Self-Regulated Pronunciation Practice

by [Gail Schwartz](#), [Dana Saito-Stehberger](#), and [Rachel Fernandez](#)

For most of us, we rely on our ability to express ourselves verbally significantly more than we rely on our writing skills. There has traditionally been an incongruity, then, in how little time is spent in the English language classroom developing speaking and pronunciation skills versus developing writing skills. One reason for this incongruity, perhaps, is that there has been less focus on establishing teaching methods with explicit learning objectives, practice, and specific feedback for developing speaking fluency than there has been for developing writing fluency. A second reason may be that, although theoretically effective teaching methods existed, the logistics of capturing and assessing individual student speech was tedious and time-consuming.

The Importance of Suprasegmentals

Fortunately, the instruction of speaking and pronunciation tends to be a standard topic covered in many TESOL teacher training programs these days, and explicit instruction has become commonplace in many classrooms. A commonly accepted claim in pronunciation pedagogy today is that suprasegmentals play a crucial and more critical role in communication—in addition to intelligibility—than segmentals (Hahn, 2004; Omidian & Siyanova-Chanturia, 2020). Suprasegmentals are often regarded as "musical" aspects of speech, such as stress, rhythm, and intonation; they refer to more than one sound segment. In other words, in order for English learners to verbally communicate their ideas in English and to be understood, it is vital that pronunciation emphasis is put more on the suprasegmentals than on the pronunciation of the individual sounds of consonants and vowels.

Technology for Pronunciation Practice

To support the instruction of speaking and pronunciation, technological advances in automated speech recognition and ubiquitous access to digital audio recording has created possibilities to easily capture and review student speech and for students to access model pronunciation videos on demand (Elimat & AbuSeileek, 2014; Evers & Chen, 2020). These advances grant students autonomy and the opportunity to self-regulate the development of their pronunciation skills. They lower affective filters as students can practice at their own pace and can self-evaluate. Teachers benefit as the urgency of immediate teacher feedback is reduced.

In our classrooms, both virtual and face-to-face, we have had success with the following three pronunciation learning activities. The learning activities have engaged students, and improvement in pronunciation has been evident. The two types of free technology used in these learning activities are Google Voice Typing and FlipGrid. These learning activities are easily adaptable to any set of vocabulary.

Google Voice Typing

Google Voice Typing is a free online transcription tool available in Google Docs and Google Slides. Students use the tool to determine how intelligible their speech is. They speak into the microphone and see the tool type out what it has "understood." Google Voice Typing has been documented as having 95% accuracy (McCrocklin & Edalatishams, 2020), which is similar to how well a native speaker might understand the nonnative speaker. See Appendix A for instructions on how to enable Google Voice Type on your desktop.

Flipgrid

Flipgrid is a free video discussion tool created by Microsoft that can be accessed using a Microsoft or Google account. In these assignments, teachers use Flipgrid to post model pronunciation of the learning tasks, which is easily accessible with a simple link. Students record and rerecord their learning tasks until they are satisfied and then post to a different Flipgrid page. Sign up for a teacher's Flipgrid account here.

Pronunciation Activities

Learning Activity 1: Pronunciation of Vocabulary in Context

Overview
This task involves students listening several times to a teacher-created video sample, speaking the sentences themselves, and reflecting.

Learning Objectives
- Improve learner's comprehensibility using new vocabulary.
- Raise awareness of an individual's pronunciation challenges.
- Increase familiarity with vocabulary, collocations, and use in context.
- Practice pausing, emphasizing keywords, and stressing the appropriate syllable for improved comprehensibility.
- Promote autonomy in working on pronunciation.

Steps
1. Create and post a video sample of the pronunciation of 10 sentences with the chapter vocabulary used in common contexts or collocations. Video is preferred over audio as it allows students to see the movements of the mouth.
2. Create a Google document using a three-column table: (1) your sentence (with words and syllables that should be stressed and with places that require a pause), (2) students'

pronunciation, and (3) student comments on any issues with pronunciation of particular words/phrases. See Appendix B for student handout.

3. Provide clear instructions and demonstrate how to use Google Voice Typing.
4. Students watch the video/teacher model. The first time, they watch and listen; the second time, they listen with a focus on syllable stress, keyword stress, pausing, and vowel pronunciation.
5. Students read the sentences aloud into Google Voice Typing. Encourage them to read each sentence several times to achieve accuracy but not more than three times so they can avoid too much frustration.
6. Students reflect in an online discussion, sharing what they learned.

Feedback/Assessment
- Comment on a couple of students' issues.
- Review common difficulties and indicate how those issues may be addressed. (See Rachel's English for more exercises and videos on syllable stress, keyword stress, and so on.)
- Give full marks to any student who did the assignment, regardless of accuracy.

Notes
- You could include several sentences for more context, especially for advanced level students.
- For lower levels, simple sentences should be used

Learning Activity 2: Pronunciation Differences Within Word Families

Overview
This task involves students reviewing vocabulary, listening to examples of the vocabulary read aloud, and posting a video that emulates your pronunciation.

Learning Objectives
- Raise awareness of the pronunciation differences within word families.
- Use the vocabulary in a sentence and raise awareness of grammar and collocations (word friends).
- Analyze the value of using a teacher model and its value in helping students hear the differences in pronunciation within a word family.

Steps
1. Create Google slides reviewing vocabulary definition, word forms, and use in a sentence (see Appendix C) and a model video in which you read the vocabulary word, the sentence in context, and each of the high-frequency word forms. (See example model video here.) Video is preferred over audio as it allows students to see the movements of the mouth. The focus is on syllable stress and pronunciation of vowels (as they change depending on the stressed syllable) as well as on the rhythm in the sentence that uses the vocabulary.
2. Provide clear instructions and demonstrate how to use Flipgrid.

3. Have students review the Google slides in class (and on their own) and then listen to the model/video.
4. Students post a video on Flipgrid of themselves emulating your pronunciation. (See example student videos [here](#) and [here](#).)
5. Encourage students to practice before they post and/or feel free to post on Flipgrid and delete until they are satisfied with their video.
6. Have students reflect in an online discussion about what they learned from the task.

Feedback/Assessment
- Provide comments on Flipgrid, which allows for video and/or written feedback.
- Feedback with encouragement along with a couple of suggestions works well.
- Make notes of patterns/issues for future lessons.

Notes
- For lower levels, the focus could be on word families, appropriate to the level.
- On Flipgrid, you can include captions (recommended) on the instructor example video. The students can also check their own pronunciation using the closed captions that are created. However, the accuracy on Flipgrid is not as good as Google Voice Typing. It is not recommended unless the students' pronunciation is at a very high level.

Learning Activity 3: Stress, Rhythm, and Intonation

Overview
In this task, students read a passage from their textbook that has been marked for stress and pauses, listen to a reading of the paragraph, and then post a video of themselves reading the paragraph.

Learning Objectives
- Increase awareness of what keyword stress, pausing, and intonation sound like.
- Practice speaking with proficient rhythm with a heightened focus.
- Gain an understanding of how the rhythm of English helps convey meaning.
- Improve pronunciation by practice and self-evaluation (before recording).
- Reflect on the process and the importance of rhythm.

Steps
1. Teach the basics of keyword stress, pausing, and intonation, and why this is important (see Rachel's English for videos on [word stress](#) and [linking and thought groups](#)).
2. Create a handout with a paragraph from your textbook marked with bolded words (keywords) for stress (louder, longer) and pauses (//). Post a video of yourself reading the paragraph. (See [an example here](#).) Video is preferred over audio as it allows students to see the movements of the mouth.
3. Provide clear instructions and demonstrate how to use Flipgrid.
4. Provide students with the passage, read it to the class, and point out how the rhythm helps convey meaning.
5. Have students view the posted video as many times as needed. Also ask them to notice and emulate the intonation.

6. Have students post their own video; encourage them to practice several times before posting. (See example student videos here and here.)
7. Students reflect on the process and their understanding of the value of stress, pausing, and intonation.

Feedback/Assessment
- Provide comments on Flipgrid, which allows for video and/or written feedback.
- Feedback with encouragement along with just a couple of suggestions works well.
- Make notes of patterns/issues for future lessons.

Notes
- Consider a subsequent lesson where students mark up the text themselves and post a video.
- This is a high intermediate/advanced task.

Conclusion

Because the research clearly indicates the importance of suprasegmentals for nonnative speakers' comprehensibility, and because automated speech recognition has improved dramatically, it is incumbent upon instructors to help our students take advantage of these tools and create more activities that foster student autonomy to work on stress, rhythm, and intonation as well as improve pronunciation with segmentals.

References

Elimat, A. K., & AbuSeileek, A. F. (2014). Automatic speech recognition technology as an effective means for teaching pronunciation. *JALT CALL Journal*, *10*(1), 21–47.

Evers, K., & Chen, S. (2020). Effects of an automatic speech recognition system with peer feedback on pronunciation instruction for adults. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2020.1839504

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Gail Schwartz *has taught academic and business English for nearly 20 years, subsequent to a career in marketing. During her 15 years at the UC Irvine Division of Continuing Education, she alternated quarters between teaching all levels and skills in their Intensive English program and*

teaching six courses in their Business English program. Ms. Schwartz now teaches adult ESL classes at Irvine Valley College, where she won the 2020 Associate Professor of the Year award. Ms. Schwartz has an MS in TESOL and an MS in urban and regional studies.

Dana Saito-Stehberger *is a research specialist at UC Irvine Digital Learning Lab, where she is part of the Elementary Computing for ALL team, creating curriculum and supporting teachers as they teach computational thinking to English language learners. She has experience teaching English language learners for the past 25 years. Her interests include instructional design, integrating technology into teaching and learning, culturally relevant pedagogy, and the impact of collaboration on learning. She has an EdD in TESOL.*

Rachel Fernandez *has an MA in Spanish and a certificate in ESL. She has taught Spanish and English at high school, community college, and university levels. She has been an instructor at UC Irvine Division of Continuing Education since 2004, teaching a highly diverse student population in the English for Internationals programs and training teachers in the TEFL Certificate programs.*

How to Enable Voice Typing in Google Docs (desktop version)[1]

Step 1: Turn on Your Microphone

To use voice typing or voice commands, your computer microphone needs to be on and working.

Step 2: Start voice typing in a document
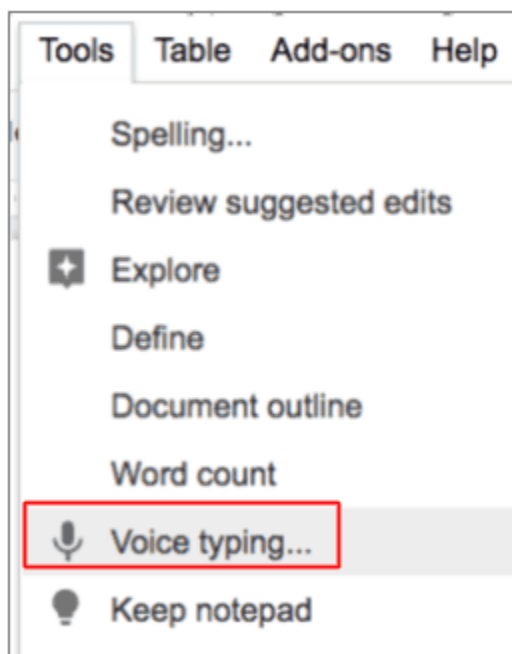
1. Check that your microphone works.
2. Open a document in Google Docs with a Chrome browser.
3. Click **Tools** › **Voice typing**. A microphone box appears.
4. When you're ready to speak, click the microphone.
5. Speak clearly, at a normal volume and pace (see below for more information on using punctuation).

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[1] From Kasey Bell's https://shakeuplearning.com/blog/7-reasons-need-try-voice-typing-google-docs/

6. When you're done, click the microphone again.
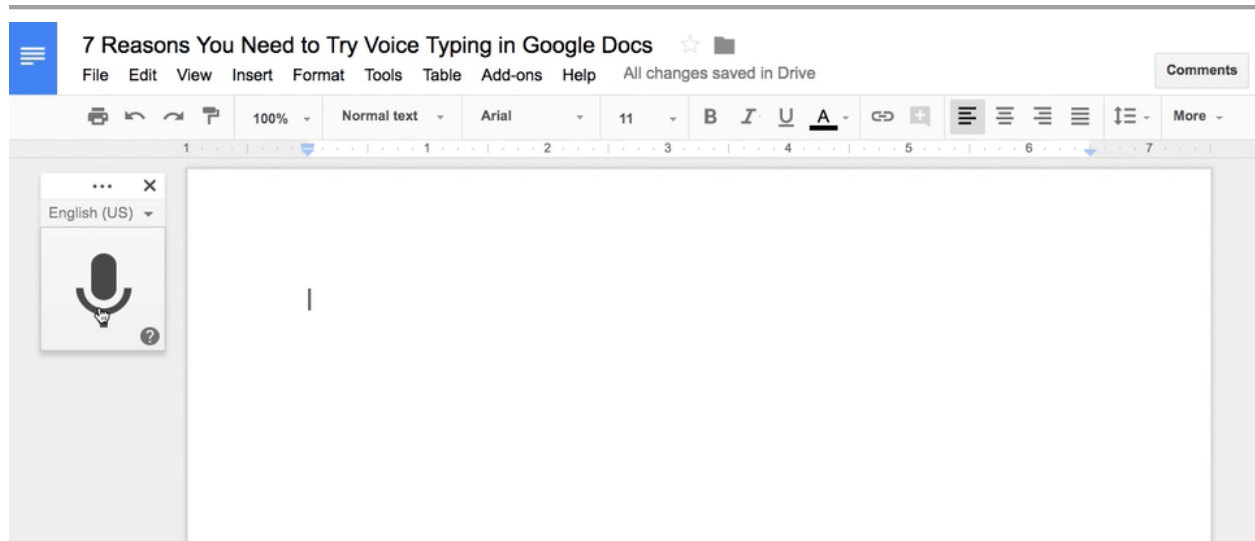
NOTE: The user must be connected to the internet through the Google Chrome Browser on Windows, MacOS or Chromebook devices or on Google Android devices.

Learning Activity 1: Pronunciation Practice: 10 sentences
(Unit 3, *Future Advanced*)

Before you do the activity, make sure you know the words.

The list is on [Quizlet](#) and the example video is on Canvas.

Record yourself reading each sentence in the table.

Directions:

1. Click on "Tools" at the top of a Google Doc Page.
2. Click on "Voice Typing." A microphone icon will appear.
3. Click your cursor in the column next to the sentence you will read. The Voice Tool will write what you say there.
4. Click on the microphone icon to record and read the sentence.

When you read:

● Speak loudly.
● **Bolded** syllables are stressed. Say them louder and longer.
● The symbol // shows the end of a thought group. Make a brief pause.
● Keywords are in **green**. Emphasize these words.

Remember:

● This can help you see the accuracy of your pronunciation and identify problem areas.
● The Voice Tool is about 95% accurate.
● You are graded on the completion of this assignment, not the accuracy of your pronunciation.
● If you have tried three times, move on to the next sentence even if it isn't perfect.
● Put any comments you have in the third column.

Sentence With vocabulary Word/Phrase	Your Recordings	Your Comments
• **Bold**—stressed syllable or word • **//**—pause • **Bolded words in green font**—keywords; should be emphasized	Click your cursor in this column and the Voice Tool will write what you say here. Don't get frustrated. If you try three times and don't get it right, you can move on.	What was difficult? What do you have questions about?
Trial and **er**ror is a **valuable** way to learn// **many** different skills.		
You don't need to e**lim**inate your accent // when you speak English. // You just need to be **comprehensible.**		
The stock market can **fluc**tuate a lot during times of **economic** uncertainty.		
Sometimes it is hard to de**tect** when our **children** don't understand something.		
It can be very **nerve**-wracking to make a presentation in front of the **whole** class.		
Science tells us that it pays **off** to exercise. // We can feel better **phy**sically and e**mo**tionally.		
Student **debt** is a big problem in the United States.		

Unit 9 Vocabulary (Future Advanced)

Word Families

Sentence Examples

Collocations (Word friends)

Objectives:

1. to raise awareness of the pronunciation differences within word families
2. to use the vocabulary in a sentence and raise awareness of grammar and collocations (word friends)
3. to analyze the value of using a teacher model

General Directions

1. Begin by looking at each slide to become familiar with the word family. Note the syllable stress and how it changes with different parts of speech.
2. Listen to the instructor's Flipgrid video. You will hear the sentence, and each word form pronounced.
3. You will then record yourself on Flipgrid, trying to get your pronunciation close to the instructor's model. You may want to use the AI-generated captions to see if you are getting close. (This is not perfect, but it should give you an idea. If the caption is completely off, you may want to try again.)
4. You will have an opportunity to share your reflections about this assignment.

Specific steps for the task

1. Print out the slides so you can easily read or have them available on another device.
2. Say the vocabulary word in ORANGE that is in the sentence
3. Read the sentence.
4. Say: the part of speech (NOUN, VERB, ADJECTIVE, ADVERB) Example: NOUN: Eligibility
5. Speak LOUDLY

1. ELIGIBLE: I wonder if he is **eligible for** the track team.

(DEF: qualified to participate)

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb
e li gi **BI** li ty		**E** li gi ble	**E** li gi bly

2. INSTALLED: We installed anti-viral software.

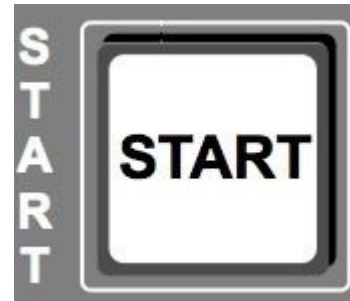(DEF: to put in a piece of equipment and make it ready for use)

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb
in sta LA tion	in STALL		

3. INITIATIVE: I **took the initiative** to call the client about their problem.

(DEF: a plan or program to solve a problem)

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb
i NI tia tive	I NI ti ate	in NI ti at ed	

4. INTERVENTION: The family planned an **intervention** so he would get help for his drug addiction.

(DEF: interference to change an outcome)

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb
in ter VEN tion	in ter **VENE**	In ter **VEN** ing	

5. MODIFY: We need to **modify** the dosage since she is not getting better.
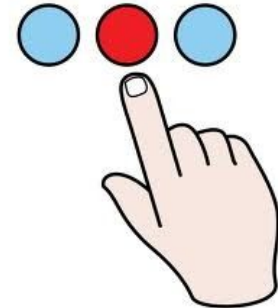
(DEF: to make a small change)

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb
mod di fi **CA** tion	**MO** di fy	mo di **FI** a ble	

6. INDICATE: Her symptoms **indicate** that there is an underlying medical condition.

(DEF: to demonstrate/suggest; to point out)

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb
in di **CA** tion	**in** di cate	in **DI** ca tive	In **DI** cat tive ly

Learning Activity 3: Pronunciation Practice: Stress, Rhythm, and Intonation
(Unit 2, p.174 *Future Advanced*)

Before you record your video:

Listen and read along to the example video on Flipgrid.

Note which words are **stressed/emphasized** and when to pause (//) as indicated.

How Should We Handle the Obesity Epidemic?

In **2010**,// **Michelle Obama founded** the **Let's Move! Campaign** to **reduce childhood obesity**. //She believed **schools** were the **best** place// to **tackle obesity**.// Nearly **50 million** children **eat** at least **one meal** //at **school every day**.// **Let's Move! encouraged** schools to serve// **more** **whole grains**,// **fruits**, and **vegetables**.// It **worked** and **proved** that schools **could** **change children's eating habits**.

- Content words are in **BOLD** (noun, verb, adjective, adverb)
- Function words are unstressed (conjunctions, pronouns, articles, etc.)
- Focus words are **BOLD and underlined** (words emphasized most in a phrase)
- Pauses are marked with **//** (after a thought group/phrase)

Directions

1. Go to the Flipgrid link to post your recording.
2. Read the above paragraph following the instructor's model and trying to use the same rhythm (stress, pausing, and intonation).
3. Optional: You can record the second half of the paragraph (no teacher model) using your new awareness.
   Salad bars were added in thousands of schools. Soda machines and dessert trays were taken away. Let'sMove! also urged schools to get students moving. A least an hour of physical education was added to the daily schedule at many schools.
4. Then, write a reflection on the Canvas Discussion about what you learned from this exercise.

Note about keywords and focus words: Content words are stressed, and focus words are stressed *even more*. In addition, pay attention to pausing (after commas, paragraphs, and all thought groups). A thought group is a phrase with words that should be linked, if possible.

To stress words, we say them louder, longer, and with a higher pitch. We often link words within a thought group but not between thought groups.

Content words and focus words: STRESSED—louder, longer, higher pitch (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs). These get a full beat (think of music).

Function words: UNSTRESSED—softer, shorter, lower pitch (of, and, the, he)

Here are some more videos about stress and thought groups:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPbNhsCkj7k&t=2s Word stress video Rachel's English

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-JtcSzL3Ic Linking and thought groups Rachel's English