
Back to School Basics

Going back to school can be a great time to improve your English!

Improving Your Pronunciation

Even if you have perfect grammar and an excellent reservoir of words, people will still find it hard to understand you if you have difficulties with pronunciation. For some, pronunciation can be the hardest part of learning English.

After all, the words “ate” and “eight” sound the same but mean different things. But “canoe” and “toe”, despite having the same “oe” ending have completely different sounds. English can be so confusing! So how can you improve your pronunciation?

One of the best ways to improve your pronunciation is to study minimal pairs. This is what we’ll focus on in these lesson plans. Feel free to listen along to the audio as you go through the lesson plan. Practice reading the words - notice how your mouth moves, where your tongue sits and how wide you open your mouth.

Ready? Let’s get started!

Lesson One

Sit - Seat

Practice saying sit and seat a few times.

When you say SEAT, your mouth is almost closed, and it looks like you're smiling.
When you say SIT, your mouth is a little more open.

You may notice that sit /ɪ/ is a shorter sound than seat /i:/. We're going to look at more examples in a few minutes so you can really see the difference between the two sounds, and how your mouth moves. Just remember that when we use say the word seat /i:/, we spread our mouth - almost like a smile! This is why we always say "cheese" (not "chiz") when we're taking a picture!

Now let's just focus on words that sound like SIT and use the /ɪ/ sound. Remember to focus on how your mouth moves, and where your tongue sits. Your mouth should feel like it's making the same shape every time you make that sound. Remember, this is a short sound.

- **did**
- **fit**
- **lick**
- **pick**
- **dip**
- **sin**
- **still**
- **kid**
- **fist**
- **hip**
- **big**

Now let's just focus on words that sound like SEAT and use the /i:/ sound. Remember, this is a longer sounding word. Again, your mouth should make the same shape every time you make that sound. Focus on how your mouth moves, and where your tongue sits.

- **peel**
- **teal**
- **heal**

- **grease**
- **sleek**
- **tease**
- **peace**
- **seem**
- **greed**
- **heed**

Now, here's a tricky exercise. Let's try pronouncing the two different sounds when they're side by side.

- pill / peel
- skid / skied
- chick / cheek
- bid / bead
- sin / seen
- risen / reason
- mill / meal
- lip / leap
- ill / eel
- grin / green

Good work! Now let's try to use some of these words in sentences. I'll read the sentence slowly, and then again at a normal speed. Try to repeat the sentences. Let's focus on the sound that **SIT** makes first.

1. I couldn't **hit** the ball because my **mitt** kept **slipping**.
2. I've got an **itch** to **pick** the best yarn to **knit** with.
3. I was quite **ill** last weekend - I **think** I got **sick**, so I took a **pill**.

4. **His chips** were good with **dip**.

Now let's focus on the sound SEAT makes.

1. I'll **steal** his **peach** while he's on the **beach**.
2. Don't **keep** debt long - you'll get in too **deep** and you won't **feel** at **peace**.
3. He **seemed** at **peace** when he **skied**.
4. His **jeep** was **sleek** and could drive through the **creek**.

Ready to review? To move on to Lesson Two, you need to complete this short quiz. Click on the link below and try the quiz. You do need to listen to the audio in order to answer the question. Your quiz is available at: testmoz.com/828851

The quiz passcode is **EE1**.