

# At the talk face

**Mark Hancock**

## Activities for working on final -s

Final -s is common in English because it occurs in plurals, possessives and 3rd person singular of the present simple, as well as in the contraction of *is* and *has*. Perhaps the main pronunciation issue involved is whether or not to add a syllable. A final -s inflection is pronounced as a syllable (vowel and consonant) the root word ends with a sibilant consonant - /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/ or /dʒ/. Otherwise, the -s inflection is just a consonant, not a syllable. Here are some activities to focus on this feature of pronunciation.

### 1 Possessive 's maze

Give out the photocopyable maze. Students must find a path from Alice's to Ross's. They may pass through a hexagon only if the 's on the name in it is pronounced as an extra syllable. Explain it like this: *Alice* is 1 syllable. *Alice's* is 2 syllables. So the 's is an extra syllable. You can pass. *Juan* is 1 syllable. *Juan's* is also 1 syllable. So 's isn't an extra syllable. You can't pass.

key: Alice's - Alex's - Thomas's - James's - Charles's - Liz's - Chris's - George's - Ms Fox's - Trish's - Marge's - Ross's

### 2 Rhyme matching

In plurals and 3<sup>rd</sup> person verb forms, we can often see from the spelling if the final -s inflexion is an extra syllable because a letter E is added. For example, *box* has one syllable, but *boxes* has 2 syllables – and notice that we added an E as well as an S. But we don't add an E for possessives. So *Ms Fox's* rhymes with *boxes* even though *boxes* has an E while *Fox's* doesn't. Ask your students to match the rhyming pairs opposite.

key: 1-b, 2-c; 3-h; 4-a; 5-e; 6-f; 7-g

### 3 Rhythm drill

One of the most important aspects of pronouncing final -s suffixes is whether or not the suffix is pronounced as an extra unstressed syllable. Consequently, the final -s has implications for the rhythm of sentences. In the first row in the table below, the -s endings are not extra unstressed

syllables, so the two sentences have a rhythm of 4 stressed syllables. The sentences in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> rows have unstressed syllables squeezed between the four stressed syllables as a result of the final -s endings. Get students to chant the sentences in the table from top to bottom.

## 4 Pronouncing contractions

Which one of these two sentences is more difficult to pronounce?

*Tennis's great!*

*Football's great!*

I think you'll agree that the first one is more difficult. Those two letter Ss get mixed up together. For this reason, we tend not to use the contraction in this case – we say instead: *Tennis is great.*

Ask your students to make sentences from the other boxes opposite, deciding when to use the contraction and when not to according to how easy or difficult it is to pronounce.

## 5 Sentence pairs

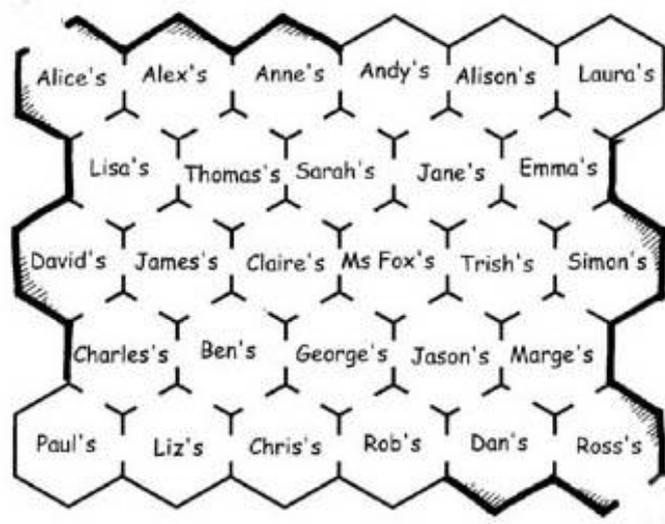
Of course, the important thing about these -s endings is that they make a difference to meaning. For example, Sentences A opposite have a different meaning from sentences B, and students should make sure they can hear and pronounce that difference. Read out one of the sentences and ask students to shout out A or B. Then get them to say sentences for each other to decide if they're A or B. It's easy to adapt this activity and devise similar sentence pairs to fit with the vocabulary and topics that you're covering in class.

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**1 Possessive 's maze**



**2 Rhyme matching**

- |                |             |
|----------------|-------------|
| 1. Ms Fox's    | a. fridges. |
| 2. My niece's  | b. boxes.   |
| 3. The witch's | c. pieces.  |
| 4. Mr Bridge's | e. phones   |
| 5. Mr Jones    | f. kisses   |
| 6. Chris's     | g. plans    |
| 7. Anne's      | h. switches |

**3 Rhythm drill**

O O O O
John's mum's name's Trish. Anne phones Fred's son.
O o O o O o O o
Duncan watches Rachel's movies. Clara's uncle's surname's Barton.
O o o O o o O o o O o o
Felix's grandparents often eat sausages. Alice's granddaughter never sends messages.

**4 Pronouncing contractions**

Tennis	's	great!
Football	is	
The giraffe	's got	a long neck.
The ostrich	has got	
History	's	on Monday.
English	is	
My fish	's got	green eyes.
My cat	has got	

**5 Sentence Pairs**

A	B
The bird sings.	The birds sing.
Tom waits.	Tom's weights.
I can see Jane knows.	I can see Jane's nose.
My friend eats a lot.	My friends eat a lot.