

Drilling

This means getting learners to repeat words, expressions or sentences to help them remember and develop more accurate pronunciation. The simplest drilling techniques are **choral drilling**, where learners repeat together as a class, and **individual drilling**, where learners repeat individually. Here we look at some tips for successful choral and individual drilling.

Before you drill

- Always make sure that you **first clarify the meaning** of the language you want to drill. Drilling is unlikely to benefit learners if they don't understand what they're saying!
- **Check the pronunciation** of the language you want to drill. If you're working with words, are you certain which syllables are stressed? If you're looking at sentences, which words are stressed? Are there any contractions? If you're not sure, check in a dictionary or ask a colleague.
- Be aware that some words can be pronounced in different ways. For example, we can say *tomato* /a:/ or *tomato* /eɪ/, 'exquisite or ex'quisite. In cases like these, **choose the pronunciation you're most comfortable with** and stick with it throughout the drill.
- Choose a specific feature of the words or sentences to draw to your learners' attention during the drill, e.g. tricky sounds, short and long vowels, misleading spellings, word or sentence stress. This will **give your drilling a focus**.

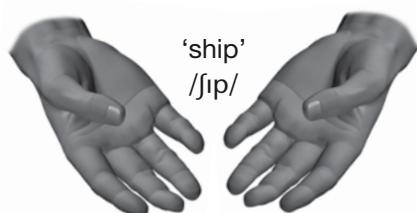
Managing the drill

- 1 Say 'Listen!' and **give an example** of the pronunciation by saying the word or sentence yourself two or three times. Speak loudly and clearly – but not too slowly! You may want to exaggerate the rhythm or particular sounds slightly, but aim to keep your pronunciation as natural-sounding as possible.
- 2 Now it's the learners' turn to speak. **Get them to say the word or sentence after you** (not at the same time, so that you can listen to what they're saying). Say 'Everyone!' or 'Repeat!' and use an open gesture. Don't be afraid to ask learners to repeat several times, and insist on plenty of energy and volume.
- 3 After a while, you'll find that it's not necessary for you to keep demonstrating. A gesture or a brief command – 'Again!' – will be enough to **elicit further repetitions**. If the language you're drilling is on the board, simply point.
- 4 **Alternate choral drilling with individual drilling**. Have all the learners repeat Item 1 together and then ask individuals to repeat. Keep learners alert by choosing them at random rather than simply going round the class in seating order. Then move on to a choral drill of Item 2 > drill it individually > do a choral drill of Item 3 > drill it individually > and so on.

Focusing on specific features of pronunciation

There are a number of techniques you can use during a drill to draw learners' attention to specific features of pronunciation:

- using your hands to show long / short vowels



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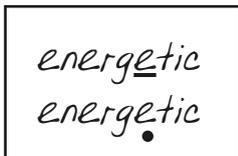
- putting a slash through silent letters on the board



- showing stress using gesture or by clapping or tapping on the board



- underlining stressed syllables on the board or putting a circle above the vowel.



Two golden rules of drilling

- **Don't be shy.** Put plenty of energy into your drilling and try to appear confident – even if you don't feel it! Most groups enjoy drilling but if you look self-conscious, your learners will feel the same.
- **Listen carefully** to what your learners are saying and be ready correct them. Remember that the purpose of a drill is to improve accuracy and that without correction, there's a danger that your drill will simply reinforce poor pronunciation. Resist the temptation to say 'Good!' mechanically.

Other drilling techniques

Choral and individual drilling are the most basic drilling techniques but there are many others. For some examples, have a look at the Teaching tips on **Disappearing drills** and **Pair drills**.