

Adapting word puzzles for teaching phonetics

This resource provides some examples of where traditional word-based games can be tailored for learning introductory phonetics. This is useful for teaching English, for Speech and Language Therapy students and others interested (RS).

I'm not the first to use these approaches but thought it might be useful to provide a guide.

Claire Timmins

Senior Teaching Fellow

University of Strathclyde

2023

@clairemtimmins

1. Word Searches

Most people have completed a word search or two in their time. This is one of the easiest puzzles to recreate for your class as you just require a blank table (either on paper or online).

How to do it

1. Create your own word search using the IPA symbol relevant to your class (e.g. accent variations) and print this out to be completed in class.
2. Get the students to create their own word searches to submit as formative assessments, which you then have to complete. You can even ask for permission to use the student creations in future classes.

Example

The example word search on the next page was created using a basic/simplified Standard Scottish English vowel system but avoids any words with post-vocalic /ɹ/. This example was presented at a conference to a mainly non-rhotic audience.

FESTIVALS

TENT

SLEEPING BAG

HAT

SUN CREAM

VITAMINS

EYE MASK

WELLIES

WET WIPES

TOILET ROLL

BUM BAG

ALCOHOL

UMBRELLA

d	s	ʌ	n	k	ʝ	i	m	ɪ	b	v	d	ə	i	d
h	w	ɛ	ʝ	n	z	w	a	tʃ	i	ʝ	k	h	ʃ	t
a	ŋ	e	k	b	o	ɛ	ʒ	d	ð	ə	ŋ	k	i	ɔɪ
ʃ	f	ɔɪ	n	v	ɪ	t	ə	m	ɪ	n	z	z	b	l
dʒ	s	l	i	p	o	w	a	ʝ	o	k	u	m	ɪ	ə
ʒ	t	k	s	a	m	aɪ	ɛ	i	m	ɛ	s	a	n	t
a	ə	i	l	ʃ	x	p	ɪ	l	d	l	tʃ	s	ŋ	ʝ
l	t	s	ɪ	ɔ	j	s	f	n	i	ʝ	h	t	e	o
k	n	aɪ	u	ð	h	a	v	p	b	z	x	ʌ	ŋ	l
o	ɛ	b	tʃ	ə	z	ə	ɪ	ʒ	ʌ	b	s	aɪ	p	θ
h	t	a	ʌ	i	f	ŋ	k	i	m	z	t	dʒ	f	w
a	ɪ	ɛ	ɔɪ	m	b	ɪ	aɪ	l	b	ɛ	k	w	ʒ	ɛ
m	v	o	ŋ	a	w	ɛ	t	θ	a	b	h	a	t	i
ɪ	o	s	g	ə	a	v	a	u	g	s	x	ɔɪ	l	z
l	k	ʌ	m	b	ʝ	ɛ	l	ə	i	dʒ	ð	k	f	s

2. Crosswords

Like word searches, most people are aware of crosswords and may have completed one or two in their time.

How to do it

1. Create your own crossword template and provide the orthographic form of the words as clues. These can be printed out for the students to complete in class. Students then need to complete the crossword by providing the relevant IPA symbol for the appropriate accent variations. You can create your own template using excel or download a template ([example here from Adobe](#)).
3. Get the students to create their own crosswords to submit as formative assessments, which you then have to complete. You can even ask for permission to use the student creations in future classes.

Example

The example crossword template was made in excel:

		1				
2						
3						

Across

1. seat
2. sit
3. apple

Down

1. city
2. splash

3. Countdown

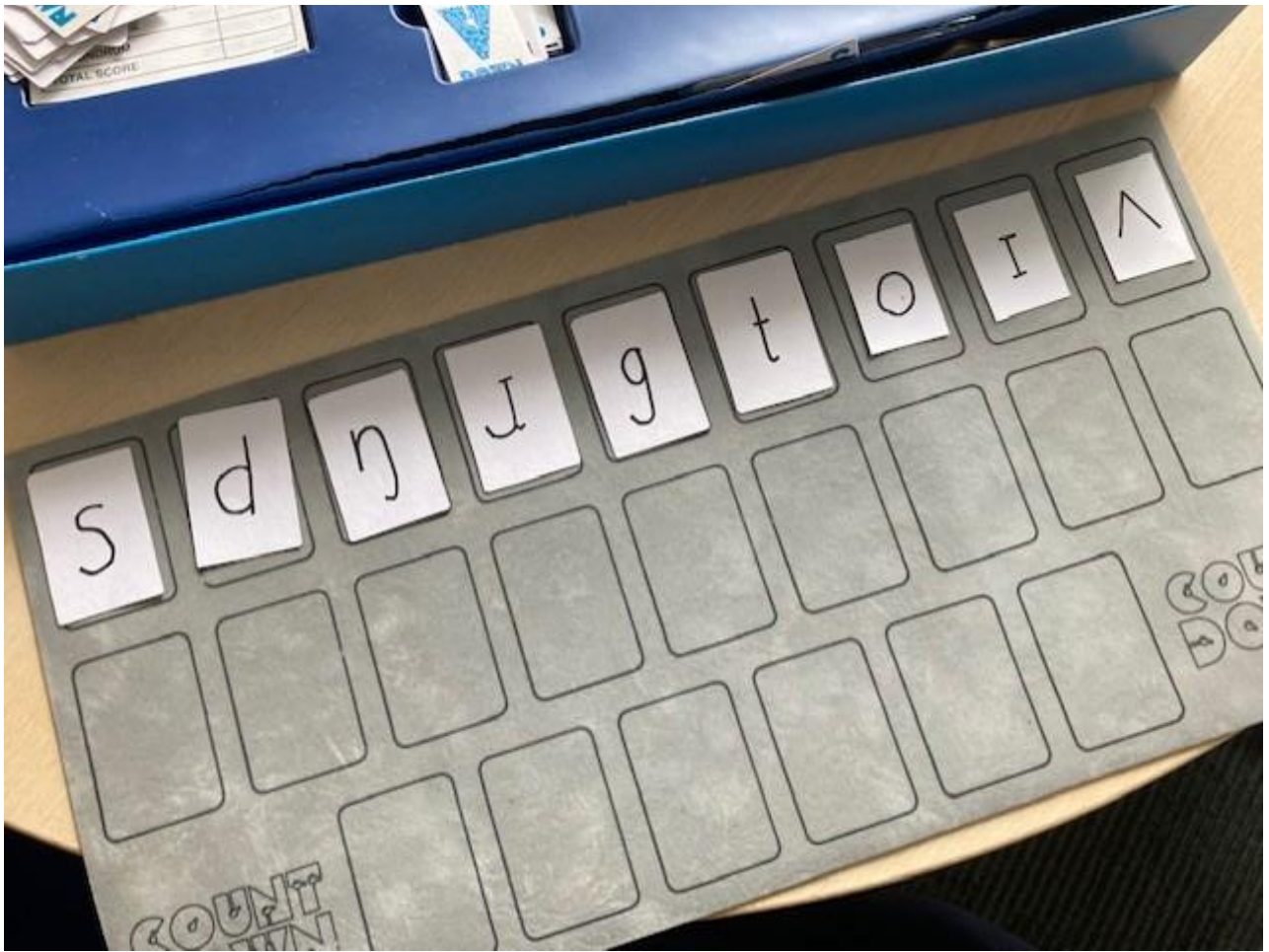
Countdown is a long running [Channel 4 TV programme](#). In the game, contestants must create the longest word from a random selection of letters within a short time period. There are many ways you can create this in class. See below for some ideas.

How to do it

1. Create your own set of vowel and consonant IPA symbols. Get students to select (blind) nine sounds (either vowels or consonants) and the group has 30 secs to create the longest word from these sounds. You may want to consult a [list of phoneme frequency](#) to ensure that your contestants have the right number of symbols to create words. There is [a YouTube video of the Countdown timer](#) which you can use in class.
2. Sociolinguist [George Bailey](#) has created an [online version of IPA Countdown](#) (available as Standard Southern British English vowels and consonants). This online version includes the Countdown timer music. You can complete this in class or during an online session.
3. Adapting the original board game. This is probably the hardest way to play Countdown in your class. I was fortunate to find the original board game in a charity shop, so I replaced the consonant and vowel letter cards with my own IPA consonant and vowels cards.

Example

The image on the following page shows the adapted Countdown board game with a random set of symbols. Can you create a word longer than 4 sounds (this set was based on Standard Scottish English vowel system)?



4. Scrabble

Scrabble is an internationally popular word game where players create words from a set of 7 random letters, placing them in a crossword fashion on a board. In order to adapt this, you will need to access the board game or create your own board.

How to do it

1. Create your own set of vowel and consonant IPA symbols tiles. I used wooden tiles that I purchased [from Amazon](#) and added the symbols and points manually and used the original board from the game.
2. The [allthingslinguistic blogsite](#) has a much more detailed set of instructions on how to manage dialectal differences when designing your game and a link to a spreadsheet that can help with tile scoring.

Example

The following photo shows a photo of the adapted board game and a random set of symbols. Can you add a word from the 7 tiles shown?



5. Bananagrams

[Bananagrams](#) is a word game where players create individual scrabble-style grids with letter tiles. The aim is to use all your letters to complete a word grid before anyone else.

How to do it

1. Create your own set of vowel and consonant IPA symbols tiles. As with Scrabble, I used wooden tiles that I purchased [from Amazon](#) and added the symbols manually.
2. Each student gets 21 tiles and must create a grid (like scrabble/crossword) with all their tiles in order to win the game. [Bananagrams rules](#) are available online.

Example

The following photo shows a random set of tiles created for IPA Bananagrams, alongside the original Bananagrams packaging.



6. Dipsticks

Dipsticks are a series of games where players pick a question stick which may provide the player with a charade to complete, a trivia question to ask or a song to sing. The winner of each task gets to keep the stick. The player with the most sticks at the end of the game is the winner. For teaching, I created a simple place, manner and voicing label game.

How to do it

1. Create your own set of sticks from blank lollipop sticks. I used [these purchased from Amazon](#) and added the questions manually.
2. In pairs, students are given a tub of sticks and must select one in turn. They have to produce the sound represented by the IPA symbol and the other student has to name the PVM label accurately.

Example

The following photo shows a random set of tiles created for IPA Dipsticks.

