

BBC Learning English – Talk about English

What makes good pronunciation?

We are going to be looking at the topic of pronunciation. What makes good pronunciation and what is it that native speakers do when they are talking that you can do to make your spoken English more fluent and natural?

A. Work in small groups and discuss the following questions. Get ready to report your answers to the class.

- 1. How important is pronunciation as a language skill?**

- 2. What we mean by good pronunciation?**

- 3. Where should learners start with pronunciation?**

- 4. Students don't need to have a native-speaker accent. True or False**

- 5. What do native speakers do when they are speaking?**

B. Listen to Alan Stanton answering the same questions. Jot down his ideas.

C. Reflection task compare your answers to Alan's ideas.

D. What do native speakers do when they are speaking?

Weak forms

1. What's the name Alan uses to talk about weak form?
2. What weak form words does he exemplify?
3. What language does he use to describe the process of weakening?

The _____ "and" is often _____ /ən/ in

The _____ "to" is _____ / tə / if

Letters and sounds

4. The number of letters in a word is not the same as the number of sounds. True or False?
5. What do we use to represent sounds?
6. This is the language Alan uses to talk about letters and sounds. Can you think of any other way of expressing these ideas with different words?

In the word "cat" we can hear every sound that appears in spelling: three letters and three sounds.

In "catch", there are five letters but there are only three sounds. Therefore, three phonemic symbols will appear in the dictionary.

Final consonant – initial (weak) vowel linking

7. Read the following extract from the interview with our expert. What is he talking about? What does “the sound spelling of a word will change” mean?

In writing you can see gaps between words, but when you are speaking fluently it can become difficult to hear those gaps because usually there aren't there at all and often, when two words come together we naturally do things to make them flow easily and these things quite often mean that the sound spelling of a word will change.

8. As you listen check your ideas and write down his example.

“A” “cup” “of” “tea”
/kʌpəvɪ:/

9. Before you listen again, read the description of this new feature and complete the gaps.

What there is that “cup” with the next word “of” or /
əv / because it's the here to produce /kʌpəv/. _____ “cup of tea”
may sound just as if it's and not

This feature linking. In our example, there is a word that ends with
a _____ sound joining with a word which begins with a _____ sound so
“cup of” becomes /kʌpəv/.

E. Sounds at work

10. Listen to a piece from a news story about traffic problems in a small Russian town see if you can pick out any of these linkings that are going on. Here's the news report:

By Russian standards Tashtagol is a tiny little town – just twenty-thousand people, a few streets and a handful of roads. So you may be surprised to learn that traffic problems here have been causing chaos – not because of cars but because of cows.

11. What are some of the linking features you've heard there? Check with a partner and get ready to report to class.
12. Listen to what features Alan is pointing at.
13. You are the news reader now. Make a recording of the news story on the computer lab. Try to produce those features dealt with.

F. Follow up

14. You are a news reader. Select a short news story and recorded. Send it to your teacher.
15. Revisit the material you've read in connection to this topics in the Clases Prácticas.

Ashby, P. (2000) *Speech Sounds* Chapter 1 and 2. Great Britain:Routledge.

Roach, P. (2000) *English Phonetics and Phonology A practical course* Chapter 12 Weak Forms. United Kingdom:CUP.

Garcia Lecumberri, M.L. & Maidment, J. (2000) *English Transcription Course* Chapter 3 Stress, rhythm and weak forms. Great Britain:Arnold