

# *Improving Oral Communication*

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## *A Pronunciation Oral- Communication Manual*

*Jeanne Handschuh  
Alma Simounet de Geigel*



# *Improving Oral Communication*

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We dedicate this book to our husbands,  
Bob and Wilfredo, for their continuing  
support and patience, to our students,  
from whom we are constantly learning,  
and to Eugenio.



## *Preface — Guide to the Instructor*

*Improving Oral Communication* is a pronunciation, oral-communication manual for the intermediate-level student of English as a second language. The book is intended for students who can read and write English fairly well but who wish to improve their pronunciation and ability to communicate orally with other speakers of English. Starting with the first lesson, the emphasis is on speaking with another person through the use of question-and-answer exercises and dialogues, the subject matter of which can spark further classroom discussion.

In the dialogues, we have kept the sentences short because in conversation people do speak in short, grammatically uncomplicated sentences most of the time. But we have another purpose in keeping sentences short: the student can easily look at the question or the response, read it once or twice, and then look at the person he or she is addressing as though in actual conversation. We have deliberately labeled the speakers A or B so that the dialogues can be used by either male or female students, depending on the makeup of the class. Also, by not identifying the speakers or specifying the situation we give the instructor the opportunity to ask, "Who do you think the speakers are?" or "What is happening?" or "Where does this dialogue take place?" or "What is the relationship between the speakers?" and so on. In this way an instructor can determine whether or not a student really understands what he or she is saying. It has been our experience that often a student can give a grammatically correct response without having the slightest idea of what it means, especially if he has memorized it.

With the exception of the vowels [eʏ] and [oʷ] we have used the International Phonetic Alphabet (the IPA) to describe the various sounds of American English because this particular phonetic alphabet is the one used by most foreign-

language dictionaries. The pronunciations given are those listed as most frequently used in Kenyon and Knott, *Pronouncing Dictionary of American English*, Webster's *New World Dictionary*, or the new *Longman's Dictionary of American English*.

Except for the dialogues in the "Appropriateness" sections, all dialogues from Lesson 5 on consist mainly of words containing the sounds being studied in a particular lesson. It is these specially constructed dialogues and "mini-dialogues" which we believe are an innovative feature of this text.

*Improving Oral Communication* (hereafter referred to as *IOC*) consists of twenty-seven lessons. Lessons 5–14 teach the vowel sounds, and Lessons 15–27 the consonant sounds. Lessons 1–4—dealing respectively with the sounds of English, word stress, sentence stress, and intonation—contain information vital to the successful use of the rest of the textbook; therefore, the various types of exercises have been carefully constructed to allow students constant practice in these necessary elements of oral communication.

The lessons in *IOC* do not have to be taken up successively, nor do all the lessons have to be covered in order for the material to be effective. Although the textbook contains sufficient material for a one-year course in pronunciation (vowels during the first semester, consonants during the second), an instructor can choose material according to the amount of time allotted for a particular course. Moreover, instructors should take into account the pronunciation difficulties of their own students and select the lessons that deal with those problems.

Beginning with Lesson 5, each lesson describes a sound or a pair of sounds and the production of each. The lesson contrasts two sounds with each other and with other related sounds, gives spelling hints, and lists frequently used words containing the sounds being studied.

The words listed in the last-mentioned section have been carefully chosen from the 4000 most frequently used. In Lessons 5–14, these words are arranged according to spelling and/or the number of syllables. In Lessons 15–27, the words listed contain the consonants being studied, and, at the same time, systematically review the vowel sounds. We have made a conscious effort to use as many of these words as possible in the various exercises and dialogues throughout the book so that students will learn to use the words in context.

There are a variety of listening and production exercises and at least one written exercise in every lesson. However, instructors should not feel that they must use all of the material presented. Some exercises may seem either too elementary or too involved for a particular class. Some will work well in one classroom situation but not in another. We have taken care to make all the exercises meaningful to the students. (Incidentally, except for the listening exercises, there are almost no drills which call for repetition because we have found that this type of exercise encourages "parroting.")

Another innovative and valuable feature of each lesson is the section called "Appropriateness" in which, through sample dialogues, explanation, and practice situations, the student learns language appropriate to various social situations such as making introductions, asking permission, expressing gratitude, and so on. No other pronunciation manual to date combines the teaching of pronunciation with the use of English in social contexts. In fact, the Appropriateness section can serve as a starting point for further class discussion as students talk about what is appropriate in similar situations in their own cultural backgrounds. (Instructors should be aware of the important features of nonverbal communication in the American culture, such as gestures, space, facial expression, and eye contact, which occur simultaneously with the language functions described in the various Appropriateness sections.)

An important section of Lessons 15–26 is the one labeled "Important Hints,"

which takes up such topics as aspiration or the lack of it and consonant clusters, and explains other idiosyncracies of the different consonant sounds.

Following are further suggestions we hope will be useful to instructors using *IOC* as a textbook.

1. The listening exercises can be used as quizzes or just for practice. A good technique is to assign one student to write the exercise on the board as the instructor dictates it, while the other students (with their chairs turned so that they cannot see the blackboard) write the exercise at their seats. When the exercise has been completed, the students turn their chairs back to the original position and compare their answers with those of the board. The instructor and the students correct any errors which appear on the board.

2. Students should be made to realize that learning the spelling rules (and the exceptions) given for each sound will help them to recognize and to pronounce correctly various combinations of letters. The instructor should make sure that the students understand the difference between a letter and a phonetic symbol. He or she should also call the students' attention to the silent letters (marked with a slash) as in *debt*.

3. In the substitution exercises, each student should be encouraged to look at the list of words to be used in the question or answer only long enough to choose the words he or she wishes to use. The student should then look at the person to whom he or she is speaking. It is helpful to have the students as a group repeat the question several times before beginning the exercise so that they can retain it in their memory and not have to look at the book and **read** it rather than **speak** it. This procedure can be used in all of the oral exercises which consist of questions and answers.

4. The oral reading exercises must be carefully monitored by the instructor, with close attention given to the use of correct stress, rhythm, and intonation. Students should be reminded to use their dictionaries and to ask questions about particular sentences if they do not understand them. Often when students read a sentence poorly it is because they have not looked up unfamiliar words and so haven't the slightest idea what the sentence means. Many of the sentences can provide a basis for further class discussion.

5. In assigning the written exercises, the instructor should remind the students to review the spelling hints. Students should not rely solely on their ears to tell them which symbol represents the sound of a particular group of letters. The exercises can either be assigned as homework and gone over later in class or used as quiz material. However, it must be remembered that *IOC* is not meant to be a phonetics text. Rather, the students are asked to use the phonetic symbols as a tool in learning the correct English pronunciation.

6. The homework activities listed at the end of each lesson are not planned according to the content of a particular lesson, and the instructor should feel free to choose among them, selecting whichever ones best suit the needs of a particular class.

7. To be most effective, the various Appropriateness sections should be taken up in the sequence in which they are presented in the text. If assigned to be studied as homework and then discussed in class, less class time will be consumed by this very important section of each lesson.

There are many people to whom we owe our gratitude for their help in making this textbook a reality. Therefore, we would like to extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to the following: our dean, Dr. José Ramón De la Torre; our chairman, Dr. John Larkin; the dean of academic affairs, Dr. Jaime Rosado Alberio; the assistant dean, Professor Doris Franqui; our colleagues and students at the University of Puerto Rico, Norma Maurosa who typed the first draft, Nancy Simounet for drawing some of the illustrations, David Rivera for



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## *lesson one*

# *The Sounds of English*

### **The Phonetic Alphabet**

Students learning English as a second language often have trouble understanding English spoken by native speakers. They also have difficulty making themselves understood. Indeed, spoken English does have certain distinct features that require a great deal of practice in listening and speaking in order for a nonnative speaker to master the language. The first of these features we will take up is the sound system.

The English sound system is made up of 27 consonant sounds and 12 vowel sounds plus 3 diphthongs. Since English has more sounds than there are letters in the alphabet—21 consonants and 5 vowels—we need a special alphabet to represent the larger number of sounds. This alphabet, called the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), makes use of some of the letters of the English alphabet with which you are already familiar as well as a few new symbols to represent additional sounds. It is important for you to recognize the symbols of the IPA because the alphabet is used in most foreign language dictionaries.

Listed here is the phonetic alphabet. First, let us look at the consonant sounds represented by familiar symbols. Next to each symbol are words in which the letter or letters corresponding to that particular consonant sound are in boldface. Your instructor will pronounce each consonant sound and the word containing that sound. Listen carefully and then repeat the words as your instructor indicates.

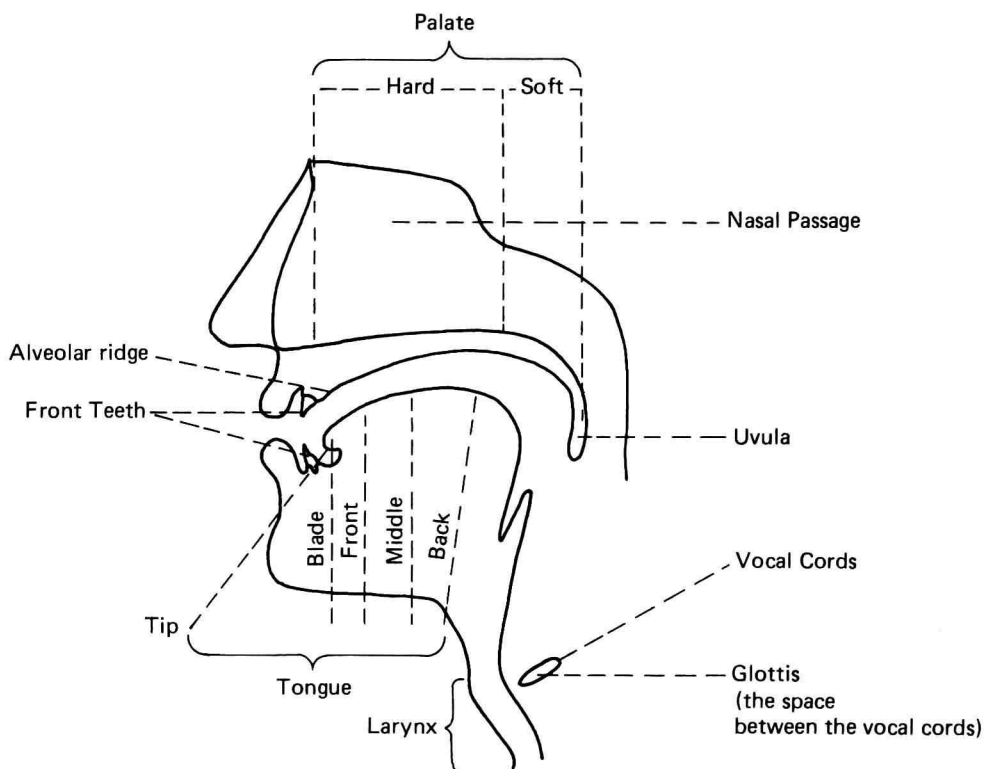
[b] ball, job  
[d] **d**ance, land  
[f] fine, leaf  
[g] go, bag  
[h] hat  
[k] cap, keep, pick

[l] land, tail  
[ɒ] bottle  
[p] **p**ark, step  
[r] red, hear  
[s] see, cease, pass  
[t] time, hat

[v] voice, five  
[w] want  
[z] zoo, boys  
[m] **m**y, from  
[ʃ] custom  
[n] no, sun  
[ŋ] cotton

Notice below the special symbols used to represent those consonant sounds for which there is no corresponding letter in the English alphabet.

[ŋ] sing, think	[ʃ] show, fish	[tʃ] church
[θ] thing, tooth	[j] yes, million	[dʒ] judge, gem
[ð] this, bathe	[ʒ] television, beige	



The Speech Organs

Now let us look at the vowel sounds that are represented by familiar symbols:

[i] feet	[eʏ]* make	[u] move	[oʊ]* no	[ʌ] lot
----------	------------	----------	----------	---------

\*The IPA uses the symbols [e] and [o] for these two sounds. However, since the production of [eʏ] and [oʊ] is similar to that of a diphthong, we have added a small [y] and [w] respectively to represent the diphthongization of the sounds. This we hope will facilitate their recognition and production by ESL students.

The following new symbols stand for the seven additional vowel sounds:

[ɪ] sit	[æ] man	[ʊ] foot	[ə] ago, cup**
[ɛ] bed		[ɔ] soft	[ɜ] bird, sister**

\*\*The IPA has two symbols for each of these sounds: [ʌ] in a stressed position as in cup [kʌp] and [ə] in an unstressed position as in ago [əgo] or soda [sɒdə]. Likewise [ɜ] is used in a stressed position as in bird [bɜd] and [ɝ] in an unstressed position as in sister [sɪstɝ]. Also English foreign language dictionaries use these symbols to distinguish the stressed vowels from the unstressed vowels. However, for purposes of simplification we have used the symbols [ə] and [ɜ] to represent the respective sounds in both stressed and unstressed syllables.