

5. $-o$ vs. $-uo$

At first glance, the $-o$ and $-uo$ finals (as in *mo* and *duo*) seem like they would make different sounds. Thus students who can intuitively pronounce *duo* end up stumbling over *mo*, not knowing if it should be pronounced “maw,” “mwo,” or “mow.” Actually, their pronunciation is the same. The reason for the discrepancy between these two finals is that $-o$ only occurs with the *b* initial set, which is comprised of *b*, *p*, *m*, and *f*. The first three are pronounced with both lips (bilabial consonants), while *f* is pronounced with the lower lip and the teeth (labiodental fricative). When a labial consonant transitions into the rounded $-o$ sound, the lips naturally make a *w/u* sound in the

process. However, initial sets coupled with the *-uo* final (the *d*, *g*, *z*, and *zh* sets) must insert the *w/u* sound to function as a near bilabial before going to the rounded *-o* sound. So while there may be a slight difference in the strength of the *w/u* sound, for all practical purposes these finals are the same. The *b* initial set and one example from each of the four initial sets that can be used with *-uo* are included in this drill.

bo	tuo
po	kuo
mo	suo
fo	ruo