iSpeaker Teaching Tips

Within the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary premium online iSpeaker section, there are a number of extremely useful resources to help your students perfect their pronunciation and improve their speaking skills, either in British or American English.

Whether you’re teaching from home* or in school, try these ideas with your students today.

1. By clicking on 'sounds' in the iSpeaker


The first thing students do is watch the video of the model saying the words. This is far more helpful than simply listening because students can see the position of the lips as the sound is made.

Using a voice recording app or the camera function on their mobile phones your students can record themselves saying the sound and the example words. For example, for the sound /əʊ/ the three words are open, coat and know. This recording means they can self-assess how accurately they are matching the model’s pronunciation. And of course they can do it as many times as they need to see an improvement.

TIP B: USING VIDEO

For a fun but useful awareness-raising practice activity, students can use the 'selfie' camera function on their mobile phones alongside the model on the video and video themselves saying the words along with the model, trying to copy exactly the shape of his/her mouth. Then they can compare their video with the model video.

TIP C: CHOOSING WHICH SOUNDS TO WORK ON

Students can work their way through the consonant sounds and vowel sounds in a logical progression down the page. However, you could really help them by offering pointers to each student about which sounds you feel they need to practise most.

You can also group sounds together to compare and contrast. For example, certain vowel sounds often cause problems such as /æ:/ and /əʊ/. And students may need to work on making the difference between voiced and unvoiced sounds such as /p/ and /b/.

It might be a good idea to set some specific sounds for homework. Students can gain confidence from practising on their own rather than in front of their classmates.

They can also keep a personal record of their progress by clicking on 'review' and checking the ‘I can’ statement when they are happy with their pronunciation.

We recommend that your students use their own phone to record their own speaking rather than the iSpeaker recording functionality, which will not work on all browsers and devices. See www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/system-requirements for more information.
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2. By clicking on 'conversations' in the iSpeaker

TIP A: IDENTIFYING FUNCTIONAL PHRASES

When students have watched a conversation, for example 'Making suggestions', tell them to play the video again but this time they need to read the script as they listen. Then ask them to find the functional phrases in the script - in this case words and phrases for making suggestions. There’s a helpful tick box below the script which will reveal the phrases by highlighting them so that students can check the answers.

TIP B: SENTENCE STRESS

Why not ask more advanced students to try to identify the stressed words in a conversation? These will normally be key information words such as times, events, actions, places and people. For example, in 'Giving orders', the stressed words are as follows:

Hi I’m here to see the head of human resources.

Could you wait here for a moment. I’ll just see if she’s free...

Ask students to practise the conversations together (this could be online in your virtual classroom or in your students’ own time), trying to make sure they stress the important content words.

TIP C: REPEATING THE USEFUL LANGUAGE

If students are going to add new phrases to their active vocabulary, they need to repeat them several times both to memorise them and to perfect their pronunciation. Remind students to expand the ‘Listen’ section and then tell them to click on each phrase and repeat it. When they feel they’re getting close to the correct rhythm, tell them to try to say the phrase with the speaker rather than repeating afterwards. This will encourage them to speak at normal speed and link words naturally.

If necessary, point out where words are contracted or reduced. For example in the useful language section in 'Giving orders', you could ask them to repeat the phrases which begin 'You can...' and point out that can isn't stressed so it is reduced from /kæn/ to /kən/.

TIP D: WORKING TOGETHER

Students can work alone using the iSpeaker conversations but it’s useful to put them in pairs after practising alone. This pair work can be online using ‘break out rooms’ on the platform you’re using, or students can record their Skype, FaceTime or WhatsApp call*. Tell them to create and record a dialogue together. They can personalize the conversation and use any of the useful phrases they like from the ‘Listen’ section. Get students to act their conversations and record them as many times as they need until they’re satisfied with their final version. Ask students to play their conversations to another pair.

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TIP E: ACTIVATING STUDENTS' OWN EXPERIENCES

Make sure for the conversational function you've chosen, you fully exploit the students' knowledge and experience. For example, if you choose 'Wishing somebody luck', ask students to discuss in small groups when they have wished someone good luck, who they said it to and why.

Then focus their attention on the setting of the conversation, pausing the video at the start to elicit what the situation is (e.g. at work) and what the relationship between the speakers might be (work colleagues). They could even brainstorm reasons why you might want to wish someone good luck in this situation. Play the conversation for students to find out if they were right.

*Are you teaching from home? Visit our Learn at Home page to find practical tips and resources for running lessons and engaging with your learners online.