

The right answer?

Read what a teacher says about this activity

‘My learners have problems hearing and also pronouncing some sounds in English. But I’ve also noticed that the more times they hear these sounds, the better they can say them. I use minimal pairs because it helps them focus. They like this activity because they can test each other, and they love performing the dialogues at the end!’

Stage 1: Prepare

Choose 8 minimal pairs that your learners find difficult or confusing.

Examples of **confusing consonant** sounds:

free/three; tree/three; they/day; thin/tin; wash/was; shell/sell; heart/hard

Examples of **confusing vowel** sounds:

sheep/ship; sit/seat; wet/wait; fast/first; saw/so; bed/bad; bat/but

Stage 2: Introduce

Say: “Let’s practise different sounds. Write the words I say.” You should then dictate one minimal pair, e.g. ‘tree’ and ‘three’.

Ask learners to check their answers with a partner. One learner should write the answer on the board. Then drill the pronunciation. You should point, say, and get the learners to repeat together.

Say: “Choose a partner and decide who is A and who is B.” Write A and B on the board. Write 4 minimal pairs under A and 4 minimal pairs under B. For example:

A	B
sit / seat	they / day
fast / first	heart / hard
bed / bad	free / three
saw / so	wash / was

Say: ‘When we start, copy only your words in your books. Don’t copy your partner’s words.’

VARIATION

If you think your learners need to review the pronunciation first, drill all the words at this stage.

Stage 3: Model	<p>Say: 'Let's try. I am A. Listen to me. Can you make a sentence with 'fast'? Hands up.'</p> <p>Take answers from 2 or 3 learners, e.g. He ran very fast. Ask the class if the answer is correct. You can tell from the sentence if the learner has incorrectly made a sentence with first (e.g. She was first in the race).</p> <p>Say: 'Good. Now it is B's turn.'</p> <p>Write some questions on the board for learners to use:</p> <p>Can you make a sentence with ____?</p> <p>What does ____ mean?</p> <p>How do you spell ____?</p>
Stage 4: Do pair work	<p>Say: 'Choose a word and a question (point to the questions on the board). Take turns to ask and answer in pairs. A, you go first.'</p> <p>Monitor, support and check/correct pronunciation.</p>
Stage 5: Extend and share	<p>Ask groups to create a short dialogue. Tell them they must include 4 words from the board. Ask them to perform the dialogues for the class. The class should listen carefully and identify the 4 words from the board.</p> <p>OPTIONAL ACTIVITY</p> <p>Ask pairs or groups to think of one more example word for the sounds in column A. If possible, learners choose rhyming words. (Example answers: sit=fit, sing; seat=meet, need; fast=last, pass; first=turn, worst; bed=said, met; bad=sad, apple; saw=more, door; so=low, know.)</p>

Using minimal pairs help learners to hear and pronounce sounds that are confusing. Make a note of sounds that are confusing to your learners. Can you think of other ways to use minimal pairs to practise these sounds?

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