

Pronunciation and Spelling

Although teaching pronunciation and spelling should play a very important role in the beginning ESL class, it has too often been ignored. Despite many irregularly spelled words, at least some basic pronunciation and spelling rules can be taught early on to improve reading and writing skills. Keep such lessons short, introduce them frequently, and review them repeatedly. Here are a few suggestions on how to begin teaching pronunciation.

1. When you begin teaching simple consonants (b, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, and z.), teach the sounds of these letters rather than their names. Although the names of the letters are important in spelling, they should come later, once the basic sounds have been learned and associated with their written forms.
2. Make or buy alphabet cards.
3. Hold the cards up and say the sounds of the letter. Then name an object that begins with the sound. It is very helpful to show a visual depiction of the object and the written word below it.
4. Direct the students to repeat the sounds and words.
5. Have students try to think of words beginning with the sounds (for example, "b" for "boy," "d" for "dog," "f" for "food," etc.). This is an excellent way to judge just how much English a new group of new students knows.
6. Introduce only one short vowel, "e."
7. Make or buy a second set of consonant cards.
8. So that students can begin to build words, place each set of consonants on either side of the vowel "e" thus creating a three-letter word. (A chalkboard tray is a convenient place do this.)
9. Tell the students read the word.
10. Replace or switch around the consonants to make new words. (Do not be overly concerned about creating meaningless words. Remember, this is practice for combining sounds into words.)

11. On the following day, teach the short vowels by associating their sounds with objects or gestures such as the following:

a = the "baa" sound of a lamb;

e = the vowel in "10" (show ten fingers);

u = a boxer hitting somebody in the stomach;

o = rubbing your stomach and saying "aaah" to indicate that you have just eaten something delicious;

i = a gesture of rejecting or refusing something disgusting.

12. Introduce the five short vowels into the word grid described in item 8 above.

13. Practice making new words.

14. On subsequent days, introduce "c," "sh," "ch" and "th" in the same manner.

15. Over a longer period of time, gradually build new words with the consonant blends ("sp," "sk," "nd," etc.), long vowels "ai," "ee," "ea," "oa," "ie" "ue," etc.), the silent final "e," and other groups.

Other Suggestions:

1. Use visuals, objects, pictures, and gestures as much as possible for constant reinforcement.

2. Do not overburden the students with too much pronunciation or spelling material at once. Do not teach more than one pronunciation lesson per day.

3. Irregularly spelled words should be taught separately from words that follow rules. A good way to teach them is through constant and frequent dictation.

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