

FREE RESOURCE · PRONUNCIATION

The shadowing technique

The shadowing technique means listening to a recording and repeating it aloud a moment after the speaker, copying the sounds, rhythm and melody. It trains your ear and mouth together, so it helps with pronunciation, fluency and listening. Use short, clear recordings and always check the words first.

What to know

What is shadowing?

In shadowing, you play a recording of English speech and say the words aloud as you hear them, just behind the speaker, like a shadow. You try to copy not only the words but also the stress, the rhythm, the pauses and the rise and fall of the voice.

What shadowing can and cannot do

Researchers have studied shadowing as a way to train listening and pronunciation. Hamada (2016) looked at which learners benefit from shadowing and how it works for listening skills, and Foote and McDonough (2017) tested shadowing as a pronunciation task with mobile technology. The research is still developing, so treat shadowing as one useful tool, not a magic method.

Choose the right recording

The most common mistake is choosing material that is too hard. Pick a recording that is clear, short and a little below your listening level, so you can understand almost every word.

- Length: 30 to 60 seconds is enough. A short clip you repeat is better than a long one you only hear once.
- Speed: slow to normal, with one speaker and little background noise.
- Topic: something connected to IELTS, such as a talk about hometowns, work, study or technology.
- Transcript: choose a clip with a written text, so you can check every word.
- Accent: a clear, standard British accent is a good match if British English is your goal.

The step-by-step method

Follow the same sequence each time. Do not skip the first two steps, because they make the later steps easier.

- Listen without reading. Notice the topic and general meaning.
- Read the transcript. Look up any word you do not know, and check how it is said in a dictionary.
- Listen again with the transcript and mark where the speaker pauses and which words are stressed.
- Say the text aloud once, slowly, without the recording.
- Shadow with the transcript in front of you. Stay a word or two behind the speaker.

What to listen for while you shadow

Shadowing works best when you aim at one feature at a time. On the first round, follow the stress: which words are louder and longer? On the second round, follow the rhythm and the pauses. On the third

round, follow the melody, especially where the voice rises and falls at the end of a phrase.

Exercises

1. In shadowing, you repeat the speaker _____.
 - a. only after the whole recording ends
 - b. a moment after, with no long gap
 - c. before they say it
2. Which recording is the best choice for a first shadowing practice?
 - a. A clear 40-second clip with a transcript
 - b. A fast 20-minute podcast with no text
 - c. A noisy street interview
3. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) Before you shadow, (2) listen without reading, (3) then read the transcript (4) and never check any new word.
4. Put the shadowing steps in order. Put the words in order: Shadow with the text / Listen / Shadow without the text / Read the transcript
5. While you shadow, which feature should you try to copy as well as the words?
 - a. The speaker's choice of topic
 - b. The speaker's age
 - c. The stress, rhythm and melody
6. Which stress pattern is natural? *It depends on the weather.*
 - a. It de **PENDS** on the **WEA** ther
 - b. **IT** de pends **ON** the wea ther
7. Write the word for the written text of a recording, which you use to check what was said.
8. If a clip is too fast, the best choice is to _____.
 - a. speak louder than the recording
 - b. slow it down or practise one phrase alone
 - c. give up shadowing completely
9. Which syllable is stressed in **pronunciation**? pro · nun · ci · a · tion
10. How often should you shadow the same short clip?
 - a. Several times over a few days
 - b. Once and never again
 - c. Only on the day of your test

Practise online, free: hear every example and check your answers at www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/shadowing-technique/practice/

IELTS tip. In the Speaking test, the way you say a whole sentence matters as well as single words. Shadow a model answer to a Part 2 question, copy its stress and pauses, and then say your own answer in the same smooth way. Use shadowing for practice only. In the real test, speak naturally in your own words.

FOR TEACHERS · PRONUNCIATION

The shadowing technique

AIM	Learners will use a simple shadowing routine to practise stress, rhythm and linking with a short model.
TIME	30 minutes
LEVEL	B1 to B2 (IELTS 5 to 6.5)
MATERIALS	This worksheet, one copy per learner; the free online practice for the audio

Warm-up

Say a short phrase and ask learners to say it with you, one beat behind. Ask what felt different compared with repeating after a pause.

Lesson steps

1. Prepare: give a 45-second recording and transcript. Learners listen once for gist, then read and check unknown words.
2. Mark: learners mark stress and pauses on the transcript while they listen again.
3. Shadow in pairs: one learner shadows while the other listens and notes one thing to improve. Swap roles.
4. Record: each learner records one shadowing round and compares it with the original.
5. Feedback: share one feature that each learner will focus on in the next round.

Extension

Learners write a model answer for a Part 2 topic, record it, and swap with a partner to shadow each other's version.

Answer key

1. b) a moment after, with no long gap. A shadow follows just behind the speaker. If you wait for the end, it is a different exercise.
2. a) A clear 40-second clip with a transcript. Short, clear and with a transcript is the right level. Long, fast or noisy material is too hard to copy.
3. Part 4: *and never check any new word.* → **and check the new words.** Check any new word first. If you shadow a word you do not know, you may practise it incorrectly.
4. Listen Read the transcript Shadow with the text Shadow without the text. You listen first for the meaning, read to check every word, shadow with support, and then shadow without support.
5. c) The stress, rhythm and melody. Shadowing trains how speech sounds as a whole: stress, rhythm, pauses and melody.

6. a) It de **PENDS** on the **WEA** ther. The stressed syllables are pends and wea. The words it, on and the are small and quick.
7. transcript. A transcript is the written form of a recording. It helps you check words and mark stress before you shadow.
8. b) slow it down or practise one phrase alone. Slowing the clip or working on a single phrase makes the target reachable without losing the benefit of the method.
9. pronunci**A**tion. The stress is on the fourth syllable: pro-nun-ci-A-tion. It is a useful word to check in your shadowing practice.
10. a) Several times over a few days. Repeating a clip across several days lets you notice small gains and fix one feature at a time.

Questions learners often ask

How long should I shadow each day? Ten to fifteen minutes is enough for one short clip. It is better to practise a little each day than for a long time once a week.

Should I shadow with the transcript or without it? Begin with the transcript so you can check every word. After a few rounds, shadow without it to train your ear and your memory.

Can shadowing improve my IELTS Listening? It can help you notice linking and weak forms, which are part of natural speech in the Listening test. It works best together with normal listening practice.

Is shadowing the same as repeating after the speaker? Not exactly. In repeating, you wait for a pause. In shadowing you speak almost at the same time, a word or two behind, which trains rhythm and attention.

Sources

- Hamada, Y. (2016). Shadowing: Who benefits and how? Uncovering a booming EFL teaching technique for listening comprehension. *Language Teaching Research*, 20(1), 35-52.
- Foote, J. A., & McDonough, K. (2017). Using shadowing with mobile technology to improve L2 pronunciation. *Journal of Second Language Pronunciation*, 3(1), 34-56.

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