

# The American English Pronunciation Tutor



Mobile App



## Instructor's Guide to Classroom Use

by Michael Berman

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## Introduction

The American English Pronunciation Tutor mobile app was originally conceived as an at-home practice companion to the American English Pronunciation Card ([www.PronunciationCard.com](http://www.PronunciationCard.com)). However, while testing the mobile app in the classroom during its development, something unexpected happened. We quickly discovered that students loved working with the app in groups and as a class! They loved the game-like challenge it provided, they were thoroughly engaged in completing both the receptive and productive exercises with their peers, and they especially enjoyed trying the speech recognition section together. In sum, it proved to be a fun, effective and motivational classroom tool for developing confident and accurate pronunciation. Meanwhile, it made prepping for class easier for me, the teacher.

This short guide will help get you started. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions, comments or suggestions!

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## Using the App in the Classroom

Logistically speaking, you can use the *American English Pronunciation Tutor* mobile app in your classes in two ways.

1. Plug one iPad or iPhone into an instructor workstation (computer, projector, etc.) and work as a class with the exercises and explanations in the app.
2. Have students use the app in pairs or groups. This will require that there are enough devices.

The following section outlines a number of approaches to using the exercises with your students, either as a whole class or in groups.

## The Four Exercises in the App

Students love and benefit from taking turns completing these active practice exercises in groups or as a class. First, when students complete a one of the pronunciation exercises below in front of an “audience,” it adds perceived value to the task. Second, students can learn from the successes and difficulties of others, and often be reassured that they are not alone in their struggles. Third, as students make themselves vulnerable as they try to produce the sounds in a given exercise, it promotes further risk taking.

1. The ***Practice*** exercise: This active exercise allows students to listen to high-frequency words (with the given target sound), record themselves speaking those words, and then compare the two. It is a warmup to the more challenging exercises to come. Students enjoy and are motivated by hearing their voices projected to the class (or group), and they make important connections when they are able to collectively analyze the clarity and precision of high frequency words and phrases, either spoken by themselves or their peers. In sum, doing this and other exercises as a group pushes students to do their best and to improve, and it helps them identify strong and problematic examples of pronunciation.
2. The ***Contrasts*** exercise: This receptive exercise guides students to notice key differences in often-confused sounds. While this passive exercise is not as exciting in a class/group context as the other active exercises, the teacher may wish to play a handful of items from this section to make sure that students can hear the difference between the two sounds in the minimal pair and ask questions as needed.
3. The ***Listening Quiz*** exercise: This exercise makes for a fantastic yet informal group assessment. For example, you can play the Listening Quiz items for the class and have pairs of students agree on the answer. Then, you can call on pairs to suggest the answer out loud to the class. This approach makes sure that each student has been involved and engaged with the content and offers instant feedback for each item. It harnesses the power of “active learning” in the classroom.

There are Listening Quizzes for each of the vowel and consonant sounds, but there are also Listening Quizzes for other pronunciation topics such as *final –s endings* (Unit 8, lessons 3), *–ed endings* (Unit 8, Lesson 6), *numbers* (Unit 9, Lesson 2), and *two-syllable nouns and verbs* (Unit 9, Lesson 3). Students love these novel approaches to these important topics!

4. The **Speech Recognition** exercise: This is the culminating exercise for most lessons and the one many students enjoy the most. It gives them instant, meaningful feedback on their pronunciation accuracy, and, like the Practice exercise, students are fully engaged and motivated when they have the opportunity to try this exercise with their peers. You can have students complete this exercise in groups or you can call individual volunteers try items in front of the class.

## Expansion Exercises and Activities: Vowel and Consonant Sounds

### Instant Feedback Groups

Assign students to groups of three or four for this activity. Assign the class one or more of the **vowel or consonant sounds** in the Pronunciation Tutor app to work with. Have each student say aloud each of the “Practice” examples, with the other group mates giving feedback as to whether the sound seems correctly uttered. Then, using the list of minimal pairs provided in the Contrasts lesson, each student should carefully say **one word/sentence** for each of the contrastive pairs, with the other students noting which of the two words they think they heard. Students really enjoy this exercise! It gives them meaningful practice and instant, authentic feedback on their pronunciation strengths and weaknesses. Of course, you may be called in to “verify” some of the results.

### ~~“Hangman”~~ Seven Strikes



Another terrific activity that deals with vowel and consonant sounds is a variation on the classic “hangman” game. (I’m not fond of the “hangman” imagery and name, so I prefer to call it *Seven Strikes*.) In this variation, the teacher writes blanks on the board for each phonetic symbol of a word. For example, write “\_ \_ \_ \_ \_” for “baseball” (b e i s b ə l). The students, in teams, send representatives up to guess a phonetic symbol. If that symbol is in the word, write the symbol in the appropriate space, and that team gets a chance to guess the word. If not, a strike is recorded for that team, and the other team gets a chance. When a team has accumulated seven strikes, it is disqualified. If both teams reach seven strikes, you can give them extra chances or reveal the word. In most cases, it’s a good idea to let students refer to their Pronunciation Cards as they play the game. It might also be a good idea to give the class some sort of clue about the mystery word.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Recognizing the Phonetic Symbols

A. Identify the underlined sounds in these words. Then write the correct phonetic symbols in the spaces.

### Vowels

- |                          |        |
|--------------------------|--------|
| 1. we <u>i</u> _____     | • [ʌ]  |
| 2. s <u>i</u> x _____    | • [ə]  |
| 3. d <u>a</u> y _____    | • [æ]  |
| 4. m <u>e</u> t _____    | • [u]  |
| 5. a <u>s</u> k _____    | • [ɪ]  |
| 6. b <u>u</u> s _____    | • [ɪ]  |
| 7. s <u>o</u> p _____    | • [ɛ]  |
| 8. t <u>o</u> _____      | • [ʊ]  |
| 9. l <u>oo</u> k _____   | • [a]  |
| 10. s <u>o</u> _____     | • [ou] |
| 11. o <u>ff</u> _____    | • [ɔ]  |
| 12. m <u>y</u> _____     | • [ɔɪ] |
| 13. t <u>ow</u> n _____  | • [aɪ] |
| 14. j <u>oy</u> _____    | • [au] |
| 15. oft <u>e</u> n _____ | • [ei] |

### Consonants

- |                                 |        |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| 1. p <u>r</u> ice _____         | • [ʃ]  |
| 2. y <u>e</u> s _____           | • [ð]  |
| 3. <u>ch</u> ange _____         | • [z]  |
| 4. j <u>u</u> ice _____         | • [ʒ]  |
| 5. s <u>p</u> ea <u>k</u> _____ | • [r]  |
| 6. bu <u>s</u> y _____          | • [θ]  |
| 7. <u>sh</u> op _____           | • [s]  |
| 8. u <u>s</u> ual _____         | • [t]  |
| 9. t <u>h</u> ing _____         | • [ŋ]  |
| 10. t <u>h</u> is _____         | • [y]  |
| 11. t <u>i</u> me _____         | • [tʃ] |
| 12. n <u>o</u> _____            | • [dʒ] |
| 13. s <u>ing</u> _____          | • [l]  |
| 14. r <u>ing</u> _____          | • [p]  |
| 15. l <u>i</u> fe _____         | • [n]  |

B. Analyze the phonetic symbols below. Write the words in the spaces.

- |                          |                        |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. yu <u>you</u> _____   | 7. 'spɪkɪŋ _____       |
| 2. mi _____              | 8. 'lɪsənɪŋ _____      |
| 3. ðɛm _____             | 9. 'kælɪdʒ _____       |
| 4. 'læŋgwɪdʒ _____       | 10. ˌɛdʒə'keɪʃən _____ |
| 5. 'klæsrum _____        | 11. 'tɪtʃər _____      |
| 6. prəˌnʌnsi'eɪʃən _____ | 12. θæŋk _____         |

## Exercises and Activities: Grammatical Endings

**Final -s Endings.** Review the pronunciation rules for –s endings (Unit 8: Introduction #1 and lesson 1-3) and have students, in pairs or groups, practice the example words listed in that lesson. Then, as an extension, assign students one of these activities (or a variation thereof):

- a. Have students compile a list of five to ten nouns, all in plural, that are associated with a particular field or occupation. Students read their lists in groups or to the class, paying particular attention to the accuracy of their –s endings.
- b. Do the same exercise as above, but instead of nouns, have students compile a list of five to ten verbs associated with a particular field or occupation. The students should then use those verbs in sentences with singular subjects. For example, a student could write, “A trial lawyer argues cases in court.” Again, students should carefully read their sentences aloud in class.
- c. Give students a list of plural nouns and third-person singular verbs. The list should have approximately equal representation from the three categories of final –s pronunciations: [ɪz], [s], and [z]. Have students work in groups and categorize each word in the list. Here is a sample list: cats, computers, bushes, touches, takes, reads, rises, paths, assumes, buildings, drops, elements, forces, girls, houses. (There are five from each category: [ɪz]=bushes, touches, rises, forces, houses; [s]=cats, takes, paths, drops, elements; [z]=computers, reads, assumes, buildings, girls.

**–ed Endings.** Review the pronunciation rules for –ed endings (Unit 8: Introduction #1 and lesson 4-6) and have students, in pairs or groups, practice the example words listed in that lesson. Then, as an extension, assign students one of these activities (or a variation thereof):

- d. Give the students the assignment of telling a story of their choice – a myth, a legend, a folk tale, a fable, etc. – to the class. The tale should use the simple past tense as the predominant tense. Students should practice the story enough before their presentations so that they can pronounce –ed endings in their stories confidently and correctly when.
- e. Have students compile a list of five to ten regular verbs which describe the things that they did the day before. The students should then compose sentences with those verbs. For example, a student could write, “I cooked dinner for my family.” Again, students should carefully read their sentences aloud in class.
- f. Give students a list of verbs and participial adjectives with –ed endings. The list should have approximately equal representation from the three categories of final –ed pronunciations: [ɪd], [t], and [d]. Have students work in groups and categorize the list. Here is a sample list: turned, closed, voted, worked, attempted, named, controlled, dressed, helped, ended, established, lowered, itched, graded, predicted. (There are five from each category: [ɪd]=voted, attempted, ended, graded, predicted; [t]=worked, dressed, helped, established, itched; [d]=turned, closed, named, controlled, lowered.

## Expansion Exercises and Activities: Stress and Rhythm

**Sentence-level Stress.** The elements of stress and rhythm can be very difficult for students to understand and gain control over. In addition to reviewing together the explanation and examples in Unit 10 of the app, it may be helpful to point out the similarity between patterns of word stress and those of sentence stress:

• • •  
understood

• • •  
Bring the wood.

• • • • •  
identification

• • • • •  
I sat at the station.

For extra practice with stress and “unstress” (including reductions), you can go over these common patterns with students:

• • •

1. black ‘n white (black and white)
2. two ‘r three (two or three)

• • • •

3. Why didja call? (Why did you call?)
4. Who c’n ya ask? (Who can you ask?)

• • • • •

5. The work was done by noon.
6. The snow has blocked the street.

• • • • • • •

7. Her feelings were hurt by her friend.
8. Computers are easy to use.

Remind students that stressed words – words that are central to a sentence’s meaning – are louder, longer, and higher in tone than unstressed words. These words are often:

- nouns
- main verbs
- adjectives
- adverbs
- negative expressions (e.g., *won’t*, *can’t*)

Unstressed words – words that are grammatically necessary but not very important to the meaning of a sentence – are spoken quickly, softly, and less precisely than stressed words, and they frequently become reduced. These words are often:

- articles
- prepositions
- conjunctions
- auxiliary verbs
- pronouns

Use the exercises on pages 9-11 to practice these concepts and skills in class. The first exercise is a simple but challenging matching exercise that works well when assigned to pairs or groups of students. The next two exercises utilize famous speeches (via internet links) and develop students “ear” for hearing sentence stress and understanding how it is used. In these cases, I have included two of my favorite speeches as examples: Malala Yousafzai’s 2014 Nobel Prize acceptance speech and Barack Obama’s 2004 speech at the Democratic National Convention – but there are hundreds of other terrific, inspirational speeches to choose from on YouTube, Ted.com and other sites.

In general, the stress patterns in these two speech segments are completely predictable and show the rhythm of English extremely well. However, there are a few places in these speeches where a stressed word is an exception to a rule. For example, in Obama’s speech, he says, “...his father, my grandfather, was a cook...” In this sentence, both the pronouns “his” and “my” are stressed because he is contrasting these pronouns to make his message clearer. These and a couple other sentence stress “exceptions” provide great opportunities to discuss the underlying purpose of sentence stress – to signal meaning and importance in a message – and why deviations from the norm are sometimes required.

Answers to these exercises can be found in the back of this guide.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Word and Sentence Stress

**Instructions:** Match the words and phrases with the same stress pattern. Review Units 9 and 10 in the *American English Pronunciation Tutor* mobile app as necessary.

- |                                    |                              |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. pronunciation _____             | a. It's not important.       |
| 2. teacher _____                   | b. Take your time.           |
| 3. Return my notebook. _____       | c. He has left the building. |
| 4. Pass the ice cream. _____       | d. Find her.                 |
| 5. right answer _____              | e. can't see it              |
| 6. Get a job. _____                | f. into the classroom        |
| 7. Did you call your mother? _____ | g. a pen                     |
| 8. Compare _____                   | h. Do your homework.         |
| 9. Practice the sounds. _____      | i. She wrote it herself.     |
| 10. She owes me fifteen. _____     | j. fifty to one              |

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Understanding Sentence Stress through Speeches

### Exercise # 1: Malala Yousafzai's 2014 Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech

**Part A: Building Background Knowledge.** In pairs or groups, use your cell phones, tablets or computers to find out who Malala Yousafzai is. After a few minutes, share what you learn with your classmates.

**Part B: Getting the Gist.** Watch the first three minutes of Malala Yousafzai's speech (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOqIotJrFVM>) and answer the questions below.

1. Who does Malala thank? Circle the answers.

- |                              |               |                  |
|------------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| a. everyone who supports her | c. her father | e. her president |
| b. her friends               | d. her mother | f. her teacher   |

2. Why is Malala proud? Circle the answer.

- a. She is the first Pakistani to be awarded a Nobel Peace Prize
- b. She is the youngest person ever to receive a Nobel Prize.
- c. both A and B

**Part C: Identifying Sentence Stress.** Read the transcript below and try to predict the stresses. Then listen to the first three minutes of the speech again and underline the stressed words.

*Your Majesties, Your royal highnesses, distinguished members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, dear sisters and brothers,*

*Today is a day of great happiness for me. I am humbled that the Nobel Committee has selected me for this precious award.*

*Thank you to everyone for your continued support and love. Thank you for the letters and cards that I still receive from all around the world. Your kind and encouraging words strengthens and inspires me.*

*I would like to thank my parents for their unconditional love. Thank you to my father for not clipping my wings and for letting me fly. Thank you to my mother for inspiring me to be patient and to always speak the truth- which we strongly believe is the true message of Islam. And also thank you to all my wonderful teachers, who inspired me to believe in myself and be brave.*

*I am proud, well, in fact, I am very proud to be the first Pashtun, the first Pakistani, and the youngest person to receive this award. Along with that, along with that, I am pretty certain that I am also the first recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize who still fights with her younger brothers. I want there to be peace everywhere, but my brothers and I are still working on that.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Understanding Sentence Stress through Speeches

### Exercise # 2: Barack Obama's 2004 Speech at the Democratic National Convention

**Part A: Building Background Knowledge.** Barack Obama gave this speech before he became president in 2006. He talks about his family background. What types of details do you think he talks about? Why? Discuss your opinions.

**Part B: Getting the Gist.** Watch the first minute of Obama's speech ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYAr4lhPb\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYAr4lhPb_s)) and answer the question below.

1. What does Obama say about his opportunity to make such an important speech?
  - a. He understands economics and social problems because of his background.
  - b. It is an unlikely opportunity because of his background.
  - c. It is special because his parents are there in the audience.
  - d. He is glad that he is giving the speech in Kansas.

**Part C: Identifying Sentence Stress.** Read the transcript below and try to predict the stresses. Then listen to the first minute of the speech again and underline the stressed words.

*Let me express my deepest gratitude for the privilege of addressing this convention.*

*Tonight is a particular honor for me because, let's face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely. My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father -- my grandfather -- was a cook, a domestic servant to the British. But my grandfather had larger dreams for his son. Through hard work and perseverance my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place, America, that shone as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before. While studying here, my father met my mother. She was born in a town on the other side of the world, in Kansas.*

## The Pronunciation Tutor App as a Self-Study Tool

If a student uses the app as a self-study tool, several important habits are necessary for the student to achieve substantive results:

1. **Repetition.** The student must have the self-discipline to practice regularly and often.
2. **Practicing aloud.** All practice sessions must involve practicing out loud in a concentrative and self-assessing manner. In sum, students must take full advantage of the listen-record-compare feature of the app. Students should also be encouraged to enlist the help of friends, classmates or relatives to listen and offer feedback. Practicing in front of a mirror can also help students to achieve the proper mouth and tongue position.
3. **Self-monitoring.** Ultimately, students will only reach their full potential if they strive to gain the ability to self-monitor themselves without the aid of the app or listener feedback. That is, students must develop the habit of listening to themselves as they speak and self-correcting whenever possible. Only through regular practice will students gain the ability to do this. Another key to success in this regard is for the student to develop pronunciation “priorities.” After all, it is unrealistic for a student to self-monitor their entire range of phonemes and stresses at the same time. Students should choose a small number of specific goals at a time and work on these goals for a set amount of time – perhaps days, perhaps weeks or longer – before turning to the next pronunciation goals on their priority list. As their teacher, you are in the best position to help students create and manage this list.



## Answer Key to Selected Exercises

### Page 5: Recognizing the Phonetic Symbols

Part A.

Vowels:

1. i, 2. I, 3. ei, 4. ε, 5. Æ, 6. Λ, 7. a, 8. u, 9. ʊ, 10. ou, 11. ɔ, 12. ai, 13. Au, 14. ɔi, 15. ə

Consonants:

16. p, 17. y, 18. tʃ, 19. dʒ, 20. s, 21. z, 22. ʃ, 23. ʒ, 24. Θ, 25. Ð, 26. t, 27. n, 28. ŋ, 29. l, 30. l

Part B.

- |                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. you           | 7. speaking   |
| 2. me            | 8. listening  |
| 3. them          | 9. college    |
| 4. language      | 10. education |
| 5. classroom     | 11. teacher   |
| 6. pronunciation | 12. thank     |

### Page 9: Word and Sentence Stress

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. f | 6. b  |
| 2. d | 7. c  |
| 3. a | 8. g  |
| 4. h | 9. j  |
| 5. e | 10. i |

### Page 10: Understanding Sentence Stress through Speeches, #1

Part B.

a, c, d, f

Part C.

Your **Majesties**, Your **royal highnesses**, **distinguished members** of the **Norwegian Nobel Committee**, **dear sisters** and **brothers**,

**Today** is a **day** of **great happiness** for me. I am **humbled** that the **Nobel Committee** has **selected** me for this **precious award**.

**Thank** you to **everyone** for your **continued support** and **love**. **Thank** you for the **letters** and **cards** that I **still receive** from **all** around the **world**. Your **kind** and **encouraging words** **strengthens** and **inspires** me.

I would **like** to **thank** my **parents** for their **unconditional love**. **Thank** you to my **father** for **not clipping** my **wings** and for **letting** me **fly**. **Thank** you to my **mother** for **inspiring** me to be **patient** and to **always speak** the **truth**- which we **strongly believe** is the **true message** of **Islam**. And **also thank** you to **all** my **wonderful teachers**, who **inspired** me to **believe** in **myself** and be **brave**.

I am **proud**, **well in fact**, I am **very proud** to be the **first Pashtun**, the **first Pakistani**, and the **youngest person** to **receive** this **award**. **Along** with **that**, **along** with **that**, I am **pretty certain** that I am **also** the **first recipient** of the **Nobel Peace Prize** who **still fights** with her **younger brothers**. I **want** there to be **peace everywhere**, but my **brothers** and **I** are **still working** on **that**.

Page 11: Understanding Sentence Stress through Speeches, #2

Part B.

b

Part C.

Let me express my deepest gratitude for the privilege of addressing this convention.

Tonight is a particular honor for me because, let's face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely. My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father – my grandfather – was a cook, a domestic servant to the British. But my grandfather had larger dreams for his son. Through hard work and perseverance my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place, America, that shone as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before. While studying here, my father met my mother. She was born in a town on the other side of the world, in Kansas.



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