

Minimal Pairs Pronunciation

Age Group: Any, although it is most effective when used with young/teenage learners.

Time: Around 40 – 50 minutes depending on how long you want to spend on each activity.

Materials

- Minimal pairs flashcards
- Whiteboard/blackboard
- Board erasers or other pointing devices

Objective

Practice minimal pairs pronunciation.

Students listen and communicate using the minimal pairs sounds – this activity also teaches them the importance of looking and listening in order to speak. If you teach just one nationality, the minimal pairs you use can be adapted to their specific ‘problem sounds’. However, even if you teach mixed nationalities, there are some minimal pairs that are common problems for many different nationalities.

Procedure

- Introduce the minimal pairs flashcards and explain that listening to the correct pronunciation is an important part of being able to pronounce difficult sounds.
- As you go through the flashcards, ask the students to concentrate on looking at the shape of your mouth and listening to the sounds you make before trying to mimic the sounds you make. You could explain how amusing situations might arise from the confusion of words such as *rice/lice* or *coffee/copy*.

Play **minimal pairs bingo** to give the students further listening practice.

- Write the minimal pairs on the board and ask the students to draw a 3x3 grid and randomly fill in the squares with 9 of the minimal pairs. If you want to speed this exercise up, then allow them to call ‘bingo’ when they have a line of three in a row rather than a full grid. Remember to check the winner’s boards to make sure that they have marked off the correct words. If not, continue the game.

Main lesson

- Write the numbers 0 to 9 on the board and write a single minimal pair word next to each question.
- Read out a telephone number to the students using the minimal pair words. The students must then tell you what number they think they heard.
- Review the minimal pair cards again and ask a student to read out his/her telephone number to the class. The class then tell the student what number they heard until somebody says the right number. Repeat this a couple of times. Then ask the students to do the activity in pairs or groups of 4.
- Write the minimal-pairs words on the board in random order. Divide the class into 2 or 3 teams and call a volunteer from each team out to face the board. Give each volunteer a board eraser or 'pointing device'.
- Show the flashcards to the rest of the class, who then call out the word or sound. The volunteers must compete to be the first person to touch the correct sound or word displayed on the board and in doing so win a point for their team. Each set of volunteers has 3 turns.

Extension Activity

- Practice some tongue twisters using the minimal pair sounds. For example, 'She sells seashells on the seashore. The shells that she sells are seashells I'm sure', or they repeat 'red lorry, yellow lorry' as many times as they can.

More tongue-twisters:

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/8136/tonguetwisters.html>

International tongue-twisters (many languages with translations):

<http://www.uebersetzung.at/twister/>

Tongue twisters for children:

http://www.indianchild.com/tongue_twisters.htm

An EFL/ ESL tongue twister page:

<http://members.tripod.com/~ESL4Kids/tongue.html>

(Please write to us if there is a problem with any of these links:
webeditor@macmillan.com: Please tell us the name of the lesson plan and the link.
Thanks for helping!)

coffee	copy
ship	sheep
fashion	fasten
sir	sure
rice	lice
work	walk

* You can always use your own minimal pairs