

ESOL tips for Portuguese speakers

Spelling, reading, and pronunciation

Spelling and reading English words is difficult for Portuguese speakers. Although we use the same alphabet, different sounds are associated with some letters. While Portuguese spelling is phonetic (a letter represents one sound, and always the same sound), English is NOT phonetic. Many letters and letter combinations in English can be pronounced multiple different ways. It is NOT always possible to use a rule to determine correct pronunciation by looking at the spelled word, or to spell a word one knows how to say.

The first priority is to make sure your student understands that English spelling is full of exceptions, and it's not the student's fault it is so difficult to spell some words. Spelling is hard even for American children and adults.

If your student is literate in Portuguese, have them explain to you how to read Portuguese sounds, and have them explain the rules about when certain letters make certain sounds. Then switch, and explain that English has different rules, and often the rules are confusing due to words having been borrowed from many other languages (350 languages or so, most words coming from Latin, French, German, Greek, and Dutch).

To explain English spelling "rules" always start with a word your student already knows. Show them how to spell it. Brainstorm similar rhyming words. Create lists of words they know, grouped by sounds. Notice any strange spellings. (Toe, show, sew, etc.) Always group the words by SOUND, not by SPELLING. Gradually, they will see patterns (and exceptions).

The following articles offer some background on English spelling, as well as some specific tips for Portuguese speakers.

Sound-Letter relationships (an article for adult literacy)

<http://www.literacyandnumeracyforadults.com/resources/355788>

14 Phonics rules for reading and spelling

<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/reading-issues/14-phonics-rules-for-reading-and-spelling#slide-6>

Reading strategies: Phonics and Spelling

<http://www.readinghorizons.com/reading-strategies/teaching/phonics-instruction/is-phonics-for-spelling-foundational>

Differences between English and Portuguese

<http://esl.fis.edu/grammar/langdiff/portuguese.htm>

10 English Pronunciation Errors by Portuguese Speakers (including audio clips)

<https://pronunciationstudio.com/portuguese-speakers-english-pronunciation-errors/>

What are the hardest English words for native Portuguese speakers to pronounce?

<https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-hardest-English-words-for-native-Portuguese-speakers-to-pronounce>

The Portuguese alphabet and how it's pronounced (notice the many differences from English)

<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/portuguese.htm>