

The SpeechCoach)))

SPEAK BETTER ENGLISH THE SMART* WAY

- This is a simple introduction to the art of English pronunciation for ESL speakers at an advanced level.
- It offers people who already have a good knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, a few easy ways to improve their pronunciation.
- Theoretical explanations are kept to a minimum.
- Practical pronunciation tips are provided.
- Secrets to smoother speech are revealed.

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*** SMART – Sonya Maybury’s Accent Reduction Techniques**

ENGLISH CONSONANTS

There are 21 consonants in the English alphabet. These consonants divide into two categories: **voiced** and **unvoiced**.

- **Voiced:** b, d, g, j, l, m, n, r, v, w, x, y, z
- **Unvoiced:** c, f, h, k, p, q, s, t

Voiced consonants carry a sound vibration whereas **unvoiced consonants** are simply made with air – like a whisper – and do not have a sound vibration. Both, however, must be audible to the listener, and both play a critical role in English speech.

Consonants – both **voiced** and **unvoiced** – are referred to as initial (at the beginning of a word), medial (in the middle of a word), or final (at the end of a word).

For good diction, **all** consonants must be pronounced clearly. For example: **good, work, company, communicate, booking, legal, timetable, meeting.**

Combination consonants consist of two or more consonants in sequence. Examples include: 'ch' 'cl' 'th' 'thr' 'sp' 'spr' 'sh' 'shr'

Combinations of three consonants may be hard to pronounce, so split the sounds up like this: sp/r (spreadsheet) **th/r** (three) **sh/r** (shredder)

Tips for pronouncing difficult consonants

To pronounce an **unvoiced 'th'**, flatten the tongue tip and let it protrude slightly between the teeth. Press the upper teeth on to the tongue gently. Blow air over the tongue before pronouncing each word:
think, theory, third, thought, thin, theme

To pronounce a **voiced 'v'** draw the bottom lip up under the top teeth. Release the bottom lip in a flipping out motion as you voice the 'v' sound. Try these words: vote, very, vivid, versatile, vanish, visitor

ENGLISH VOWELS

English **vowels** are represented by the letters: ‘**a**’ ‘**e**’ ‘**i**’ ‘**o**’ ‘**u**’. Vowels are called **long vowels** or **short vowels**, depending on their pronunciation. The long vowels take longer to say than the short vowels. But in reality, short vowels are only ‘shorter’ sounds; they are not abrupt sounds.

The **vowels** in the following words demonstrate the short(er) and long sounds.

Short vowel sounds: ‘**a**’ (mat) ‘**e**’ (met) ‘**i**’ (mint) ‘**o**’ (mop) ‘**u**’ (nut)

Long vowel sounds: ‘**a**’ (mate) ‘**e**’ (meat) ‘**i**’ (mine) ‘**o**’ (mode)

- A single vowel will usually produce a short vowel sound such as: bat, cap, dad, end, men, lot, club,
- A vowel followed by two consonants will usually produce a short vowel sound: letter, matter, happen, network, fitting
- Two vowels in a word – whether beside each other (**ee**) or split by a consonant (**ate**) – usually produce a long vowel sound. For example: date, meet, made, moon, time, tail, take, pain, peer
- Combinations of two vowels can produce different sounds such as: book, look, cook, food, good, hood and mood.

Vowel sounds must be distinct from each other. Try the following sentences:

- To get a safe tan, sit for only ten minutes a day in the sun.
- The plural of ‘woman’ is ‘women’ and the plural of ‘man’ is ‘men’.
- Ben was banned from driving for six months last year.
- The savings plan offers plenty of financial rewards.
- The band would not bend the rules for anyone.
- The gymnast met the mat with a thud.
- The sander was sent to the mender.
- Did it matter if he met her at speed dating?
- The manager sent the flowers by messenger.

Tip

Try to develop good daily vowel habits. Practise listening to how words are pronounced. Visualise their spelling but remember how they *sound*.

THE ROLE OF THE ORGANS OF SPEECH IN ENGLISH

To speak English effectively, speakers must make full use of their mouths: the jaw, the tongue, the teeth, the lips and the soft palate.

Practising tongue twisters regularly helps build vocal flexibility.

Seashells on the seashore

She sells seashells on the sea shore. But are the shells she sells seashells, for sure? Yes, the shells she sells on the sea shore are seashells, that's sure.

Peter Piper

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. Now if Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?

Ragged Rascal

Round the rough and rugged rocks the ragged rascal ran. Round and round the rough and rugged rocks the ragged rascal ran rapidly. Right round the rough rocks the rough and rugged rascal ran and ran.

Theophilus Thistle

Theophilus Thistle, the successful thistle sifter, in sifting a sieve full of unsifted thistles, thrust three thousand thistles through the thick of his thumb. Now if Theophilus Thistle, the successful thistle sifter, in sifting a sieve full of unsifted thistles, thrust three thousand thistles through the thick of his thumb, see that thou in sifting a sieve full of unsifted thistles, thrust not three thousand thistles through the thick of thy thumb.

Betty Botter

Betty Botter bought some butter
But she said, the butter's bitter
If I put it in my batter, it will make my batter bitter
So she bought a bit of butter, better than her bitter butter
And she put it in her batter, so the batter wasn't bitter.

WHEN IS AN 'S' PRONOUNCED AS A 'Z'?

The letter 's' is an unvoiced consonant (air sound). It is pronounced as an 's' at the beginning of a word. For example: set, sell, same, Saturday, seminar.

However, when it appears within a word or at the end of a word, it is pronounced as either an 's' (an unvoiced sound) or a 'z' (a voiced sound). There is a logical reason for changing an 's' sound into a 'z' sound. The result is easier pronunciation and smoother speech.

Here are the guidelines:

Pronounce an 's' as an 's' when it follows an **unvoiced consonant**:

- bits, tips, books, limits, speaks, topics, myths, tricks, thanks

Pronounce an 's' as a 'z' when it follows a **voiced consonant**:

- doors (doorz), cars (carz), details (detailz),

These sentences demonstrate when to pronounce an 's' as a 'z'.

- They advertised (advertized) men's (men'z) silk ties (tiez) .
- There was a prize for the best home baked pies (piez).
- Do you realise (realize) those (thoze) guys (guyz) are spies (spiez)?
- She raised (raized) her eyebrows (eyebrowz) in surprise (surprize).
- There are many ways (wayz) to organise (organize) files (filez).
- The company supplies (suppliez) chicken and fries (friez).
- The waves (wavez) were as big as breakers (breakerz).

Note

The rule changes – sometimes – when an 's' at the end of a word is followed by an 'e'. We say 'horse' and 'course' with an 's' but 'blouse' with a 'z'. And there's 'close' (as in 'near') and 'close' (cloze) meaning 'to shut'!

WHAT YOU *SEE* IS NOT ALWAYS WHAT YOU *SAY*

English spelling is an unreliable guide to pronunciation.

The following words sound the same but are spelled differently:

- cite (quote a reference)
- site (building or web site)
- sight (eyesight)

The following words also sound the same:

- no/know
- knee/nee
- meet/meat
- made/maid
- plain/plane

Then there are words which are frequently mispronounced because of the way they are spelled. Here are examples:

- **World** (werld) rhymes with curled, twirled
- **Work** (werk) rhymes with perk, shirk, Turk,
- **Word** (werd) rhymes with bird, heard, purred, third
- **Walk** (wawk) rhymes with talk, fork, cork, pork

Even the simplest words need careful pronunciation:

- as (az), was (woz), his (hiz), is (iz), say (say) **but** says (sez)

Try this tricky pronunciation challenge:

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 bear and pear,
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 and thwart and cart –
Come, come, I've hardly made a start!
A dreadful language, man alive,
I'd mastered it when I was five.

(Author unknown)

ABOUT SONYA MAYBURY **THE SPEECHCOACH**

Sonya Maybury is an established professional trainer. Her career in adult tertiary education and management spans 25 years. Her qualifications include an arts degree in literature and language and international speech teaching diplomas.

Since commencing her own business in 1994, Sonya has successfully trained people to give polished, professional presentations; helped people to reduce their strong accents and speak clear English; and coached people to give entertaining, memorable speeches at social celebrations.

For further information on The **SpeechCoach Programs, Services and Accent Reduction Workshops, please contact us below.**

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