

How to Greatly Improve Your English Pronunciation in 14 Steps

 fluentu.com/blog/english/how-to-improve-english-pronunciation/

By

March 24, 2015

“What?”

“Can you say that again?”

How many times do you hear this when you’re speaking? Even if your vocabulary and English grammar are perfect, it can still be difficult for people to understand you because of your pronunciation.

Learning to pronounce English words correctly can be one of the hardest parts of learning English.

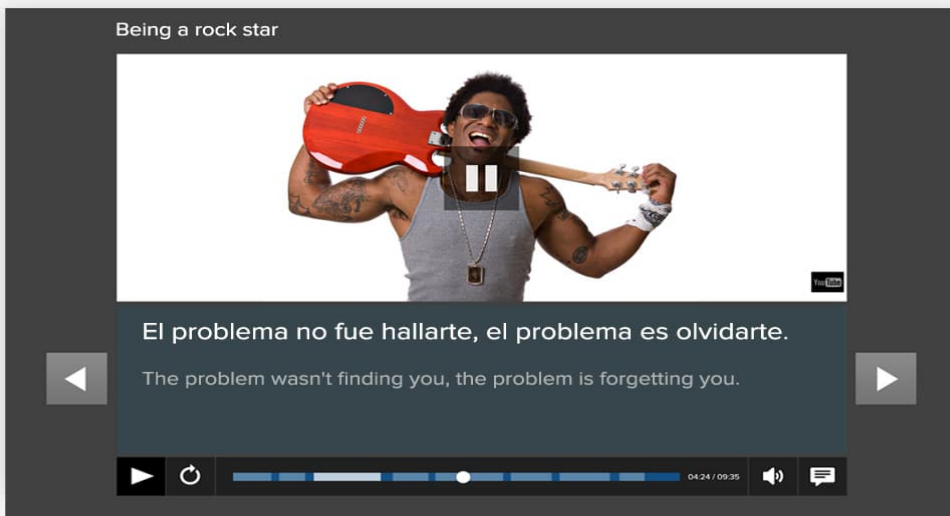
The English language has some sounds that your native language might not, so you will have to learn how to make completely new sounds.

Plus, English vowels make it really tricky to know how to say a word. “Way,” “weigh” and “weh” are all said the same, for example, while “comb,” “bomb” and “tomb” are all pronounced differently.

Ah! Yeah, we know it can make you crazy.

So that’s why we have 14 tips for you, to help you pronounce English words better.

How to Improve Your English Pronunciation: 14 Tips to Talk Like a Native



Looking for a fun way to learn a language?

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1. Learn to listen.

Before you learn how to speak, you'll need to learn how to listen. Some sounds can be hard to tell apart when you're listening. Did the speaker *sleep* or *slip*? Did he hurt his *chin* or his *shin*? If you can hear the difference, it will be easier to speak the difference.

There are many guides to get you started in learning to listen. We have some great articles here about learning to listen from movies, songs and music and podcasts. You can also find listening exercises online, like this one from Rong-chang.

The pronunciation practice at Many Things is really slick, especially its huge selection of lessons on **minimal pairs**. Minimal pairs are pairs words like *sleep* and *slip*, that are only different by one sound. You can click on each word to hear a complete sentence with each, then quiz yourself in the second box and click the correct answer.

When you want to listen to authentic English instead of pronunciation exercises, you can watch videos on FluentU. FluentU is an online immersion platform that takes real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons.

Every word comes with an in-context definition, image, audio and example sentences, so you have enough support to make native English accessible to you. FluentU's "learn mode" takes your



learning history into account, and asks questions based on what you already know, which sets you up for success.

The better you get at hearing words, the better you will become at pronouncing them.

2. Notice how your mouth and lips move.

When you speak, you move your mouth. *How* you move your mouth affects how you pronounce a word.

The first step to correcting your mouth shape is to notice it and pay attention. There are a few ways you can check that your mouth and lips are making the correct shape:

Use a mirror. This is by far the simplest way to tell what your mouth is doing while you talk.

Put a finger in front of your lips (like you're saying "shh"). As you speak, don't move your finger. You should feel your lips moving away from or pushing against your finger.

Watch other people and notice the shape their mouth and lips make when they talk. Try following along with your favorite TV show or movie. Can you repeat the faces and sounds that the actors are making?

There are guides and pictures online that will help you learn how to move your mouth. Sounds of English has some good explanations for pronouncing specific words. This guide is for people making 3D animations, but the pictures are a great start to understanding how your mouth should look when you speak.

You can also find great videos showing how to properly form the mouth and lip shapes when you're speaking, like this one from Georgie Harding:



Watch Video At:

<https://youtu.be/mfZscA9V6nU>

Feeling stiff? Loosen up your mouth and tongue and get ready to practice your speech with this fun warm-up exercise from Howcast!



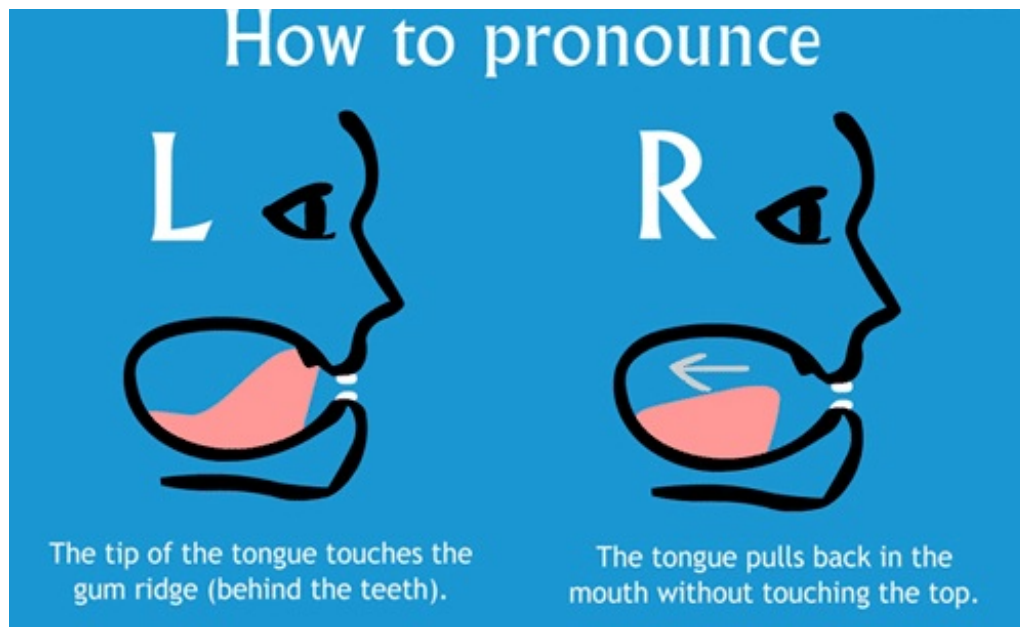
Watch Video At:

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3. Pay attention to your tongue.

The main difference between *rice* and *lice* is in your tongue. When you speak, you move your tongue to make sounds. You probably didn't even notice that, since you do it without thinking. To improve your English pronunciation, it's a good idea to check what your tongue is doing.

Some difficult sounds for non-native speakers to make are the letters "L" and "R," and the sound "TH." Pronouncing them correctly is all in the tongue!



[Image Source](#)

To make the "L" sound, your tongue should touch the back of your front teeth and the top of your mouth, just behind your teeth. **Try it now:** Say the word "light." Say it a few times. Feel where your tongue is in your mouth. Make sure it touches the top of your mouth.

To make the "R" sound, your tongue should *not* touch the top of your mouth. Pull your tongue back to the middle of your mouth, near where it naturally rests if you weren't saying anything. As you say the sound, your lips should be a little rounded. **Try it now:** Say the word "right" a few times. You should feel air blowing between your tongue and the top of your mouth as you speak. You should also feel your lips get a little rounder when you make the sound.

Now for the "TH" sound. This one may seem strange if you don't have a similar sound in your native language. To make this sound, put your tongue between your top and bottom teeth. Your tongue should stick out a little between your teeth, and as you push air out of your mouth, let some air escape between your tongue and teeth—that's what makes the sound. **Try it now:** Say the word "think." Repeat it a few times. Make sure you push your tongue between your teeth.

Now that you know where to put your tongue, can you hear the difference?

For a more detailed explanation on how to make those three sounds correctly, watch this video from the Woosong University:



Watch Video At:

https://youtu.be/jXWgzlz_OhM

Or check out this one from Club English:



Summit
Language
Institute

Watch Video At:

<https://youtu.be/MLXyFOJupbo>

There are many other pronunciation guides on YouTube, so look around for one that helps you master the sounds of the language!

If you can't figure out what to do with your tongue to make the right sound, try asking someone. Ask them to say a word with that sound, then tell you where they put their tongue. They probably never thought about it before, either!

4. Break words down into sounds.

Words are made up of syllables, or parts. The word "syllable," for example, has three syllables: syl-la-ble. Turning words into parts can make them easier to pronounce.

To check how many syllables a word has, place your hand flat just under your chin. Say the word slowly. Each time your chin touches your hand, that's a syllable.

You can even write the word down in parts. Leave a space or draw a line between each syllable (every syllable should have at least one vowel: a, e, i, o, u, y). Now try saying the word. Say it slowly and pause after each syllable. Isn't that easier?

If you're having trouble with syllables, you can check out [How Many Syllables](#). This website shows you the syllables in any word you look up, and even shows you how to pronounce it.

How Many
Syllables™

5. Add stress to sounds and words.

English is a stressed language. That means some words and sounds are more important than others. You can hear this when you say a word out loud. For example, the word “introduce” is pronounced with a stress at the end, so it sounds like this: “in-tro-DUCE.”

Sometimes where you put the stress in a word can change the word’s meaning. Say this word out loud: “present.” If you said “PREsent,” you are talking about a noun that means either “right this moment” or “a gift.” If you said “preSENT,” you are talking about a verb that means “to give or show.”

There are rules for where the stress goes in each word. Here’s one rule:

Most two-syllable nouns are stressed on the first syllable, and most two-syllable verbs are stressed on the second syllable.

That’s just like the word “present.” Here’s another example: the noun “ADDress” is the place where you live, and the verb “addRESS” is to speak to someone.

If this all sounds too complicated, don’t worry about memorizing all these rules—the best way to learn is by listening and practicing. Remember that most native English speakers don’t know the rules either, they just say what “sounds right.” With enough practice, you can get what sounds right too.

This [video about six common English mistakes](#) goes over word stress in detail in the first point:



Watch Video At:

<https://youtu.be/Z7AdB1fjJSA>

Keep watching the rest of the video for other useful tips for avoiding some of the most common English learner mistakes.

Watch [this video from mmmEnglish](#) for more information about syllable stress in English:



Watch Video At:

<https://youtu.be/XAIoSYqzGkY>

Sentences have stresses too; some words are more important, and are said with more clarity and strength than the rest of the sentence. Try reading this sentence aloud: “I ate some toast with butter in the morning.”

The sentence should have sounded like this (the bold words are the stressed ones): “I **ate** some **toast** with **butter** in the **morning**.” Notice how you slow down every time you get to an important word, and quickly pass over the less important ones?

Keep practicing by reading out loud, having conversations and listening well to where others place stress when they speak.

6. Ask yourself which dialect of English you want to learn.

When you speak English, do you want to sound like you’re from America or England? Australia or New Zealand? Maybe Canada or South Africa.

Choosing your dialect of English is one of the first decisions to make on your English-learning journey. First of all, it will determine much of the vocabulary you learn. For example, English speakers in Ireland use different terms for certain things than English speakers in the United States—especially when it comes to slang.

Second, this choice will drastically affect your pronunciation.

The two most common types of English for ESL students are probably **American English and British English**.

Choosing which type will affect how you pronounce sounds. For example, in America, the “r” sound at the end of a word is much harsher.

And when a “t” appears in the middle of a word, Americans often pronounce it as a “d,” while the British pronounce it as a hard “t.” Think of words like “water,” “whatever” or “lighter.”

That’s just the beginning. I could go on and on!

Choosing between American and British English will also drastically alter how you say words like “aluminum,” “schedule,” “garage” and “mobile,” just to name a few.

Once you’ve chosen which dialect of English you want to take on, **base your studying methods and tools on that decision**.

For instance, if you want to learn American English, you wouldn’t want a British language exchange partner, would you? You’re going to emulate the sounds you hear, so you want to find people and resources that will feed you the right accent.

Watching movies and TV shows are fantastic ways to learn English and pick up accents. I particularly love watching TV series, because you have hours of content, and you learn to understand characters' accents over time.

If you're looking for a British TV show, I recommend "[The Crown](#)," a drama about Queen Elizabeth II. I also love "[The Great British Baking Show](#)." This reality show is lighthearted and fun to watch, and you'll pick up modern slang.

How about English shows? "[Friends](#)" is a classic option for learning English, and many Americans will love to talk about it with you. "[Brooklyn Nine-Nine](#)" is a sitcom that's currently on the air that centers around cops (policemen and women) in New York City.

You can also find learning materials that expose you exclusively to your desired dialect. Take apps, for example.

If you want to learn British English, LearnEnglish Sounds Right will provide an English pronunciation guide for people wanting to attain a British accent, and you can download it for your [iOS](#) or [Android device](#).

ELSA Speak: English Accent Coach is a great app for learning how to speak like an American. Download it at the [Apple](#) or [Google Play store](#).



As you can see, your choice of dialect will affect every other decision you make regarding English pronunciation!

7. Exaggerate certain sounds (make them bigger).

Anyone who has acted in the theater knows about exaggeration.

Have you ever been onstage and made a facial expression or reacted to someone else's line, only for your director to yell, "Do it bigger!" On the stage, you have to exaggerate to appear normal to the audience.

English pronunciation is the exact same way.

Depending on what your native language is and which dialect of English you're studying, you'll find certain sounds to be difficult. Actually, I think every ESL student I've met who is learning American English struggles with the American "r" sound!

So how do you master a tricky sound like this?

Exaggerate. Exaggerate the sound until you feel ridiculous. Exaggerate until you're sure it's so over the top that people are going to make fun of you.

Are you exaggerating to the point that you feel stupid? **Then you're probably on the right path.**

If you're super over the top in your pronunciation, you'll become more and more aware of the shape of your mouth and placement of your tongue when you make that sound.

Believe it or not, **exaggerating these sounds will likely make it easier for native speakers to understand you.** You may think you sound corny because you aren't used to making these sounds. But for a native speaker, you'll sound way more authentic than a foreigner who is shy about these sounds.

What's the goal? Eventually, you will be so used to the shape your mouth makes that you won't be conscious of exaggerating, and you won't be thinking of English pronunciation rules as you speak. And that's when you know you're on the path to fluency.

8. Write out difficult words by their sounds.

Having trouble with certain words? Try writing them out.

No, not just the word. Try writing it out phonetically (by their sounds instead of their spelling).

Let's say you're struggling with the word pizza. Write it out phonetically: **pi:tsə.**

When you look at the phonics, you can see that the double-z is pronounced like a "ts."

Try making flashcards. Write the word on one side, then spell it out phonetically on the other side. If it helps, you can highlight the letters on each side that you're testing yourself on. (This can be especially useful for visual learners!)

Writing things out phonetically can be difficult, especially if it's in your second language. If you need help, visit EasyPronunciation.com. Type in the word or sentence you need help with, and the website will transcribe it phonetically for you. **(Bonus—it lets you choose between American and British English!)**



9. Write down what you hear.

Want to master English pronunciation? Sit down and listen. Listen to someone speak and write down what they are saying.

You might be thinking, "Hey, I'm here to practice speaking, not listening!"

However, listening is an excellent way to improve English pronunciation.

In my high school French classes, we had to take dictation (write what the teacher said) every week. The teacher spoke for 20 minutes, and we had to write down exactly what she said. Trying to decipher her accent and write down what we heard made me understand French spelling and pronunciation better.

Don't have an English teacher who wants to talk aloud for 20 minutes at your disposal?

There are plenty of ways to find a resource!

EnglishClub is a great dictation website, regardless of your learning level. Choose from elementary, intermediate or advanced dictation.

You'll listen to the dictation once at normal speed. Then a second time at a slowed down speed so you can write it down. Listen for a third time at a normal speed. Then check your answer.

YouTube also has many options to practice your listening and writing skills. Get started with Speak English with Vanessa's Dr. Seuss dictation video:



Watch Video At:

https://youtu.be/y_Rezm4wiGI

You can also watch a scene from a TV show or movie and write down what you hear. If you're watching on a service that provides subtitles, play the scene again with subtitles to check your work.

If you recognize difficult sounds when you hear them, it's likely that you'll learn how to say them.

10. Practice with tongue twisters.

When speaking English, do you struggle with sounds that are similar? Like “sh” and “ch,” “t” and “th” or the short and long “e” sounds?

Don't worry, you're not the only one. Not by a long shot.

Wondering how to improve your English accent in a way that's a bit more entertaining? Tongue twisters can be a fun (but tricky!) way to practice differentiating between two sounds.

Tongue twisters are poems that can be hard to recite because a lot of the sounds are similar. In English-speaking countries, people say them just because it's funny when you mess up and sound silly. And it's satisfying when you finally master the poem!

Here are a few examples of popular, effective English tongue twisters:

Want to practice the “s” and “sh” sounds? Here's one:

She sells seashells by the seashore.

That's a very famous tongue twister. But once you've got that down, try adding on a few less well-known lines:

*The shells she sells are sea-shells, I'm sure.
For if she sells sea-shells on the sea-shore
Then I'm sure she sells sea-shore shells.*

Alright, now let's try one to practice the “cl” and “cr” sounds:

How can a clam cram in a clean cream can?

And now one for the “sh” and “ch” sounds:

If a dog chews shoes, whose shoes does he choose?

Want to practice different sounds with tongue twisters? [Take a look at this list here.](#)

You can also hear some tongue twisters spoken by a native English speaker [on Rachel's English](#) (and see that even native speakers can have trouble mastering these tricky twisters!):



Watch Video At:

https://youtu.be/McJ6JI_2JQo

11. Use pronunciation podcasts and videos.

There are some excellent video and audio guides on English pronunciations that you can use to improve. The English Language Club has videos that show how to make different sounds in English. Rachel's English has friendly videos on how to speak and pronounce American English in everyday conversations.



If you like podcasts better, Pronuncian has over 200 audio files that help with everything from pronunciation to stress and pitch (how you raise and lower your voice while you speak).

If none of these are what you're looking for, there are many more to choose from. Find the one that's right for you.

12. Record yourself.

One way to tell if all your practice is working is to record yourself with a camera. Use a camera and don't just a sound recorder because it's important to **see** how you speak, not only hear it.

You don't need to download any special software to record yourself; most computers and mobile devices have built-in video recorders. You can use PhotoBooth on a Mac or Movie Moments on a Windows computer. The specific programs change with time (the Movie

Moments program, for instance, might not be available anymore by the time you read this) but as long as a computer has a camera, you should be able to record videos with it. Your phone or mobile device also has a video capturing app, usually as part of the camera app.

Compare your recording to someone else saying the same words or sounds. Find a video of your favorite part from a movie, like this clip from “Earth to Echo.” Choose one or two sentences and record yourself trying to match the stress, tone and pronunciation of the video. Then you can compare the two and see what you did differently, and try again.

Ask a friend or watch a video to check. If your pronunciation doesn’t sound the same, ask yourself some questions: Are you moving your mouth the right way? Is your tongue in the right place? Are you stressing the right part of the word? Use everything you learned in this article so far!

13. Practice with a buddy.

As always, “Practice makes perfect!” And it’s easier to practice with a friend. Find someone to practice pronunciation with, either in person or through online communities like Language Exchange or InterPals.

Practicing with a buddy (friend) will give you a chance to try everything you learned, and learn new things from each other. Plus, it’s fun!



14. Speak as much as you can.

If you don’t speak often, you can become nervous when it’s finally time to open your mouth and say something in English.

It’s like playing basketball. You might be good at running, dribbling and passing. But you never shoot the ball.

You know how to shoot the ball. You watch other people do it all the time. But you’ve never done it.

When it’s time to play and you get a chance to shoot, it would be hard. Plus, you’d become so nervous by doing something new in front of other people that your nerves could paralyze you.

It’s the same with speaking English. Not only do you need English pronunciation practice, **but you need to get over your nerves so that you feel comfortable speaking in front of others**. Nerves can lead to a lot of mistakes, especially regarding pronunciation.

Try making a rule for yourself: You must speak English to yourself at home. To start, try just narrating what you're doing when you're cooking dinner or getting ready for bed.

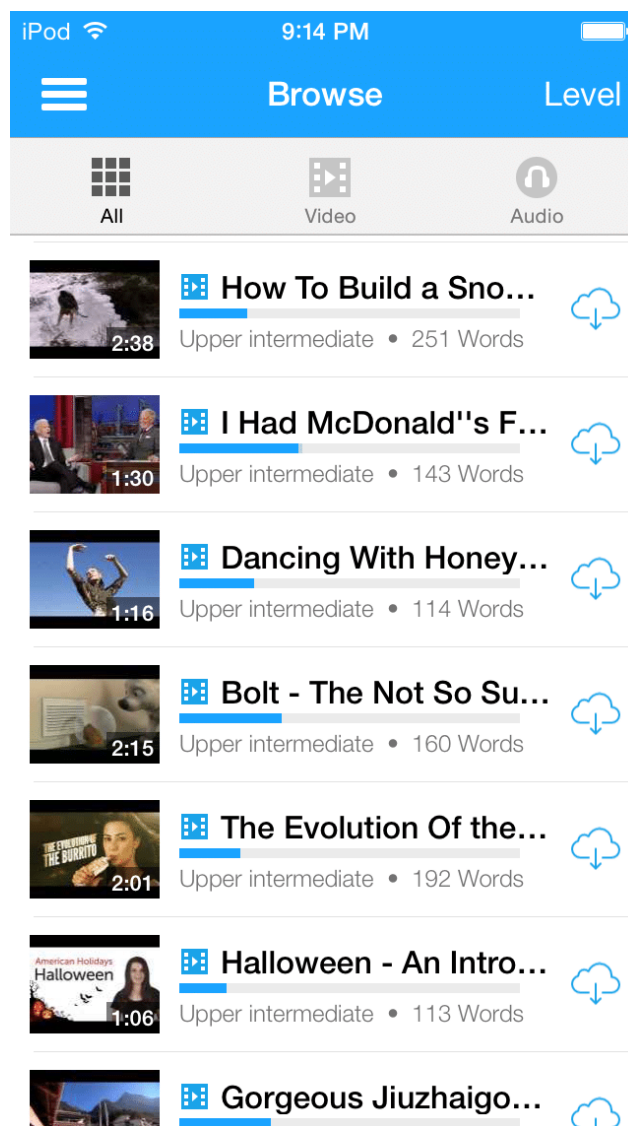
Promise yourself that you're going to speak aloud for at least a few minutes per day.

Remember, practice makes perfect!

Pronunciation is as important to learning English as vocabulary and grammar. Thanks to these 14 tips, you'll soon be on your way to pronouncing English like a native.

And One More Thing...

If you liked these tips, then you'll love FluentU. FluentU uses popular talk shows, catchy music videos, and funny commercials to teach you English:



If you want to watch it, FluentU's probably got it.

FluentU makes it really easy to watch English videos. How? There are interactive captions. In other words, you can tap on any word to see an image, definition, and useful examples.



Well , a friend of mine ,
Steven Spielberg , told
me to look

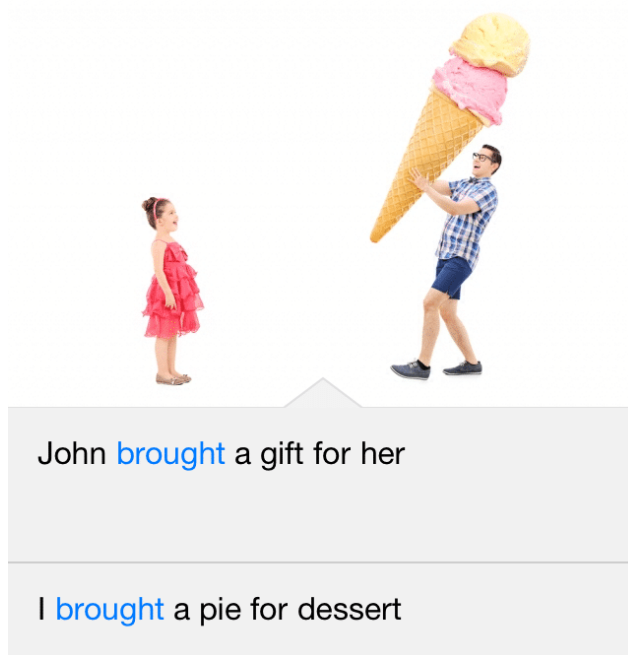


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For example, if you tap on the word “brought”, then you see this:

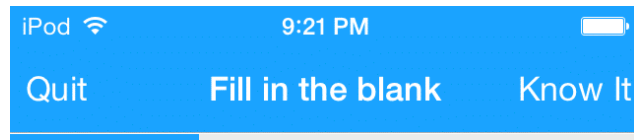
brought

v. to take something or
someone to another place



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Buildings can after a fire .



Hint: to fall down or inward; to come apart

collapse



decoded

step

fusing

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