

From Module 2 Unit 5

The phonemic chart

The phonemic chart is divided into three sections, indicated by the double lines. The bottom section beginning with the letter *p* contains the symbols representing the **consonant** sounds. The twelve symbols in the top left section are the pure **vowel** sounds, while eight double symbols in the top right section are for sounds known as **diphthongs**. The chart shows that there are twenty-four consonants, twelve pure vowels and eight diphthongs. In order to acquaint you fully with the symbols and their sounds, we will move through the chart in a systematic way beginning with the consonants. Once more, you should bear in mind that the sounds referred to are to be found in RP English and that the sounds in your own accent may not therefore be completely reflected in this description.

The consonants

Many of the symbols used for the consonant sounds will already be familiar to you from the Standard English alphabet. The first ten symbols should cause you no problems at all since they have the pronunciations that you are most likely to associate with the normal English letters. So, for example, /p/ (the phonemic symbols are normally written inside forward slashes) represents the sound of the letter *p* in the words *paper*, *supper* and *soup* and /d/ the letter *d* in *dog*, *grand* and *ladder*. But, you will need to be careful with /k/, /z/ and /g/. You must remember that these symbols represent the *sounds* of the language, irrespective of how they might be spelt in the normal written language. So, /k/ represents the sounds in bold in the following words: **cat**, **key**, **Christmas**, **unique** and **accurate**. Similarly, /z/ can stand for the sounds made by either the letter *s* or *z* in words such as: **zip**, **razor**, **lose**, **houses** and **cruise**. The symbol /g/ always stands for the 'hard *g*' sound found in **great**, **log** and **guess**, but never for the 'soft *g*' in *gesture* or *suggest* – this sound is shown by another symbol from the chart.

Other symbols which you will recognise are: /r/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /w/ and /h/, but again you should exercise caution when transcribing written words to the IPA, since they

can all be represented in the normal alphabet by more than one letter or even a combination of two letters. The chart below will give you some idea of the problems facing learners.

/r/	ruthless, worry, r hubarb, w ring
/l/	lovely, thrill
/m/	m other, swimmer, bomb , column
/n/	nose, sinner, gn aw, kn ow, p neumonia
/w/	w ell, w hat, o nce, s uite
/h/	h ouse, w ho

It needs to be emphasised that we are dealing with the *sounds* of English and that these might be represented in many different forms in the written language. At this point, in order to give you some practice with the symbols presented so far, I am going to introduce a pure vowel from the top left of the chart. This symbol is /ɪ/ and is the short vowel sound that can be found in the following words: *pit*, *women*, *busy*, *college* and *potty*. I will give you several examples, after which you should try the task that follows.

hit	his	killed	drill	city	witty	live	sick
/hɪt/	/hɪz/	/kɪld/	/dɪrɪl/	/sɪtɪ/	/wɪtɪ/	/lɪv/	/sɪk/

You will notice that double letters are represented by only *one* phonemic symbol and letters which are not sounded have no symbol. (e.g. *live* where the *e* is not represented)

Task 2 *

Write out the following phonemic words in the normal alphabet.

/kwɪt/ /slɪpt/ /fɪkst/ /lm/ /flmzɪ/ /wɪgl/ /rɪst/ /trɪkɪ/

The remaining eight symbols will need to be illustrated, but are unlikely to cause too much trouble. A chart showing how the sounds can be represented by different spelling combinations may be useful.

/ʃ/	sh ower, sug ar, insu re, acti on, consci ous, mach ine
/ʒ/	treas ur e, fus i on, fusel ag e (quite rare in English)
/θ/	th ree
/ð/	th en
/tʃ/	ch in, mix tur e, cat ch
/dʒ/	ju st, edg e gestur e, sugg est
/ŋ/	ri ng (in RP /rɪŋ/, but in many accents /rɪŋg/)
/j/	y es

Before giving some examples using these symbols, it might be useful to introduce another vowel. The symbol /ɪ/ is relatively easy to learn since it is used to represent only the letters in bold in the following words *fed*, *head* and *many*. Some examples using the symbols /ɪ/ and /e/ as the vowel sounds are given in the table below:

ship	thing	this	wedge	which	yet	jingle
/ʃɪp/	/θɪŋ/	/ðɪs/	/wɛdʒ/	/wɪtʃ/	/jɛt/	/dʒɪŋɡl/

Task 3 *

Try to transcribe the following words into IPA.

swim, till, hedge, wick, mix, fell, wicked, begin, shed, women, slimmed, quick

The vowels

The consonants should not have proved too difficult for you to pick up and memorise – the vowels may require a little more perseverance, but are possible to learn in a short time.

We will begin with the pure vowels. You have already been introduced to the symbols /ɪ/ and /e/, so there are only ten vowels remaining. Nine of these are shown, with examples, in the table below. The vowels in bold are not intended to be an exhaustive list of all the possible letter combinations that can be used to represent a particular sound; rather, they are an illustration of the sound associated with the symbol.

/i:/	fe et, chea t, decei ve, piec e
/æ/	ca t
/ɜ:/	fi rst, herd , world , sear ch, burn
/ʌ/	bun , flood , son (many UK accents use /ʊ/ instead)
/ʊ/	shou ld, foot , pull
/ɑ:/	farm , palm , fast , heart
/u:/	food , you
/ɔ:/	cord , claw , caught , hoard , course
/ɒ/	got , swan

One vowel symbol has not been included either in the table or the examples above. This is because it occupies a rather special position in the sounds of the English language. The symbol is an upside-down e - /ə/ and is called **schwa**. It is the most common sound in English (between 10 and 12%), and is inextricably linked with the **word stress** and the **sentence stress** (see below) peculiar to English. In writing, it can be represented by all of the vowels *a*, *e*, *i*, *o* and *u* and many combinations of these. These full vowels are often reduced to the clipped sound of the schwa in connected speech. Below we have given you just a few of the very many examples of the occurrences of schwa in isolated words. In each case the letter or letters shown bold correspond to the sound /ə/.

***a**bout, **J**apan, **m**anager, **i**nternational, **ph**otographer, **ch**aracter*

The diphthongs

Finally in this short tour of the sounds of English we come to the diphthongs. As mentioned above, diphthongs combine two vowel sounds by means of a 'glide' – a movement of tongue, jaw and lips from the first vowel sound to the next. So, for example, the diphthong /ɪə/ begins with the sound /ɪ/ and moves very quickly to a schwa /ə/ with an intervening y-like sound to help with the 'glide'. If you say the word *clear* at normal speaking speed, you should be able to hear the effect quite easily.

Again, the examples in the following table are intended only to give an idea of the range of possible written representations of the symbols. You will be able to think of more examples for yourself.

/ɪə/	career, dear, weird, here
/eɪ/	late, freight, say, plain
/eə/	there, fare, wear, fair
/ʊə/	poor, lure, tour (many people now use /ɔ:/ instead)
/əʊ/	go, slow, though, cloak
/aʊ/	how, shout
/aɪ/	line, height, sigh, spy, pie
/ɔɪ/	foil, boy

From Module 2 Unit 6

Attitudes to reading

It is important here to differentiate between the attitudes of the teachers and the students. You might assume that teachers have a very positive view of reading and ensure that the students have plenty of opportunities to read both inside and outside the classroom. Although teachers might recognise the importance of reading in theory, in *practice* they often do not provide their students with sufficient or appropriate opportunities for practice. When asked about the provision of reading opportunities for

their students, teachers often point to the reading that the students do in class, and what they are generally referring to is intensive reading activities, often using comprehension passages. However, this is only one part of a reading programme and by itself it is not enough to fully develop the students' skills.

Teachers often complain that they are unable to provide for the students' extensive reading needs because of the demands of the curriculum, the pressure of exams or the limited number of hours that they have with the class. In some schools in countries with limited resources, externally funded projects have provided a wide range of reading materials together with training for the teachers, and yet the books continue to languish on the shelves untouched by the students. In many cases this is because the teachers continue to believe that the most important aspect of teaching English involves teaching grammar rules, and they find that the link between reading and progress is far too tenuous. They also claim that there is inadequate time during the week and that the pressure of the exam system forces them to follow the syllabus. Nevertheless, whether you are working in a crowded government school or a well-equipped language college, it is quite possible to provide for both the intensive and extensive reading needs of your students and in this unit we will investigate how this can be done.

The student's attitudes to reading range widely from complete indifference to avid interest. The students with an avid interest in reading are going to find a way to read whatever the obstacles placed in their path. However, in many cases, while students accept the value of intensive reading, like the teachers, they also find it difficult to relate extensive reading to significant progress in English. They may believe that learning lists of words or grammar rules is more useful. This is why it is so important for teachers to be convinced of the importance of reading and to provide the necessary guidance and support that will stimulate the students' interest and direct them along an appropriate path of reading. This can be done with the help of a class library collection and an effective record keeping system, and will be considered later in this unit.

As a teacher, your job is to ensure as far as you can that your students become independent readers who can both understand and enjoy the pleasures of reading. This takes time, and it takes resources, but it can be done.

Task 1 *

List as many ideas as you can think of that will encourage your students to read extensively.

Reading for a purpose

One feature of reading that teachers sometimes forget is that we all need a purpose for reading. When we read the newspaper in the morning or a letter from a friend, or an advertisement in a magazine, we all have a reason even if the reason is quite a general one. Sometimes the reason for reading is very specific, such as when we read a holiday brochure or a business report, or the next chapter of a gripping novel. In the same way it is very helpful for the students if they too can be given a reason for reading just as they should be given a reason for writing. Providing an immediate reason for extensive reading may be more difficult and here you may find it helpful to reiterate the value of reading and build up a reading culture within your class. We will look at how you can do this later on. With intensive reading however, a specific reason for reading can be provided with appropriate preparatory activities, and again we will look at these later on.

It is important not to merely adopt a fixed pattern of text + comprehension questions, even if this is the dominant pattern in your textbook. Many textbooks today include a wide variety of interesting activities; however, there are still many older books in different parts of the world that rely heavily on dreary passages and even duller multiple choice questions. Such examples of reading and reading tasks will do nothing to stimulate your younger students and, on the contrary, may kill off their interest for life!

An example might help to make this clear. You can give your students a passage about a family on holiday together with ten multiple choice questions regarding the factual detail of the passage. The students are unlikely to find it very exciting but they will probably go through the motions of completing the tasks. An alternative approach with an intermediate group of adults might be as follows:

- ask the students about their holidays
- ask them too about any problems or difficulties they have experienced
- next, give them a letter from a family describing their disastrous holiday
- after reading the letter, give them a copy of the brochure for that holiday
- let them compare the two and pinpoint the differences
- finally, let them write a letter of explanation/apology from the company.

A set of tasks like this that meshes the four language skills and provides a solid basis for reading will generate much more enthusiasm from your students.

Task 2 *

You have a passage about a well-known athlete plus ten multiple-choice questions. You do not think this is very exciting as it stands, so you decide to prepare a more interesting lesson. What can you do to make your lesson more interesting? List down the 5-6 steps you would follow in your lesson.