

Why you should study English pronunciation

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First impressions

[Pronunciation](#) is definitely the *biggest thing that people notice when you are speaking English*. Let us tell you a personal anecdote about this:

We once went to a conversation class taught by [native speakers](#) (Americans). Before the class started, the teacher said to us: "So, do you speak good English?". Tom replied "We think so", and the guy said "It sure sounds like you do".

Notice that we just said three words, and the teacher could already tell if our English was good or bad. Why did the teacher think our English was good? Because of the difficult words we used? No. Because we used advanced grammar structures? No. It was our [pronunciation](#).

When you meet a person, and you just say a sentence or two, do you think they will notice your poor [vocabulary](#) or bad grammar? Probably not. But they *will* notice if your [pronunciation](#) is good or bad. If your [pronunciation](#) is poor, they will [immediately](#) think about you as "the guy/girl who speaks bad English". Your [pronunciation](#) creates the first impression you make.

Communication

Good [pronunciation](#) should be one of the first things that you learn in English. You can live without advanced [vocabulary](#) — you can use simple words to say what you want to say. You can live without advanced grammar — you can use simple grammar structures instead. But there is no such thing as "simple [pronunciation](#)". If you don't have good [pronunciation](#), you have... bad [pronunciation](#).

And the results of bad [pronunciation](#) are tragic. Even if you use great vocabulary and grammar, *people may simply not understand what you want to say*.

For example, if you [pronounce](#) *sleep* [like this](#), and not [like that](#), or if you [pronounce](#) *ghost* [like this](#) instead of [this](#), [native speakers](#) will have serious problems understanding you! In our opinion, you should know how to say English sounds like the *ee* in *sleep* or the *o* in *ghost*, before you even learn words like *sleep* and *ghost*.

Here is another anecdote about this. After coming back from a [vacation](#) in the USA, a friend of Tom's said:

"Whenever I spoke to a person in America, they kept asking me "What? What?". I would repeat my sentence again and again. Finally they would say "Ah-ha!" and then say my sentence, using exactly my words! It was very humiliating. I knew my words and grammar were good, but nobody would understand me, just because of my [pronunciation](#). I am very [motivated](#) to learn English now."

Can you communicate in English?

Almost all English learners say "I don't need to study [pronunciation](#). I just want to communicate in English." Many of them think that they can communicate in English because they can communicate with their teacher and other students.

Do not make this mistake! You have to remember that:

- Your teacher has been listening to bad English for years. He or she can understand it much more easily than the average person.
- Other students are usually from the same country as you. Therefore, they speak English like you and they make the same mistakes. So it is easy for them to understand you.

The only true test is: Go to America or Britain and try to talk to "normal people" — a clerk at a supermarket, a bus driver, etc. If they can understand you, *then you can say that you can communicate in English.*

Unfortunately, many learners ignore [pronunciation](#). They can communicate in class, so they think that they are good enough. After a few years they go to England or the USA and... nobody understands what they are saying. Remember Tom's friend who went on [vacation](#) to America and couldn't communicate? He was the best student in his English class.

Michal wrote a [short story](#) about people living on two islands where English is spoken. The story is for those who say: "I don't need to learn pronunciation because I only want to communicate."

Communication is not enough

If you can communicate in English with people from other countries, congratulations! It's a big achievement. But it may not be enough.

If you are at [Level 2 of pronunciation skill](#), your English is understandable, but you have a strong foreign accent which is unpleasant for other people.

We have already said that your [pronunciation](#) is important because it makes your first impression. This is certainly true — nobody will say that you speak good English if you have a strong foreign accent. But there is more. *If you have a pleasant accent, people will simply enjoy talking to you.* They will want to spend time with you. On the other hand, if your accent is bad, people may be even avoiding you (consciously or unconsciously).

The good news is that you can work on your [pronunciation](#) until you speak "[understandable and pleasant English](#)" (we simply call it *good pronunciation*). For example, you can learn the sounds of English, listen to recordings, watch English-language television, etc. But first you have to realize there is a problem! Most English learners don't.

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