

TEACHING TIP

PRONUNCIATION WORKOUT!

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Pronunciation is a physical act!

To produce the sounds of a language, a person needs to activate muscular components relevant to the target language or dialect. Those in the head, the neck, and the face, in particular, are instrumental in the articulation of speech. The lungs also play an important role in sending sound out through the oral cavity.

The point and manner of articulation of sounds varies, sometimes in almost unnoticeable but still important ways, from language to language. The amount and duration of pulmonary pressure from the lungs through the glottis and larynx also varies among languages. Especially when learners have had years – perhaps decades – of experience moving their mouths and controlling their breath in certain ways, it is beneficial to do stretching and breathing exercises to increase strength, flexibility, and plasticity so that learning new sounds and sound patterns can develop more readily. The breathing exercises also help learners relax, calm anxieties that may arise from speaking a foreign language, alleviate distractions, and center their minds on the here and now.

Pronunciation workout exercises can enhance a speaker's delivery in ways analogous to people engaged in athletic and musical performance. Ballet dancers' exercising regularly at the barre helps them build the balance, swiftness, and range of motion to dance gracefully and fluidly. Pianists' practicing scales and chords at varying tempos and degrees of pressure helps them play melodic compositions with appropriate lyricism, texture, and dynamics. Football players' sprinting through tires laid in a zig-zag pattern helps them gain the strength, agility and speed to dodge and weave through opponents on the field during a game. Similarly, second language speakers' doing exercises that involve stretching, tensing, and expanding the muscles of the vocal apparatus helps them improve their ability to modify their oral production and increase automaticity in communicating with a desired pronunciation and style of vocalization. In a pronunciation class, I tell my students to think of themselves as athletes of the mouth with me as their personal trainer!

While cognitive skills are certainly involved in conceptualizing, perceiving, forming, and categorizing sounds, this teaching tip focuses on bringing speakers in touch with the physical actions of the body to perform and modify spoken language so that they can proceed with the perception and production of specific sounds and prosodic patterns of the target language.

Pronunciation Workout Videos

If a picture speaks a thousand words, a motion picture speaks a million. What better way to present pronunciation workout exercises than by sight, sound, and kinesthesia via video? To help

readers visualize this teaching tip, I refer them to videos on [Pronunciation Doctor's](#) (the author's) Youtube Channel. This channel contains hundreds of videos curated into playlists, one of which is called [Pronunciation Workout Videos](#). Below is a sampling of workouts that learners can do to enhance performance in spoken language, such as pronunciation, oral presentation, and dramatic interpretation. Of varying lengths and complexity, some recorded in a studio and others before a live audience, these workout video clips and techniques may be used in class to jump-start a lesson, no matter what the target language is. As a teacher, you may use these videos in class as a co-presenter to lead your students, as a model on which to develop your own workout, and as a means for your students to practice on their own outside of class.

Based on comments posted by users from around the world, the workouts are also effective for individuals learning outside a teacher-fronted classroom.

- Ludmila Spivak Excellent learning experience. Exactly, what I was looking for to improve my speaking skills. THANK YOU SO MUCH dear Pronunciation Doctor, Marsha Chan, for sharing your knowledge!
- salal2007: THANK YOU!!!! what a joyful, great class! very useful, not only for non-native English speakers but anyone who needs to improve their vocal expression.
- Marina Babichova: you are hilarious! and it's a very useful and fun warm up! thanks!
- Alexis Granizo: You the best!!! thanks for share this exercises it helps to take my fears out.
- The Marwan: thanks that's was helpful now i can rap faster.

[Pronunciation is a physical act. Let's do warm-up exercises! \(17:40\)](#)

This video shows that pronunciation is a physical act. Warm up your vocal apparatus in a pronunciation workout! To speak, to pronounce, to modify your accent, you need to control your lips, teeth, tongue, throat and lungs. Consider me your personal trainer. Use a mirror to see yourself. Stretch your face, lips, and tongue.

Suggestion: Find time to do physical exercises 10 minutes every day to build and develop flexibility. No fees! No uniform! No equipment! Do it! Work out!

[Pronunciation Workout - Stretch your jaw and cheeks \(3:36\)](#)

In this exercise, you'll stretch your jaw wide open "AHHHHH!" /a/. Lower your jaw and tongue. Stretch your cheeks from side to side. Make sure both the upper lip and lower lip are moving. Keep your nose in front!

[Pronunciation Workout - Stretch your lips oo-ee \(3:36\)](#)

In this exercise, you'll stretch your lips far forward as you make the sound "oooooo" /uw/. Then you'll stretch your lips and cheeks as you make the sound "eeeeee" /iy/.

[Pronunciation Workout - Stretch your tongue \(5:31\)](#)

In this exercise, you'll stretch your tongue out as far as it can go. Feel the muscles in the root of your tongue. As you practice over time, stretch farther and farther. Move your tongue faster and faster. This will help you develop strength, flexibility and automaticity.

Pronunciation Workout - Waggle your tongue (4:12)

In this exercise, you'll waggle your tongue in and out. Feel the tip of your tongue hit the inside upper front teeth on the way out.

Pronunciation Workout - Poke your cheeks and clean your teeth with your tongue (5:08)

In this exercise, you'll use the tip of your tongue to poke the inside of your left and right cheeks. Then you'll stretch your tongue so that it wipes the outside upper teeth from the far right molar around the front teeth to the far left molar and back. Finally you'll stretch your tongue so that it wipes the outside lower teeth from the far right molar around the front teeth to the far left molar and back.

Pronunciation Workout - Vibrate your lips and blow through them (5:41)

In this exercise, you'll first loosen your upper and lower lips manually. Then you'll vibrate your vocal cords and close your lips as for the sound 'mmmm' /m/. Feel the vibration of your lips. Next, press the tips of two fingers on the cheeks near the corners of your mouth so that your lips protrude. Vibrate your vocal cords, and with a deep breath, send air and vibration through your lips. Trill your lips. Make funny noises!

Pronunciation Workout (Standing) (8:58)

Pronunciation is a physical act. Warm up your vocal apparatus in a pronunciation workout! In this exercise, you'll stand up, stretch your arms, shoulders, torso, and back. You'll relax your head and neck. You'll stretch your mouth and jaw, expanding the oral cavity. You'll breathe deeply and send relaxation throughout your body. You'll loosen your lips and tongue saying "blah-blah-blah." You'll stretch your tongue out, increasing the distance and speed. You'll vibrate your vocal cords and trill your lips. You'll listen and clap different rhythms.

CONCLUSION

The pronunciation workout exercises are designed to help learners become aware of the vocal apparatus and make the muscles stronger and more flexible so as to enunciate more clearly and modulate oral production with greater ease. A new exercise may be introduced each session, or a variety of exercises can be led, depending on time, learners' interest and motivation, teacher's comfort in presentation, and the accessibility of the video clips on YouTube.

Further Resources

Chan, M. (1994). *Pronunciation Warm Up*, in K. Bailey & L. Savage, (Eds.), *New ways in teaching speaking*, (pp. 202-204). Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL).

Chan, M. (1985). Video: *Marsha Chan's pronunciation workout for foreign language learners*. APAAC Video Group: Sunnyvale, CA.