

## Pronunciation Skills — by Craig Rusbult

Today we'll focus on how to pronounce "problem sounds." In the future, some PRONUNCIATION, and also help with skills for CONVERSATION. For each problem sound, we'll have **technical tips** (for how to make the sound using mouth, lips, teeth, tongue) plus **long tones** and **practice-words**.

**A Problem-Solving Approach to Improving Pronunciation** — You have a **problem** when the way something is NOW does not match your GOAL for the way it should be. You solve a problem by converting the NOW-situation into your GOAL-situation.

1. **Define the GOAL:** In ESL, one goal is to pronounce each word the way Americans say it, so you must **listen** (aware, careful) to develop a **clear idea** (sound-memory) about **the sound** of a particular word when it's pronounced properly; this sound is your GOAL.

2. **Observe the NOW:** **Say** the word and **listen** to the sound, to get a clear idea (sound-awareness) of what you are saying NOW.

3. **Explore Possibilities** for a New Now: **Do experiments** — by adjusting all factors (shape of your mouth, relationships between your mouth & tongue & teeth, and timings of changes in these relationships,...) — **and observe** how every change affects the sound. Practice in private (with mirror?) so you're not self-conscious or embarrassed. Let your mouth & lips move freely, let sound go out. Try to determine what combination of factors will produce the best sound, the sound that most closely matches your GOAL-sound.

4. **Internalize and Master:** When you discover how to pronounce the word properly, **practice** the word (and words with similar sounds) until you can consistently say it correctly, both by itself (in a practice drill) and together with other words (in the context of a sentence) by doing the "speak and observe" of Step 3 when you say the word during a sentence.

*This problem-solving method is **scientific** because the foundation of Scientific Method ([URL](#)) is the logical use of Reality Checks to determine if "the way you think the world is" matches "the way the world really is." Or in this case, you're trying to determine how closely "the way you **do speak** a word" (in each of your experiments) matches "the way you **should speak** the word."*

It's also an application of Design Method (<http://www.asa3.org/ASA/education/think/intro.htm>) and the GOAL is **proper sound**.

***A Problem-Solving Approach to Improving Pronunciation*** — copyright © 2009 by Craig Rusbult

**LONG TONES** - When singing or playing a wind instrument, make long-lasting tone with goal of **listening** for quality and **doing** whatever is needed to produce better quality; then **transfer** this sound to words, phrases,...

**PRONUNCIATION during conversation** with **TRANSFER** of **skills** from practice drills to real conversation: Practice in situations that gradually become more "realistic" and try to **develop good pronunciation habits**; begin with *individual words*, then move to *words spoken in combination* (in phrases or in a complete sentence) when you *repeat* (what you hear) or *read* (with visual guidance), then to *improvised speaking* (when ideas come from "inside your head" due to your own thinking). At each stage, **focus on quality** so you develop good habits.

**FEEDBACK** in ESL Cafe is OK, is done by friends with good intention, for a purpose; your goal is to learn, and we want to help; feedback (in drills! and conversation?) is useful for learning. (Multiple Intelligences, ESL)

### L-sound

technical tips: tip of tongue is on "bump" at top of mouth, just behind teeth, with air flow (not d or t).

- do **long tone**, eLLLLLL and then say shorter sounds with **L at end**, eLL eLL eLL eLL or aLL aLL aLL.
- L at **start** of word or **middle** (not **end**), lift tongue away from top of mouth: La La La La Lee Lee Lee or eeLee eeLee eeLee eeLee. (or use other vowels: aLa ooLoo oaLoa ayLay iLi, and so on)
- s m e: life led load look loose late / balloon element elephant / fall small smell tool tale
- phrases: late lunch lost in life lots of light like to laugh long legs fall in love (some "separation")
- combinations (make clear L but no pause; please ≠ puhlease ≠ police): black plane split clean

### R-sound

how? tongue as in L but further back, and away from roof of mouth, relaxed round-shape mouth

- **long tones**: eLaR eLaR eLaR eLaR, aRRRR, aR aR aR, Ra Ra Ra (Roa, Roo,...), aRa aRa aRa
- start-middle-end: rain run ran roam / errand airplane agree argue / motor adore adventure / river
- R-vowel (in **stressed** syllable): sir turn dirt hurt serve person term perfect circle Thursday term
- R (**non-stress**): enter teacher energy summer summertime perhaps computer, (with th) other father mother
- combinations: frog (not fog, not furrog), pray train brain draw grain grow shrink crane prime tree
- Rand L (liver miracle), RL (girl world pearl curl), LR (alright already ballroom), a girl with a pearl

## TH-sounds

- how? tongue few mm in front of top teeth, between teeth (not behind as in d-t or s-z), look in mirror.
- long tones: **voiceless-TH** (th th th th) with no vocal chord vibration, with only simple air flow, or **voiced-TH** (the the the the) with vocal chord vibration. (or other vowels: thee tha tho thoo ...)
- TH-unvoiced: think thank thin thigh / author everything something nothing / both teeth path math south mouth
- TH-voiced: this that there the (functional) / (before *er*) **mother brother either weather / smooth breathe**
- combinations: NTH - month tenth thirteenth, LTH - health wealth healthy, THR - three throw throat, RTH - earth north fourth birthday, and MORE - depth length width
- sentence (unvoiced): I think Beth is traveling north on a path to study math. With teeth, I eat anything healthy.
- in sentence (voiced): this that and the other ; the mother over there is breathing fresh air. (also lots of Rs)
- exception: she remembered both things (natives don't "separate" [th th] but...) / exception: Thomas Thomson

## VOWEL sounds for e-i-u (as in "heat hit hoot") e-i-a (as in "heat hit hate")

how? by changing shape of lips; smile wide for **ea-sound of heat** with lips stretched, but **oo-sound of hoot** is at other extreme with lips rounded in "o" shape; for **i-sound of hit** the lips are in-between; teeth-spacing changes from ea to ay, and i is between. Do long tones with no in-between (eueu... or eaea...) and slowly (eiuieiu... or eiaieia...) and with separation (e i u i e... or e i a i e...) and listen, then words: hoot hit heat (6 different orders; heat hit hoot ...), ship sheep mitt meat mood leak lick loot

also: *Combination Vowels* (ah-ee as in "eye), *Word Endings* ( n m , t d , -ed -ing , k ), *Syllable Stress*.

**MULTI-SYLLABLE** words require ENUNCIATION -- **say all sounds** (don't skip any), **clearly & distinctly** (not slurred together), because often "saying it **all, clearly**" is the key to being understood, is all that is needed.

- problems: **remember** all of word (read or think), **speak** all of it / multiple syllables, international, miami, mechanical, mathematical, educational (2 ways? edu, edgu), conclusion, technology, engineer, examination
- master your important *professional academic-area* words: practice with feedback, ask "am I saying this OK?"
- look for complex words in everyday life, use dictionary / exception: not laboratory (Br), say labratory (Am)

**PACING — Speak more slowly.** (but not too slowly)

### WHY ?

- 1A. **give listener more time** to hear & process your WORDS (these are more difficult to understand because of your accent),
  - 1B. **give listener more time** to hear & process your IDEAS (so they can understand). [ This is also useful for native speakers. ]
  - 1C. **give listener logical "cues"** about your IDEAS, by the way you use brief pausing-stops.
- 2a. **give yourself more time** to plan your own IDEAS and word-order, and
  - 2b. **give yourself more time** to self-monitor your own PRONUNCIATION.

### HOW ?

**intentionally try to slow down** -- Don't try to "match the speed" of native speakers, because it isn't a race. And if you slow down your speaking, maybe others will slow down when they speak, and this will make it easier for you to listen and understand.

**take more time to enunciate** (to say **slowly, clearly, distinctly**) -- for **vowels, word-endings, and multiple-syllable words**.

**use pauses for emphasis** as suggested in 1B and 1C above: use slight pauses between thoughts and sentences (so listener can "catch up with you" and process information) or for dramatic effect. Use strategic/logical pauses (\*) within sentence to emphasize important words, to give "idea cues" about what is most important. (\* maybe combine pause with emphasis by loudness or pitch)

Speak slowly, but not extremely slow. (as with most things, don't be "extreme" in your pacing) But speaking too fast is a more common problem than speaking too slowly, for non-native speakers.

**LOUDNESS — Speak more loudly.** (but not too loud)

If you speak with enough loudness, it helps listeners understand your words and ideas. This prevents the difficulties that occur when listeners must cope with the double problem of "not loud enough" plus your accent.

Speak loud enough, but not too loud. Compare your own voice volume with others, and usually try to "match them" so your volume is similar and it blends in, so you're not too loud or too soft.

Homework Resources in ESL Cafe Homepage: <https://mywebspaces.wisc.edu/crusbult/web/eslcafe/index.htm>