Improving one's pronunciation

1. How to benefit from these materials

Contrary to popular belief, you do not need to sound like a native English speaker. Most speakers of English in the world speak English as a second language, with a non-native accent. Attaining a fully native-like accent is not realistic, nor is it necessary. What is important is that your pronunciation is simply clear enough to be understood by others.

Improving pronunciation in a second language is very difficult, in part due to the challenge of learning new sound categories and matching them with speech production, all of which is harder with an adult brain (which is not as linguistically flexible as a child’s brain). Thus, one short course in pronunciation cannot magically improve your pronunciation. This course, rather, is designed to make you aware of your own pronunciation issues, and what your speech organs need to do differently in pronouncing English (as the English phonology, or linguistic sound system, is very different than the Korean system). It is up to you to continue practicing outside of class, and hopefully the materials in this booklet (and the websites below) will be helpful for your own study. There may be new words in the examples, but in this course we cannot really answer questions about word meanings – feel free to look up word meanings at www.dictionary.com.

In class we may do some choral repetition – repeating in unison after the teacher. But we will sometimes work in pairs or groups with the items from the book. This is not necessarily so that you can give feedback to your partner or receive feedback from him/her – though if possible, it would be helpful if you can give him/her feedback on his/her pronunciation. More importantly, this is an opportunity for you to practice
speaking with a single listener while monitoring your own pronunciation – i.e., this for your own self-awareness in producing English sounds.

Again, you will need to practice on your own. You can use the materials from this book for your own practice outside of class. You can also practice speaking by talking to yourself (or to a pet, your child, your children’s stuffed animals, your own stuffed animals), and you may find it helpful sometimes to speak in front of a mirror and watching what your speech organs do, particularly for working on vowels and consonants. You can also listen to English audio and video materials, and imitate it by repeating after the speaker (sometimes called “shadowing”). It might be helpful to use audio / video software like the VLC media player (see below), which can slow down the playback speed.

Improving pronunciation in a second language is difficult; it takes time, effort, and motivation, and you may be too busy to invest much time in this. Nonetheless, here are some things that might be helpful.

1. **Use authentic materials**, that is, real English media materials (video and audio) and reading materials, rather than just English textbooks and artificial materials produced for ESL (English as a second language) studies. Natural materials are more motivating and lead to better learning and retention of what you have learned. It is best to choose materials where the amount of words that you do not know is not more than 2% of the total contents; otherwise, you will find it difficult understand and may lose interest and motivation. You can and should use a variety of materials, from academic to popular – materials that are informative, interesting or fun, such as materials in your field of study, other fields, and general interest. They should be materials that you find informative, interesting, or fun, in order to maintain your interest and motivation to study.

2. **Watching videos** with subtitles, or listening to audios with accompanying printed text (read-aloud books, songs with printed lyrics, etc.). Since many such media are freely available on the Internet, you can find whatever genre you like for practice.

3. **Shadowing**: Listening to video or audio materials, and repeating after the speakers; imitating their pronunciation and intonation can be helpful, if the materials are interesting to you. Avoid overdoing this, or using materials that are uninteresting to you, or you may become tired or discouraged.

4. **Intensive listening**, that is, listening carefully to a video or audio file multiple times for fuller comprehension; this may include some shadowing. You can listen once for the main idea, listen again to guess unfamiliar words, then look up words that you cannot guess, and then listen a few more times for deeper comprehension.

5. **Extensive listening**, that is, listening to a variety of video and audio materials of different genres (academic and popular), without trying to understand everything. Focusing and trying to understand everything should be for intensive practice.

6. **Intensive reading** is focused practice with a particular text. You can read once for the main idea, read again to guess unfamiliar words, then look up words that you cannot guess, and then read a few more times for deeper comprehension.
7. **Extensive reading:** Extensive reading can help your overall language skills, especially vocabulary; it can also reinforce the mental connections between words and their pronunciations. It will be most helpful to read a variety of materials—different genres; reading informative materials and reading for leisure; and reading materials within your field of study and outside your field.

8. **Think in English.** Making yourself think in English sometimes can be a means of rehearsal or practice. Thinking to yourself and even talking to yourself in English can be helpful when you do not have access to native English speakers for practice.

2. **Web resources**

1. **OCW sites.** Many universities host online courseware sites, especially in North America, which can be found via simple Google searches; see also [www.ocwconsortium.org](http://www.ocwconsortium.org) and [ocw.korea.ac.kr](http://ocw.korea.ac.kr).

2. **TED.com.** Online speeches by popular speakers from academia, business, and other fields; often, transcripts and subtitles are available, with the option of downloading subtitled videos.

3. **Iowa phonetics website** at [http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics](http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics). This is one of the better sites for pronunciation practice, as it shows flash tutorials of mouth movements.


10. Urban Dictionary at [www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com). Dictionary for slang and some idioms, including those that would be too informal or inappropriate for academic contexts.

11. VLC media player [www.videolan.org/vlc](http://www.videolan.org/vlc). A media player for Windows, Mac, and Linux; this software allows you to slow down playback, which may be helpful for pronunciation practice with audio or video files. It is easier to use, to adjust settings, and in playing different file formats, than other programs.

12. Firefox web browser [www.mozilla.org](http://www.mozilla.org). This free web browser is not only fast and secure, but easily customizable with hundreds of possible extensions (add-ons or plugins), including many dictionary tools. One good dictionary tool is the ‘Wiktionary and Google Translate,’ which provides a pop-up definition of any word that you double-click on.