

At the talk face 5

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Initial consonant clusters

English initial consonant clusters present problems for learners whose native languages do not contain such clusters. Faced with such problems, learners often try to simplify the cluster in one of three ways:

- a. by eliding a sound eg *scare* instead of *square*
- b. by adding a sound at the beginning eg *eschool* instead of *school*
- c. by adding a sound in the middle eg *support* instead of *sport*

Of these three simplifications, the first is perhaps the most damaging to intelligibility, but all three can lead to misunderstandings and are best avoided if possible. One teaching strategy is to show how the cluster can be built up in increasing complexity, eg 1 *eight* 2 *rate* 3 *trait* 4 *straight*. Notice that, although the spelling is significantly different in these words, in pronunciation terms they are identical except that a single consonant sound is added to the beginning at each step. The three games/puzzles in this edition of *At the talk face* are all based on this strategy.

1 Noughts and crosses

Copy one of the three grids on the board and divide the class into two teams. Teams take turns to try and win squares. As in normal noughts and crosses, a team must win a row of three squares, horizontal, vertical or diagonal to win. To win a square, they must make a word combining the consonant sound on the left of the row and the sound of the word at the top of the column. For example, in the middle top square of 1, they could suggest *flew* or *blue*. They must pronounce the word, spell it and say it in a sentence to win the square.

Optional extra rules to get more practice:

* A team can win a square off the other team by offering a different correct word for that square. For example, if team A got the square with *blue*, team B could win it off them with *flew*.

* Teams could compete to win as many squares as possible. At the end, they get 1 point for each square they've won plus a bonus 3 points for any row of three.

Key of possible words:

1 *bride/fried*; *blue/flew/flue*; *brain*; *dried*; *glue*; *drain/grain*; *cried/pride/tried*; *clue/true*; *crane/train*

2 *breast*; *tries*; *blow*; *dressed*; *dries/tries*; *glow/flow*; *crest/pressed*; *cries/prize*; *slow*
 3 *throw*; *bread/bred/thread*; *fry*; *grow*; *dread*; *dry*; *crow*; *tread*; *cry/try/pry*

2 Monday mornings

Give out a copy of the text. Explain that the words in italics are misprints and that the correct word has exactly the same pronunciation but with one extra consonant sound at the beginning. These are given below as the *clue letters*. Students should write the correct word in the gap. Use the examples given to show how to do it. In particular, use the *rest-dressed* example to point out that we're focusing on sounds here and the spelling can be quite different. At the end, get students to practice saying the words and their corrections *lock - clock*, *rest - dressed* etc.

Key: *lock-clock*; *rest-dressed*; *water-quarter*; *rain-train*; *cool-school*; *refer-prefer*; *top-stop*; *treat-street*; *white-quite*; *low-slow*; *tarts-starts*

(note - the *water-quarter* example doesn't work for rhotic varieties of English, where the letter R in the first syllable of *quarter* would be pronounced, so that it would not rhyme with the first syllable in *water*)

3 Rebus

Copy the exercise and ask students to solve the puzzles as shown in the example. In each of these puzzles, the final word in the line contains a consonant cluster beginning with S. Get students to practice saying these. If they elongate the s at the beginning: *ssss*, this may help them to avoid adding a vowel sound. Make sure they pronounce all of the consonants in the clusters by asking them to say the word with and without each one, for example for *sky*: /skai/, /kai/, /sai/, making a clear difference.

Key: 1 ? = sky; 2 ? = sw; 3 ? = start; 4 ? = speak (or stop); 5 ? = spring; 6 ? = air; 7 ? = sk; 8 ? = no/know (for *snow*, or *tar* if they interpret the picture as being a star); 9 ? = sn; 10 ? = air

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NOUGHTS AND CROSSES

1	ride	loo	rain
/b/ or /f/		<i>flew</i>	
/d/, /g/ or /s/			
/k/, /p/ or /t/			

2	rest	rise	low
/b/ or /t/			
/d/, /g/ or /f/			
/k/, /p/ or /s/		<i>prize</i>	


3	row	red	rye
/b/, /f/ or /θ/			
/d/, /g/ or /s/		<i>dread</i>	
/k/, /p/ or /t/			

MONDAY MORNINGS


My alarm *lock* clock wakes me up at seven. Then I have a shower and get *rest* dressed. I leave the house at *water* _____ to eight. I never take the *rain* _____ to *cool* _____ - I *refer* _____ the bus because there's a bus *top* _____ in my *treat* _____. The bus is *white* _____ *low* _____ but it's convenient. My first class *tarts* _____ at nine.

(Clue letters = e, d, p, q, q, s, s, s, s, s, t)

REBUS

Example sk +  = ?
Solution: ? is sky


1 s +  = ?


2 ? + eat = 


3 s +  = ?


4 s +  = ?

5 sp +  = ?

6 st + ? = 

7 ? + 8 = 

8 s + ? = 

9 ? + ache = 

10 sq + ? = □