

TEACHING TIP

SMOTHER NEWS OR THE SAY MOLD STORY? COKE SING EMMA CROSS A NOTION

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Wailing's speech lacks fluency and sounds choppy. She often pronounces words and word segments separately. In particular, she doesn't articulate final /m/ sounds, and she doesn't link final consonants to subsequent vowels in phrases. She is unaware of this /m/ deficit and disconnected speech, yet she is eager to learn to speak English better. With gradual and systematic scaffolding, using techniques that draw upon Wailing's existing skills and tendencies, and supplementing with visual and audio aids, including video clips, this multi-step lesson brings greater perception and production; it helps in coaxing the /m/ across an ocean between words.

Written words are separated on the page by spaces; spoken words in the stream of speech are not. Beginning and intermediate learners are often unable to parse utterances in spoken English, which are typically emitted in continuous streams of sounds carried by prosodic elements of stress, intonation, and rhythm. For example, consonant sounds that belong orthographically to the ends of words are linked to the beginnings of words whose orthographic forms begin with vowels, making the phrase "same old" sound like "say mold" and the phrase "an ocean" sound like "a notion." Linking, as defined by Alameen and Levis, is a category of connected speech processes "that does not involve changes to the segments of the words" but makes two words sound like one... "as in... some_of [sʌm əv]" (2015, p. 162). The importance of linking in pronunciation and listening instruction is widely accepted (e.g., Cauldwell, 2013; Field, 2013; Rost, 2011), and many pronunciation learning materials provide presentations, strategies, and exercises on linking (e.g., Brown 2012; Celce-Murcia, et al., 2010; Chan, 2009; Dauer, 1993; Gilbert, 2005; Grant, 2009; Sardegna & McGregor, 2017). Consonant-to-vowel (C-V) linking is among the most common types of connected speech, yet many adult English learners, especially those who have learned the language through the written form, lack the facility to perceive and produce linked words in speech with accuracy, ease, or confidence.

Some other news or the same old story? Coaxing M across an ocean

This teaching tip focuses on helping learners for whom final /m/ is difficult to produce due to the fact that their primary languages do not use the bilabial voiced continuant at all, or in the same way as in English, even though initial /m/ may be present in their languages. Among them are speakers of Spanish and many dialects of Chinese. Teachers can guide such learners to transfer their success in pronouncing initial /m/ to pronouncing final /m/ in sentences with C-V linking by:

- 1) describing the place, manner, and voicing characteristics of /m/
- 2) providing training in lip sensitivity and visual, tactile, and auditory perception
- 3) leading practice of words with initial, medial, and final /m/
- 4) guiding production of phrases and sentences with /m/ + vowel
- 5) using systematic facial expressions and gestures

- 6) moving an “M” wand to symbolize vibration and linking across word boundaries
- 7) guiding repetitions of phrase build-up to sentences
- 8) encouraging the use of video recorded practice material
- 9) having the learners write and practice their own sentences that include linking /m/ to the next word, after which they record and/or perform them live.

Place, voice, and manner

This sound is bilabial; it is produced with the two lips pressed lightly against each other, with no gap. It is voiced; the vocal cords vibrate. It is a continuant; unlike /b/, which is also bilabial and voiced, the lips part for /b/ as a stop sound, whereas the vibration of the vocal cords continues throughout phonation of /m/. With the lips closed, the sound /m/ is nasal, not oral.

Visual, tactile, and auditory perception

Teachers can train students to increase their sensory perception by having them focus on specific aspects of articulation. Visual: Students look at the teacher’s lips. They then look at their own lips in a mirror and ensure that the lips are touching each other. Tactile: Students place their fingers on their throats to feel the vibration of their vocal cords. They continue feeling the resonance from their throats to their lips. They place a finger on the side of their noses to feel the vibration on the nasal orifice. They move the finger over both nostrils to stop the sound, and then remove the finger to allow continuation of the /m/ sound. Auditory: Students listen to the sound of the teacher or other voice model. They listen closely to their own production of the /m/ to approximate the target sound. A video demonstration can be viewed at [Pronunciation characteristics of the sound /m/](#) (1:28).

Pronouncing /m/ in initial, medial, and final positions

Start with the familiar initial /m/ by having students practice words like *make, more, money, moon, mat, motion, magnificent*, using words that are within their vocabulary range.

Continue with words with medial intervocalic /m/, such as *famous, woman, dreamer, image, camera, amazing, lemon, summer, tomato, command, remain, semester*. Use words in which /m/ is at the beginning of both stressed (*tomato*) and unstressed syllables (*woman*).

Next, practice words with final /m/, e.g., *come, same, time, mom, some, ham, room, name, team, swim*. If final /m/ does not occur in the students’ dominant languages, they are likely to need more time with these words.

Students may confuse final /m/ with other nasal consonants, such as /n/ and /ŋ/, as well as nasal vowels such as /ã/ or /õ/. If so, you may give the following tips:

- Keep the back of your tongue down; don’t let it close the air passage at the back of the throat to /ŋ/ sound.
- Keep the front of your tongue down; don’t let the tip or the blade approach the teeth or the roof of the mouth, or else it sounds like /n/.

A video demonstration can be viewed at [Pronouncing /m/ at the end of words: come same time mom](#) (0:38).

Reconceptualizing boundaries between final /m/ to vowel-initial words

When the students have succeeded in pronouncing initial /m/ and intervocalic /m/, it's time to show them how a final-/m/ word preceding a vowel-initial word can be conceptually reconfigured. Students trained on written text and dependent on seeing letters on a page may tend to make an oral gap between words—as they see a space between written words—rather than link them in spoken English. Sliding the /m/ over to the right and visualizing the letter 'm' in a new position can coax them to pronounce the /m/ connected to the following vowel. In a few cases, real written words and phrases are available to demonstrate the concept for our text-dependent learners.

many
 so many
 some antics → semantics
 some arise → summarize
 sam 'n' i → salmon eye
 time 'n, again → tie men again
 name or money nay more money
 summon Ed's friends some o' Ned's friends

Show students that in written English seen in cartoons, dialogs in literature, and movie scripts, an apostrophe is used to replace an omitted or obscured consonant or vowel sound, as above, as well as in these common informally written alterations below:

come on → c'mon
 some more → s'more (the name of a dessert consisting of toasted marshmallow and pieces of chocolate bar sandwiched between two graham crackers)

By now, students are prepared to accept respellings, such as the following (choose your variant!), for the purpose of pronunciation:

some apples → se mapples, sa mapples, somapples, s'mapples
 some ants → se mants, sa mants, somants, s'mants
 some eggs → se meggs, sa meggs, someggs, s'meggs

Use phrases that are appropriate for your particular students, their language proficiency, majors, professions, or interests.

Facial expressions, gestures, and written marks

During face-to-face oral practice, you may use systematic facial expressions and gestures to guide students to articulate /m/ more clearly. For example, hum with your lips closed (but not pressed too tightly), a finger pointing to your lips. Place a hand on your throat to emphasize that the vibration needs to start in the vocal cords, move it to a cheek and the nose to indicate that the

vibration continues throughout the oral and nasal cavities. Sometimes, in order to emphasize the tactile and auditory, rather than visual, nature of the vibratory characteristics, I close my eyes while facing my students and humming.

Using phrases with final /m/ preceding a vowel, write phrases with a linking mark such as *farm_animals*, *cream_n_sugar*, *some_other news*, *same_old*.

Gesture linking with a flow of your hand or a finger, as in the written form, to indicate the connected speech element as you speak. A video demonstration can be viewed at [Linking /m/ in phrases: farm animals, cream 'n' sugar, some other news](#) (0:21).

Using an M wand for coke sing Emma cross a notion

For a visual aid, write a big **m** on a card, the size of which is easily visible to your audience. To give a nonverbal correction to an individual while speaking, or to give continued guidance on the target sound to the whole class during practice exercises, simply hold up the **m** card as a reminder of the target sound.

For greater dramatic effect, create an “**m** wand”. With a wide marker pen, write a big, bold **m** on a card; affix the card to a popsicle stick or a ruler. Holding the stick, shake the **m** from side to side quickly and in small movements to indicate vibration.



Figure 1. M on a stick.

To coax the /m/ across word boundaries, move the wand smoothly from your right to your left (students see the motion from their left to their right) to emphasize linking of final /m/ during phrases such as *ham_n_cheese*, *Mom_or Dad*.

Phrase by phrase guided repetitions

Using vocabulary and sentence structures that are appropriate for your particular students, include selected phrases in complete sentences, modeling appropriate phrasing, stress, and intonation. Lead guided repetitions of each phrase, especially the phrases featuring linking of the target /m/ and other sounds, to help them overcome most challenging parts of the sentence. Following repetitions of your model, have students say each sentence on their own—with the text, without the

text, to you, to their classmates, softly, loudly, eyes open, eyes closed, sitting down, standing up—to help them build accuracy and fluency.

Examples

Kim is eating a ham and cheese sandwich:

Kim_is_eating /
 a ham_an' cheese /
 a ham_an' cheese sandwich /
 Kim_is_eating a ham_an' cheese sandwich.

Swimming is an awesome activity:

Swimming /
 is_an_awesome /
 awesome_activity /
 is_an_awesome_activity /
 Swimming_is_an_awesome_activity!

Tom and you will team up in the same environment:

Tom_an'_you /
 team_up /
 will team_up /
 same_environment /
 in the same_environment /
 Tom_an'_you will team_up /
 in the same_environment /
 Tom_an'_you will team_up in the same_environment.

A video demonstration can be viewed at [Linking /m/ in sentences: Kim is eating a ham 'n' cheese sandwich. Tom 'n' you will team up...](#) (1:47).

Provide recorded practice material

Students benefit from directed practice outside the classroom. Record phrases, sentences, and stories on audio for listening and pronunciation practice. Better yet, especially for the text-bound students who have developed less than optimal /m/ habits, provide video recordings.

If you do not have the time or inclination to create your own, direct your students to access my video lesson on this topic: [/m/ the same age the same afternoon the same environment \(voiced bilabial continuant\)](#) (32 minutes)

Students make, monitor, and record

Having students write down phrases that require /m/ linking and that they commonly use in their daily English-speaking lives—at work, at school, at home, in the community—will help bridge the

gap between other people's phrases and their own. Those who are capable can be encouraged to write complete sentences, including ones that include more than one instance of /m/ linking. They may need guidance from you in pronouncing the phrases and sentences, modeling correct pronunciation, stress, intonation, rhythm, and linking, before gaining confidence and fluency in "performing" them live to you or a class, or committing them to an audio or video recording. This part of the process, along with monitoring their output, provides students with a step toward transferring /m/ linking to their free speech.

Teachers of pronunciation, I hope you find these visual and kinesthetic "tricks" help your learners link final /m/ to words beginning with vowels.

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