

Teaching Pronunciation



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Pronunciation lessons should be based on the phoneme contrasts that are important in the language. The vowel sound in beat (/i:/) and that in bit (/ɪ/) has to be taught because using one for the other will convey a change in meaning. Otherwise there is no reason to teach the difference. Similarly, no matter what pronunciation lessons are included in the school textbook, teachers should only concentrate on those sounds that their particular class has difficulty with. Thus, if the pupils do not on the whole get confused between the initial consonant sounds in wane and vein, there is no point in drilling the class on distinguishing these two sounds. On the other hand, the textbook may not have dealt with some phonemes that are troublesome for the class. In that case, the teacher has to devise lessons on her own, along the lines laid down below.

At the initial stage, there should be intensive drilling on the individual sounds. Obviously not all sounds can be taught at the same time. The teacher should prepare her own programme if this is not already done so in the textbook.

Drilling should be on the principle of 'a little and often'. About 5 minutes spent on a single problem at the beginning of every lesson is more effective than a single period of 30 minutes each week. It should be systematic and programmed, never just at random, and should continue long after the student is able to produce the correct sound. Thus it is important to remember that the single lesson presented in the textbook on any sounds is not meant to be done only once, but to be repeated as often as may be necessary for the class to master the sounds.

The following are sample lessons on the contrast between hurt (/ɜ:/) and heart (/ɑ:/). There are 4 lessons, some of which can be done with all levels of pupils, some only with more advanced ones. Teachers can prepare lessons such as these for any sounds they may need to deal with in their classes.

SAMPLE LESSONS /ə / -- /ɑ:/

(Each lesson is meant to take 5 – 10 minutes to be drilled at the beginning or the end of an English period. The teacher should adjust the length of the drills, i.e., the number of minimal pairs used, the number of times pupils are asked to repeat or to distinguish between sounds, etc., so that the pronunciation drills do not take up more than 10 minutes at the most. Depending on the discretion of the teacher and the level of the pupils, any one lesson may be extended to 2 periods.)

Lesson 1

Listening: (i) Pupils listen to teacher reading briskly down each column twice, then in pairs twice.

/ :/	/a: /
cur	car
burn	barn
heard	hard
lurk	lark
purse	pass
firm	farm
hurt	heart

(ii) Pupils distinguish which pairs sound the same, which different.

1. pass	pass	S
2. lark	lurk	D
3. cur	cur	S
4. lurk	lurk	S
5. farm	firm	D
6. barn	barn	S
7. hard	heard	D
8. hurt	heart	D

AND/OR

(iii) Pupils distinguish which sounds are the same.

1. hard	—	heard	—	heard	2,3
2. purse	—	pass	—	purse	1,3
3. firm	—	farm	—	firm	1,3
4. hard	—	hard	—	heard	1,2
5. barn	—	barn	—	barn	1,2,3
6. car	—	cur	—	cur	2,3
7. lark	—	lurk	—	lark	1,3
8. purse	—	purse	—	pass	1,2

(Note: The answers indicated on the right are for the benefit of the teacher so that she should not have to think whether an answer is right or wrong while drilling)

Speaking: Pupils repeat minimal pairs, listed as above. Repetition with whole group, small groups, individuals.

Lesson 2

Listening: (i) Pupils choose which of a pair of sentences (written on rollboard/cyclostyled sheets) has been read by teacher.

1. His ^{barn}
burn looks much better now.
2. The ^{firm}
farm is very big.
3. I've left my ^{purse}
pass behind.
4. Do you know that ^{parson}
person?

AND/OR (ii) Pupils to identify which two of three sentences read out are the same.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. I hear him gargling.
I hear him gurgling.
I hear him gurgling.</p> <p>2. The farm is very big.
The firm is very big.
The farm is very big.</p> <p>3. It hasn't been hard.
It hasn't been hard.
It hasn't been heard.</p> | <p>4. He ran out of the room fast.
He ran out of the room first.
He ran out of the room first.</p> <p>5. You have your pass, I hope.
You have your pass, I hope.
You have your purse, I hope.</p> |
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Speaking: Repetition after teacher of above sentences.

(Note – Teacher may get a pupil to read, others to identify and check.)

Lesson 3

Listening:(i) Rhymes. Pupils choose the word which does not rhyme.

1	2	3	
1. harm	term	firm	(1)
2. lark	dark	Turk	(3)
3. far	cur	bar	(2)
4. purse	curse	farce	(3)
5. burp	sharp	harp	(1)
6. curd	hard	bird	(2)

(Note – It may necessary to explain what is meant by a rhyming word before doing this exercises.)

Speaking: (ii) Pupils raise hands each time they hear the /a:/ sound, (or/a:/ if the teacher so chooses) as the words are read out.

SHARK.....FAR.....BURN.....CUR.....TAR.....FUR.....PURSE.....BARN.....
PASS.....FUR.....CARD.....HEARD.....BIRD.....HEART.....FIRST.....
PARSON.....LURK.....PERSON.....FAR.....PURSE

(Note – Teacher may ask pupils suspected of having difficulty with a particular sound to do this exercise singly.)

Speaking: (i) Pupils supply words that have a similar sound as in the words put up on the board.

BARN

BURN

•
•
•

•
•
•

AND/OR (ii) Pupils choose which words in a list should go into a column underneath the two guide

Lists given: heart, card, fur, bird, half, purse, first, pass, purr, car, turn, term,
firm, dark, sharp, girl.

Lesson 4

Listening: Pupils say True or False according to the meaning of the sentence.

1. Wood can be heard. F
2. He came to school in a car T
3. Wood can be hard. T
4. A farm usually grows food. T
5. He came to school in a car. F
6. A firm usually grows food. F

(Note: Obviously this kind of lesson cannot be done with pupils whose level of English is not high enough for them to understand the meaning in such sentences.)

Speaking: (i) Sentences in which a particular sound occur frequently. Pupils repeat after teacher.

1. The early bird catches the worm.
2. Half the class laughed.
3. You can't pass after dark.
4. The nurse was far worse.
5. He heard a bird in church.

AND/OR (ii) Short verse for repetition:

I say ah
To my glass
Ah for after,
Ah for laughter,
Ah for class,
Laughing in
The looking-glass.

Notes:—

1. It is important that pupils should have heard correctly before they attempt to repeat. They should have heard the teacher read at least twice before they begin repeating. That is why the listening drills precede the speaking drills.
2. Let the pupils repeat two or three times in chorus, and then choose individuals to do the repetition. If a wrong pronunciation is made give the correct model again.
3. In drills where pupils have to choose one or two words in a sentence make sure that you read the sentences absolutely normally, with no undue emphasis on the problem word. It is often a good idea to have some pupils read out the sentence with the word they have chosen before checking begins.
4. In the same/different exercise, read the two words of each pair with exactly the same intonation. Read each pair or group of words twice with beginners and weak classes.
5. With consonant sounds, remember to include drills with the sound in initial, medial and final positions; e.g., coat — goat, backing — bagging, back — bag, when doing/k/ vs. /g/.
6. All model reading should be done at normal conversational speed and nothing should be pronounced in an over-emphatic and exaggerated manner. Do not allow the drills to become too slow moving, but try to keep up a brisk pace.