling more effective.

#### **Want to find out more ... ?**

Pages 248 to 264 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4<sup>th</sup> edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007) contain extra reading on teaching pronunciation.

Pages 284 to 297 of *Learning Teaching (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005) also contain extra reading on teaching pronunciation.

See also section 5 of *Language Teaching Classroom Practice DVD & Workbook* by Heather Richards and Karen Wise (AUT University 2007).

**Answer Key**



**Task 2 – Feedback**

- 1) f
- 2) b
- 3) d
- 4) a
- 5) e
- 6) c

**Task 4 – Feedback**

- 1) c and g
- 2) e and j
- 3) b and f
- 4) d and i
- 5) a and h

**Task 3 – Feedback**

- 1) c
- 2) d
- 3) a
- 4) e
- 5) b