

# Talk a Lot

## Clear Alphabet Dictionary

### Learn the Sounds of English with the Clear Alphabet – Sample Lesson Plan

<u>Activity Type:</u>	Introduction to the sounds of English with the Clear Alphabet
<u>Level:</u>	Elementary – Pre-Intermediate
<u>Skills:</u>	Speaking & Listening; Pronunciation
<u>Class Size:</u>	Whole group lesson, e.g. ten students in a group
<u>Time:</u>	1 hour
<u>Aim:</u>	To introduce the sounds of English with the Clear Alphabet; to lay the foundations for further study with the Clear Alphabet
<u>Materials:</u>	x1 Clear Alphabet chart handout (p.17) per student, whiteboard and pens; students have their notebooks and pens

*Note: this lesson focuses on teaching the vowel sounds of English, with only a little focus on the consonant sounds. This is because most of the consonant sounds can be guessed at, because they are encountered in English already (e.g. g , t , d , etc.). The vowel sounds are more difficult to learn from scratch, so we spend more time with them during this lesson, although we do also look at some of the stranger-looking consonant sounds (e.g. ng , tt , zz , etc.) towards the end of the lesson.*

#### Procedure:

1. Give out the handouts as students come into the class. This gives them time to look at them, comment (e.g. “On no!”), and get ready for the lesson.
2. Tell students that you’re going to learn the sounds of English with the Clear Alphabet. Write on the board:

#### Vowel sounds

Your language: \_\_\_\_

English: \_\_\_\_

Elicit how many vowel sounds there are in your students’ first language (or different students’ first languages for mixed nationality groups), and write it on the board. Make sure you know that answer before the lesson, e.g. in Polish there are 8 vowel sounds. Elicit from students how many vowel sounds there are in English (23). No doubt they will be surprised at the disparity between the two numbers. In English there are a lot of vowel sounds! Explain that lack of knowledge of English vowel sounds causes many mistakes in pronunciation.

3. Explain why you are doing this activity today. When I did this, I read a short text in Polish (which my friend helped me to write, because I’m an elementary rather than fluent Polish speaker). The text helped the students to understand the aims of the lesson. It went something like this (in Polish):

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*“If you know the phonetic alphabet, you know how to pronounce words. This alphabet gives you power. Power!”*

(Here I emphasised the word “power” (“moc”) in Polish for comic effect, as well as to make my point: **“Da wam moc! Moc!” – “Gives you power! Power!”**)

*“You will be able to speak better in English. Polish is a phonetic language. In general, you write like you speak.”*

(Here I stopped to emphasise this important concept. I pointed out that, for example *“The letter ‘a’ in Polish is always pronounced a , and the letter ‘o’ in Polish is always pronounced o . Pronunciation in Polish is generally easier than in English.”* The students agreed. I asked them in Polish: “Is English a phonetic language?” The students grimaced and shook their heads, laughing, because no, of course English is most definitely **not** a phonetic language!)

*“English is not a phonetic language. We write differently to how we speak.”*

(I illustrated this by writing the following words on the board: “my”, “high”, “pie” and eliciting the pronunciations. I wrote each word phonetically and explained that in the dictionary there are two spellings for each word. The normal spelling is usually no help at all for working out the sound of the word. By contrast, the phonetic spelling gives us the sound of the word. You could use more examples to show that although English words can have exactly the same sounds, the spellings can be completely different. Students sometimes ask why this is, but the lesson’s too short to go into the answer in much detail, although you could explain that English has developed from many different languages over hundreds of years, which has helped to push spellings and sounds apart.)

different spellings:	same vowel sound:
my	mai
high	Hai
pie	Pai

4. Once everybody understands why they’re doing the lesson, write on the board:

8 short vowel sounds | 5 long vowel sounds | 10 diphthongs

Drill each group of sounds in turn. I asked my students to listen, repeat, and write notes. I read each sound loudly and clearly four times, with students repeating each time, and writing down notes about each sound to help them remember it. They were able to use letters from Polish to represent each sound. Give a good, clear model of each sound, or use the .mp3 file from the Talk a Lot website as your classroom model: <http://tinyurl.com/nea-sounds> Use examples of words that contain each sound, e.g. the ones on the handout, or different words that your students will know.

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Highlight sounds that are the same in your students' first language and in English. For example, the sound *o* is the same in Polish and in English. In English, the pronunciation *Sok* means "sock", that we wear on a foot, whilst in Polish *Sok* means "juice" that we drink from a bottle. Let your students have fun and enjoy making the sounds, which may be new for many of them. My Polish students love saying the long vowel sounds, or the guttural grunt *schwa uh* (that comes from the belly), and the classroom is filled with laughter, as well as the vowel sounds of English!

5. Explain that diphthongs are "double sounds" or two sounds together. For example:

e + i = ei

Encourage students to try saying the two sounds together, getting quicker and quicker until they arrive at the diphthong *ei*. Show students how the mouth has to move when pronouncing a diphthong – changing from the first position (for the first sound) to the second position (for the second sound). Spoken English is a work-out for the mouth and tongue!

6. After modelling and drilling short vowel sounds, long vowel sounds, and diphthongs, go back to the beginning and ask your students to listen and repeat each sound (about four times). Here you may be able to spot some errors in speaking the sounds, that you can correct straightaway.

7. At this point I always stop and congratulate the group: "Well done! You can do it. You see, you **can** make all of the vowel sounds in English. You don't need to use all of these sounds in your language, but you **do** need to use them all in English."

8. Spend a few minutes looking at the consonant sounds. Explain that it is most important to be able to recognise the vowel sounds, because they are what cause the most confusion and the greatest number of errors in pronunciation. Elicit from students – by saying them out loud with them – that consonant sounds are either voiced (with voice) or unvoiced (without voice). Almost all of the consonant sound IDs look exactly how students would expect them to (unlike with the IPA), whilst a few are different and need closer attention:

- *22 consonant sound IDs that students are likely to know and recognise already:*

b, ch, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, ng, p, r, s, sh, t, th, v, w, y, & z

- *3 consonant sounds that look different from how we expect, and need extra study:*

tt, zz, hh

9. Take general feedback from students and answer any questions they might have. There's been a lot to take in! Explain that this lesson is only an **introduction**, that they're not expected to learn all forty-eight sounds of English in one hour, and that you will continue to look at the sounds of English with the Clear Alphabet throughout the course – for example, using activities from this dictionary (see from p.47). Perhaps give out one set of flashcards to each student so that they can learn the sounds at home (see pp.20-29). You could also create your own tests to check students' progress (see Sample Test on p.44).