

Welcome Letter and Guidelines for Studying English Phonetics and Phonology I

Dear Students,

Welcome to my class! You may already be wondering what this subject is all about. Well, it's very simple. Phonetics is the scientific study of speech sounds. But what are speech sounds? The sounds of speech are the sounds that we use when we speak.

And what is phonology? We'll use this term in two related senses. First, phonology is the scientific study of the meaningful sounds of a language. The meaningful sounds of a language are also referred to as *phonemes*. Phonemes are abstract representations of the different variations of specific sounds. The presence or absence of a given phoneme determines the difference in meaning between two words, phrases or sentences; that's why phonemes are considered to be the smallest meaningful or significant units of sound in a language. The phonetically related variations of phonemes are known as *allophones*. Allophones are the actual (*real*) sounds that we use when we speak, depending on our particular accents. Second, the phonology of a language is the set of rules that account for the changes in the form of phonemes in specific contexts or environments. That is to say, phonological rules explain how a phoneme becomes the different allophones. But don't worry! We won't be studying too many phonological rules in this course.

Now what should you do in order to learn this subject and pass this course with a good grade? First of all, I expect you to **attend all the class sessions**. Remember: ***You will automatically fail this course if you miss 25% of the classes***. Second, prepare the subject-matter for the upcoming classes. Third, participate actively in class by **COMING TO CLASS ON TIME** (Note: **You won't be allowed access to the classroom if you arrive 10 minutes after the time the class has started**), paying attention to the teacher's explanations, taking appropriate notes, asking pertinent questions and having your doubts cleared up, volunteering to answer questions and doing exercises, and so on. Please **never** leave the classroom with doubts about the topics treated in class. Fourth, when you go home, review your notes and make sure you understand them. Then supplement your notes with what is stated in the phonetics books. If you have any doubts or questions about a topic, write them down and ask your teacher later in class or during his office hours. Fifth, do transcription exercises. Use a good pronouncing dictionary as a reference. After that, read the transcriptions aloud and get familiar with the IPA symbols. Sixth, read aloud. Seventh, listen to the radio, TV, movies and songs in the English language and notice how the native speakers pronounce and try hard to imitate them. Eighth, **come to my office hours** for consultation or for a chat. Ninth, **SPEAK IN ENGLISH IN CLASS AND WHEREVER AND WHENEVER YOU CAN**.

Likewise, I have to tell you that both ***your time and efforts and mine*** are precious and valuable. Don't waste yours or mine! **Study** constantly (***every day!***). Always come prepared to class. Don't wait till the night before a test to study. If you don't do well in a test, don't become discouraged! See me and together we'll try to find out what is wrong. If you need extra explanations and practice, I'll be glad to provide them. **BUT** if you don't study regularly or do nothing to improve, **LATER ON DO NOT ASK ME TO GIVE YOU EXTRA POINTS OR PASS YOU!** With this admonition, I don't mean to be rude or sound too strict. I simply want you to know what I expect of you and what my rules are. Please abide by them and we'll have no problems at all during the semester; on the contrary, we'll become **GOOD FRIENDS** and you'll learn a lot.

Finally, I want to ask you a favor. **PLEASE KEEP YOUR CELL PHONES OFF** or in the **VIBRATE MODE WHILE YOU'RE IN MY CLASS**; their ringing or beeping distracts the class and interrupts my thoughts and teaching. Thank you!

Prof. Argenis A. Zapata