

# Teaching the Pronunciation of -ed in the Present Simple

By Alfred Utton

I've taught the pronunciation of -ed several times to advanced learners, most recently as part of a lesson comparing the present perfect and the past simple. However, it occurs to me that it would make more sense to teach the ways that -ed is pronounced before students are introduced to the past simple, rather than attempting to fine tune pronunciation later. Here are a few ideas on how to use participial adjectives in the present simple to introduce the pronunciation of -ed to beginning English language learners.

A couple notes before we begin. While these suggestions build on each other, culminating in a production activity, I wouldn't teach them all in single lesson. I think they would work best interwoven into other topics, revisited for five or ten minutes at a time. Also, these suggestions involve a significant amount of grammar, some of which might be beyond the typical scope of a beginner lesson. However, language like, He's extremely annoyed with Michael, and, She's not frightened of anything, can be taught to all students through pictures and gesture, without using metalanguage.

## Explore the Pronunciation of -ed

Depending on your students, it may be helpful to begin by explaining how the final sound of a root word determines whether -ed is pronounced as /d/, /t/, or /ɪd/. If your goal is simply to expose your students to this distinction, you might choose to skip this step. Regardless, here are some adjectives you could use in a lesson on emotions, as well as how -ed is pronounced in each word.

annoyed	/d/	embarrassed	/t/
confused	/d/	relaxed	/t/
bored	/d/	depressed	/t/
terrified	/d/	shocked	/t/
tired	/d/	disappointed	/t/
scared	/d/	excited	/t/
worried	/d/	delighted	/t/
frightened	/d/	interested	/t/

Once students have practiced pronouncing these words, you can assess their ability to distinguish the -ed endings by giving them a chart like the one above, cut up into pieces, and having students sort the slips according to how the suffix is pronounced. I suggest discussing the words' meanings afterwards. Introducing the pronunciation first enables students to practice saying the words correctly while they're discussing what they mean.

## Use the Targeted Adjectives in Sentences

Have students create simple sentences in the present simple using be. Expand these sentences by introducing prepositions—such as by, in, of, about, and with—and matching them to the adjectives with which they collate. Provide example sentences: I am **frightened by** clowns. I am **interested in** books.

Expand the grammar focus of the lesson by introducing negation and question formation. Provide example sentences: *She is not excited by flowers. What is he worried about?* You could also use this as an opportunity to review contractions of *be not*, leading to sentences like *We aren't embarrassed*. Further expand the grammar focus by introducing adverbs: *extremely, really, very*. Students would use these to create sentences like *They are very annoyed with Pat*.

**Use Plurals to Explore the Pronunciation of -s**

Use sentences with plural objects—such as *He's scared of spiders*—to expand the pronunciation focus by addressing the different ways that -s is pronounced. Compare the ways that the pronunciation of -s and -ed change depending on the sounds they follow. For example, they're pronounced one way following the /t/ in *delighted* and *cats* and another way following the /ɔɪ/ *annoyed* and *toys*.

**Use Pictures in an Assessment**

Here you might assess understanding and pronunciation by having students sort pictures of different things into piles depending on what they are *interested in, frightened by, bored with, etc.* Depending on the pictures you give them, students would comment on their sorting by saying sentences like *I'm delighted by puppies* or *I'm terrified of guns*.

**Practice with an Information Gap**

Finally, students can practice writing, listening, and speaking in an information gap activity using the following chart, as is or cut into slips.

Jack	scared	spider s
The children	excited	flower s
I	intereste d	height s
Elizabeth	delighted	clowns
Her Father	bored	books

Begin by reviewing pronunciation of -ed and -s, as well as question intonation.

Working in pairs, students mix up items from the chart to write sentences. They must supply their own prepositions. Provide examples: *Jack is interested in books. I am scared of heights.*

Pairs write questions that their sentences answer: *What is Jack interested in? What are you scared of?*

Pairs peer edit each other's sentences and questions.

Present the use of anything in negative sentences. Provide examples: *Elizabeth isn't frightened of anything. The children aren't interested in anything.*

Working with students who hadn't edited their sentences, pairs join up to form small groups. Each pair attempts to recreate the other's sentences by asking them questions. Model asking and answering questions: *What is her father bored with? Her father is bored with heights. Her father isn't bored with anything.* Given sufficient time and class size, the final step can be repeated with students working alone instead of as partners.

Pronunciation should be interwoven throughout an ESL curriculum and that even lower-level students can appreciate distinctions like the ways -ed and -s are pronounced. Furthermore, though it may be difficult to convey these distinctions to students with limited vocabularies, it's better for students to practice saying things correctly from the beginning, instead of correcting fossilized mispronunciations later. The strategies I've presented here use the present simple to introduce distinctions in the pronunciations of -ed and -s, while touching on other areas, including negation, question formation, and adverb use. I hope they prove useful in your beginner English classes.



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