

# Appendix 1: Sample Pronunciation Exercises and Activities

(Appendix to ICCT FAQ: “How can I improve my pronunciation skills?”)

© Lonna J. Dickerson, Ph.D.  
Director, Institute for Cross-Cultural Training (ICCT)  
Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL 60187  
<http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/icct/>

The first two exercises are particularly useful for independent learners who need to focus on pronunciation learning but don't want to spend a lot of time constructing more elaborate exercises and activities. However, teachers and tutors who plan to work with groups of learners or with a number of individual learners will want to go beyond these first two exercises, constructing a variety of exercises and activities for listening and production at the word, phrase and sentence levels.

## Basic Word Level Exercises

### 1. Listening and Production (Mimicry, Reading)

Make a list of words containing a sound (consonant or vowel) that is difficult. For consonants, if you have enough words containing a problem sound, form columns with that consonant in initial, medial, and final positions in a word.

#### *The English Consonant /θ/*

Initial	Medial	Final
think	method	path
thumb	Kathy	tooth
thin	Athens	mouth
thank	nothing	math
three	everything	Smith
through	athlete	growth
thread	author	north
Thursday	birthday	fourth

- Listen:** Going down the columns, the language helper pronounces the words while the class listens.
- Mimic as class:** Going down the columns, the language helper says each word; the class (or group) mimics after each word is pronounced.
- Mimic as individuals:** As the language helper says each word, individuals mimic. (You may have the language helper call on individuals in a set order or he/she may call on individuals in random order.)
- Produce as individuals:** an individual produces a word (usually this means *reads*, but at time you may be able to use pictures or real objects), the language helper corrects, and the learner repeats. The words can be dealt with in a set order (e.g., down the columns, across the columns) or they can be handled in random order. Likewise, individuals can be called upon in a set order (e.g., going around the class) or in random order.

Variations in content focus: Instead of a single consonant or vowel, you can focus on a sound sequence (e.g., consonant clusters in English such as /sp/, /st/, /sk/) or a single tone, intonation or stress pattern (e.g., the falling intonation pattern in the English sentences *He's going. He's working. He's thinking.*)

## 2. Listening and Production (Mimicry, Reading)

Make lists of words containing two sounds (or, tones, intonation patterns, stress patterns) that you confuse with one another. If you can, try to find *minimal pairs*, that is, words that are exactly the same except for one feature that is different, and that difference causes a difference in the meaning of the two words. (For example, Arabic speakers have trouble distinguishing English /p/ vs. /b/. A useful minimal pair for these two problem sounds is *pit* vs. *bit*. These two words constitute a minimal pair because they differ in only one sound contrast, /p/ vs. /b/.) If you can't find minimal pairs, try to find words that are as similar to each other as possible except for the one problem feature.

### **The English Consonants /t/ vs. /θ/**

/t/	/θ/
tank	thank
taught	thought
tin	thin
true	through
pat	path
debt	death
fate	faith
tent	tenth

- Listen:** The language helper pronounces the words in each column while the class listens. For particularly difficult contrasts, first go down the columns and then across; for less difficult contrasts, go across the columns only.
- Mimic as class:** Going down the columns, the language helper pronounces each word and the class mimics. For particularly difficult contrasts, first go down the columns and then across; for less difficult contrasts, go across the columns only.
- Mimic as individuals:** The language helper says each word and one individual mimics. The words may be used in a set order (e.g., if the class [in b. above] has mimicked going down the columns, you may want individuals to mimic going across the columns) or random order. Also, the individuals may be called upon in a set order or in random order.
- Produce as individuals:** An individual reads a word, the language helper corrects after each item, and the learner repeats. The words can be dealt with in a set order (e.g., down the columns, across the columns) or they can be handled in random order. Likewise, the individuals can be called upon in a set order (e.g., going around the class) or in random order.

Variations in content focus. Instead of contrasting a pair of consonant or vowel sounds, you can contrast (a) three or more confusing sounds (e.g., English /s/ sank vs. /θ/ thank vs. /t/ tank, or Korean /p<sup>h</sup>/ vs. /p/ vs. /p/), (b) two or more confusing tone, intonation or stress patterns (e.g., in English, we can contrast the intonation patterns for *He's going.* vs. *He's going?*)

### **Listening Exercises: Discrimination**

These exercises (#3 - 8) require learners to listen carefully to hear sound distinctions (or tone, intonation or stress differences). Note that #3 - 7 do not require mimicry or production of the problem distinctions. If discrimination exercises are used before mimicry and reading (or other types of production), learners are likely to mimic and produce more accurately.

To construct discrimination exercises like those listed below for the English /iy/ sound as in *see*, *feed*, *eat*, start with a list of minimal pairs that contrast the two sounds likely to be confused. For example, those learning English often confuse the /iy/ in *beat* with the /ɪ/ in *bit*.

3. **Same/Different.** (Target: vowels / iy / and / ɪ /. Helper reads, going down the columns; group or individuals respond with *same* or *different*. Learners do not see the items.)

bid - bead	(D)	feet - fit	(D)	rich - reach	(D)
hid - hid	(S)	cheek - cheek	(S)	field - field	(S)
eat - eat	(S)	peach - pitch	(D)	deal - dill	(D)
hit - heat	(D)	leak - lick	(D)	meal - meal	(S)
jeep - jeep	(S)	slip - sleep	(D)	Tim - team	(D)
cheap - chip	(D)	list - list	(S)	still - still	(S)

4. **Which is Different—1/2/3.** (Target: vowels / iy / and / ɪ /. Helper reads, going down the columns; group or individuals pick out the word that is different from the other two and respond with *one*, *two* or *three*. Learners do not see the items.)

bead - bid - bead	(2)	seek - sick - sick	(1)
fizz - fizz - fees	(3)	reach - reach - rich	(3)
lead - lid - lid	(1)	leak - leak - lick	(3)
leave - leave - live	(3)	sill - seal - sill	(2)
feet - fit - fit	(1)	dill - deal - deal	(1)
lip - leap - lip	(2)	pill - peel - pill	(2)
chip - chip - cheap	(3)	sin - seen - seen	(1)
peak - pick - peak	(2)	rim - rim - ream	(3)

5. **One/Two.** (Target: vowels / iy / and / ɪ /. Helper reads, going down the columns; group or individuals pick out the word that has the / iy / sound, Word 1 or Word 2, and respond with *one* or *two*. Learners do not see the items.)

deed - did	(1)	deep - dip	(1)	fill - feel	(2)
bit - beat	(2)	fist - feast	(2)	teen - tin	(1)
peak - pick	(1)	reap - rip	(1)	green - grin	(1)
seat - sit	(1)	sick - seek	(2)	rim - ream	(2)
wick - week	(2)	slit - sleet	(2)	bin - bean	(2)

6. **Yes/No.** (Target: vowel / iy /. Helper reads, going down the columns; group or individuals decide whether the word has an / iy / sound or not, and respond with *yes* or *no*. Learners do not see the items. )

did	(no)	jeep	(yes)	heel	(yes)
leave	(yes)	leak	(yes)	peel	(yes)
each	(yes)	list	(no)	sill	(no)
ship	(no)	hit	(no)	knit	(no)
bit	(no)	heap	(yes)	seen	(yes)

7. **Column One/Column Two.** (Target: vowels /iy/ and /ɪ/. This activity can be used most easily after listing on the board sets of minimal pairs that contrast the two problem sounds. Use the pairs for *Listening* (e.g., across columns) before *Column One/Column Two* .

**Listening:** (Helper reads across columns [or down and across] as group listens.)

[1]	[2]
/iy/	/ɪ/
bead	bid
heed	hid
deep	dip
heat	hit
sleep	slip
feel	fill
steel	still
neat	neat
teen	tin

**Column One/Column Two:** (Helper reads, going down the columns; group or individuals decide which column the word comes from, and respond with *one* or *two*. Learners do not see the items. Note that the first items are identical to those used for listening [above], but the last items have not been used in the listening exercise.)

bead	(1)	rip	(2)	hill	(2)
hid	(2)	deep	(1)	dill	(2)
lid	(2)	slip	(2)	neat	(1)
hip	(2)	filled	(2)	teen	(1)
heat	(1)	steel	(1)	green	(1)
peak	(1)	peel	(1)	skim	(2)

8. **Repeat the word with the target sound.** (Target: vowel /ow/. Helper reads phrase, learners repeat words with /ow/. Learners do not see the items. This exercise can be used for discrimination only, which means the helper judges the item correct or incorrect based on selection of correct word, not on how that word is pronounced. Or, it can be used as a combination of discrimination and production, which means that the helper corrects not only for choice of word, but also for its pronunciation.)

**Repeat the word with /ow/**

long ago	(ago)	across the ocean	(ocean)
snow shovel	(snow)	my only brother	(only)
bowling ball	(bowling)	a funny joke	(joke)
phone number	(phone)	a stone wall	(stone)
laundry soap	(laundry)	a well-known author	(known)
both cultures	(both)	Please come home.	(home)

## **Production Exercises and Activities**

Learning tends to be more effective when the learning experiences gradually increase in difficulty. Since some exercises and activities are inherently easier (or more difficult) than others, it makes sense to arrange them in order from easy to difficult. To determine level of difficulty, determine the demand placed on the learner. For example, it's usually easier to mimic words than phrases or sentences, and it's usually easier to read than to construct sentences from clues, etc.

These production exercises and activities are generally arranged from easy to difficult. However, sometimes two exercises are of similar difficulty (e.g., # 11 and #12). Also, #18 is more difficult than #19, but #19 and #20 are listed in sequence because they are similar in type (both dialogs).

- 9. Mimicry (words, phrases).** (Target consonant / θ /. Note that the phrases include many of the words just practiced and that the target consonant, / θ /, appears in initial, medial and final positions. These items may also be used for reading.)

thank	thin	method	Athens	cloth	mouth
think	thousand	anything	athlete	both	growth
theme	thief	nothing	author	math	beneath
thick	thunder	Kathy	ethical	Smith	north

Thank you.	Do you need anything
Think about it.	Think nothing of it.
theme paper	She's a popular author.
thick and thin	a red cloth
a thousand miles	both of you
He's a thief.	Do you like math?
a new method	Kathy Smith

- 10. Mimicry (phrases, short sentences).** (Target: / ε / and / æ /. Note that each item contains at least one occurrence of each of the target sounds. These items may also be used for reading.)

next Saturday	medical practice	stamp collector	an accurate evaluation
next January	grammar lesson	a black sweater	Is Nancy ready?
West Africa	stamp collector	a special package	Where's Jack?
national election	a well-known fact	a leather jacket	Did you cash the check?

- 11. Matching: Word Association.** (Target consonant / θ /. Learner finds a word in Column 2 that can be associated with each word in Column 1.)

Column 1 (helper cue)	Column 2 (list of choices)
essay	thunder
finger	cathedral
book	youth
lightning	author
child	thin
movie	theme
steal	teeth
dentist	death
skinny	theater
church	thief
die	thumb

- 12. Matching: Opposites.** (Target consonant / ε /. Learner finds a word in Column 2 with the opposite meaning from each word in Column 1.)

Column 1 (helper cue)	Column 2 (list of choices)
positive	wet
remember	exit
alive	less
sickness	west
dry	yes
worst	best
answer	dead
east	yesterday
more	sell
entrance	question
buy	negative
no	forget
tomorrow	health

Variations:

- a. synonyms (learners choose word with approximately the same meaning as the cue word)  
(/iy/)  
inexpensive (cheap)  
bad (evil)  
to yell (scream)  
to stop (cease)
- b. categories (learners choose all the words that match a category)  
(/ w / - / v /):  
natural features (river, valley, waterfall)  
appliances (dishwasher, stove, vacuum cleaner)  
states in U.S. (West Virginia, Nevada, Wisconsin)  
occupations (waitress, taxi driver, veterinarian)
- c. place and activities (plural noun endings)  
post office (mail packages)  
bank (cash checks)  
supermarket (buy groceries)

- 13. Sentence Matching.** (Target : / ey / and / ε /. This works especially well with two or more learners, with one reading a sentence from the first column and the second locating and reading the appropriate response from the second column.)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. What are you taking to Ed's party?                       | a. You can pick up bagels and coffee at that new deli on Race Street.                         |
| 2. My favorite bakery is on Second Street.                  | b. Is that the place where they have really good steaks and a salad bar with lots of veggies? |
| 3. I always get up too late to eat breakfast.               | c. I hear they make really good cakes and their whole wheat bread is fantastic.               |
| 4. Fresh vegetables are on sale today at the corner market. | d. A bag of potato chips, a bag of pretzels, and a bottle of Pepsi.                           |
| 5. Have you tried the new restaurant on Main Street?        | e. We could use some lettuce and maybe also a few tomatoes.                                   |

**14. Reading/Completion.** (Target / ə /. The learner chooses an item for the list to complete each sentence)

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <i>pup</i>       | 1. When we buy twelve apples, we buy one <u>dozen</u> . |
| <i>lunch</i>     | 2. We can buy medicine at the _____.                    |
| <i>months</i>    | 3. An underground transportation system is a _____.     |
| <i>drugstore</i> | 4. We bake food in an _____.                            |
| <i>gloves</i>    | 5. A young dog is called a _____.                       |
| <i>Monday</i>    | 6. My mother's brother is my _____.                     |
| <i>dozen</i>     | 7. At noon we eat _____.                                |
| <i>uncle</i>     | 8. Clowns are supposed to be _____.                     |
| <i>funny</i>     | 9. The next day after Sunday is _____.                  |
| <i>subway</i>    | 10. Each year has twelve _____.                         |
| <i>oven</i>      | 11. When my hands are cold, I wear my _____.            |

**15. Substitution.** (Target / ey /. These exercises can range from quite easy (single-slot substitution, in which words are always substituted into the same column) to fairly complex (multiple-slot substitution, in which words are substituted into different columns). To make the exercises more interesting as well as more challenging, you can at times use pictures or drawings for the cues.)

*Situation: Next Sunday some friends are going to have a picnic to celebrate Jay's birthday. Each person will bring something to the picnic.*

**Single Slot Substitution:**

Kay will take	steaks potato chips baked beans lemonade a birthday cake paper plates
---------------	--

**Multiple Slot Substitution:**

Kay	will take	steaks potato chips
David Jane		baked beans lemonade a birthday cake
Ray		paper plates

**16. Transformation.** (Target / ey /. Two common types of transformation drills often used either in teaching grammar or used for teaching stress and intonation are (a) changing affirmative statements to negative statements and (b) changing statements to questions. For each of these, the helper (or another learner) can give the first sentence and the learner makes the transformation.)

- a. Affirmative to negative: Kay will take steaks. → Kay will not take steaks.  
David will take baked beans. → David will not take baked beans.  
Jane will take lemonade → Jane will not take lemonade.
- b. Statement to question: Kay will take steaks. → Will Kay take steaks?  
David will take baked beans. → Will David take baked beans?  
Jane will take lemonade. → Will Jane take lemonade?

The first exercise can be made more complex by beginning with either an affirmative or a negative statement, and the learner must supply the opposite. Likewise, in the second exercise, the helper can begin with either a statement or a question, and the learner must supply the opposite.

**17. Arranging activities: sequencing sentences.** (Target: / s /, / z / and / əz / verb endings. Learner reads the sentences as written and then rearranges them into a logical sequence and reads them again.)

He puts the letter in an envelope.  
He mails the letter.  
He puts a stamp on the envelope.  
He seals the envelope.  
He writes a letter.  
He addresses the envelope.

**18. Sentence Construction.** (Target: / b / - / v /. For each item, the learner constructs a sentence using the words provided, supplying additional words as needed.)

Example: Bill / Dave / movies

Possible answers:

Bill and Dave are at the movies.  
Bill and Dave like to watch old movies.  
Are Bill and Dave going to the movies?

- |                                |                             |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. gloves / brown              | 5. movie / begins / 7:05    |
| 2. vase / valuable             | 6. Bob / arrive / 5:45      |
| 3. vacation / November 17      | 7. library / close / 11:00  |
| 4. beets / favorite vegetables | 8. breakfast / serve / 7:00 |

**19. Fixed dialog.** (Target / v / and / w /. These are more natural when used either by two or more learners, or when the helper takes the role of one speaker.)

*Two friends discussing volunteer work.*

Wayne: Have you done any volunteer work, Dave?  
Dave: I work in a hospital every weekend. I visit with about six or seven patients each time I go.  
Wayne: (That) sounds like a rewarding thing to do. You must enjoy it.  
Dave: I really like it. How about you, Wayne? Are you involved in volunteer work, too?  
Wayne: Once a week I teach English to refugees. I do it every Wednesday evening from 7 to 9.

**20. Controlled dialog.** (Target / θ /. The first two examples below (fixed dialogs) provide the model for the last two dialogs (controlled dialogs).)

- A. *John:* When's your birthday?  
*Jim:* July third. Is your birthday in July, too?  
*John:* No, it's the fourth of December.
- B. *Beth:* When's your birthday?  
*Mary:* November sixteenth. Is your birthday in November, too?  
*Beth:* Yes, it is. It's the tenth.
- C. *Learner 1:* When's your birthday?  
*Learner 2:* \_\_\_\_\_ (month, day). Is your birthday in \_\_\_\_\_ (month), too?  
*Learner 1:* No, it's the \_\_\_\_\_ (day) of \_\_\_\_\_ (month).  
(Yes, it's the \_\_\_\_\_ (day).)
- D. With a larger group, such as a class, one person can ask another:  
*Learner 1:* When's \_\_\_\_\_ (class member's) birthday?  
*Learner 2:* It's \_\_\_\_\_.

**21. Controlled Questions/Answers.** (Target / θ /. These are more natural when used either by two or more learners, or when the helper takes the role of one speaker.)

Use the data from the charts below to make us questions and answers.

Examples:     Learner 1:     How many births occurred in Thunder City in 1995?  
                   Learner 2:     323

                  Learner 1:     In 1997, were there more births or deaths in Thornton?  
                   Learner 2:     More births.

	Record of Births				Record of Deaths		
	1995	1996	1997		1995	1996	1997
Thunder City	323	230	253	Thunder City	133	139	136
Thornton	38	26	23	Thornton	43	23	29
St. Catharine	163	128	133	St. Catharine	86	92	73

**22. Information Gap**

In this activity, each learner has information not shared by the other learner(s). For communication to take place, learners must interact verbally so that the information that each knows can be communicated clearly to the other(s). Learners must listen carefully and speak clearly and accurately for communication to occur. This activity type is particularly valuable because (1) it fosters meaningful interaction and (2) it involves both the listening and speaking skills. Although the interaction is highly controlled, it resembles actual communication between two or more speakers.

The following information gap activity involves two learners of English. In this example, the learners are practicing / ε / and / æ / with names of people and names of food items. One has the card for Learner A and the other has card for Learner B. Neither is allowed to see the other's card. All communication must be verbal.

*Situation: Each person listed is supposed to bring two items to a church picnic. Learner A knows what some of the items are; Learner B knows the other items. As each asks questions of the other person, he or she fills in the blanks. Questions might be: "What is \_\_\_\_\_ bringing?," "Who is bringing \_\_\_\_\_?" or "Is he (she) bringing anything else?"*

Learner A		
Ed	baked beans	cake
Cheri		pretzels
	potato chips	7-UP
Betty	baked beans	
David		
Ted	paper plates	

Learner B		
Ed	baked beans	cake
Cheri	steak	
Debbie		
Betty		lemonade
David	cherry pie	Pepsi
Ted		tablecloth