

The Pronunciation Doctor is In!

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Do your 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. Do students put the stress on the wrong syllable and cause confusion? Special attention is given to speakers of Asian languages.

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

- /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
- Chopstick above tongue for /l/ la-la-la
- Chopstick below tongue for /n/ na-na-na
- Chopstick before tongue for /r/ ra-ra-ra



American Short o (ɒ)

IPA /a/



The letter **o** makes several sounds in English. A very common sound is called the “short o” in phonics, represented in American dictionaries as (ɒ) 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 (ɔ) or even (ō).

- 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 allophones¹. Likewise, speakers of Japanese, Korean and many dialects of Chinese don’t distinguish /l/ and /r/.

¹ **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.

Stress and intonation

Putting the stress on the wrong syllable in multisyllabic words can cause confusion and misunderstanding, especially when there are several such errors in one sentence.²

In English, stressed syllables are longer, stronger, clearer, and higher than unstressed syllables.

Many languages do not have a great difference between long and short syllables; they may sound choppy in English.

Many languages do not have a weak schwa, /ə/.

Learners may not perceive difference in duration–vowel length.

- Use a rubber band
 - Between index fingers of two hands
 - Between thumbs of two hands
 - Between index finger & thumb of one hand
- Stretch the rubber band while stretching the vowel in the stressed syllable



K e y boarding and word **p r o** cessing are **r e** levant skills in any acad **e** mic field

² Do you have students who usu**A**lly put the em**P**HAsis in the in**C**ORrect syl**L**Able in multi**S**YLLabic vocabu**L**ARy? And **P**ERhaps they don't even rea**L**IZE the **M**IStakes they're **C**OMmitting!