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# Pronunciation Suggestions for Individual Phonemes

## Easy to Pronounce

/m/	(man)
/n/	(nose)
/f/	(face)
/v/	(vase)
/sh/	(shop)
/sh/	(division)
/s/	(safe)
/z/	(zebra)
/th/	(think)
/th/	(the)

## Pronunciation Notes

These phonemes can all be “stretched out” without distorting them very much. The main thing to remember for phonemes such as /f/, /sh/, /s/, and /th/ is that the vocal cords are not used when making the sounds, so you need to put enough “air” into the pronunciation to be easily heard.

## Slightly Harder to Pronounce

/t/	(talk)
/p/	(pink)
/k/	(kite)
/ng/	(ring)
/l/	(lap)
/ch/	(cheek)
/w/	(water)
/wh/	(what)
/h/	(help)

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## Pronunciation Notes

- Some of these phonemes, such as /t/, /p/, /k/, /ch/ are hard because we need to learn to pronounce them strongly as “whispers.” The vocal cords are not vibrating while we pronounce these sounds, so we should not say, for example, *tuh*, or *puh*, or *kuh* with a vowel sound following the phoneme.
- Teachers also have a tendency to pronounce /l/ as *luh*, but this will make it hard for children to blend the sound with other phonemes during sound-blending activities. You do not need to follow the /l/ sound with a vowel—just bring your tongue to the top of your mouth (behind the front teeth) and leave it there as you say the sound).
- The /ng/ sound is just hard to get used to saying by itself. The best way to practice saying it is to say a word like *ring*, and then notice what your mouth is doing at the end of the word. When you say the sound /ng/, put your mouth in the same position, and use your vocal chords.
- The sound /h/ is difficult just because you need to get enough energy in your “whisper” (do not follow it with a vowel by saying *huh*) in order to be heard. You should be blowing a lot of air out when you say /h/, but should not be using your vocal chords.
- Finally, the sounds /w/ and /wh/ are often confused with one another, particularly in Southern dialects. Thus we often pronounce words like *what* and *win* as though they begin with the same first sound. In reality, the sound /wh/ should be pronounced with no vocalization (with just air coming out), while the /w/ sound is vocalized from the beginning. In reality, this distinction is important primarily for spelling (if the words *where* and *were* are pronounced

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## Short Vowels

/a/	apple
/e/	eskimo
/i/	indian
/o/	octopus
/u/	umbrella

## Pronunciation Notes

- The major difficulty presented by vowel sounds is that their pronunciation varies a lot with dialect. They are pronounced somewhat differently in various regions of the country, and there may be a mismatch between the way the teacher pronounces them and the way children in the class pronounce them. As long as the teacher allows reasonable latitude, this does not present as much of a problem in phonological awareness training as it does when children begin to learn the sounds associated with various letters.
- At some point, it may be helpful to teach children that pronunciation for words “in books” may be different from the way they hear them pronounced in their home and neighborhood. It is important to learn about “book” sounds because this will be very helpful in spelling. Children who come to school speaking a very different dialect than the one in which instruction is offered frequently experience difficulties learning to read. One of the reasons for this is that they have difficulty relating the sounds in their oral language to the way words are represented in print. Since it is critical for all children to acquire phonemic reading skills early in development, teachers must work especially hard with these children in order to insure that they make the connection between the sounds in words and spellings in print.

properly, it is obvious from listening to them that one begins with *wh* and the other a *w*.) However, in order to avoid confusion when letter sounds and spelling are introduced, it may be best to avoid words with the /wh/ phoneme during instruction in phonological awareness.

## Hardest to Pronounce

/d/	(dog)
/b/	(big)
/g/	(gone)
/r/	(run)
/j/	(jump)

## Pronunciation Notes

- The primary difficulty with the phonemes /d/, /b/, /g/, and /j/ is that we need to vocalize (make our vocal chords vibrate) while we say them, and we often have a tendency to lengthen out the resulting vowel sound too much. Thus, we say duuuh for /d/, and buuh for /b/. The art of good pronunciation with these phonemes is to make that vowel sound as short as possible.
  - The phoneme /r/ is probably the hardest one to pronounce in isolation. Typically, teachers pronounce it in one of two ways. It can be pronounced with a vowel sound at the beginning, as in *errrr*, or the vowel sound can follow, as in *ruh*. The pronunciation that is usually most helpful is similar to *ruh*, as long as the vowel part is very short. For example, if you are asking a child to blend the sounds in *run*, it would be a mistake to say /err/-/u/-/n/, because then the child would be led to say *errun*. Words in which the vowel sound come before the /r/ are most usually words like *hurt*, *dart*, *her*, or *corn*, that contain what is called an r-controlled vowel. When blending these words, the teacher would say, for example, /k/- /or/- /n/ for *corn*.
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