

Pronunciation Doctor

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Why do learners say “oh” when you want them to say “ah”? Or mix up “*night-light-right*” and “*hot-hut-hurt*”? Let’s teach phonetic and phonemic awareness, with the help of simple devices. Special attention is given to speakers of Asian languages. The audience is welcome to submit questions to the Pronunciation Doctor.

Dear Pronunciation Doctor,

A lot of my ESL students see words like “rod” and “got” and pronounce them as “road” and “goat”. How can I get them not to round their lips and lower their tongues?

“Got a lotta problems” Lotta

Dear Pronunciation Doctor,

I’m working with a Chinese learner whose /l- /n/ problems are pretty severe. He can’t hear or say the difference between “night” and “light.” It’s especially troublesome at the beginning of a word. Do you have any specific suggestions?

“Low Lose is Good Lose” Laura

Dear Pronunciation Doctor,

My Japanese and Korean students mix up /l/ and /r/. They say “light” for “right” and “wrong” for “long”. How can I help them?

“It’s a Wrong Road” Rita

A Mirror is a Must

Every student uses a mirror fastidiously and systematically.

- All together
- Direct line: student’s mouth–mirror–teacher’s mouth
- 1st listen & watch the teacher
- 2nd look in the mirror, repeat 3 (5, 10) x
- Long pause = waiting for ss’ eyes



American Short o (ɔ̃)

IPA /ɑ/



The letter **o** makes several sounds in English. A very common sound is called the “short o” in phonics, represented in American dictionaries as (ɔ̃) as in *hot, pot, stop, dollar*. Many ESL learners, when seeing these words written, and possibly borrowing from their native languages, produce a more rounded vowel sound (ô) or even (õ).

- Use a tongue depressor
- Relax the lips
- Lower the tongue
- Memorize this line:



The doctor says, “Ah!”

More proficient students can tackle The doctor wants father to say “Ah.”

/l/ - /n/ - /r/

In English, /n/ and /l/ are distinct phonemes (night ≠ light), but for many Cantonese speakers, as well as speakers of some other Chinese dialects, /n/ and /l/ in initial position are allophones*. Likewise, speakers of Japanese, Korean and many dialects of Chinese don’t distinguish /l/ and /r/.

- /n/ is nasal, /l/ and /r/ are oral
- Tongue placement is key
- Touching gum ridge vs. nothing
- Red sock = tongue
- One finger to feel vibration for /n/
- Two fingers to pinch nose for /n/
- Mirror to see throat & tongue
- Straw above tongue for /l/ la-la-la
- Straw below tongue for /n/ na-na-na
- Straw before tongue for /r/ ra-ra-ra



*allophone

any of the members of a class of speech sounds that, taken together, are commonly felt to be a phoneme, as the t-sounds of *toe, stow, tree, hatpin, catcall, cats, catnip, button, metal, city*; a speech sound constituting one of the phonetic manifestations or variants of a particular phoneme.
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/allophone>

