

Reading aloud

Your learners may need to read aloud in English, particularly in professional situations – for example, when giving a speech or delivering a presentation. An essential skill which learners often lack is the ability to use **pausing and prominence** appropriately.

Pausing simply refers to the way in which speech is made easier for people to follow by dividing it up into logical groups of words, like this:

| An essential skill | when reading aloud | is the ability to use pausing. |

Within each group of words, we tend to choose one key word for particular stress or **prominence**:

| An essential skill | when reading aloud | is the ability to use pausing. |

Clearly, different speakers may choose to use pausing and prominence in slightly different ways:

| An essential skill when reading aloud | is the ability | to use pausing. |

But equally clearly, there are ways of using pausing and prominence which are not appropriate:

~~| An essential | skill when reading | aloud is the ability to use | pausing. |~~

Here is a simple technique for getting learners to think about pausing and prominence when preparing to deliver an extended talk in English.

Pausing

- 1 Your learners have just written texts (e.g. short speeches, presentations, stories) which they are going to read aloud. Write or display an example text on the board:

Thanks for your introduction and thanks everyone for coming. For the first ten or fifteen minutes I'd like to talk about four main things: first, what it's like to be a travel writer, the lifestyle; then money, very important; how to get into travel writing, of course; and finally, how I think the profession's changing at the moment. After that, we can throw it open and talk about anything you want to.

English Unlimited Upper Intermediate, Unit 9 (adapted)

- 2 Say the first sentence of the text while learners listen. Point out how we use pausing to divide up the sentence into logical groups of words, and show this on the board using lines | or slashes / :

| Thanks for your introduction | and thanks everyone for coming. | For the first ...

- 3 Invite learners to say where the next couple of pauses might go, and write those on the board too. Elicit some negative examples too, i.e. ask learners to tell you some places where pauses definitely shouldn't go. Point out that there are different possible ways of using pausing, and that they're all fine as long as they're logical, i.e. helpful to the listener.

English Unlimited Teaching Tips

- 4 In pairs or small groups, tell learners to work through the rest of the text on the board and decide where the pauses go. You may want to give out a paper copy of the text at this point, or learners can just do the activity orally, looking at the board.
- 5 Put the learners into different pairs or groups and ask them to compare their ideas. Again, emphasise that different pausing is possible, but it needs to be logical.
- 6 Go through the text as a class, deciding where to put the pauses and marking them on the board.

Prominence

- 7 Now read aloud the first sentence of the text again and draw learners' attention to the fact that one word in each word group is prominent, i.e. is given particularly strong stress. Show this on the board by underlining the prominent syllables:

| Thanks for your introduction | and thanks everyone for coming. | For the first ...

- 8 Invite learners to say where the prominences might be in the next couple of word groups, and mark them on the board. Again, you could elicit which words definitely would not be prominent and you will need to point out that there are various possibilities. The individual speaker needs to choose which word in each group is the most important.
- 9 In pairs or small groups, learners work through the rest of the text on the board and decide where the prominences go.
- 10 Regroup the learners so that they can compare their ideas.
- 11 Go through the text as a class, decide where to put the prominences and mark them on the board.
- 12 Learners are now ready to practise reading the text aloud. First do this as a class, the learners repeating the text after you a couple of word groups at a time. Make sure that the learners stay focused on pausing and using prominence at the correct points in the text. Then ask learners to practise in pairs, taking it in turns to read the text aloud while their partner listens.
- 13 Learners can now work alone with their own texts, deciding where to put in the pauses, choosing prominent words, and then rehearsing.

Variations

If your learners have their texts on computer, they can put in pauses by simply hitting the ENTER key:

Thanks for your introduction
and thanks everyone for coming.
For the first ten or fifteen minutes
I'd like to talk about four main things:
first, what it's like to be a travel writer, ...