

Broken Telephone

Daphne Tan, Singapore

This is a little game I have used to help students with their listening practice and it develops pronunciation awareness. The name of this game is 'broken telephone'.

- First the class is divided into a few groups, with about 10 in each group. I hand one person in the group a sentence, which he or she must then memorise and pass on to the next person, by whispering.
- The next person will pass the sentence down the line to the next and so on until it finally gets to the last person in the group. That person in the group will then have to stand up and say what the sentence is.

I find this exercise fun and a break from the normal learning routine. Teachers can construct sentences with words that may sound similar to others, like working (walking), lazy (lady), grass (glass) and so on. It's really funny hearing the sentence at the end because it is often a mad distortion of the original. The students often have a good time laughing at how ludicrous it all became in the end, and more importantly, realise the value of proper pronunciation.

C for consonant, V for vowel

Alan Stanton, teacher trainer and materials writer

This is an activity to be carried out before introducing phonemic symbols. It is designed to teach students:

- The difference between sounds and letters
- The difference between vowel sounds and consonant sounds
- The difference between one sound and two sounds

Procedure:

1. Choose ten words that students already know. It is important that they are familiar words.
2. Choose four or five other familiar words as examples.
3. Demonstrate on the board that the word 'cat', for example, can be written CVC, Consonant sound, Vowel sound, Consonant sound. This is a very easy example but there are more difficult ones. 'Caught' is CVC, 'through' is CCV, 'breakfast' is CCVCCVCC, 'brother' is CCVCV, 'hour' is VV, 'carrot' is CVCVC.
4. Ask students to do the same with the ten words you have chosen. You can ask them to do this by looking and writing, by looking, listening (to you) and writing, by listening, saying (to each other) and writing - whichever combination seems valuable and necessary.
5. If you are not sure about a word, check the phonemic symbols in a dictionary.
6. Check students' answers and explain any difficulties.

This activity will clarify many points for students. For example, that 'br' is two sounds but 'th' is one, final 'er' is one and 'rr' is one. It will show that 'h' is sometimes silent and sometimes not and that final 'r' is silent. Note that diphthongs count as one vowel sound. This activity is good preparation for learning phonemes because it focuses on sounds and not letters.

Same sound, different sound

Alan Stanton, teacher trainer and materials writer

This is an activity for more advanced students. It is diagnostic because it reveals the mental picture of English sounds that students have. When you do this, you will feel as if you are looking inside students' brains. You will gain valuable information about their knowledge.

Procedure:

1. Begin by explaining what a homophone is. You can give examples in the students' own language and in English, emphasising that the words have the same sound, but not the same spelling or meaning. Obviously, homophones are written with exactly the same phonemic symbols.
2. Show students a list of pairs of words, some homophones, some not and ask them to identify the homophones. Choose the words according to the level of the students. 'See' and 'sea' are a lot easier than 'sword' and 'soared'. If students think that 'caught' and 'court' are not homophones (they are) or that 'pull' and 'pool' are homophones (they are not), this will give you valuable information about how students are thinking about English phonology.

3. This activity is best done in pairs and groups because students do not necessarily agree and the discussion can be useful.
4. When you check the answers, you can practise minimal pairs with the words that are not homophones. Write up the phonemic symbols to show that they really are different. If the words are in columns headed 1 and 2, you can ask students to say 'One' or 'Two' when you say each word. If they make mistakes, you need to repeat until they improve.
5. If students are doing well, you can reverse the minimal pair exercise and ask individual students to say one word of the pair that you then identify as 1 or 2. Do not proceed to this stage unless students are performing well.
6. An extension to this activity is to ask students, in pairs or groups, to produce pairs of homophones of their own. Ask them to say the pairs. They will also need to spell them or show what they have written (they can write in large letters on cards). If they have produced genuine homophones, write them up in one colour. If they are not homophones write them up in another colour - these are the sounds they need to practise. This activity will give you valuable insights into students' pronunciation problem areas.

The Silent Sounds Game

Liz Oldham

This game is a good way to practice the vowel and diphthong sounds, and it is particularly enjoyed by young learners.

In 'Silent Sounds' you mouth a sound silently and the children guess the sound from the shape of your mouth. Use the game to contrast sounds that are often confused such as /æ/ and /e/ - found in words like 'mat' and 'met'.

Before you start, divide the board into two halves - left and right. On one side write the phonemic symbol for one of the two sounds - for example /æ/, or a word containing the sound - such as cat. On the other side of the board, write the other sound - so for example /e/ or the word 'bed'. Now mouth one of the two sounds, the children should watch your mouth closely and then identify the sound by shouting the correct sound, or - with a small class, by jumping left or right! You can then get the children to work in pairs and test each other in the same way.

Sound pictures

Liz Oldham

Sound Pictures exploit young learners' love of drawing, associating pictures with sounds and spelling. This also helps students who have a visual learning style.

With sounds which are more difficult for your class - for example /eə/, ask the children to make a sound picture. The children draw an object that has this sound such as 'chair'. Inside the picture of the chair they can write other words with the same sound such as hair, wear, scared.

This can be an ongoing activity with posters on the walls which they can add to. It's a useful way of familiarising children with some of the sound / spelling rules.