

Alexey Tymbay & Irina Tymbay

Sounds of English

a practical pronunciation course

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Preface

Purpose

This is a practical two-semester pronunciation course designed for students of teacher-training colleges. The course aims to correct the most common phonetic and phonological errors, raise students' awareness of English phonemes and basic coarticulation processes, introduce typical British English intonation and accentuation models, and practice spontaneous dialogue skills.

Design

The textbook is divided into 18 units and a Revision section. The unit consists of 5 tasks, each following a particular learning objective:

“Phonetic warm-up” contains tongue twisters and limericks. It is aimed at revisiting and integrating basic phonetic skills. The student is not expected to go into phonetic detail when doing this task. General articulation skills are more important at this stage.

“Learn to differentiate between the sounds” focuses on correcting the most common pronunciation errors typical of non-native speakers of English. These are the problems associated with the confusion of similar phonemes or those occurring due to the L1 transfer. The task is based on sound contrasts and students' mastering the correct pronunciation of English consonants.

“Master the sounds” is the core section of each unit. It is devoted to detailed working with a vowel phoneme. The students are taught to recognize and reproduce the distinctive features of English vowel sounds, both monophthongs and diphthongs. The phonemes are first given in isolation, then in contrast, and finally as word combinations.

“Sounds in a dialogue” is a part of the lesson which integrates the just-learned phoneme into a dialogue. The learning objective here is to teach the students to pronounce the target sound in a phrase or a sentence to practice coarticulation. Dialogues illustrate the co-play of segmental and suprasegmental features happening in connected speech, such as assimilation, elision, and linking, as well as the changes related to accentuation.

The “**Improve your tones**” section is meant for working on the proper intonation of a sentence or a text. The exercises aim to drill the basic intonation patterns of the English language, introduce the idea of “focus words,” and practice reading short reports as an integration activity. A few tasks in this section are also designed for practicing spontaneous dialogue speech.

The textbook ends with a **Glossary** containing definitions and examples of basic phenomena of English phonology. Since the course was meant as a practical pronunciation manual, the authors deliberately avoided complicated theoretical explanations and aimed at presenting pronunciation features in simple terms.

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Unit 1

[i:] vowel sound, consonants [p], [t], [k], aspiration

1. Phonetic warm-up

English **consonant**¹ sounds [p], [t], [k] are pronounced with **aspiration** (a puff of air on a consonant sound). Aspiration is especially strong if [p], [t], and [k] come at the beginning or the end of a word or phrase.

Read the tongue twister with aspiration on the sounds [p], [t], [k]. Pay attention to the "English accent" that appears as a result.

Peter, Peter pumpkin eater,
Had a wife but couldn't keep her;
He put her in a pumpkin shell,
And there he kept her very well.

2. Learn to differentiate between the sounds

When pronouncing the sounds [f] and [v], the teeth and the lips are involved (**labiodental** sounds), whereas the English consonant [w] is articulated only with the lips (a **bilabial** sound).

Note that the lips on the sound [w] are spread to the sides but not protruded.

Read the word combinations with the [f], [v], and [w] sounds.

very weak	quite well
very well	a quarter of an hour
very wise	have we got

¹ The words in bold can be found in the Glossary at the end of the book.

very white	a lot of work to do
very witty	a lot of water
very worried	the wonder of wonders

Notes to the exercise:

- pay attention to the pronunciation of the preposition of [əv], which is never **devoiced**;
- don't forget about the aspiration on the consonants [p], [t], [k];
- do not devoice the final consonants (e.g., wise [z] or worried [d]);
- do not **soften** (palatalize) consonant sounds. English consonant sounds are never softened (palatalized).

3. Master the sounds

[i:] is a long **vowel** sound.

Listen to the words with this sound at the following link or by scanning the QR code below:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/features/pronunciation/longvowel1>



Clipping is a change in the vowel's length happening when a voiceless consonant follows a long stressed vowel. The length of this vowel is thus considerably reduced.

e.g., bee - *been* - *beat*

The vowel is the longest in the open position (*bee*). It is somewhat shorter when followed by a voiced consonant (*been*) and the shortest when followed by a voiceless consonant (*beat*).

Read the exercise first in columns, then in rows, paying attention to the positional change of the [i:] vowel's length and the lack of palatalization (softening) of the consonants.

bee	bean	beat
knee [ni:]	need	niece
see	scene [si:n]	seat
we	weed	weep
tea	evening	meat
pea	peel	people
three	Edith	eating
tree	easy	street
he	heel	cheeks
she	meal	deep

Read the exercise, paying attention to the **linking** of the words into phrases.

people in the street	cheap cream
in green jeans	reveal a secret
free seats	mean evil
read a speech	keen on reading
keep a secret	sweet dreams

Notes to the exercises:

- note that English consonants [t], [d], [n], [l], [s], [z] are **alveolar** (not dental), i.e., when pronouncing them, the tip of our tongue touches the alveolar ridge (the part of the hard palate immediately behind the upper front teeth);

- the exercise is performed with the so-called "**phonetic smile**" when the lip ends are stretched as much as possible to the sides to imitate the English sounds better.

4. Sounds in a dialogue

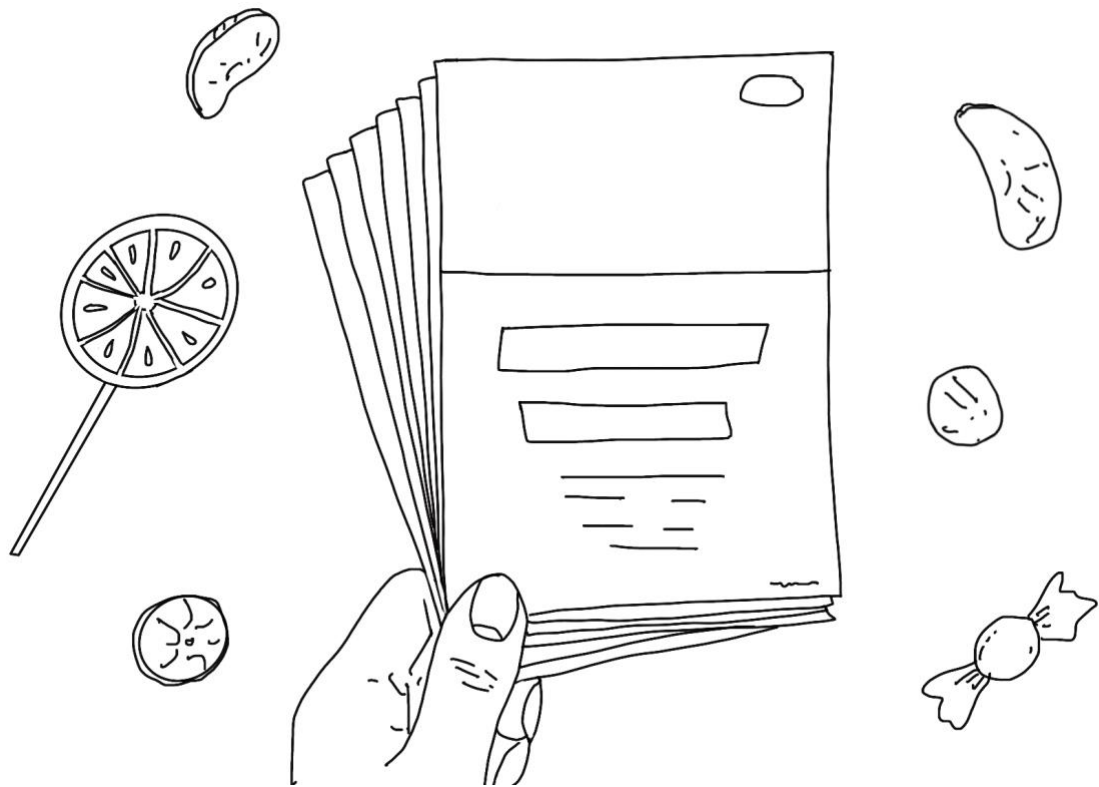
Identify words with the [i:] sound in the dialogue. Scan the QR code and listen to the dialogue, then read it, imitating the intonation of the speakers.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Byajwq2s5TQ>



A Meeting in the Street

- Pete, can you see these people in the street?
- Do you mean the group in green T-shirts and jeans?
- Yes, let's go and see.
- They're handing out some leaflets and free sweets for the kids.
- Can you see the man with the beanie? He's preaching something to the people.
- There are some free seats under the trees. Let's see what he can teach us.
- OK, Pete. But, please, buy me some ice cream. And not the cheapest!



5. Improve your tones

What is intonation?

Intonation is the way we say things. Our voice can rise, fall, or run flat, expressing different emotions and stressing different ideas. Sometimes intonation is just as important as the words themselves.

The noticeable change in the pitch of the voice, usually happening on the last stressed syllable in a phrase, is called a **nuclear tone**. The nuclear tone indicates whether the phrase is a statement (a falling tone) or a question (a rising tone).

The most common nuclear tone in English is a Low Fall. Saying a word with a Low Fall is like drawing an arc with your voice in the air.

Read the phrases from the dialogue “a Meeting in the Street” with a Low Fall on the words in bold. Drawing an arc with your head or your hand will help you “see” the movement of your voice.

Let's (↘) **go**.

Let's go and (↘) **see**.

They're handing out some (↘) **leaflets**.

They're handing out some free (↘) **sweets**.

They're handing out some free sweets for the (↘) **kids**.

They're handing out some (↘) **leaflets** and free sweets for
the (↘) **kids**.

He's (↘) **preaching** something.

He's preaching something to the (↘) **people**.

There are some free (↘) **seats**.

There are some free seats under the (↘) **trees**.

Buy me some ice (↘) **cream!**

And not the (↘) **cheapest!**

Unit 2

[ɪ] vowel sound, consonants [f], [v], [w]

1. Phonetic warm-up

Read the tongue twisters with aspiration on the [p], [t], and [k] sounds.

Tell Tom, the ticket-taker, to take the ticket to the ticket wicket.

If coloured caterpillars

Could change their colours constantly,

Could they keep their coloured coat

Coloured properly?

Note to the exercise: Try to "see" aspiration by placing a piece of paper or a burning candle in front of your mouth. If the sounds [p], [t], [k] are pronounced correctly, the sheet of paper (the candle fire) will bend forward.

2. Learn to differentiate between the sounds

In some languages (Russian, Czech, and others), the final **voiced** consonant in a word turns into a **voiceless** one unless it is followed by a vowel sound, e.g., dub (Czech) will be pronounced as [dub]. **Devoicing** of final consonants hardly ever happens in English and, therefore, should be avoided as it may change the meaning of the word.

e.g., bid is pronounced as [bid], not [bit]

Read the word combinations with the [f], [v], [w] sounds. Do not devoice the voiced consonants at the end of words (in bold)

very good d advice	What a wonderful friend d he is!
a very wise and witty woman	What a wonderful wife she is!
never believes what he says	What wonderful weather we are having!
we have visited them twice	What wonderful voices they have!
twelve weak voices	

the Prince of Wales
the time of the meeting
turn off the news
put off the wedding

Note to the exercise: pay attention to the difference in the pronunciation of prepositions "of" and "off." The preposition "of" is always pronounced [əv] and is never devoiced. A common mistake is to pronounce this preposition like [əf], which actually means saying a completely different preposition - "off."

3. Master the sounds

[ɪ] is a short vowel sound.

Listen to the words with this sound at the following link or by scanning the QR code below:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/features/pronunciation/shortvowel1>



An incorrect pronunciation of a sound can lead to a foreign accent of a speaker. This type of mistake, which does not change the meaning of the word, is called a **phonetic mistake**. If incorrect pronunciation leads to a change in the meaning, a pronunciation mistake is called a **phonological mistake**.

Read the exercise, paying attention to the difference in the length and quality of vowel sounds [ɪ] and [i:]. Confusion between the two can cause a phonological mistake.

did – deed	sit – seat	lead - lid
live – leave	bit – beat	leek – lick
filled – field	list – least	sheep - ship
sin – seen	slip – sleep	neat – knit
bin – bean	it – eat	eat - it

Read the exercise, paying attention to the linking of the words into phrases.

big sister	bitter pill
Mister Will	sit still
didn't live	pink liquid
drink the milk	children and kids
list of idioms	winter <u>u</u> and spring

When saying words beginning with a vowel sound, Czech and German students often start them with a **glottal stop** (a type of a consonant sound produced by obstructing airflow in the vocal tract). A glottal stop is a common sound in their mother tongues but it is quite rare in English and, therefore, should be avoided. Glottal stops can also prevent the correct linking of words into phrases.

Read the exercise, paying attention to the absence of a glottal stop before the vowel sound at the beginning of the word. You can avoid glottal stops by producing a barely heard sound [h] before the vowel.

ink	It is.
in ink	Is it?
ill	Isn't it?
in it	It's interesting.
Indians	Is it interesting?
interesting	It's a pity!
in the city	Kitty lives in the city.

4. Sounds in a dialogue

Identify the words with the [i] sound. Scan the QR code and listen to the dialogue, then read it, imitating the intonation of the speakers. Pay special attention to the aspiration of the [p] sound in the words "pill," "pity," and "pink."

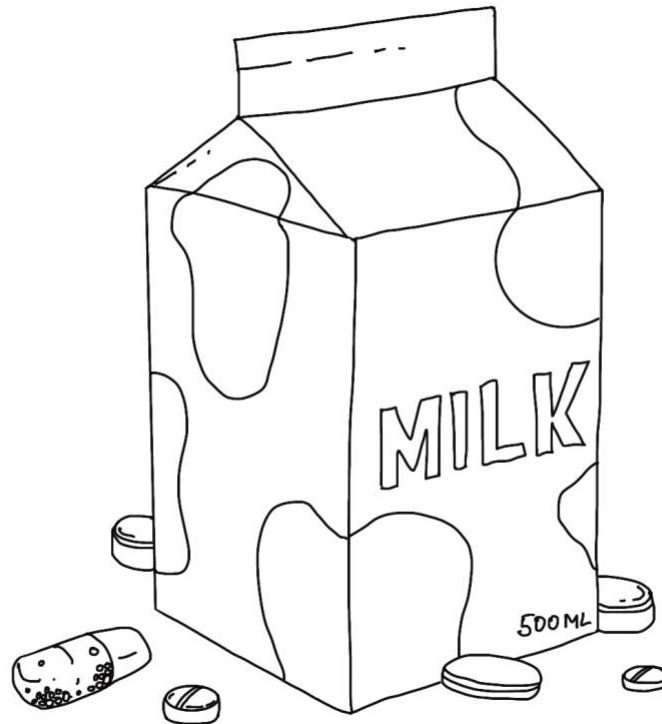
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-7XdnlUCw0>



Milk or a Pill?

- Why didn't you drink the milk, Mister Will? I insist that you drink it.
- This milk makes me feel sick. You'd better give me a pill!

- It's a pity! I think with your illness, milk is better than a pill.
- But you mixed it with something pink! You've tricked me! It isn't just milk. Now it's bitter, and it stinks!



5. Improve your tones

An English sentence usually has two or three distinctly pronounced words that are in the focus of the speaker's attention. They are called the "**focus words**." Focus words highlight the main idea of the utterance or show new information in the text.

When saying the focus word, it is common to stress this word more than the other words in the sentence and pronounce it with a **nuclear tone** (a fall or a rise).

Remember that nuclear tones are usually followed by a short pause to make them sound more distinct.

First, read the focus words (in bold) separately with a Low Fall intonation on the stressed syllable, then read the entire passage. Listen to the nursery rhyme by clicking the following

link or scanning the QR code below: www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_tR59hcxwo and check yourself.



The House That Jack Built

This is the house that (↘) **Jack** built.

This is the (↘) **malt** that (↘) **lay** in the house that (↘) **Jack** built.

This is the (↘) **rat** that (↘) **ate** the malt that (↘) **lay** in the house,

That (↘) **Jack** built.

This is the (↘) **cat** that (↘) **killed** the rat that (↘) **ate** the malt

That **lay** in the house that (↘) **Jack** built.

This is the (↘) **dog** that (↘) **worried** the cat that (↘) **killed** the rat,

That (↘) **ate** the malt that (↘) **lay** in the house that (↘) **Jack** built.