

A man in a dark suit and tie stands at a modern, dark-colored podium on a stage. Behind him, a band of musicians in dark uniforms with white accents stands in a line. To the left, several flags are visible, including the United States flag. The stage is lit with spotlights, and the floor in the foreground is covered with a pattern of small, glowing lights. The overall atmosphere is formal and professional.

PART II: TECHNIQUES FOR BETTER SPEAKING

BASIC PRONUNCIATION EXERCISES

HINTS ON PRONUNCIATION FOR FOREIGNERS

By GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

I take it you already know
of tough and bough and cough and dough.
Others may stumble, but not you, On hiccough, thorough, laugh and through.
Well done! And now you wish, perhaps,
To learn of less familiar traps.

Beware of heard, a dreadful word
That looks like beard and sounds like bird.
And dead - it's said like bed, not bead.
For goodness sake, don't call it deed!
Watch out for meat and great and threat.
They rhyme with suite and straight and debt.

A moth is not a moth in mother,
Nor both in bother, broth in brother,
And here is not a match for there,
Nor dear and fear for pear and bear.
And then there's dose and rose and lose
Just look them up - and goose and choose.
And cork and work and card and ward.
And font and front and word and sword.
And do and go, then thwart and cart.
Come, come I've hardly made a start.

A dreadful language? Man alive,
I'd mastered it when I was five!



Try reading this poem aloud. If you can, tape yourself and listen to how you sound. Keep the tape, if you can, to check on your progress as you go through your English B course.

English is a tricky language, that is for sure!! One of the most important things to remember for your oral is to pronounce your words clearly. Do not confuse clear pronunciation with your accent – English is a foreign language to you, you are supposed to have an accent. It is expected! However, it is also expected that you can articulate yourself clearly and make yourself understood – this includes your voice being clear on the tape recording of your oral.

You can make sure you maximise your pronunciation by practicing well – start with individual letters, then repetitive letters by using devices such as tongue twisters.

OPEN YOUR MOUTH!

When you speak, it is very important to open your mouth – use your lips and tongue to make your words nice and clear. Try the following exercises – they may make you feel silly at first, but with these basic exercises you can become aware of what your mouth should be doing, and how it should feel when you are speaking clearly.

OVER-THE-TOP ALPHABET



If you do this in class, use your fingertips to feel your mouth to understand how it is moving. Watch your teacher's mouth and the other students – how well does everybody move their mouths when talking?

For the first few times you do this by yourself, use a mirror. Sit in front of the mirror – it doesn't matter what size it is, as long as you can see your mouth clearly. Your tongue, lips, mouth and jaw should all move when you speak.

Loosen up your mouth and lips first by opening your mouth as wide as you can – as if you are trying to get the corners of your mouth to touch your ears. Then open it as high as you can, by pushing your top lip towards the top of your head, and the bottom lip towards your chin. Alternate each stretch two or three times.

Start saying each letter of the alphabet, exaggerating the movement of your mouth as much as you can to pronounce the letters. Notice how your mouth moves differently for each letter. Repeat this exercise to practice moving your mouth and get into the habit of moving it for each of the letters.

What's the point? Obviously nobody moves their mouth this much when they speak English in normal situations. Practising these movements, however, will make you more aware of how your mouth is moving, and help to train it into the habit of moving well to make sure your words come out clearly when you do speak.



TONGUE TWISTERS



OK, so you know that you have to move your mouth, but repeating the alphabet can get a little boring. So let's expand your exercises and make things more interesting.

Tongue twisters are a great way to make your mouth move and to help your pronunciation become clearer. Tongue twisters are used by actors to warm up their voices to help them say their lines clearly and by speech therapists to help people overcome problems of speech. The bottom line is, tongue twisters can help you to improve your speech.

Take care to pronounce each word carefully and clearly the first few times you say each phrase. Speak slowly at first. Speed is not the key, not at first. Good pronunciation is the important thing.

If you stumble over one word, don't worry – continue on. If you have trouble with a couple of words: stop, take a breath and continue.

TRY THESE FIRST FEW: REMEMBER, SPEAK SLOWLY AT FIRST.

The cat catchers can't catch caught cats

In Hertford, Hereford and Hampshire hurricanes hardly ever happen.

Do drop in at the Dewdrop Inn.

A flea and a fly flew up in a flue. Said the flea, "Let us fly!" Said the fly, "Let us flee!" So they flew through a flaw in the flue.

How can a clam cram in a clean cream can?

One-one was a race horse.
Two-two was one too.
One-one won one race.
Two-two won one too.

All I want is a proper cup of coffee made in a proper copper coffee pot. You can believe it or not, but I just want a cup of coffee in a proper coffee pot. Tin coffee pots or iron coffee pots are of no use to me. If I can't have a proper cup of coffee in a proper copper coffee pot, I'll have a cup of tea!

So what did you think? Not as easy as it seems, is it?

MORE TONGUE TWISTERS
TRY THESE WHENEVER YOU CAN!



You've no need to light a night-light on a light night like tonight. For a night-light's light's a slight light, and tonight's a night that's light. When a night's light, like tonight's light, it is really not quite right, to light night-lights with their slight lights on a light night like tonight.

Ed Nott was shot and Sam Shott was not. So it is better to be Shott than Nott. Some say Nott was not shot. But Shott says he shot Nott. Either the shot Shott shot at Nott was not shot, or Nott was shot. If the shot Shott shot shot Nott, Nott was shot. But if the shot Shott shot shot Shott, the shot was Shott, not Nott. However, the shot Shott shot shot not Shott - but Nott. So, Ed Nott was shot and that's hot! Is it not?

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. Did Peter Piper pick a peck of pickled peppers? If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?

I need not your needles, they're needless to me; for the kneading of noodles, they're needless, you see. But did my neat knickers need to be kneed, I then should have need of needles indeed.

Six sick hicks nick six slick bricks with picks and sticks.

I thought a thought. But the thought I thought wasn't the thought I thought I thought!

If two witches were watching two watches, which witch would watch which watch?

A tutor who tooted a flute, tried to tutor two tooters to toot. Said the two to their tutor, "Is it harder to toot or to tutor two tooters to toot?"

Betty beat a bit of butter to make a better batter.

A big black bug bit a big black bear, made the big black bear bleed blood.

A tree toad loved a she-toad
Who lived up in a tree.
He was a two-toed tree toad
But a three-toed toad was she.
The two-toed tree toad tried to win
The three-toed she-toad's heart,
For the two-toed tree toad loved the ground
That the three-toed tree toad trod.
But the two-toed tree toad tried in vain.
He couldn't please her whim.
From her tree toad bower
With her three-toed power
The she-toad vetoed him.

When does the wristwatch strap shop shut? Does the wristwatch strap shop shut soon? Which wristwatch straps are Swiss wristwatch straps?

A good cook could cook as much cookies as a good cook who could cook cookies.

She sells seashells by the seashore.

MAKE YOUR OWN TONGUE TWISTERS



PART ONE

1. Write the first five names that come into your head.
2. Now choose one of the names to use for this activity. (Names beginning with b, d, l, m, p, s, or t are easiest)
3. Brainstorm words beginning with the same letter – don't try to fit together anything, just make a list of as many word as you can. This will help you to focus on the letter sounds.

PART TWO



Work in small groups (of between two and four people). You can use the form in the 'Activity Forms' section at the back of the resource (or photocopy it if this is a library resource) or create your own on a piece of paper. Write the name you have chose at the top of the page. To create your own, draw a table. Down the side, one on each line, write the questions 'What, Where, When, Why'. Divide the remainder of the page into columns.

MARY

What did s/he do?			
Where?			
When?			
Why? (because ...)			

Pass your paper to the person on your right.

Write one answer for the first questions for the paper you just received. Your answer must begin with the first sound in the person's name (e.g. Mary, made a mess).

Pass the paper again and write an answer for the next question, again using the same sound. Continue doing this until all the blanks on all the papers are full. You should have lots of different answers from all the people in your group when your paper comes back to you!

PART THREE

Now use your paper to make funny tongue twister combinations. How many can you create? Which one is the funniest? You can even make one up for each of your friends!

What's the point? Very rarely is a conversation as complicated as this! Once in a while you will come across combinations that contain similar sounds, but nothing like these, and not very often. So why practise these? Practise these tongue twisters because they will help you to focus on individual words and make your pronunciation unambiguous, so when you do speak in a normal conversation, your words will be clear to your listeners.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE (OTHER ACTIVITIES)

You have probably heard the saying: Practice makes perfect. Well, it's true! By practising you will gain the skills and experience to get the best result you can in your oral, so here are some exercises to help you on your way. Some of these you can do by yourself, in the classroom or at home, and some are group activities for the whole class.

Remember, have fun!

WHAT COMES NEXT?



Watch the beginning of a video/movie scene; enough to understand a bit about the characters and what is happening. After you are happy with the scene, watch a five-minute segment of video **without sound**. In groups, write what you think the dialogue might have been, then perform it for the class.

Try to mimic the style of speech as closely as you can. This doesn't mean that you should try to imitate the accent — just try to imitate the style of their speech. Take into account the character's age, profession, emotions, who they are talking to and the situations they are in.

AUDIO BOOKS



Borrow a book from the library in both written and audio form. Don't worry if they don't match exactly — books are always changed for the audio version. The idea is to listen to the expression in the reader's voice. To entertain listeners, to gain their interest and keep it, the reader needs to make the story sound interesting. Remember, there is nothing to look at, so every expression, emotion and sense of drama in the reading has to come from the reader's voice.

Each person should choose one chapter to read aloud. Listen to the intonation and expression in the reader's voice on the audio book then practise your own version from the text in the book. Try to copy the style of reading as closely as possible. Read it aloud to your class.

HAIKU POEMS



Haiku is a style of poetry that originated in Japan. It has only three lines, with lines one and three having five syllables each, and line two having seven syllables. Reading haiku poems can be very good for your pronunciation, because it gives you a small group of words to work with, but it is also an excellent way to practice your rhythm and emphasis.

Go to your school library and find a book with haiku verses, or look some up on the internet. Choose one that you like the best. Practice reading it aloud, and present it to your class. If you are feeling adventurous, write some of your own.



Reading poetry aloud can also help you to pace your speaking voice. If you talk too quickly, especially when you are nervous, your audience may not understand you. If you speak too slowly, your audience may lose interest in what you are saying! Pace is very important.

Read your favourite poem aloud, by yourself or to your class. If you are reading by yourself, you can tape it and listen back to your reading to see how it sounds. Listen with your eyes closed. How well can you understand yourself?

GET DRAMATIC!

Plays are an excellent way to practise your intonation and pronunciation, getting you to use real conversation in actual situations. It is also good to practise interaction with someone else, even if the lines are scripted. There are plenty of resources on the internet, if your library at school doesn't have books of plays in English.

This does not mean that you have to learn the entirety of Macbeth by heart! There are a lot of short, entertaining plays out there. Some of the sites on the internet where you can find these resources include:

Free Drama <http://www.geocities.com/pocolocoplayers/free.html>

Theatre Words <http://www.theaterwords.com/>

G.L. Horton's One-Act Plays http://www.stagepage.info/oneact/_oneact.html

Bruce Goodman's One Act Plays <http://plays.freeservers.com/bbgone.htm>

School Show Plays <http://www.schoolshows.demon.co.uk/resources/plays/plays.htm>

Look for your own resources. Check your library. Ask the drama teacher at your school. She may know where to find some.

If you are feeling really adventurous, and you have the time, write your own! Make it sound as real as you can. Remember, they don't have to be long. The story you tell, and how you tell it, is the most important thing to work on.

LAST LETTER FIRST



This is a great quick game to play at any point, in any class with a group of people. Pick a topic/ subject for the game to revolve around. At first, choose something simple, like animals, until everyone understands the rules and is comfortable with the game.

Your teacher will give you the starting word, then go around the classroom, with each person saying another word that fits into the same category – but each new word must start with the last letter of the word the person has said before them!

EXAMPLE:

Subject: Animals

Teacher: Hippopotamus

Student 1: Snake

Student 2: Elephant

Student 3: Tiger



Continue around the room. If a word is repeated, or incorrect, that person is out of the game!

PRACTISE YOUR INTONATION



This is an exercise for pairs. Intonation is very important. Different functions of sentences have different intonations. Below are some examples. Listen as your teacher says each one. Can you hear the difference?

This is something you must remember when you do your oral. Try saying each one with a partner. Listen to how they say it. Make sure each type of intonation you use is accurate. Intonation such as this stops your oral from becoming boring, and makes what you are saying much easier and clearer to listen to.

- I like running, hiking, swimming and cycling. (List intonation)
- Do you prefer cats or dogs? (Choice intonation)
- Are we all going? (Rising intonation)
- Would you like gloves and a scarf? (Double rising intonation)
- Today is the worst rainstorm yet. (Falling intonation)

Discuss with your class what you think the reasons for each type of intonation might be. Create another example of each type of intonation. Make sure you check each with your teacher to make sure it is correct.

No FILLERS FOR ME!



At all times, you should try to be clear with your speech. 'Fillers' are common in English, as they are in most languages, to give you time to think of a word or your next point. However, fillers are sloppy and if you get into the habit of using them, it can be very annoying for your listeners.

Examples of fillers include: 'Umm...', 'Uh...', 'you know...', 'like...', 'whatever...'. How many others can you think of?

These fillers (and all the others!) are very distracting to your listeners. They may forget your point, or think you sound unsure of what you are saying. Be firm! Be confident! Say no to fillers!

MONITOR YOUR FILLERS:



With a partner, talk for one or two minutes about anything (use impromptu topics, if you wish), without stopping. Your partner should listen closely, and monitor your speech. The listener should write down any fillers heard. After one or two minutes, swap over.

You should now have an idea of which fillers you use. Alternatively, you could try this exercise with a tape recorder by yourself at home.

No FILLERS - THE GAME



One person is selected to go into the 'hot seat'. They are then asked questions to which they can reply 'Yes' or 'No' or with a short answer. Just remember, the questions and answers should be short! The person must answer as quickly as possible WITHOUT saying 'Ummm....' or using any fillers!

DRAMA QUEENS AND KINGS

This is a variation of using drama in the classroom. Using a play or conversation you have read and enjoyed, imagine you are in a terrible soap opera – OVERACT!!

Make every emotion extreme, every event as tragedy or triumph! Just put as much expression into it as you can. If you have some good actors in your class, they may wish to do some 'impromptu performances' and make it all up themselves! Imagine scenes such as the typical 'break up' scene in soap operas, or a 'revelations' scene.

Alternatively, you could choose one script, and each group could act it out in different emotions, as chosen by your teacher! Try some of the following emotions, no matter what the script says:

- Joyously happy
- Tragedy
- Secret/Conspiracy
- Dramatic revelation
- Angry/Argumentative
- Fear
- Comedy/Everything is terribly funny

IMPROMPTU TALKS



An impromptu talk — or making a speech without any preparation — is an excellent way to practise your skills. Set a time limit for each person. Draw your topic out of a hat or box of topics. There are two lists of topics provided in the Activity Forms section — one easy and one more advanced.

If you would like to make your own, each student should write a topic title they would like to speak on, or listen to, on a piece of paper. Fold them up. Put them all into a container to draw random topics from.

For the simple topics, you may have no preparation time, but for the advanced topics it is recommended that each student have at least one minute preparation. One idea is to have the students draw their topic one person before they speak, with the initial person being given one minute preparation by the teacher.

Each student should randomly choose a topic and talk on the subject for one minute.

For a more advanced activity, the other students in the class may also evaluate the impromptu speeches. There is an evaluation form you may photocopy in [Part V: Assessing Verbal Skills](#).

ONE MORE EXERCISE.....IF YOU CAN



There is a marvellous poem called *The Chaos* written by Nolst Trenité, also known by the name 'Charivarius', who lived from 1870 until 1946. Like George Bernard Shaw's *Hints on pronunciation* for foreigners, it covers the problems of English spelling and pronunciation, except that *The Chaos* is much longer! It is said that if you can pronounce every word of this correctly, you will speak more correctly than most of the native English speaking population! The poem is reprinted at the back of this resource, in the Activity Forms Section.