

## **Academic Speaking Guide**

### **Record Your Voice**

It can be very useful to develop your pronunciation and speaking skills to hear yourself speak. The audio cassette recorders in the Open Access Centre can be used for this (please ask someone at reception or make a one-to-one advisory appointment if you need help). Many mobile phones also have voice recorders built on to them and some digital voice recorders are now very inexpensive. Listen to yourself speaking and work on improving your pronunciation (the sounds of the language), enunciation (how clearly you speak) and intonation (the pitch and movement of your tone of voice). Try to imitate native speakers and see how close you can get! The audio cassette recorders in the OAC allow you to listen to the recording of your own voice simultaneously with the recording on the cassette. This is the best way for you to make an immediate comparison between the model voice and your own. Ask at OAC reception if you need help.

If you find someone to have conversation practice with, ask them if you can record the conversation. Then, play some of the conversation and ask your partner to identify where misunderstandings occurred and try to work out better ways to express yourself in that situation.

### **Talk Out loud**

Speaking has many similarities with sport. When you are speaking, you are using the muscles in your chest, throat, mouth and face. In order to improve your pronunciation and the clarity of your speaking (enunciation), you have to train your muscles to work in a different way than they do with your native language. When you speak a foreign language, your face typically feels different because you are making shapes with your face and mouth that you may not normally do. Talking out loud to yourself helps to train your muscles (but warn your flatmates or they may worry that you are talking to yourself). Just like sport, you need regular practice to improve.

### **OAC Self-Study**

For pronunciation, it is generally better to study frequently for a short time (15 to 45 minutes). Browse the resources in the OAC. Find a book that you think will be useful for you.

Here are some examples:

Practise pronouncing consonant clusters 'pl', 'bl', 'pr' and 'br' on page 27 of Elements of Pronunciation. Identify any English sounds that you find difficult to produce or recognise e.g. /i:/ or /ɪ/ or /e/ or /æ/ and use the diagrams in 'Ship or Sheep' to help you to practise how to produce each sound. You can also use the online sound videos on the BBC website for this.

Find the units in New Headway Upper-Intermediate Pronunciation Course that will help you with connected speech and stress and intonation.

## Watch Yourself in the Mirror or Video Yourself

Achieving good pronunciation in a second language often involves developing the muscles in your face, mouth, throat and upper body to do things that they may not do in your first language! This is just like practising a sport. Sports professionals develop their skills by watching video of their own performance and this technique can also apply to pronunciation. If you have video camera or a mobile phone that can take video, use that. Alternatively, watch yourself in the mirror. Two suggested activities that you can do are as follows:

Try taking a very short extract of a DVD or a video of an English speaker that you have that you can play and repeat. Copy exactly what the person says. Concentrate on the shape of the face and the expression. Close your eyes and imagine yourself saying the same thing and making the same shapes and expressions with the mouth and face. See if you can imitate the person's face and mouth. Does this help your pronunciation improve?

Watch the videos for the sounds that you find difficult on the BBC website ([www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/sounds](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/sounds)). Record or watch yourself and try to imitate the same shape and movement of the mouth.

## Observe Others

Before you can develop good pronunciation yourself, you need to be able to identify the sounds. Typically, sounds that students may have problems with pronouncing may also be sounds that students have problems identifying when listening. So, developing your ability to identify sounds when listening may also help your pronunciation. So, try to identify the sounds that you have problems with when listening, not just when speaking.

## Silent Reading

When you read quietly to yourself, there is a voice inside your head that reads along with you so you can hear the words (try it in your own language to make sure!). There are several interesting things about this 'inner voice'. One is that it is capable of 'speaking' much faster than you can speak normally. Of course, this is because when you speak normally, the speed is restricted by the physical movements of the muscles in your face, mouth and throat. The second interesting fact is that when your inner voice is 'speaking', the muscles in your throat, mouth and face make movements that match the sounds the inner voice is making. You are not making any noise, but your muscles are still matching the inner voice!

We have all experienced meeting unfamiliar words in English when we are reading (even native English speakers). If it is a word that you can easily pronounce, you may stop to think about the meaning. However, if it is a word that you can not pronounce, your inner voice tries to work out how to pronounce it. You may even try 3 or 4 different possible ways of pronouncing the word. This problem is less likely to occur with languages which are phonetic where there is a direct relationship between spelling and pronunciation. English, however, is not a phonetic language, and words with the same combinations of letters can often be pronounced in different ways and vice versa e.g. foot / room / soon / book.

As a result, it is possible to argue that pronunciation can help with reading speed! If you know how to pronounce the words you are reading, you will be able to read more quickly.

So, what activity can I do to practice this? As a self-study activity for pronunciation, read a book that is slightly above your level. You can use the graded reading books in the Open Access Centre (which you can also borrow and take home) as a good resource. These are simplified books at different levels so you can find the best level for your own vocabulary knowledge. When you are reading, pay attention to your inner voice. Identify the words that you have problems pronouncing. Use the phonemic chart and a monolingual dictionary to learn and practise the correct pronunciation of the unfamiliar words, or ask someone else to help. Then, read the same passage again and see if you can increase your reading speed.

## Learn the Phonemic Chart

The phonemic chart is included in this guide as an appendix. The pronunciation books and resources in the Open Access Centre have units to help you learn the phonemic symbols and the BBC website has videos which are very useful. There are many advantages to knowing the phonemic chart and also being able to write with the symbols (like learning a new alphabet).

Knowing the phonemic chart allows you to use dictionaries as a pronunciation resource. All good dictionaries contain the phonemic script version of a word. Online and electronic dictionaries often have sound files included with them which also helps. The phonemic symbols are also used a lot in most English teaching resource books so knowing the symbols will help you to gain the most benefit from them. Finally, they can help you to identify your individual, personal weak areas in pronunciation and then find activities in the resource books to practise them.

Being able to write using the phonemic symbols allows you to record pronunciation of new individual words in your vocabulary books. When you look up a word in a dictionary, you can also record the pronunciation of it. It also means that if you hear a new word that you do not know, you can write down the sound of it and ask another English speaker for help identifying the word. Finally, it can help you to make sense of connected speech e.g. "Do you want to go?" can be written as /dʒə wɒnə ɡəʊ/. This gives you a record of how typical spoken English sounds so you can practise it. It will also help you to identify connected speech when you are listening.

## Identify Common Pronunciation Problems

Different nationalities tend to have specific pronunciation problems as they do not have equivalents in their own first language and are therefore unable to pronounce certain sounds.

All nationalities, with exception of the Greek, have problems pronouncing the sounds /θ/ and /ð/. All nationalities tend to have problems pronouncing: /t/, /d/, /s/ and /z/. The Dutch, Scandinavian, German, Indian, Spanish, Thai, Vietnamese, Arabic, Japanese and Chinese tend to have no equivalents or make substitutions for: /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /ʃ/ and /ʒ/.

This information comes from the book *Learner English* by Swan and Smith (1987), which is available in the OAC. The book deals with the majority of nationalities and looks at the specific pronunciation problems faced by each nationality. By identifying the potential problems for your nationality, you can concentrate on the areas that are more likely to be a challenge for you. Once you have identified the 'problem areas' you can use the study resources available to you to practise and improve your pronunciation.

## External Websites

There are a number of useful websites that can help you to improve your speaking skills. Please note that these websites are not affiliated with Newcastle University.

### **BBC Learning English: Pronunciation**

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron)

### **BBC Learning English: Sounds**

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/sounds](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/sounds)

### **BBC English: Features of English pronunciation**

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/features/spelling](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/features/spelling)

### **BBC English: Pronunciation Quizzes**

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/quiz/quiz1](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/quiz/quiz1)

### **BBC English: Radio programmes about pronunciation**

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/progs/prog1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/progs/prog1.shtml)

### **English Language Centre**

Presentation advice and video clips.

<http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/eap/audio-visual/>

### **Using English for Academic Purposes (UEFAP)**

[www.uefap.com/speaking/spkfram.htm](http://www.uefap.com/speaking/spkfram.htm)



ELMO has sections to help with speaking skills. Go to <https://elmo.ncl.ac.uk> or select 'English Language Materials Online' from the 'quick links' menu on the Newcastle University internal home page. Click on 'Study', then 'Search', then 'Skill', then 'Speaking'. There are four different aspects of speaking you can work on. Choose the skill area you are most interested in and work through the exercises.

For more information in ELMO visit- <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/insessional/english/elmo/>

## Books with Audio Cassettes, CDs, Videos and DVDs

Some recommended books to help improve your speaking skills are listed below. Many of these books are accompanied by audio cassettes or CDs. This list also includes materials to help with presentation skills and pronunciation. All are available in either the Open Access Centre (OAC) or the Robinson library (RL).

- ❖ Discussion and Interaction in the Academic Community (Madden and Rohlck, 1997) [OAC]
- ❖ Elements of Pronunciation (Mortimer, 1985) [OAC]
- ❖ English Pronunciation in Use: Elementary (Marks, 2007) [OAC]
- ❖ English Pronunciation in Use: Intermediate (Hancock, 2006) [OAC]
- ❖ English Pronunciation in Use: Advanced (Hewings, 2007) [OAC]
- ❖ Giving Academic Presentations (Reinhart, 2002) [OAC & RL]

❖ Headway Elementary Pronunciation (Cunningham and Moor, 1996)	[OAC]
❖ Ideas and Issues (Gerard-Sharp, 1994)	[OAC]
❖ Learner English (Swan and Smith, 2001)	[OAC & RL]
❖ New Headway Pronunciation Pre-Intermediate (Bowler and Parminter, 2001)	[OAC]
❖ New Headway Pronunciation Intermediate (Bowler and Cunningham, 1999)	[OAC]
❖ New Headway Pronunciation Upper-Intermediate (Bowler and Cunningham, 1999)	[OAC]
❖ Presenting at Conferences, Seminars and Meetings (Shephard, 2005)	[OAC]
❖ Presenting Facts and Figures (Kerridge, 1988)	[OAC]
❖ Presenting in English (Powell, 1996)	[OAC]
❖ Professional Presentations (Goodale, 1998)	[OAC]
❖ Pronunciation for Advanced Learners of English (Brazil, 1994)	[OAC & RL]
❖ Pronunciation Games (Hancock, 1995)	[OAC & RL]
❖ Scientists Must Speak (Walters and Walters, 2002)	[OAC & RL]
❖ Ship or Sheep? An intermediate pronunciation course (Baker, 1977)	[OAC]
❖ Sounds English (O'Connor and Fletcher, 1989)	[OAC]
❖ Speaking (Rignall and Furneaux, 1997)	[OAC]
❖ Study Speaking (2 <sup>nd</sup> Edition) (Anderson, Maclean and Lynch, 2004)	[OAC]
❖ The Language of Meetings (Goodale, 1987)	[OAC & RL]

# The Phonemic Chart

Single Vowel Sounds

Diphthongs

i:	ɪ	ʊ	u:	ɪə	eɪ		
feet	sit	book	shoe	ear	pay		
e	ə	ɜ:	ɔ:	ʊə	ɔɪ	əʊ	
bed	mother	bird	more	pure	toy	no	
æ	ʌ	ɑ:	ɒ	eə	aɪ	aʊ	
cat	cup	car	hot	hair	fly	how	
p	b	t	d	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
pen	boy	ten	do	chip	jump	can	go
f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
fall	voice	thin	the	sit	zip	she	vision
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j
map	not	song	help	long	run	win	yes

Consonants