

Games to teach pronunciation

Pronunciation practice can be tedious. But there are ways to make pronunciation practice a little more fun with the help of pronunciation games. Some of these games can be played if you are teaching your student one-on-one and some are most fun when played with a group however you can adapt most of them to be played with any number of students you have.

One-on-one games.

1. Verb Endings

The pronunciation of verb endings is something that is particularly troublesome for some students. The two main problem areas are:

-Present Simple – third person singular. There are three possible sounds for the verb ending – [s] as in *talks*, [z] as in *sees* and [ɪz] as in *confuses*

-The Past Simple of regular verbs. There are also three possible sounds for the –ed verb ending: [d] as in *stayed*, [t] as in *talked* and [ɪd] as in *wanted*.

After going over the differences, divide the whiteboard into three columns. First practice the verb endings for the third person singular in Present Simple. Place each sound at the top of each column. Say a verb and ask a student to say it in the third person singular. Ask the student which column the verb belongs to.

Finally, fire off one verb after another. Students must correctly pronounce the verb ending. If they make a mistake, they must try with a different verb till they get one right.

Do the same with the –ed ending of regular verbs in Past Simple.

[s] [z] [iz] [d] [t] [id]

2. Pronunciation Maze

In this game, the student must connect words that have the same vowel sound. Take a look at this Pronunciation Maze as an example.

| | | | | | |
|-------------|----------|--------|--------|--------|---------------|
| boys | employed | sleep | report | used | stay |
| girls | lie | toys | joined | noise | void |
| house | spoke | dance | stay | two | oyster |
| storm | speed | letter | know | employ | police |
| poker | toilet | coin | oil | jail | sorry |
| noisy | annoy | follow | sold | money | doing |
| boil | stole | fill | more | going | spoil |
| thief | enjoyed | now | good | play | hello |
| store | point | poison | buy | apply | destroy |
| baby | honk | age | royal | avoid | choice |

Find a path from **boys** to **choice** by connecting words with the /ɔɪ/ sound. You can move up, down, left, right, or diagonal.

Here, the student must follow the path from *boys* to *choice* by following the words with the /ɔɪ/ sound. But you can create your own maze. Make a 10x6 table, add the words that have the sound you want to practice, then fill in the rest with others words that don't have this sound at all. If you are teaching a group, you can have students take turns on one maze. Or print out several copies to see who reaches the end of the maze first!

3. Four in a Row

Here's a good one for young learners! Print out this Four in a Row worksheet (or make your own!) and cut it up into separate cards. The student must arrange the words into sets that have a sound in common. If you are teaching a group of students, have them work in teams. The first team to complete all of the sets wins.

| | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| cat | pot | man | red |
| lip | mug | cut | jam |
| dog | bus | fun | nut |
| bin | met | pop | leg |

4. Rhyming Pair Memory Game

Make cards with words that rhyme, like *name/game*, *box/fox*, *tick/stick*, etc... Place them face down. If you are teaching your student one-on-one, you both take turns turning over the cards to find the pairs that rhyme.

5. Join the dots

If you teach very young students (ages three to six or thereabouts), you are probably familiar with join the dots activity sheets which you can easily find on the internet. You can use these easy activity sheets as motivation for your students on their pronunciation journey. Give your student a list of words to say that work on a specific pronunciation skill. and join the dots worksheet like the one in the example. The student reads the words on the list one by one. If they pronounce the word correctly, they get to join two dots on the picture. Once they have finished their picture, they may colour it. If you are teaching a group, race to see how quickly your students can join all the dots on the picture.

Minimal pair games

1. *Mimicking Pairs*

Mimicking is an essential part of pronunciation practice, that is, you model a word and your student repeats by copying the same stress and tone. But you can maximize the opportunities for learning by practicing two sounds at once. Have your student repeat sentences like these:

Sit in your seat.

Chips are cheap.

Your niece is nice.

2. *Which One Makes Sense?*

Present your student with two sets of possible answers to a question, for instance:

Hit it. /Heat it.

Ask: *The soup is cold. What should I do?*

He took the bait ./He took the bat.

Ask: What did he take fishing?

3. *What's Your Number?*

This fun game challenges students to listen for specific vowel sounds among a group of minimal pairs. Start by writing a group of ten words each beginning with and ending with the same sound. (For example, put, pat, pet, peat, pit, pout, pot, etc.) Write them across your board and then write the numbers zero through nine under them. Then tell your student you are going to give them your phone number, but instead of saying the numbers say the words above the numbers. Have your student write down the number they think you gave them. When you are done, check to see if they got the number right. Then have your student tell you their phone number and recite the word equivalents. If you are teaching a

group, score one point for each number students get correctly. The person with the most points at the end of the game wins.

Group games.

1. Is It a Pair?

In this game, students will work together to determine which words on their list are pronounced the same. Start by making two lists of words. Most of the words on the lists should be either homophones or minimal pairs. Then give one list to one student and the other list to his partner. The students will read each word on their list without showing it to the other person. They will then have to decide if the words are pronounced the same or if they are pronounced differently. Students score five points for each pair they get right. The team with the most points at the end of the activity wins. If you like, have students write their own lists and switch them with another pair to follow up the activity.

2. Odd One Out

Prepare a list with sets of three to four words that have the same vowel sound, plus one somewhere in the middle that is different. For example, *but*, *nut* and *put*. Divide your class into two teams and have them form two lines in front of the board. Write the first set of four words on the board. The students at the front of the line must read the set of words, race to the board once they have identified the word that sounds different and circle it. The first student to circle the odd word scores a point for the team.

A different way to play this game is to read a list of words to your class, pausing briefly after each word. The words on the list should all contain a certain sound you want your students to listen for. It might be a particular vowel or a certain word ending. Include on your list one word that does not follow that pattern. Tell your students that they should listen for the

word that does not belong, and when they hear it they should raise their hands. You will be able to see exactly how closely your students are listening with a simple show of hands.

3. Homophone Go Fish

This is a game that is best played in pairs or small groups – a really fun way to practice homophones! Make a list of the homophone pairs you'll use, and write each word on a separate index card or piece of paper. Make as many decks of cards as you'll need depending on the number of groups you'll have. Each group gets a set of cards; each student gets five cards. The remaining cards are put in a draw pile. The goal of the game is to find the matching homophone by asking another student if they have "a word that sounds like...". For example:

S1: *Do you have a word that sounds like "plane"?*

S2: *Yes, I do. (hands over "plain")*

Now, to keep the matching pair the S1 must use both words correctly in a sentence or two. If S2 does not possess the homophone he/she has to say, "Go fish!" And S1 takes a card from the draw pile.

4. Minimal Pair Slap

There's no better way to practice those pesky little minimal pairs! Choose sets of minimal pairs and write down each word on a separate card/piece of paper. Divide the class into two teams and have each team line up in front of a desk; the first students in line must have their hands behind their backs. Present two cards: *sit* and *seat*. Say one of the words out loud: *sit*. Students must slap the right card. The one who slaps it first must use the word in a sentence to get a point for the team.

5. The Whisper Game

Sit your students in a circle and show one of them a symbol, also whispering it in his/her ear. That student then whispers it to the student

next to him/her. The sound is passed around the class from one student to the other. If the sound is correct at the end, the students get a point, if not, the teacher gets a point.

To make the game more challenging, you can whisper to the first student a phrase containing several words with that phoneme, a tongue twister will be perfect for this. Each person quietly passes the message to the next person in line, and they only get one chance to say it. That is why careful pronunciation is so important. When the message gets to the last person in line, they say it out loud so their entire team can hear. Odds are, the message will have changed from the front of the line to the end of it, but it is possible for students to carefully pass the message without errors. If you like, have each person write down the phrase they hear before they pass it to the next person so you have a better idea where the pronunciation issues occurred in the line. Play again this time starting at the opposite end of the line or mixing up the order of the students.

6. Same or Different

For this activity, you'll need to make two sets of sentences, list A and list B. Some sentences in list A and B should be identical. But other sentences should differ by a minimal pair or two. For example, if list A contains the sentence "Don't forget to bring your pens." List B might contain the sentence "Don't forget to bring your pins." Choose your minimal pair words based on the specific sounds you are teaching your class or the ones they struggle with the most. Then put students in pairs and give one person list A and the other list B. Students should then read their sentences to each other, carefully, and decide together if the sentence in list A and the sentence in list B are the same or if they are different. Have students write their answers down and then award ten points for every correct answer. The team with the highest score wins

the game. If you like, play two or three rounds with different lists of sentences.

7. Give It a Shot

Set up for this basketball pronunciation game by putting two trash cans at the front of your room and labeling each with a different vowel sound or two sounds your students have trouble distinguishing for example v and w. Then put students into two teams. Have a player from one team come to the front of the room and read a word that contains one of the sounds on the trash cans. Another member of their team should then shoot a crumpled up piece of paper at the basket labeled with the sound the word contained. (You can also use a ball if you prefer.) The player scores one point for choosing the right basket and another point if they get make the shot. If they make the shot in the wrong basket, they score zero. Continue this way alternating teams until you run out of words or one team reaches a predetermined score. Award the winning team with a basketball trophy made from plastic cups.

8. Minimal Pair Up

This simple game challenges students to speak with accuracy as they search for the perfect match in their classroom. To set up for this group game, write words that comprise minimal pairs on index cards. You will need one card for each person in class. Give each person a card and tell them they cannot let anyone else see what is written on their card. Then have students mingle until they find the person who has the match to complete their minimal pair. When students find their minimal pair, they can sit down. You can play several rounds with the same set of cards by shuffling them and redistributing them to your students or by changing up the cards you use each time.

9. Bang!

This game is fun whether you are practicing general pronunciation skills or a specific set of challenging sounds. Take several notecards and write the words you want your students to pronounce. About eighteen cards is a good number. Then add two or three cards that just say Bang! Put all the cards in an empty container and you are ready to play. Students take turns pulling a card from the container and reading the word on that card. If they pronounce it correctly, they get to keep it. If they make a mistake, the card goes back in the container. If they pull a Bang! card, all their cards go back into the can. Play until time is up. Whoever has the most cards in their possession at that time wins the game.

10. Brainstorm Relay

Divide your class into teams of five to six students. Have each team stand in a line, and designate part of your front board for each team. Then tell your class the target sound they will be looking to include in the words they brainstorm. It might be a certain vowel sound, a consonant blend, or any other sound you want them to be aware of. On go, one person from each team runs up to the board and writes down a word with that sound before returning to the back of his team's line. Then the next person goes. Continue for two to three minutes. The team which has the most correct words on its list at the end of the time wins the round.