

## Pronunciation, silence

### Do you ever drill for pronunciation?

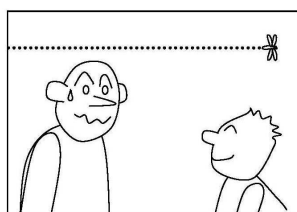


Sometimes. When I introduce the new phrases and vocabulary I model the pronunciation and intonation, and we drill it together a few times. Then when I feel that students have had enough pair practice (usually after 5-10 minutes or so) , I tell them to stop. If necessary, here is where I sometimes do a bit of group oral practice, asking questions of individual students in front of the whole class. This is simply to check if the pronunciation and usage were properly understood, but it can be a bit nervewracking on the first day of classes, so I just play it by ear. How much group practice you want

to do depends on the class size, makeup, atmosphere, etc. as well as your own teaching style. Some teachers like to "work the class" while others prefer to skip that part almost completely and communicate with students on a more individual basis, when going around the class or in the tests themselves. Personally, I'm in the latter group.

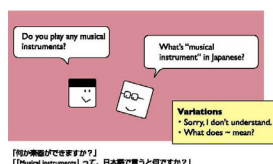
For the first class, it 's just simple things like *How do you say shusseki hyo in English ?* This idea is to have students respond immediately. Even if they don't know the answer, they can respond correctly but quickly saying something like *I don't know* or *I'm not sure*.

### But how do you get around the problem of Japanese students' tendency to 'freeze up' when questioned ?



Before the first group oral practice (immediately after the first pair practice), I ask the students to open their books and read *Golden Rule 1* (of English Conversation) : *Don't remain silent*. The most important rule of this class is that you must answer a question within a few seconds, or, if you cannot answer, at least say

something. This is actually easier said than done. Some basic



strategies for combating silence are outlined on page 11 of the textbook. Although some textbooks have lists of useful metcommunicative questions and phrases, I have found that students will

never be able to use them if they are not explained carefully, and practiced rigorously from the very beginning. I realise this sounds like its going against the IM's principle of 'making life easier for teachers', but it is worth investing some time in this. In the long run, once students are able to naturally ask you (and each other) for help, it makes conversations, and the class itself, run so

much more smoothly.

It is possible to practice this. You can prepare a list of grammatically simple questions which contain an impossibly difficult word or phrase (with the meaning of the difficult word explained in Japanese), and have students read the questions to their partner, who has to use the metacommunication strategies. I find it easy enough to ask these kind of questions to individual students as I go around the class. When students see that they can be praised even if they don't know the answer (surely a first in their lives !) but have responded appropriately, they feel much more at ease.