

The J Sound Workout

English learning resource · EN

Key words & expressions · English

12 learning entries

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

1

to warm up

DEF

to prepare your body or voice for activity through gentle, graduated exercises before the main effort begins

Warm up is borrowed from sport and music. Pronunciation work needs a warm-up too — the muscles of the mouth, jaw, and tongue need to be engaged before you ask them to perform difficult sounds.

Before you tackle the J sound, warm up your jaw and lips with some gentle sounds.

Professional singers always warm up before a performance — treat your English speaking the same way.

2

to nail a sound

DEF

to produce a specific sound perfectly and consistently; to master it fully

Nail a sound is satisfying, confident language — it suggests a clean, decisive hit. Used to describe the moment a difficult pronunciation clicks and feels natural and reliable.

Once you nail the J sound, you'll hear it everywhere and produce it automatically.

She finally nailed the TH sound after two months of daily five-minute drills.

3

articulation

DEF

the clear and precise formation of speech sounds using the tongue, lips, teeth and jaw

Articulation is the physical dimension of pronunciation. It describes the mechanics: where exactly your tongue touches, how wide your mouth opens, whether your lips round. Poor articulation makes speech hard to understand even when grammar and vocabulary are correct.

Work on your articulation — English sounds require specific positions that your native language may not use.

Her articulation improved dramatically after she spent two weeks practising individual sounds in front of a mirror.

4

to drill

DEF

to practise something repeatedly and systematically in order to build accuracy and automatic recall

Drill is the sports coach word for repetitive practice. In language, you drill sounds, phrases, grammar patterns, or vocabulary until they become automatic. Drills have a bad reputation from old teaching methods, but used correctly — short, focused, varied — they accelerate specific improvements.

Drill the sounds you struggle with until they feel automatic — five minutes a day is enough.

She drilled the 'th' sound for a week and could finally produce it naturally in conversation.



5

minimal pairs

DEF

two words that differ in only one sound, used in pronunciation practice to train the ear and mouth to distinguish similar sounds

Minimal pairs are the precise training tool for pronunciation. If you confuse 'ship' and 'sheep' or 'bed' and 'bad', you practise minimal pairs. By isolating the one sound that differs, you sharpen your ear and your production at the same time.

Practise minimal pairs for the sounds you confuse — 'bit'/'beat', 'live'/'leave', 'pull'/'pool'.

Her teacher used minimal pairs to help her hear the difference between long and short English vowels.

6

stress and intonation

DEF

the patterns of emphasis (stress) and pitch movement (intonation) that give English its distinctive rhythm and expressiveness

Stress and intonation are what make English sound English. The stress pattern of a word can change its meaning — 'PREsent' is a noun, 'preSENT' is a verb. Intonation signals whether you are asking a question, making a statement, or showing surprise. These are as important as pronunciation of individual sounds.

Get the stress and intonation right and your English will sound natural even with a foreign accent.

She had a strong accent but excellent stress and intonation, which meant native speakers understood her easily.

7

connected speech

DEF

the natural way sounds change, blend, reduce or disappear when spoken in a continuous stream — as opposed to isolated words

Connected speech explains the biggest gap between learners' pronunciation and native speakers'. In natural speech, 'did you' becomes 'didja', 'want to' becomes 'wanna', 'going to' becomes 'gonna'. This is not lazy speech — it is standard English.

Recognising connected speech patterns is essential for listening comprehension.

Connected speech is why fast English feels impossible — learn the patterns and your listening will improve dramatically.

She had learned individual sounds perfectly but struggled with connected speech until she started listening to unscripted content.

8

a vowel sound

DEF

a speech sound produced with an open vocal tract, where breath flows freely — English has more vowel sounds than vowel letters

Vowel sound distinguishes the sound from the letter. English has only five vowel letters but approximately twenty vowel sounds. Many learners struggle with English precisely because their native language has fewer vowel contrasts. Knowing this helps you target practice.

English has far more vowel sounds than vowel letters — learning all twenty is key to clear pronunciation.

She focused on the vowel sounds that did not exist in her first language and her clarity improved immediately.



9

to mouth the words

DEF

to form words silently with your mouth without making sound — often used in practice or when you cannot speak aloud

Mouth the words is the whisper technique of pronunciation practice. When you cannot speak aloud, you can still train your mouth muscles by mouthing words silently. It is particularly useful on public transport, in waiting rooms, or anywhere silent practice is necessary.

Mouth the words of English songs or dialogues when you cannot speak aloud — it still trains your mouth.

She mouthed the words of the podcast while commuting and found her pronunciation improved without a single spoken session.

10

to overpronounce

DEF

to articulate each sound too carefully and separately, making speech sound unnatural or robotic — the opposite of connected speech

Overpronounce is the error of trying too hard. When learners worry about pronunciation, they sometimes speak each sound perfectly but unnaturally. Native English speech reduces and blends. Overpronouncing every syllable actually makes you harder to understand, not easier.

Do not overpronounce every syllable — natural English blends and reduces sounds, especially in fast speech.

She overcame overpronouncing by practising with authentic recordings at normal speed rather than slow textbook audio.

11

a soft G

DEF

The /dʒ/ sound represented by G in words such as giant or age.

It contrasts with hard G /g/ as in game; spelling patterns help but have exceptions.

The word giant begins with a soft G.

Practise the soft G in age and huge.

12

a listening challenge

DEF

A task designed to test whether you can recognise a sound or expression.

Challenge suggests useful difficulty, not an impossible test.

The listening challenge contrasts job and chop.

Try the listening challenge before reading the answer.

