

Vowels

- The characteristics of the 'pure' vowel sounds
- The characteristics of diphthongs
- Raising awareness of vowel sounds
- Sample lessons
 - Lesson 1: 'Phonemic bingo': Particular vowel sounds
 - Lesson 2: 'Noughts and crosses': Particular vowel sounds
 - Lesson 3: 'Snap': Particular vowel sounds
 - Lesson 4: 'Stand up and be counted': Vowel sounds/schwa /ə/
 - Lesson 5: 'Which vowel am I?': Vowel sounds
 - Lesson 6: Collaborative writing: Vowel sounds
- Further ideas for activities

The characteristics of the 'pure' vowel sounds

We saw in Chapter 1 that vowels are articulated when a voiced airstream is shaped using the tongue and the lips to modify the overall shape of the mouth. English speakers generally use twelve pure vowels and eight diphthongs.

If you try saying /i:/ /e/ /æ/ /ɒ/ /ɔ:/ /u:/ out loud, you should be able to feel that your tongue changes position in your mouth, yet it doesn't actually obstruct the airflow. Try moving smoothly from one sound to the next, without stopping. You will also be aware of the shape of your lips changing, and your lower jaw moving. It is these basic movements which give vowels their chief characteristics.

It is important to keep in mind what it is exactly which makes a phoneme valid as a unit for analysis; the distinctions between phonemes hold, in that they are units which differentiate between word meanings. In the previous chapter we looked at minimal pairs, such as *soap* /səʊp/ and *soup* /su:p/ to illustrate this principle.

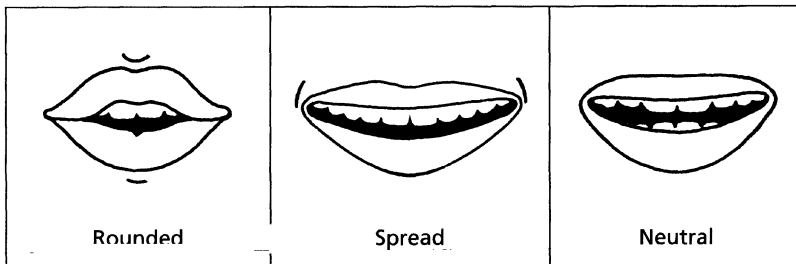
It is useful to mention here too one of the principles behind phonemic analysis: it was mentioned in Chapter 1 that we may pronounce particular sounds in different ways. Your pronunciation of /r/ may be slightly different to mine, yet we manage to understand each other. These two different pronunciations of /r/ are known as **allophones**. (Allophones are usually indicated by being enclosed in square brackets.) Though there may be subtle differences in articulation, they do not lead to a change of meaning. In phonemic transcription, each symbol is therefore used as a representation of the 'principal' sound of a 'family' of similar sounds. Such subtle differences are not important for the classroom, and so we will concentrate on general descriptions for vowel sounds.

The pure vowel sounds

The word 'pure' here is used to differentiate single vowel sounds from diphthongs, which we will consider later. The sounds have been divided up into categories, according to the characteristics of their articulation, and each category begins with a brief outline. All of the sounds, together with the example words, are on the CD.

The tables on the following pages give the following information. A diagram of the 'vowel space' (or the part of the mouth and throat which is used in the production of vowels) is shown. The dot on each diagram represents the height of the tongue, and also the part of the tongue which is raised. The phonemic symbol is shown. The characteristics of the sound are described. Tongue and lip positions are referred to. Example words are given, to illustrate the spelling/sound relationships.

Reference is also made to lip positions; the illustrations below show the basic lip positions which are used in describing the articulation of vowel sounds. We notice, of course, constant movement in real speech, as we move from sound to sound and switch between vowels and consonants. However, if we take a 'snapshot' view of lip positions, this is what we see:



Rounded: the lips are pushed forward into the shape of a circle. Example sound: /ʊ/

Spread: the corners of the lips are moved away from each other, as when smiling. Example sound: /i:/

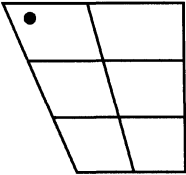
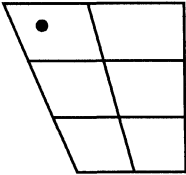
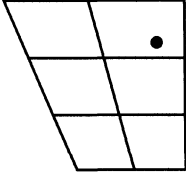
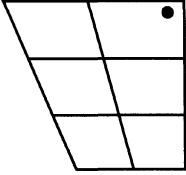
Neutral: the lips are not noticeably rounded or spread. Example sound: /ə/

The languages referred to in the following diagrams are as follows:

Arabic (A)	Chinese (C)	French (F)	German (G)
Greek (Gk)	Indian languages (Ind)	Italian (It)	Japanese (J)
Portuguese (P)	Russian (R)	Scandinavian languages (Sc)	Spanish (Sp)
Turkish (Tu)			

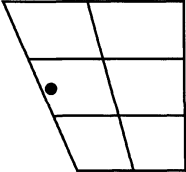
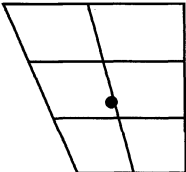
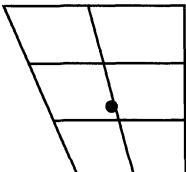
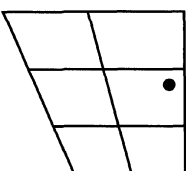
Close vowels

For close vowels the tongue is quite high in the mouth. Moving from /i:/ through to /u:/, we also notice the different positions of the tongue; /i:/ is a front vowel, and /u:/ is a back vowel.

9	<p style="text-align: center;">i:</p> 	<p>Characteristics The front of the tongue is slightly behind and below the close front position. (The 'close' position is where the tongue is closest to the roof of the mouth.) Lips are spread. The tongue is tense, and the sides of the tongue touch the upper molars.</p> <p>As in . . . <i>be<u>a</u>d, ke<u>y</u>, chee<u>s</u>e, sce<u>n</u>e, pol<u>i</u>ce, <u>peo</u>ple, qu<u>a</u>y</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: C, Gk, P, R, Tu</p>
10	<p style="text-align: center;">I</p> 	<p>Characteristics The part of the tongue slightly nearer the centre is raised to just above the half-close position (not as high as in /i:/). The lips are spread loosely, and the tongue is more relaxed. The sides of the tongue may just touch the upper molars.</p> <p>As in . . . <i>hi<u>t</u>, sau<u>s</u>age, bi<u>g</u>gest, rhy<u>th</u>m, mou<u>nt</u>ain, bu<u>s</u>y, wo<u>m</u>en, sie<u>v</u>e</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: A, C, F, Gk, It, J, P, Sc, Sp, Tu</p>
11	<p style="text-align: center;">U</p> 	<p>Characteristics The part of the tongue just behind the centre is raised, just above the half-close position. The lips are rounded, but loosely so. The tongue is relatively relaxed.</p> <p>As in . . . <i>bo<u>o</u>k, go<u>o</u>d, wo<u>m</u>an, pu<u>s</u>h, pu<u>l</u>l</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: F, Gk, It, P, Sp, Tu</p>
12	<p style="text-align: center;">u:</p> 	<p>Characteristics The back of the tongue is raised just below the close position. Lips are rounded. The tongue is tense.</p> <p>As in . . . <i>fo<u>o</u>d, ru<u>d</u>e, tru<u>e</u>, wh<u>o</u>, fru<u>i</u>t, sou<u>p</u></i></p> <p>Difficulties for: C, P</p>

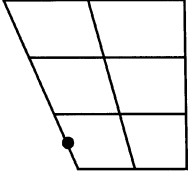
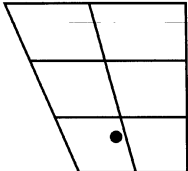
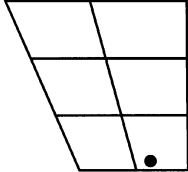
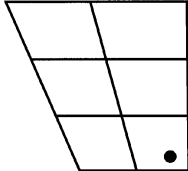
Mid vowels

For mid vowels the tongue is neither high nor low in the mouth. Moving from /e/ through to /ɜ:/, we also notice the different positions of the tongue; /e/ is a front vowel, and /ɜ:/ is a back vowel.

<p>13</p>	<p>e</p> 	<p>Characteristics The front of the tongue is between the half-open and half-close positions. Lips are loosely spread. the tongue is tenser than for /ɪ/, and the sides of the tongue may touch the upper molars.</p> <p>As in . . . <i>egg, left, said, head, read (past), instead, any, leisure, leopard</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: A, Ind, Tu</p>
<p>14</p>	<p>ə</p> 	<p>Characteristics: The centre of the tongue is between the half-close and half-open positions. Lips are relaxed, and neutrally spread.</p> <p>As in . . . <i>about, paper, banana, nation, the (before consonants)</i></p> <p>Commonest vowel sound in English. Never stressed, and many unstressed vowels tend towards this sound. Differs from other phonemes, in that its contrast with similarly articulated long sound /ɜ:/ does not involve a change of meaning. Gets its name from Hebrew /ʔəwɑː/, meaning 'emptiness', or 'nothing'.</p> <p>Difficulties for: A, C, F, G, Gk, Ind, It, J, P, R, Sc, Sp, Tu</p>
<p>15</p>	<p>ɜː</p> 	<p>Characteristics The centre of the tongue is between the half-close and half-open positions. Lips are relaxed, and neutrally spread.</p> <p>As in . . . <i>shirt, her, word, further, pearl, serve, myrtle</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: J</p>
<p>16</p>	<p>ɔː</p> 	<p>Characteristics The back of the tongue is raised to between the half-open and half-close positions. Lips are loosely rounded.</p> <p>As in . . . <i>fork, call, snore, taught, bought, board, saw, pour, broad, all, law, horse, hoarse</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: A, C, F, G, Gk, Ind, It, J, P, R, Sp, Tu</p>

Open vowels

For open vowels, the tongue is low in the mouth. Moving from /æ/ through to /ɒ/, we also notice the different positions of the tongue; /æ/ is a front vowel, and /ɒ/ is a back vowel.

17	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">æ</p> 	<p>Characteristics The front of the tongue is raised to just below the half-open position. Lips are neutrally open.</p> <hr/> <p>As in . . . <i>hat, attack, antique, plait</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: A, C, F, G, Gk, Ind, It, J, P, R, Sc, Sp, Tu</p>
18	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">ʌ</p> 	<p>Characteristics The centre of the tongue is raised to just above the fully open position. Lips are neutrally open.</p> <hr/> <p>As in . . . <i>run, uncle, front, nourish, does, come, flood</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: A, C, F, Gk, It, J, P, Sc, Sp, Tu</p>
19	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">ɑː</p> 	<p>Characteristics The tongue, between the centre and the back, is in the fully open position. Lips are neutrally open.</p> <hr/> <p>As in . . . <i>far, part, half, class, command, clerk, memoir, aunty, hearth</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: A, C, F, G, Gk, Ind, It, J, P, R, Sp, Tu</p>
20	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">ɒ</p> 	<p>Characteristics The back of the tongue is in the fully open position. Lips are lightly rounded.</p> <hr/> <p>As in . . . <i>dog, often, cough, want, because, knowledge, Australia</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: Ind</p>

Difficulties in analysing vowel sounds

Aside from the articulatory differences, the length of short and long vowels (the long vowel phonemes being followed by the lengthening symbol /:/), is best seen as relative. For example, consider the sound /ɪ/ in the words *bid* /bɪd/ and *bit* /bɪt/. If you say the two words over to yourself a few times it becomes apparent that the /ɪ/ in *bid* is longer than the /ɪ/ in *bit*. The same phenomenon is noticed in the minimal pair *badge* /bædʒ/ and *batch* /bætʃ/. Essentially, the rule in operation here is that a short vowel is longer before a voiced consonant. Taking the investigation further would reveal that they are actually more likely to be longer before certain types of voiced consonant too. Interestingly this is not true of all languages, yet it is a distinctive feature of English. There are further aspects of vowel length which we will explore in Chapter 5. You should keep in mind the premise that each symbol represents a 'family' of sounds.

The characteristics of diphthongs

A crude definition of a diphthong might be 'a combination of vowel sounds'. A slightly closer analysis shows us that there is a **glide** (or movement of the tongue, lips and jaw) from one pure vowel sound to another. The first sound in each phoneme is longer and louder than the second in English, but not in all languages. If we listen to the word *house* (the diphthong in question is /aʊ/), we can hear that the /a/ part of the sound is longer than the final /ʊ/ part. If you try making the /ʊ/ part longer, you will hear the difference.

English is usually described as having eight diphthongs, and they can be usefully grouped in the following way:

Centring diphthongs end with a glide towards /ə/. They are called 'centring' because /ə/ is a central vowel (refer to the /ə/ table on page 32).

Examples:

- 1 *clearing* /ɪə/
- 2 *sure* /ʊə/
- 3 *there* /eə/

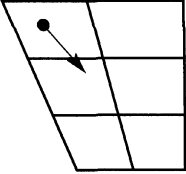
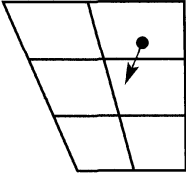
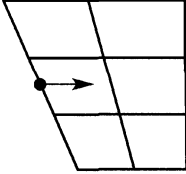
Closing diphthongs end with a glide towards /ɪ/ or towards /ʊ/. The glide is towards a higher position in the mouth.

Examples:

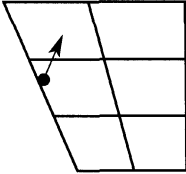
- 4 *they* /eɪ/
- 5 *boy* /ɔɪ/
- 6 *mighty* /aɪ/
- 7 *go* /əʊ/
- 8 *now* /aʊ/

The following tables show the characteristics of the eight diphthong sounds, in the same manner as the previous vowel tables. Bear in mind that while we have mentioned a combination of sounds, or more accurately a glide from one tongue position to another, diphthongs are perceived as one sound, and should be treated as such. The glide in each diagram is shown as an arrow from the tongue position of the initial sound (represented by a dot) to the finishing position of the second element of the diphthong.

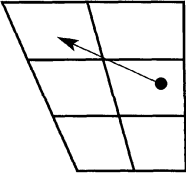
Centring diphthongs

21	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">ɪə</p> 	<p>Characteristics The glide begins in the position for /ɪ/, moving down and back towards /ə/. The lips are neutral, but with a small movement from spread to open.</p> <p>As in . . . <i>beer, beard, fear, pierce, Ian, here, idea</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: A, C, F, G, Gk, Ind, It, J, P, R, Sc, Sp, Tu</p>
22	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">ʊə</p> 	<p>Characteristics The glide begins in the position for /ʊ/, moving forwards and down towards /ə/. The lips are loosely rounded, becoming neutrally spread.</p> <p>As in . . . *<i>sure, moor, tour, obscure</i></p> <p>*Quite a rare diphthong. Many speakers replace it with /ɔ:/</p> <p>Difficulties for: A, C, F, G, Gk, Ind, It, J, P, R, Sc, Sp, Tu</p>
23	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">eə</p> 	<p>Characteristics The glide begins in the position for /e/, moving back towards /ə/. The lips remain neutrally open.</p> <p>As in . . . <i>where, wear, chair, dare, stare, there</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: A, C, F, G, Gk, Ind, It, J, P, R, Sc, Sp, Tu</p>

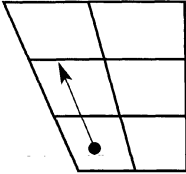
Closing diphthongs ending in /ɪ/

24	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">eɪ</p> 	<p>Characteristics The glide begins in the position for /e/, moving up and slightly back towards /ɪ/. The lips are spread.</p> <p>As in . . . <i>cake, way, weigh, say, pain, they, vein</i></p> <p>Difficulties for: A, C, F, G, Ind, It, Sc, Sp, Tu</p>
----	---	---

25

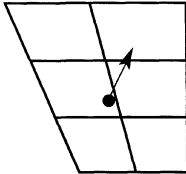
	<p>Characteristics The glide begins in the position for /ɔ:/, moving up and forward towards /ɪ/. The lips start open and rounded, and change to neutral.</p>
	As in . . . <i>toy, avoid, voice, enjoy, boy</i>
	Difficulties for: A, C, Ind, Sp, Tu

26

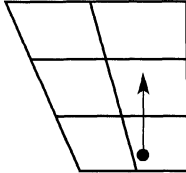
	<p>Characteristics The glide begins in an open position, between front and centre, moving up and slightly forward towards /ɪ/. The lips move from neutral, to loosely spread.</p>
	As in . . . <i>high, tie, buy, kite, might, cry, eye</i>
	Difficulties for: A, C, Sp, Tu

Closing diphthongs ending in /ʊ/

27

	<p>Characteristics The glide begins in the position for /ə/, moving up and back towards /ʊ/. The lips are neutral, but change to loosely rounded.</p>
	As in . . . <i>go, snow, toast, home, hello, although</i>
	Difficulties for: A, C, F, Gk, Ind, It, J, P, Sp, Tu

28

	<p>Characteristics The glide begins in a position quite similar to /aɪ/, moving up towards /ʊ/. The lips start neutral, with a movement to loosely rounded. The glide is not always completed, as the movement involved is extensive.</p>
	As in . . . <i>house, loud, down, how, bough</i>
	Difficulties for: A, C, Sp, Tu

Raising awareness of vowel sounds

The aim of dealing with a sound in isolation in the classroom should be to help learners towards more successful pronunciation of the particular phoneme which is having an effect on communication and intelligibility. In a class which is learning general English, it would not make sense to divert attention away from that purpose in order to teach the complete catalogue of English phonemes, unless the teacher and the class have decided that it would be advantageous.

Sounds should be dealt with in class as and when the need arises. This can be done remedially as a reaction to a communicative difficulty which occurs in class, or because the sounds are an important feature of the grammar or lexis being taught. Sounds can also be practised in their own right, as a way of focusing on a particular area of difficulty.

In spoken language all sounds are, of course, important, but at times certain sounds seem central to the success or otherwise of communication. While L1 English speakers seem able to tolerate a lot of variation in vowel sounds (for example the North/South differences in British English, such as *bath*, pronounced as /bæθ/ or /bɑ:θ/), poor pronunciation can affect intelligibility. Native speakers do accept without too much difficulty some variety in vowel sounds, and certainly the trained ear of a teacher can cope with a wide range of variation, yet vowels present learners with particular difficulties. Accuracy often involves losing a vowel sound from an utterance (seen with /e/ in the 'Alice' lesson plan in Chapter 2) as much as using the correct sound (seen with the *soap* /səʊp/ and *soup* /su:p/, and *paper* /'peɪpə/ and *pepper* /'pepə/ minimal pairs also mentioned in Chapter 2).

Every time someone speaks in class, pronunciation is a matter for consideration. The following suggestions can be used to raise general awareness of vowel sounds. The suggestions are followed by some sample lessons, and other activities.

Using a phonemic chart

This is certainly to be encouraged, especially if the chart is laid out so as to explain the relationships between sounds in a 'student friendly' way. Students will need some initial coaching through the chart, but using one can help enhance independent learning outside the classroom. The learners' reference chart of English sounds is on page 143. The chart aims to give the information that students need in order to be able to use it independently. Have one in your class, give students their own copy, and encourage them to refer to it when they need to. Use it periodically in conjunction with dictionary study, and use it both for teaching 'new' sounds and the correction of sounds already covered.

Drilling, repetition and associating sounds with ideas

Drilling was discussed at length in Chapter 2, and for vowel sounds it remains one of the teacher's best tools. Sounds can be drilled along with the structures or lexis being practised, in order to show how they 'fit in' to the general environment of the language being worked on in class.

If a particular focus is needed, sounds can be worked on singly. Here are some (occasionally light-hearted) suggestions to help make the vowel

sounds more memorable for students. The teacher can model, and students can copy the sound. The suggestions are intended to help students associate sounds with particular ideas, which, for most learners, will make them easier to remember.

Sound	Suggestion
Vowels	
i:	A 'smiling' sound. Smile widely, make and hold the sound. Demonstrate that it is a 'long' sound.
ɪ	Make the sound, and make it obviously short. If necessary, contrast it with /i:/.
ʊ	A short sound. Exaggerate the forward position of your lips. One way into this sound is to ask students what noise a gorilla makes!
u:	Make and hold the sound. Use a 'rising then falling' intonation, as if you've heard something surprising, or some interesting gossip (uuUUuu). Demonstrate that it is a 'long' sound.
e	A short sound. Make the sound, and point out the loosely spread position of your lips.
ə	The 'Friday afternoon' sound. Relax your whole body, slump your shoulders, relax your face and mouth, and say /ə/, as though completely exhausted.
ɜ:	The 'something horrible' sound. Make and hold the sound, curl your upper lip, and pretend to look at something nasty. Look in the litter bin, if there is one to hand. Demonstrate that it is a 'long' sound.
ɔ:	The 'either/or' sound. Liken it to the word <i>or</i> . Demonstrate that it is a 'long' sound.
æ	Make the sound, and point out the neutrally open shape of your lips.
ʌ	Make the sound, and throw your head back slightly as you do it. This works well if contrasted with /æ/.
ɑ:	The 'holding the baby' sound. Place your arms as though holding a baby, and say /ɑ:/. Demonstrate that it is a 'long' sound.
ɒ	Make the sound, and point out your lightly rounded lips.

Diphthongs	For all diphthongs, one of the best techniques is to get students to make and hold the first element, then slowly move to the second. Finish off by making the sound at a 'normal' speed. Some other suggestions are made below.
ɪə	Make the sound while tugging your ear.
ʊə	Hold the first sound, and move to the second.
eə	Likened this to the word <i>air</i> . Point to your hair. Say <i>over there</i> , or <i>on the chair</i> . All will give good examples of the sound, which you can then isolate.
eɪ	Pretend not to hear someone, and say <i>eh?</i>
ɔɪ	Words work best here: <i>toy, boy, enjoy</i> .
aɪ	Make the sound and point to your eye.
əʊ	<i>Oh, hello</i> , said slowly, and exaggerated a little, works well.
aʊ	The 'shut your finger in the door' sound. Pretending to do this and making the sound while pulling a 'pained' expression works rather well!

You may or may not feel comfortable using some of these suggestions with your class; if in doubt, the best advice is not to do it, but devise your own alternative to suit your classroom manner and style. These are all only suggestions.

It can help also to associate sounds with pictures that illustrate the sound (for example a picture of a sheep with /i:/, a picture of a hat with /æ/, and so on). Some students find this a good aid to memory. But if the picture illustrates a word which the student knows, and is in the habit of mispronouncing, this can simply lead to the vowel difficulty becoming further entrenched.

The sounds need obviously to be associated with the phonemic symbols; you need not worry about whether or not students can 'cope' with being introduced to phonemic script, as long as you are clear about explaining the purpose of it. Show students the symbols being used in dictionaries, and aim to use them regularly, clearly and consistently. Care needs to be taken, however, if students are not familiar with roman script (for example beginner Chinese or Arabic students, or those more used to Cyrillic script), to differentiate between phonemic symbols and the letters we use for writing. You can, for example, use a different coloured pen on the board for phonemic script, or save one section of the board for it; however you do it, be consistent, so as to minimise any potential problems. I have used phonemic script successfully with students ranging from complete beginners to very advanced; if you treat its use as a normal part of your teaching, and not as something 'special', or 'technical', you will have a very valuable classroom tool at your disposal.

‘Halfway house’ sounds

If students are having problems producing a particular sound, you can treat the sound that they are having difficulty with as a ‘halfway house’ between two others, as shown in the following chart. Students should start by making and holding the ‘home’ sound, and without stopping, they should make the necessary gradual adjustments of articulation as they head for their ‘destination’. Students don’t actually have to reach the destination sound, but en route, they will find the sound they are aiming for.

‘Home’ sound	‘Halfway house’	‘Destination’
i:	ɪ	e
ɪ	e	æ
e	æ	ɑ:
æ	ʌ	ɒ
æ	ɑ:	ɒ
ɑ:	ɒ	ɔ:
ɒ	ɔ:	ʊ
ɔ:	ʊ	u:
e	ə or ɜ:	ɔ:

The exact ‘halfway house’ sound you are trying to get students to produce will not necessarily be accurately made in all cases, but doing this procedure can at least get students nearer to producing the sound in question. The teacher needs to exercise judgement in order to let students know when the ‘halfway house’ has been reached. The idea can also help students to appreciate the subtle differences between vowels, and also, in some cases, show how English sounds differ from similar sounds in L1.

Sample lessons

The activities in the following sample lessons can be used in various ways, whether for raising awareness of a pronunciation issue or as revision of something already covered. However, they are all Practice lessons (see page 14) and thus can form the basis for an extended lesson on pronunciation. Some of the activities can be used for practising consonants, and some necessarily include study and practice of both vowels and consonants. This reflects the nature of what goes on in the classroom; teachers will have to, eventually, deal with vowels and consonants together.

Lesson 1: ‘Phonemic bingo’: Particular vowel sounds (All levels)

Lesson type: Practice
 Materials: Bingo cards

Make some bingo cards with a good range of phonemic vowel symbols on each. Each one should have the same number of sounds on it. Make sure that you have enough to go round. In monolingual classes, the sounds used can reflect typical problem sounds for speakers of the students’ L1. In

multilingual classes, the sounds can reflect the range of difficulties for the students present.

Example cards are shown below:

	e	əʊ
æ	i:	
	ɔɪ	ʌ

ʌ		ə
ɑ:	aɪ	æ
	eə	

To play the game, students are given a card each. The sounds are called out one by one, and students cross off or cover up the ones they have on their cards. The way of 'calling' the sounds can be varied according to the needs and abilities of the class.

One variation involves calling out words instead of sounds; students then have to work out whether or not the words contain vowels which match any on their cards. Teachers could also ask students to write another example word on their card as they cross sounds off. The 'caller' would have to allow time for this of course! When a student has filled up her card, she shouts 'Bingo', and the card is checked.

A part of the learning value of an activity like this comes in going through the winning card with the whole class, to see if the student who has crossed all the sounds off first has got them right. The activity can equally well be used for practising consonant sounds.

Lesson 2: 'Noughts and crosses': Particular vowel sounds (All levels)

Lesson type: Practice

Materials: Noughts and crosses grids, with vowel phonemes written on.

ɪ	ʌ	e
ə	ɒ	æ
ɔɪ	i:	ɑ:

A grid with nine 'squares' is used, each square having a vowel phoneme. The phonemes used should reflect the sounds which cause particular difficulty for the students in the class. Students should work in pairs, with one copy of the grid for each pair. The first student chooses a square, and provides a word which contains that sound. If they get it right, they put a 'nought' in the square. Then it is the second student's turn; if their suggestion is correct for their nominated square, they put a cross. (You can use different coloured counters, or different denominations of coins, if you want to hang onto the grids for later use.) If a student gets a word wrong (i.e. it does not contain the sound for the square they are trying to win), the second student can try to win the square.

The winner is the first to complete a straight line of three. Although noughts and crosses seems almost universal, the activity has a different slant here, and so the teacher should demonstrate the activity to the whole class, just to make sure that students know what to do. Students can then play the game in pairs. It can also be played in teams, in which case the teams need to be given time to confer. It also helps if a spokesperson is nominated for each team. To provide more focus prior to the game, give students/teams time to look at the 'grid' and think up words in advance, without the use of a dictionary. The activity can equally well be used for practising consonant sounds.

Lesson 3: 'Snap': Particular vowel sounds (All levels)

Lesson type: Practice

Materials: Sets of cards with vowel sounds written on

The teacher needs to prepare several class sets of cards with a single vowel sound on each card. It is recommended that each set has an even number of each vowel phoneme. A lot of preparation is therefore required, but if suitably sturdy materials are used (e.g. card, written on then laminated) the sets can be used many times over. The game is played just like the card game 'Snap', in that cards are dealt out, and two to five players take it in turns to lay them down; the first to shout 'snap' when a matching pair are consecutively laid down wins all the cards that are on the table. To make it more than just a visual game, the instruction can be given that instead of shouting 'snap' when a pair occurs, the players have to shout out a word containing the sound. If the word is not correct, the other player(s) can have a go at providing a word. The teacher can act as referee if necessary.

Alternatively, known or recently studied words can be used on the cards, but make sure you don't put the same word twice and try to ensure a high number of words which share at least one vowel phoneme. It helps to underline the letter(s) corresponding to vowel sounds. When two words are laid down consecutively which share a vowel sound, the players shout 'snap', and the first to do so wins that 'hand'.

Another variation is to make two sets of cards: one with vowel symbols, and the other with recently studied or known words (or some new ones too, if you want to encourage prediction skills). Players take turns to turn over one card at a time from either pile. Whenever the sound on the top vowel card is found in the word on top of the other pile, players again compete to shout 'snap'. Whichever version of the game is used, it is useful to demonstrate it to the class first, to make sure students are familiar with the rules.

Lesson 4: 'Stand up and be counted': Vowel sounds/schwa (All levels)

Lesson type: Practice

Materials: Cards with vowel sounds on

This task is useful for vowel recognition, and uses the students' own suggestions for words. The teacher asks students to write down three or four

words each. These can be recently studied words, words from that day's lesson, or simply random ones. Give each student a card with a vowel phoneme on. Make sure that /ə/ is included. Each student reads out their words in turn, and all the students listen out for which vowel sounds appear in the word. If the sound they have on their card appears in the word that has been read out, they stand up. The student who has the /ə/ card should, by the end of the activity, have been required to stand up more often than others. This activity is very useful for showing the high incidence of /ə/. This is usually demonstrated by this activity, but not always!

Lesson 5: 'Which vowel am I?': Vowel sounds (All levels)

Lesson type: Practice

Materials: Sticky labels with vowel sounds on

The teacher places a sticky label with a vowel phoneme on each student's back. Students move around the classroom, looking at the notes on each other's backs, and tell each other words which include that sound. When they have worked out what their sound is, students have to write their name on the board, and write up the phonemic symbol also. The task can take the form of a race to be first, a race not to be last, or simply a task to be achieved without the competitive element, if you prefer.

To make it more difficult, depending on the level of the class, the teacher can instruct students that the words they say must not start with the sound, but must include it. Also the teacher should tell students that they mustn't cheat, by deliberately giving wrong words! To help prevent this, and also to encourage a co-operative atmosphere, the students can be divided into two teams. The team members help each other guess their sounds, and the first team to get all of them correct, wins.

A slightly easier variation is to have a list of words on the board, each of which includes an example of one of the phonemes assigned to students. Students then have to write their name on the board next to the word which matches 'their' sound, when they have worked it out. Of course, the students need to be told that they must not say any of the words that appear on the board.

Lesson 6: Collaborative writing: Vowel sounds (Elementary+)

Lesson type: Practice

Materials: Strips of paper for writing on

Studying vowel sounds gives plenty of scope for working with rhyme. Collaborative poem writing can be a rewarding group- or pair-based activity. The teacher chooses a current problem sound. In this example the sound is /i:/. Students are asked to write lines of a poem, according to the following criteria: Some lines should start with a subject pronoun (*I, you, he, she, it*, etc.), and they should only use the past simple. (You can, of course, use other criteria; these simply ensure a degree of readability.) The last word in each line should end with the sound being worked on. The lines are written on strips of paper, which can be collected in a box, or put in a pile.

The following are random lines produced by an Intermediate class who did this activity (although admittedly, not all the sentences here use the past simple):

Is this seat free?
 He had a cup of tea
 I damaged my knee
 Would you like coffee?
 'To be' or not 'to be'
 I sat under a tree
 I got stung by a bee
 Yesterday I lost my key
 I want to be free

Groups then select a given number of lines from the box or pile, and organise them into 'poems', to be read out later to the class. The lines above were reorganised into the following masterpiece:

Yesterday I lost my key
 I sat under a tree
 I damaged my knee
 I got stung by a bee
 He had a cup of tea
 Would you like coffee?
 I want to be free
 'To be' or not 'to be'

The finished piece may not be great poetry, but the task focuses students successfully on the sound in question. Students might also be given the chance to make their poem read better (e.g. *Yesterday I lost my key, So I sat under a tree...*). Also, it is noticeable that most of the lines above end in the easiest choice for /i:/, the *-ee* spelling. Alternative spellings for /i:/ can then be looked at in detail at the beginning, middle and ends of words (e.g. *e-mail*, *easy*, *Israel*).

Further ideas for activities

'Phonemic crosswords'

The teacher needs to produce a basic crossword grid. It's a good idea to spend some time producing a few blank versions, which you can photocopy (or print out if your computer skills are up to it) and adapt to suit the needs of your class. Clues can be in alphabetic script and the answers in phonemic script, or clues phonemic and answers alphabetic, or both clues and answers in phonemic script. (A phonemic crossword clearly requires knowledge of both vowel and consonant phonemes.) Bear in mind how familiar and confident your students are with the phonemes, and aim to make the task achievable, and include a combination of known and recently studied words among your answers. It can help to keep clues related to a particular subject area. To focus clearly on vowel sounds, make sure at least some words 'cross' each other on these sounds. The small example here gives both clues and answers:

¹ ɒ	k	² t	ə	p	ə	³ s
s		ɔː				iː
⁴ t	ɜː	t	ə	l		l
r		ə			⁵ ɒ	
⁶ I	n	s	e	k	t	s
tʃ					ə	

Across

- 1 Sea animal with eight legs.
- 4 Swimming version of 2 down.
- 6 These animals all have six legs.

Down

- 1 Big bird which can't fly.
- 2 Very slow animal, with four legs and a shell.
- 3 Animal that lives in the sea and on land, and has flippers.
- 5 These brown mammals live in rivers or the sea and eat fish.

'Irritable vowels'

This is not so much an activity, as a reminder to both teacher and students to pay attention to vowel sounds which have been causing difficulty. It's a good idea to get into the habit of setting aside some time to work on difficult sounds, for example during the last lesson of the week, and to set some homework based on those sounds. Homework activities connected with pronunciation of vowels could include exercises on paper (like matching exercises, crosswords, finding words with particular sounds in a text, etc.) or could be based on awareness of sounds in everyday conversation. For example, students might be asked to consider situations they have been in, or conversations they have had, in which particular sounds have caused difficulties. These could be productive difficulties (i.e. somebody else had difficulty understanding the student), or receptive (the student had difficulty understanding something within a conversation). Students need not be tied down to conversations, either; a lot of very useful work can come from listening to the radio, or watching television and videos. Videos are particularly useful, as students can rewind the bits they have had difficulty understanding, and try again. Particular sounds which have caused difficulty can then be noted down and brought up in class for further study.

Students can be asked to nominate which sound has caused them the most difficulty that week. Each student can be asked in turn, or students can share their thoughts in small groups, asking the teacher for help with sounds as necessary. Students can be asked also for a word which includes that sound. They could also be asked to give suggestions for words for other students to note down. This has the added advantage of helping everyone in the class to concentrate on the sounds and improving classroom communication by helping to familiarise students with each other's difficulties.

Students might be asked to act as monitors for each other for a lesson, a day or a whole week. At the beginning students might say 'I'd like you to listen out for my pronunciation of /æ/'. This works best if students only ask their neighbours in the class; otherwise there is too much for everyone to listen out for. However, narrowing down the task of mastering vowel sounds can pay enormous dividends for individual students, and keeps an achievable aim in mind. Regular use of such ideas in the class also

encourages students to keep pronunciation in mind while concentrating on activities which are primarily concerned with grammar and vocabulary.

‘Vowels-U-Like’

As a flipside of the ‘irritable vowels’ idea, students can also be given time to either congratulate themselves on mastering a particular vowel sound, or have time to practise something they are comfortable with. Students can also be encouraged to point out how well their classmates have progressed with sounds. While we have said that it isn’t worth focusing on sounds if they aren’t causing difficulties, it’s also important to sometimes let students use what they already have, or use what they have recently mastered, without being set too much of a challenge.

Teachers should aim to involve students in setting the agenda for classroom pronunciation work, through helping them to be conscious of the particular sounds which they have difficulty in either recognising or producing.

Conclusions In this chapter we have:

- considered the characteristics of the ‘pure’ vowel sounds and diphthongs and seen that vowel sounds can be described in terms of tongue and lip positions. Diphthongs, on the other hand, can be described in terms of a movement (or ‘glide’) from one vowel position to another.
- studied tables showing the characteristics of the vowel sounds including the tongue and lip positions for each, their phonemic symbols, example words, and we have listed the first languages of those speakers who may have productive difficulties with these sounds in English.
- considered ways of raising awareness of vowel sounds in the classroom.
- considered reasons for using a phonemic chart to promote learner independence.
- considered a variety of classroom activities for focusing on vowel sounds in the classroom.
- suggested that teachers should involve their students in deciding on priorities for classroom pronunciation work, through helping them to be aware of their pronunciation difficulties.

Looking ahead In Chapter 4 we will:

- look closely at consonant sounds, describing how they are articulated and which speakers might have difficulties in producing which particular sounds.
- look at ways of raising awareness of consonant sounds.
- look at activities which can be used in class to focus on consonant sounds.



Consonants

- The characteristics of the consonant sounds
- Raising awareness of consonant sounds
- Sample lessons

Lesson 1: 'Hangman': Consonant and vowel sounds

Lesson 2: 'I'm going to the party': Particular consonant sounds

Lesson 3: Phonemic word search: Consonant and vowel sounds

Lesson 4: Advertising slogans: Particular consonant sounds

Lesson 5: Running dictation: Particular consonant/vowel sounds

- Further ideas for activities

The characteristics of the consonant sounds

As we saw in Chapter 1, consonants are formed by interrupting, restricting or diverting the airflow in a variety of ways. There are three ways of describing the consonant sounds:

- 1 the manner of articulation
- 2 the place of articulation
- 3 the force of articulation

The **manner of articulation** refers to the interaction between the various articulators and the airstream. For example, with plosive sounds, the articulators act in such a way that the air is temporarily trapped, and then suddenly released. The manners of articulation are:

plosive	affricate	fricative
nasal	lateral	approximant

These are the categories used for classification in the tables in this chapter. For more details on these terms, see page 6.

Describing the consonant sounds in terms of the **place of articulation** gives more information about what the various articulators actually do. The term 'bilabial', for example, indicates that both lips are used to form a closure. For a general description of places of articulation, see page 6.

With regard to the **force of articulation**, the following terms are used: **fortis** or strong, and **lenis** or weak. In spoken English, 'fortis' happens to equate with unvoiced sounds, which require a more forcefully expelled airstream than 'lenis' sounds, which in English happen to be voiced. As far as English consonants are concerned, the distinction is most useful when it comes to distinguishing between sounds that are articulated in essentially the same way, one using the voice, the other not. An example pair is /p/

(unvoiced, and fortis) and /b/ (voiced, and lenis). Most teachers (and students) find the terms ‘unvoiced’ and ‘voiced’ more memorable, and so we will use these as the main way of distinguishing between such pairs of sounds. As suggested in Chapter 1, the difference between unvoiced and voiced sounds can be felt by touching your Adam’s apple while speaking. You will feel vibration for the voiced sounds only.

At times, certain voiced sounds may be devoiced, like the /d/ at the end of *hard* /hɑ:d/, for example, where the voicing is not so apparent. This is useful factual knowledge, but as an allophone (i.e. a variation of a sound which does not lead to a different word being produced), it is not so important for classroom teaching. The sounds and phonemic symbols we will consider represent, in reality, a family of possible variations.

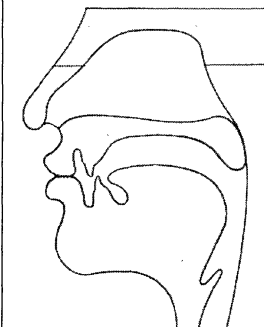
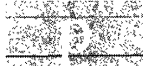
The tables on the following pages are similar to those in the previous chapter on vowels, except that the pictures show the positions taken by the various articulators when these sounds are produced. ‘Pairs’ of sounds are shown together. Unvoiced sounds like /p/ are shown on a grey background. Voiced sounds like /b/ are shown on a white background.

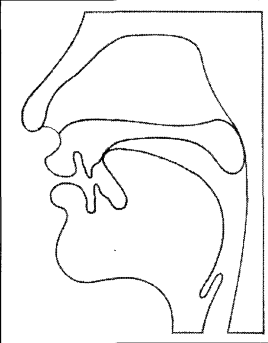

(You may find it useful to refer back to the table of consonant phonemes in Chapter 1, page 7, and also to the learners’ reference chart of English sounds, page 143. All of the sounds and example words are on the CD. The languages which are listed in shorthand are explained on page 30.)

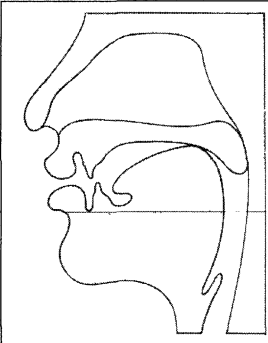
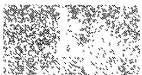
Plosives

Plosives occur when a complete closure is made somewhere in the vocal tract. Air pressure increases behind the closure, and is then released ‘explosively’. Plosive sounds are also sometimes referred to as **stops**.

29

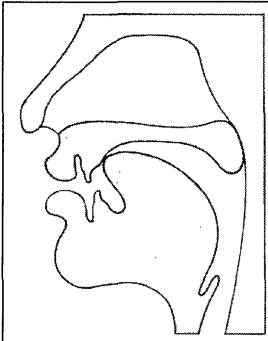

		<p>Characteristics Bilabial sounds: total closure is made using both lips. The soft palate is raised. /p/ is unvoiced and fortis. /b/ is voiced and lenis. /b/ is devoiced at the end of a word.</p>
	<p>Difficulties for: A, Ind, P, R, Sp</p>	
	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; text-align: center;">b</p>	<p>As in . . . <i>pin/bin, cap/cab, happen, cabbage</i></p>
	<p>Difficulties for: A, C, G, R, Sc, Sp</p>	

30			Characteristics Alveolar sounds. Closure is made by the tongue blade against the alveolar ridge. The soft palate is raised. /t/ is unvoiced and fortis. /d/ is voiced and lenis. /d/ is devoiced at the end of a word.
		d	Difficulties for: C, G, Ind, J, P, R, Sc, Sp

31			Characteristics Velar sounds. Closure is made by the back of the tongue against the soft palate. /k/ is unvoiced and fortis. /g/ is voiced and lenis. /g/ is devoiced at the end of a word.
		g	Difficulties for: A, C, G, P, R, Sc, Sp

Affricates

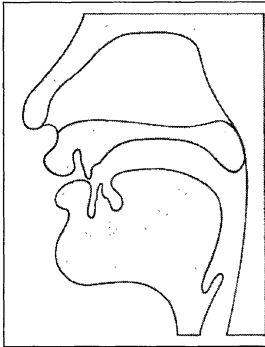
Affricates occur when a complete closure is made somewhere in the mouth, and the soft palate is raised. Air pressure increases behind the closure, and is then released more slowly than in plosives.

32			Characteristics Palato-alveolar sounds. The tongue tip, blade and rims close against the alveolar ridge and side teeth. The front of the tongue is raised, and when the air is released, there is audible friction. The soft palate is also raised. /tʃ/ is unvoiced and fortis. /dʒ/ is voiced and lenis. /dʒ/ is devoiced at the end of a word.
		dʒ	Difficulties for: A, C, F, G, Gk, P, Sp, Tu

Fricatives

Fricatives occur when two vocal organs come close enough together for the movement of air to be heard between them.

33



Difficulties for:
J

Characteristics

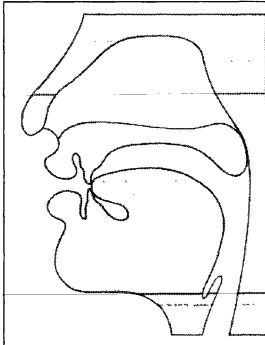
Labio-dental sounds. The lower lip makes light contact with the upper teeth. The soft palate is raised. /f/ is unvoiced and fortis. /v/ is voiced and lenis. /v/ is devoiced at the end of a word.



Difficulties for:
A, C, G, Ind, J,
Sp, Tu

As in . . . *fan/van, hoof, hooves, cafe, cover, phase, above*

34



Difficulties for: A,
C, F, G, Ind, It, J,
P, R, Sc, Tu

Characteristics

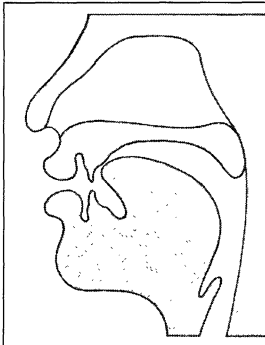
Dental sounds. The tongue tip makes light contact with the back of the top, front teeth. Or, tongue tip may protrude between upper and lower teeth. The soft palate is raised. /θ/ is unvoiced and fortis. /ð/ is voiced and lenis. /ð/ is devoiced at the end of a word.



Difficulties for:
A, C, F, G, Ind, It,
J, P, R, Sc, Tu

As in . . . *think, the, bath, bathe, mathematics, father*

35



Difficulties for:
J

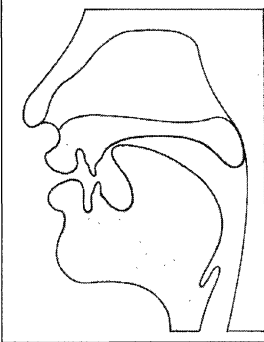
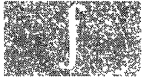
Characteristics

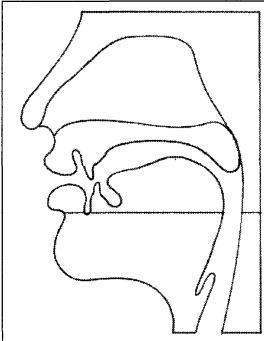
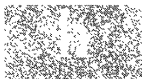
Alveolar sounds. The tongue blade makes light contact with the alveolar ridge. The soft palate is raised. /s/ is unvoiced and fortis. /z/ is voiced and lenis. /z/ is devoiced at the end of a word.



Difficulties for:
A, C, F, G, Gk,
Ind, It, J, P, R, Sc,
Sp, Tu

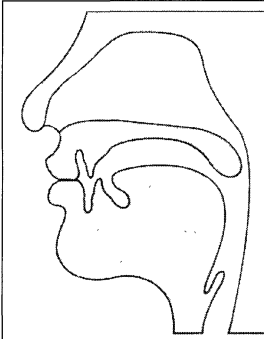

As in . . . *sue/zoo, this, these, icy, lazy*

36			Characteristics Palato-alveolar sounds. The tongue blade makes light contact with the alveolar ridge, and the front of the tongue is raised. The soft palate is also raised. /ʃ/ is unvoiced and fortis. /ʒ/ is voiced and lenis. /ʒ/ is devoiced at the end of a word.
		Difficulties for: C, Gk, Sp	3 Difficulties for: A, C, G, Gk, Ind, It, R, Sc, Sp

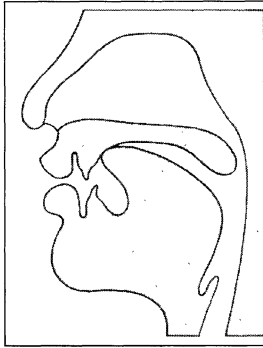
37			Characteristics A glottal sound. Air passes from the lungs through the open glottis, causing audible friction. Tongue and lip position is that of the following vowel sound. The soft palate is raised. /h/ is unvoiced.
		Difficulties for: A, C, F, Gk, It, J, P, R, Sp	As in . . . <i>hello, behind</i> /h/ does not occur as a final sound.

Nasals

Nasal sounds occur when a complete closure is made somewhere in the mouth, the soft palate is lowered, and air escapes through the nasal cavity.

38			Characteristics A bilabial sound. Total closure is made by both lips. If followed by /t/ or /v/, the closure may be labio-dental. The soft palate is lowered, and air passes out through the nasal cavity. /m/ is voiced, but may be devoiced, after /s/, for example (as in <i>smart</i>).
		m Difficulties for: Sp (at end of words)	As in . . . <i>more, room, camera</i>

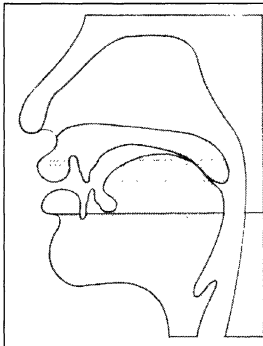
39



n
Difficulties for:
C

Characteristics
An alveolar sound. The tongue blade closes against the alveolar ridge, and the rims of the tongue against the side teeth. If followed by /f/ or /v/, the closure may be labio-dental, or bilabial if followed by /p/ or /b/. The soft palate is lowered, and air passes out through the nasal cavity. /n/ is voiced, but may be devoiced, after /s/, for example (as in *snow*).
As in ... *no, on, infant, know*

40



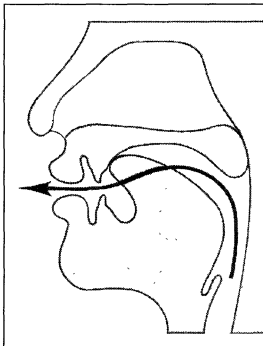
ŋ
Difficulties for:
A, F, G, Gk, It,
R, Tu

Characteristics
A velar sound. The back of the tongue closes against the soft palate. The closure is further forward if it follows on from a front vowel (compare *sing* and *bang*). The soft palate is lowered, and air passes out through the nasal cavity. /ŋ/ is voiced.
As in ... *sing, sink, singing, sinking*
/ŋ/ does not occur as an initial sound.

Lateral

The lateral is so called because, in this sound, the airflow is around the sides of the tongue.

41



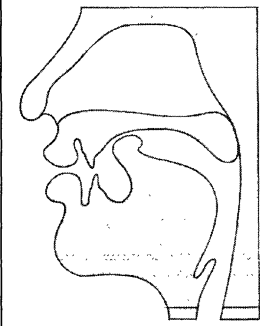
l
Difficulties for:
C, J, P

Characteristics
A lateral sound. A partial closure is made by the blade of the tongue against the alveolar ridge. Air is able to flow around the sides of the tongue. The soft palate is raised. /l/ is voiced.
As in ... *live, pool, pulling*

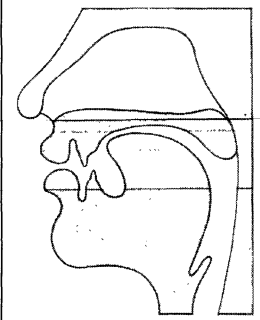
Alveolar closure with the tip of the tongue gives 'clear' *l*, as in *live*. This occurs before vowel sounds. After vowel sounds, (as in *pool*), before consonants (as in *help*), the back of the tongue is raised towards the soft palate, giving 'dark' *l* (an allophone).

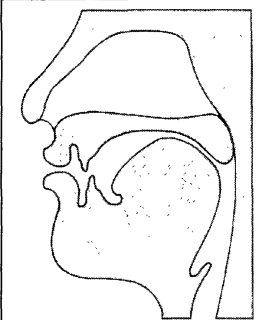
Approximants

Approximants occur when one articulator moves close to another, but not close enough to cause friction or to stop the airflow. Note that /w/ and /j/ are sometimes referred to as 'semi-vowels'. This is because they are made without a restriction to the airflow, unlike the other consonants. But they act in a consonant-like way; we say *an apple*, but we say *a pear*, *a watermelon* and *a yam*. All three approximants are important linking sounds in connected speech (see Chapter 7).

42		r Difficulties for: A, C, F, G, Ind, J, P, Sc, Sp	Characteristics A post-alveolar sound, as the tongue tip is held just behind (not touching) the alveolar ridge. Back rims of tongue touch upper molars. The soft palate is raised. /r/ is voiced.
			As in . . . <i>red, hurry, *party, *car</i>

*pronounced in these positions in rhotic accents (see page 111).

43		j Difficulties for: Sp	Characteristics A palatal semi-vowel. The tongue is in the position of a close front vowel (similar to /i/). The soft palate is raised. The sound glides quickly to the following vowel. /j/ is voiced.
			As in . . . <i>yes, young, usual, few, queue, educate, suit</i> <i>/j/ does not occur as a final sound.</i>

44		w Difficulties for: G, Ind, R, Sc, Sp, Tu	Characteristics A labio-velar semi-vowel. The tongue is in the position of a close back vowel (similar to /u/). The soft palate is raised. The sound glides quickly to the following vowel. /w/ is voiced.
			As in . . . <i>wood, walk, wet, wheat, hallway</i> <i>/w/ does not occur as a final sound.</i>

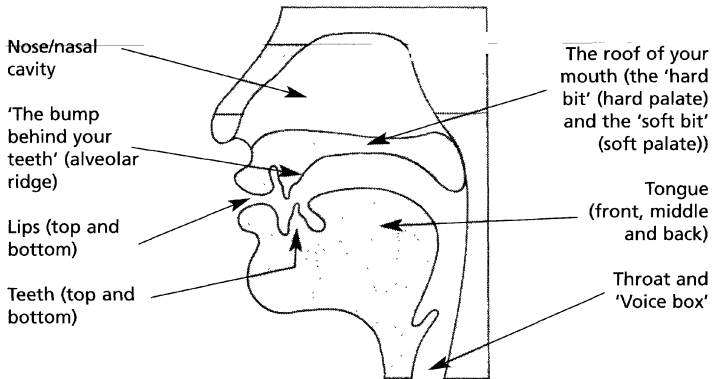
Raising awareness of consonant sounds

Teachers focus on individual sounds usually as a response to a communicative difficulty which arises, or because they are an integral feature of the language being taught. Teachers should always integrate pronunciation aspects into lesson planning and language analysis, in order to raise students' general awareness. One of the best methods of helping students to master pronunciation in the classroom remains that of drilling, the repetition of the sound giving learners the opportunity to practise the correct movements of their speech organs for themselves. This, combined with 'learner-friendly' explanations of the movements, can be very effective in raising awareness of how sounds are produced.

Using diagrams and 'learner-friendly' explanations

The articulation of consonants is easier to describe than that of vowel sounds. With vowels we are attempting to describe the movement of the tongue within a space, which is extremely difficult. With consonants, however, we can talk about the parts of the mouth and throat which touch, and how they restrict, interrupt or divert the airflow.

The diagrams and tables earlier in this chapter can have their place in helping to show students how consonants are produced, but it would be unwise to assume that they are self-explanatory, and so clarification is necessary, using terms your students can understand. Telling your students that they should be using a voiced labio-dental fricative /v/ rather than a voiced bilabial plosive /b/, is unlikely to be the best approach (unless, of course, they happen to be experts in phonetics!). Instead, you could show your students a diagram and point out the following:



Using 'easy' terms, you can more than adequately describe the range of possibilities. Rather than describing /v/ as a 'voiced labio-dental fricative', therefore, use 'learner-friendly' explanations to describe how to make the sound. For example, you could show students how to pronounce /v/ by demonstrating, and describing as follows: 'Touch your top teeth with your bottom lip, and breathe out, using your voice'. For /f/, the same description can be used, except that the instruction would be '... and breathe out, but don't use your voice'.

Teachers of course need to grade their language according to the level of the class (you can afford to be a bit more ‘technical’ with higher level students). The following table gives some suggested ways of explaining how to form the consonant sounds:

Sounds	Learner-friendly explanations
p b	Put your lips together. Try to breathe out, but don't let the air escape. Release the air suddenly. Don't use your voice. Try again, and add your voice.
t d	Put your tongue against the hard bump behind your teeth. Try to breathe out, but don't let the air escape. Release the air suddenly. Don't use your voice. Try again, and add your voice.
k g	Put the back of your tongue against (the soft bit of) the roof of your mouth. Try to breathe out, but don't let the air escape. Release the air suddenly. Don't use your voice. Try again, and add your voice.
f v	Touch your top teeth with your bottom lip, and breathe out. Don't use your voice. Hold the sound, and add your voice.
θ ð	Put the front of your tongue against the back of your top teeth. Let the air pass through as you breathe out. Don't use your voice. Hold the sound, and add your voice.
s z	Put the front of your tongue lightly against the bump behind your teeth. Let the air pass through as you breathe out. Don't use your voice. Hold the sound, and add your voice.
ʃ ʒ	Put the front of your tongue against the bump behind your teeth. Let the air pass through as you breathe out, making an /s/ sound. Now move your tongue slightly back. Don't use your voice. Hold the sound, and add your voice.
h	Open your mouth and breathe out. Don't use your voice, but try to make a noise.
m	Put your lips together. Use your voice, and let the air escape through your nose.
n	Put the front of your tongue against the bump behind your teeth. Use your voice, and let the air escape through your nose.
ŋ	Put the back of your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Use your voice, and let the air escape through your nose.
l	Put the front of your tongue against the bump behind your teeth. Use your voice, and let the air pass out of your mouth.
r	Point the front of your tongue towards the roof of your mouth. Use your voice.
j	Make the sound /i:/, followed by the sound /ə/. Now put them together, and keep the sound short.
w	Make the sound /u:/, followed by the sound /ə/. Now put them together, and keep the sound short.

The above explanations can, of course, be used in conjunction with a phonemic chart. Take some time to consider the above suggestions while looking at the learners' reference chart at the back of the book (see page 143).

Other techniques can also be used to help learners articulate particular sounds. One such idea is designed to show the fortis and lenis characteristics of /p/ and /b/ respectively. A small slip of paper is dangled in front of the lips, and the two sounds are made in turn; the paper should move more with /p/, due to the greater degree of aspiration (air) involved in producing the sound. The following table gives some more suggestions:

Sounds	Ideas to help students articulate sounds
p b	Hold a small piece of paper in front of your lips. Make the sounds. The paper should move for /p/, but not for /b/.
t d	Hold a match or lighter in front of your face. Make the sounds. You should be able to make the flame flicker for /t/ and /k/, but less for /d/ and /g/.
k g	
f v	Hold your palm in front of your mouth. Make both sounds. You should feel some air for /f/, but less for /v/.
θ ð	Place a finger against your lips. Try to touch your finger with your tongue. Breathe out. Now add your voice. (This exaggerates the positions, but will help nonetheless.)
s z	What noise does a snake make? (/s/). Now add your voice.
ʃ ʒ	What noise do you make if you want someone to be quiet? (Show 'Shh . . .' gesture if necessary.) Now add your voice.
h	Hold your palm in front of your mouth. Open your mouth and breathe out. Don't use your voice, try to make sure you can feel the air on your palm.
m	Link this with 'liking something' (e.g. food, as in <i>Mmm, nice</i>).
n	Use a word as an example, with /n/ as the last sound. Hold the sound, and get students to copy.
ŋ	Use '-ing' words as examples (e.g. <i>singing</i>).
l	Use repeated syllables, as in <i>lalalalala</i> .
r	Point your tongue towards the roof of your mouth, but don't let the tip touch. Breathe out, using your voice, and hold the sound for as long as you can.
j	Smile, and say /i/. Now quickly say /ə/. Say the two together, and keep it short.
w	What shape is your mouth if you are going to whistle? Now use your voice, and say /wə/. Also try /wəwəwi:wə:wu:/ etc., to practise using different vowels after /w/.

You may or may not feel comfortable using some of these ideas with your class; if in doubt, the best advice is not to do it, but devise your own

alternative to suit your classroom manner and style. These are all only suggestions.

Some of the suggestions in the table above can also be used for other sounds (the ‘palm in front of your mouth’ idea not only works for /f/ and /v/, but also works equally well for /p/ and /b/, for example). As with vowels, teachers should use a phonemic chart to facilitate the study and practice of particular sounds, and they may find it necessary at times to use a combination of the above ideas, and the learner-friendly explanations, and the chart.

It can also help to associate sounds with pictures of objects or actions which include the sound (e.g. a pen for /p/ and a bell for /b/), but bear in mind that if students are already in the habit of mispronouncing these words, the difficulty can remain unaffected by this pictorial approach.

How to refer to the consonants

There is also the question of what to ‘call’ the consonants when discussing them with students. With vowels, it is easier, in the sense that you can say ‘the /æ/ sound’ or ‘the /ɪ/ sound’, or simply use the sounds themselves as names. Some teachers ‘name’ voiceless plosive, fricative and affricate sounds with the addition of /ə/; thus, /p/ is named as /pə/, /f/ as /fə/, /tʃ/ as /tʃə/, and so on. However, if they are trying to make the point about voicelessness, then this point may well be lost by using such a naming system, as the voice has to be used in order to produce /ə/. The system makes sense if one is dealing with voiced sounds, as the voiced nature of vowels chimes well with the voicing of the consonants, and there is no confusion.

So, for voiceless plosive and affricate sounds, for example, it is better to use a whispered /ə/ after the sound, so that the whole remains voiceless, preserving the point one is trying to make. It can then be easily shown that pairs of phonemes can be made for which articulation is essentially the same, apart from the presence or absence of voicing.

Voiceless fricative sounds can simply be held, and the addition of the voice can show a transition from one sound to its ‘pair’ (e.g. from /f/ to /v/, or /s/ to /z/). Nasal sounds can be held too, as can /l/ and /r/. The system described above is used on the CD.

Always aim to be consistent with your students in how you refer to the sounds. Using the ‘naming’ system described above will help to raise your students’ awareness of how the sounds actually function within words.

Consonant clusters and other sound difficulties

Consonant clusters (consonant sounds which occur together, as in *matchbox* /mætʃbɒks/) can provide many difficulties for learners, particularly when the cluster in question is not possible in L1. English words can have up to three consonants together at the beginning (as in *scratch* /skrætʃ/ and *splash* /splæʃ/) and up to four at the end (as in *sixths* /sɪksθs/ or *glimpsed* /glɪmpst/).

Japanese, by contrast, has very few clusters, and consonant (C) and vowel (V) sounds tend to alternate (CVC). Putting consonants together may well prove difficult, and Japanese learners may tend to insert a vowel sound into

a consonant cluster, and add a vowel at the end of a word, resulting in realisations such as /ˈjesʊpʊriːzə/ for *Yes, please*. (The example also highlights the /l/ /r/ difficulty which many Japanese learners experience.)

In Spanish, the cluster /sp/ does not occur at the beginning of a word (as in English words such as *Spain, spouse, spout* and *spot*). Speakers will tend to insert an /e/ before /sp/ (and /st/ and /sk/, for that matter) as they do in L1, leading to pronunciations like /eˈspeɪm/, /eˈspɒt/, and so on. Speakers of other L1s will also bring habits across into English, or find particular clusters difficult.

As clusters are a common feature of English, they will come up very often in class, whether this be within an item of vocabulary, or in the juxtaposition of sounds when practising a structure (for example, as in *He's taller than them* /hiːzˈtɔːləðənˈðeɪm/).

Aside from drilling these difficult sounds, there are various other ideas the teacher can try out. Some clusters benefit from repetition of the sounds which occur together; for example, a student having difficulty with /sp/ might be asked to say /spspspspsp/. This helps the student avoid the tendency to insert a vowel, and to get used to the physical feeling of putting these sounds together, which will often be very unfamiliar to the student. One can then tie the sounds in with 'familiar' words which include the cluster (such as *wasps*, or *crisps*) and which can then be included in activities and drills.

Teachers can also try isolating the clustered sounds. The word or utterance can be written on the board, in phonemic script, and students are asked to repeat the sounds slowly. For example, in the utterance used above, *He's taller than them*, you can isolate and practise /z/ and /nð/. Hold the first sound, and then move to the second and get your students to do the same. Doing this will again help your students to get the feel of putting these sounds together.

Other sound difficulties and transferences from L1 can, of course, also cause difficulties. Possible productive difficulties are noted in the tables earlier in this chapter. Sometimes the difficulties may be due to the absence of a phoneme in L1: Italian, for example, does not have /ʒ/, and so, understandably, Italians may have difficulties with this phoneme in English.

Sometimes the difficulty is a little more complex: for example, in German, the written letter 'w' is pronounced as /v/, leading to pronunciations like /vaim/, for *wine*; occasionally the reverse happens, and *very* might become /ˈveriː/. To add to the complication, the letter 'v' is pronounced as /f/ in German.

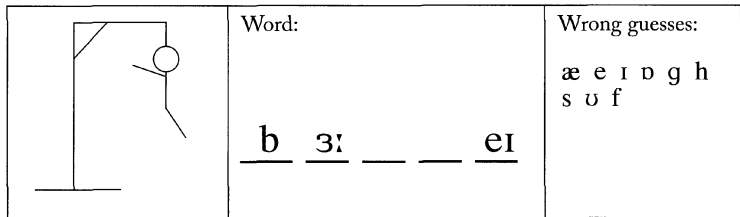
Sample lessons

The activities in the following sample lessons can be used in various ways, whether for raising awareness of a pronunciation issue, or as practice of a point which has been investigated and explained in a lesson. You will also notice that some of the activities might equally well be used for practising vowels, and some necessarily include study and practice of both vowels and consonants. This reflects the nature of what goes on in the classroom; often teachers will necessarily be dealing with vowels and consonants together. All these sample lessons are Practice lessons, in the terms defined on page 14.

Lesson 1: 'Hangman': Consonant and vowel sounds (All levels)

Lesson type: Practice

The teacher demonstrates the game by doing an example on the board with the whole class. The game is played just like the normal 'Hangman' game, where players try to guess a word by suggesting letters it might contain. In this version, however, they nominate phonemes. For each 'wrong' guess made (i.e. the sound suggested is not contained in the word) a line is drawn on the board/page and these lines make up the form of a gallows with a 'stick-man' hanging from it. (See below. The origin of the game is obscure!) A correct guess is acknowledged by writing the phoneme in its correct place within the word. Wrong guesses can also be noted, so that they are not repeated.



(The required word is *birthday*.)

The game is slightly more complicated than traditional 'Hangman', because when using letters, there are only 26 to choose from, whereas there are 44 phonemes. After the game has been demonstrated to the whole class, students can play their own games in pairs or small groups. The game can be made competitive if you wish, through awarding points for each word successfully guessed, but it does not need to be. Students can choose words at random, for general practice, or choose ones which have been studied recently. Alternatively, the teacher can also suggest particular words, in order to direct the practice towards particular phonemes. The game can be played between individuals, or in teams.

Lesson 2: 'I'm going to the party': Particular consonant sounds (All levels)

Lesson type: Practice

The idea of this game is for students to guess which consonant is held in common between words brought up within a stylised sentence; the sentence is *I've got a _____, and I'm going to the party* (or you can make up your own suitable sentence). The word which students insert into the gap includes a target phoneme: students have to work out what this phoneme is as the game progresses. The target phoneme is chosen by the student who starts the game, or can be whispered or otherwise indicated to him/her by the teacher, if you wish to work on a particular sound.

The teacher sets the activity up by eliciting three recently studied items of vocabulary which happen to share a consonant phoneme, and also elicits that this is what the words have in common. She then briefly explains the

game, and introduces the sentence (*I've got a _____, and I'm going to the party*). One student starts the game, saying for example, *I've got a cap /kæp/, and I'm going to the party*. (Let's assume the target phoneme is /p/.) The second student tries to guess what the target phoneme is, saying for example, *I've got a car /kɑː/, and I'm going to the party*. The student here has wrongly assumed that the target phoneme is /k/, and so the student who began will say *No, you aren't*. The third person might guess correctly that the phoneme is /p/, and say *I've got a parrot /'pærət/, and I'm going to the party*. The first student will then reply *Yes, you are*, as the target has been correctly guessed. Occasionally people will get it right without realising why!

The game progresses until everyone has guessed the target phoneme, and includes it in their sentence. It is best played in groups of five or six, so that students don't have to wait too long for their turn. Teachers may also need to be ready to chip in with suggestions, in order to keep the game moving.

Lesson 3: Phonemic word search: Consonant and vowel sounds (All levels)

Lesson type: Practice

Materials: Word search grid

This activity is a familiar one, where students search a grid for 'hidden' words, but with the words written phonemically. Words may appear horizontally, vertically, diagonally and also in reverse. Although they take some preparation, it is worth spending some time devising them. It is useful to have a few larger ones for general practice, and smaller ones which can be tailored for particular classes, either to practise particular phonemes, or to work on recently covered vocabulary. The activity can also be used to introduce new words, particularly if tied to a subject area; for example, if students know that they are looking for 'vegetables', but don't know the word /kæbɪdʒ/ (*cabbage*), finding it in the grid can neatly prompt the word for further work and practice. The following sample is a 'vegetable' grid.

j	s	w	i:	t	k	ɔ:	n
ə	aʊ	l	f	ɪ	l	ɒ	k
t	ʊ	k	s	p	r	aʊ	t
ə	k	æ	r	ə	t	n	aʊ
m	k	b	v	ŋ	ɜ:	b	r
ɑ:	h	ɪ	z	ʊ	n	i:	p
t	b	dʒ	f	i:	ɪ	n	f
əʊ	t	eɪ	t	ə	p	z	ə

(The words hidden in the grid are *sweetcorn*, *cauliflower*, *sprout*, *carrot*, *potato*, *pea*, *tomato*, *cabbage*, *turnip*, *bean*.)

The teacher demonstrates the activity by showing students the grid (for example, on a handout, or on the overhead projector) and asks them to find a word. When one student offers a suggestion, the teacher makes sure that all the students can see the word. She then tells the students that the words can be found going in all directions (though grids can be made less complex if you wish) and sets a time limit for the activity. Students can work on their handouts singly or in pairs. As a follow up activity they can be asked to devise their own grids; this can be a marvellous way of focusing attention on phonemes. Students can do this in small groups, and their grids can be given to other groups to solve.

Lesson 4: Advertising slogans: Particular consonant sounds (All levels)

Lesson type: Practice

Materials: advertisements from magazines or newspapers/video of television adverts

The teacher shows students some popular or well-known advertisements from newspapers or magazines, or videotaped from the television, which include a catchy slogan used to advertise the particular product. She then asks the students to think up a new slogan for one of the products, but using the phoneme which the product's name begins with as many times as possible. Students are given a short time to do this, and suggestions are elicited from the class and written up on the board. If the suggestions don't particularly work, the teacher can offer one or two of her own. The teacher then tells the students that their task is to think up a product which might be advertised using a slogan; the slogan must aim to include the target phoneme as many times as possible. Here, a particular sound may be worked on, or the teacher may set phoneme targets for particular students, depending on the variety of 'difficult' sounds the teacher wishes to work on. Slogans (and accompanying pictures) can be drawn on paper, and 'advertised' on the wall, or put up on the board.

A group of Japanese students, whose target phoneme was /r/, produced the following suggestion:

**Robert
Riley's
Recycled
Radios**

A variation would be to use the activity to work on the contrast between two sounds which are causing difficulty. Here, the sounds being worked on are /w/ and /v/, which can cause difficulties for German speakers:

Vera's Wonderful Wedding Videos

To add to the difficulty of the activity, students might also be asked to give a short 'sales talk' about their product, again the idea being to include as many examples of the target phoneme(s) as possible. A similar exercise can be done with invented newspaper headlines.

Lesson 5: Running dictation: Particular consonant/vowel sounds (All levels)

Lesson type: Practice

Materials: prepared texts for dictation

In this activity, pairs or teams compete to dictate a short passage, or a series of words (depending on which sounds, lexis or grammar the teacher wishes to work on). He puts these up on the wall of the classroom, or in another suitable place the students can get to easily. The game is best played in pairs.

The first member of each pair runs to the wall, and tries to memorise the contents of the dictation sheet as fast as possible. She then runs back to her team-mate, and dictates what she can remember. Her partner attempts to write it down in phonemic script. At various points, the teacher claps, or gives some other agreed signal for the pair or team members to change roles.

The task can integrate work on pronunciation, grammar and lexis; the teacher can change the emphasis placed on pronunciation issues by doing any of the following:

- the target text is written in phonemic script and must also be written down in phonemic script, or
- the target text is written in phonemic script but must be written down using the alphabet, or
- the target text is written normally, but must be written down in phonemic script.

Further ideas for activities

'Sound chain'

This activity is useful for working on initial clusters of two or more consonants. Starting with a given word (which can be suggested either by the teacher or by the first student in the chain), students think of a word which includes, in its own initial cluster, one of the sounds which appears in the previous word. For example:

green /grɪn/ brick /brɪk/ blue /blu:/ play /pleɪ/ flower /flaʊə/ friend /frend/

The activity requires good knowledge of the consonant phonemes, and a good vocabulary, too. It is best played with Intermediate level students and above who are reasonably familiar with phonemic transcription. If you feel it will help make the task more achievable, let students refer to a phonemic

chart while doing the activity, to help jog their memories; don't, however, let this slow the activity down too much. It may be an idea to set a 'thinking time' limit. You can make the game co-operative or competitive, as you and your students prefer, and it can be played in pairs or small teams or as a whole class.

'Tongue-twisters'

These were mentioned as a general idea in Chapter 2, but can be particularly useful for working on difficult consonant phonemes. Well-known examples are things like *Around the rugged rock, the ragged rascal ran* (useful for practising /r/) and *She sells sea shells on the sea shore* (which might be used for contrasting the articulations of /s/ and /ʃ/). Bear in mind, though, that the very nature of tongue-twisters means that native speakers find them difficult to say also, and that you are duty-bound to explain what a *ragged rascal* is! Try making up your own, or get students to write them. Here are some real examples produced by students of different nationalities:

Ban vans! Ban vans! Ban vans! (Spanish speakers, practising /b/ and /v/).

Try Gerry's Charming German Cherry Gin (German speakers, practising /dʒ/ and /tʃ/).

This theatre, that theatre, this theatre, that theatre (French speakers, practising /θ/ and /ð/).

In order to write their own tongue-twisters, students need of course to have an awareness of which sounds cause them difficulty! The teacher can suggest these if necessary, but needs to be careful to choose phonemes which actually cause difficulties. You may also need to suggest creative ideas if your students find the task too taxing. Tongue-twisters need not be linguistically complex; the first example above only contains two words, yet adequately practises the contrast between /b/ and /v/, and the third one only has three words, and does its job admirably.

Fill the grid

Draw a grid on the board (see the example on page 64), or on an overhead projector. Students (or teams) take it in turns to suggest one phoneme at a time, gradually building up the number of phonemes on the grid, until it is possible to form words going either across or down (or in other directions, if you want to increase the number of possibilities; this also increases the complexity of the activity, however).

Students nominate a square, and decide which phoneme they want to put in it. For example, the first student might say 'A3, /p/', and the teacher or the student can put the phoneme in the relevant square. The next person might put an /e/ in G8, for example, and so on. Let's say that an /e/ appears at some point in B3; the next person can put a /n/ in C3, earning three points for the number of phonemes used in the word. The game carries on until an agreed target number of points has been accumulated by one of the players or teams, or until an agreed time limit has expired. A grid in progress might look something like this:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1										
2								au		
3	p	e	n							
4						h	u			
5						e				
6		ð				l				
7	tʃ	eə		s		əʊ				
8							e			
9										
10	t	ʃ					θ			

The teacher can include a few strategically placed phonemes to help the game get off to a good start.

‘Phoneme and vocabulary exerciser’

Choose a sound or sounds you want to concentrate on; for a multilingual class you could choose a suitable sound for each student, and for a monolingual class you might be able to choose a sound for the whole group of students.

Then choose various categories (see the table below). Students have to give at least one word per category which starts with the ‘target’ phoneme. You can vary the instructions (for example, the words might simply have to include the target sound rather than start with it), and the activity can be done as a race against the clock, as a collaborative exercise, individually, as a class, or in teams. The examples below have been produced by learners having difficulty with /p/. The activity might equally well be used for working with vowel sounds.

Food	Place	Part of Body	Animal	Colour	Verb
peas	Poland	pupil	pig	purple	press

Do make sure, of course, that the task is achievable; try it out yourself, and see if you can think of a word for each category that you might reasonably expect your students to be able to offer in class! If not, then you will need to change the categories accordingly.

‘Sound race’

This is similar to the above activity, but it gives students more freedom of choice over which words they can bring up. A ‘difficult’ sound (or consonant cluster) is written phonemically on the board. Teams or individuals compete to see how many words they can think of within a given time limit which include the target sound. To vary the degree of difficulty, instructions might

be that the words must be two syllables or more, or that the students have to provide a certain number of words with the sound at the beginning, middle and end.

‘Who am I? What’s my line? What am I?’

This is a version of an old party game, which can be adapted to practise particular sounds and items of lexis. Stick a piece of paper on students’ backs or foreheads, with the name of a famous, modern or historical figure written in phonemic script on each one. Bear in mind the age, background etc. of your students in deciding which names to use. Students can ask questions in order to find out the name they have been given (‘Am I a woman?’, ‘Am I an actor?’, etc). When they think they know, ask them to write the name in phonemic script on the board, and see if it matches with what is on their sticker. Bear in mind if you use ‘foreign’ names, that your students might not pronounce *Leonardo da Vinci*, for example, in the same way that you do!

Conclusions

In this chapter we have:

- considered the characteristics of the consonant sounds. Consonant sounds can be described in terms of the manner, place and force of articulation. Sounds may also be ‘voiced’ or ‘unvoiced’. We have primarily thought about manner, place and the presence or absence of voicing.
- studied the characteristics of the consonant sounds and listed first languages whose speakers may have productive difficulties with these sounds in English.
- thought about some ‘learner-friendly’ ways of describing the consonants, and thought about some techniques to help individuals form consonants which they have difficulty with.
- considered ways of raising awareness of consonant sounds in the classroom, and been reminded again that teachers should always aim to integrate pronunciation work into their teaching.
- considered a variety of classroom activities for focusing on consonant sounds in the classroom.

Looking ahead

In Chapter 5 we will:

- consider how syllables may be stressed or unstressed, and the implications this can have for meaning.
- look at how stress and unstress can also affect the qualities of certain phonemes.
- introduce the idea of levels of stress.
- consider further the role of drilling.
- think about how to integrate work on stress into teaching, and look at some activities for working on stress in the classroom.
- start investigating the links between stress and intonation.

In Chapter 6 we will:

- look at intonation in more detail.