



Speaking Skills

in the Academic Context



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Chapter 5: Pronunciation (PN)

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Understand the marking criteria of Pronunciation (PN) in IELTS Speaking test
- Distinguish features that lead to a higher band score
- Avoid common pronunciation features

In the previous chapters, you have learnt the marking criteria of Fluency and Coherence (FC), Lexical Resource (LR) and Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GA). In this chapter, we will focus on the final marking criteria – Pronunciation (PN) – by looking at the features made by candidates of different bands.

Part I. What does Pronunciation (PN) mean?

Pronunciation in IELTS speaking test refers to the ability to produce comprehensible speech. The key indicators include the amount of strain caused to the listener, the amount of the speech which is unintelligible and the noticeability of L1 (i.e., your mother tongue) influence (*IELTS Home of the IELTS English Language Test*, 2019).

Check out this IELTS official video to know more about PN: <https://youtu.be/T-uYzReetEI>

How candidates perform in each Band? (IELTS Home of the IELTS English Language Test, 2019)

Band 4

- uses a limited range of pronunciation features
- attempts to control features but lapses are frequent
- mispronunciations are frequent and cause some difficulty for the listener

Band 5

- produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy
- uses a limited range of more complex structures, but these usually contain errors and may cause some comprehension problems
- shows all the positive features of Band 4 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 6

Band 6

- uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed control
- shows some effective use of features but this is not sustained
- can generally be understood throughout, though mispronunciation of individual words or sounds reduces clarity at times

Band 7

- shows all the positive features of Band 6 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 8

Band 8

- uses a wide range of pronunciation features
- sustains flexible use of features, with only occasional lapses
- is easy to understand throughout; L1 accent has minimal effect on intelligibility

Band 9

- uses a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety
- sustains flexible use of features throughout
- is effortless to understand

Here are the key indicators determining your marks in PN:

1. Segmental: Consonants
2. Segmental: Vowels
3. Suprasegmental: Word stress

Segmental features refer to consonants and vowels, while suprasegmental features refer to intonation patterns, stress placement in a word, linking and rhythm of a sentence in spoken language.

Consonants, vowels and word stress are mainly devoted to the accuracy of your speech. While accentual features should not be considered as errors, it is important to make sure that your pronunciation is intelligible. Inappropriate word stress may also lead to a lower mark in accuracy, especially to words within the same family among different part of speech, such as 'photo', 'photographer', and 'photographic'.

4. Suprasegmental: Intonation
5. Suprasegmental: Linking
6. Suprasegmental: Rhythm

Intonation, Linking and Rhythm contribute to the variety of your speech. The examiner will look at whether you can perform changes in meaning by the appropriate use of intonation and rhythm. If you can manage rhythm properly, you should be able to stress the content words in a sentence such as 'if I were YOU, I'd go by BUS'. Intonation refers to the differences in your pitch between a statement and a question. Monotone pitch may lead to a lower mark in this aspect. Finally, linking can make your speech more natural and easier to follow. For example, in the phrase 'part of speech', the 't' consonant in 'part' can link with the 'o' consonant in 'of'. The pronunciation of this phrase will then become 'partof speech'. Only Consonant-vowel (C-V) linking is annotated in this corpus.

Activity 1. Pronunciation Accuracy

Go to the corpus and use the 'Browse' function. Take a look at the PN performance of [Speaker 72](#) (Band 9.0). Can you find any mispronunciation?

Activity 2. Which is the correct answer?

Question 1: In the following words, which is the syllable with primary stress? (On word stress)

- A. traditional
- B. adventure
- C. celebrities
- D. teenagers

Question 2: How to link the following phrases / sentences? (On linking)

- A. Not at all
- B. Can I have a bit of egg?
- C. turn it off please

Watch this [video](#) from BBC to learn more about 'linking'!

How to determine the syllable with primary stress?
Watch this [video](#) from Oxford Online English and check these [tips](#)!

Activity 3. Segmental feature

Go to the corpus and take a look at the PN performance of any Band 5.5 speaker. Can you list at least one segmental feature on consonant and one on vowel?

Segmental feature – consonant:

Segmental feature – vowel:

Part II. What are the features of a high-band performance?

Now you know there are some key indicators in PN. How can these indicators be reflected in speakers' performance? Generally, speakers with higher Band (7.0 or above) can successfully employ various pronunciation features such as linking and appropriate intonation. Since they can



manage a variety of pronunciation structures, their speeches are usually more comprehensible and intelligible. The table below has summarised a comparison between speakers of different Bands in terms of pronunciation.

	Features from speakers of Band 7.0 or higher	Features from speakers of Band 7.0 below
Suprasegmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Intonation ✓ Consonant-vowel linking ✓ Rhythm ✓ Word stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? Intonation ? Consonant-vowel linking ? Rhythm ? Word stress
Segmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Consonants ✓ Vowels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? Consonants ? Vowels

Activity 4. Searching the corpus

Question 1: In [Speaker 14](#), how many sets of linking have been identified? Can you list one example?

Question 2: In [Speaker 39](#), how many consonant features have been identified? Can you list one example?

Activity 5. What are the suprasegmental features?

Go to the corpus and use the ‘Browse’ function. Look at the general description for any two speakers (one should be from Band 5.0 / 5.5 and another one should be from Band 8.0 / 8.5). What can you identify as suprasegmental features of a higher achiever?

	Positive Features
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Speaker _____ Band _____	
Speaker _____ Band _____	

Part III. How to avoid common segmental features?

Activity 6. What are the possible segmental features?

Go to the corpus and use the ‘Search’ function. After selecting the Band of speakers and ‘Pronunciation’ as the criteria, how many types of segmental features can you find? What are they?

Example: Insertion of consonant(s)

After learning the ways to demonstrate pronunciation variety in terms of linking, intonation and rhythm, it is time to tackle the issue of accuracy. While you do not need to be 100% accurate to get a Band 7.0, avoid making the following segmental features is a key to differentiate a Band-6.0 and Band-7.0 performance.

Common segmental features

1. Consonant

Before checking the list, visit this [document](#) if you are not very familiar with IPA consonants.

- Alveolar plosives /t/ & /d/
- Bilabial plosives /b/ & /d/
- Velar plosives /k/ & /g/
- Dental fricatives /θ/ & /ð/
- Labiodental fricatives /f/ & /v/
- Post-alveolar fricatives /ʃ/ & /ʒ/
- Alveolar fricatives /s/ & /z/
- Glottal fricative /h/
- Post-alveolar affricates /tʃ/ & /dʒ/
- Alveolar nasal /n/
- Bilabial nasal /m/
- Velar nasal /ŋ/
- Bilabial approximant /w/
- Alveolar lateral approximant /l/
- Post-alveolar approximant /r/
- Palatal approximant /j/
- Aspiration & unaspiration (aspiration is represented by the small ^h on the upper right corner of the IPA symbol, e.g., /k^h/)
- Other replacement
- Substitution of consonant(s) beyond English sound system
- Insertion of consonant(s)
- Omission of consonant(s)

2. Vowel

- Near-high front short vowel /ɪ/
- Mid front short vowel /e/
- Near-low front short vowel /æ/
- Mid-central short vowel /ə/
- Near-low central short vowel /ʌ/
- Near-high back short vowel /ʊ/
- Low back short vowel /ɒ/
- High front long vowel /i:/
- Low-mid central long vowel /ɜ:/

Before checking the list, visit this [document](#) if you are not very familiar with IPA vowels.

- High back long vowel /u:/
- High-mid back long vowel /ɔ:/
- Low back long vowel /ɑ:/
- Closing diphthongs /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /əʊ/ & /aʊ/
- Centering diphthongs /eə/, /ɪə/ & /ʊə/
- Substitution of vowel(s) beyond English system
- Insertion of vowel(s)
- Omission of vowel(s)

3. Mispronunciation

4. Word stress

Activity 7. How does the speaker respond?

Go to the corpus and use the 'Browse' function. Listen to a part of the performance of any speaker. How many segmental and suprasegmental features can you find? Can you give a suggestion to the segmental features?

Example:

Speaker: [Speaker 56](#) (Band 7.0)

Part: 1/2/3

Duration: the 4th response (2:13-2:35)

Segmental features:

Consonant

that: /ð/ → /d/

Vowel

bad: /æ/ → /ʌ/

Suprasegmental features:

Linking

halfand half

Speaker:

Part: 1 / 2 / 3 (~~delete~~ as appropriate)

Duration:

Segmental features:

Suprasegmental features:

Activity 8. Mock test with the corpus

Have a mock test with the videos [here](#). You are recommended to record yourself, either in video or in audio, during the mock test. Evaluate yourself based on the following form:

Key indicators	Occurrences
Replacement of consonant within English sound system	
Substitution of consonant beyond English sound system	
Insertion of consonant	
Omission of consonant	
Replacement of vowel within English sound system	
Substitution of vowel beyond English sound system	
Insertion of vowel	
Omission of vowel	
Mispronunciation	

Inappropriate word stress	
Inappropriate intonation	
Consonant-vowel linking	

If you have made any segmental and suprasegmental features, try to identify them as many as possible. Do you think these features will hinder others to understand your speech?

Indicators:

Number of Linking:

≤ 10: Below average

11 – 20: Average

21 – 30: Good

> 31: Excellent

Number of segmental features:

> 81: Below average

51 – 80: Average

21 – 50: Good

≤ 20: Excellent

Share your performance with other learners and learn from each other at this link.



Activity 9. Self-reflection

Have you ever done any classroom presentation or delivered any free speech? How did you perform on Pronunciation?

If you were given chances to re-do it again, how would you improve your performance with the skills you learnt in this chapter?

Activity 10. Self-reflection on all criteria

From your previous classroom presentation or free speech delivery, how did you perform on the four marking criteria introduced in this book?

If you were given chances to re-do it again, how would you improve your performance with the skills you learnt in this book?



Teaching corner: Justify their levels

Go to the corpus and listen to the performances by the two speakers below. Can you give some justifications for the levels they get based on the key indicators of Pronunciation (PN)?

Speaker A (Band 5.0)

[Part 3](#)

Speaker B (Band 7.0)

[Part 3](#)

https://corpus.eduhk.hk/english_speech_corpus





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