FlashAcademy® EAL

Learner Profile: Portuguese

This guide presents common challenges faced by European and Brazilian Portuguese learners of English and typical features of language production. Brazilian and European Portuguese differ in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and spelling. However, these two accents are broadly mutually intelligible. Please note, these guidelines are intended to advise teachers on areas where students may experience problems; however, native speakers may not all find the following points challenging.

Facts

- **Language family:** An Indo-European language, Portuguese is in the Romance family.
- **Native speakers:** Approximately 223 million
- **Second language speakers:** Around 20 million
- **Location:** Portuguese is an official language in Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, East Timor, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Macau, Mozambique, Portugal and São Tomé and Príncipe.
- **Writing system:** Latin script
- **Alphabet:** The Portuguese is the same as the English alphabet, however, some letters are pronounced differently.

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Pronunciation

• Portuguese does not have the 'th' sound so speakers may replace this with a Portuguese phoneme, such as 's', 'z', 't' or 'd'.

• Portuguese words do not normally have a nasal consonant at the end of words. Brazilian Portuguese speakers may fail to pronounce the 'n' but nasalise the final vowel in English. European Portuguese speakers may pronounce the final 'n' as a 'ng' sound, for example, 'he ran' can sometimes be produced as 'he rang'.

• Portuguese native speakers sometimes insert a vowel before a consonant, such as 'estrap' for 'strap'. This is to break up consonant clusters which are not native to Portuguese, which makes them easier to say.

• Portuguese native speakers also emphasise the pronunciation of the final 'e' of words, which is often silent in English, however, it is more common for Portuguese words to end in a vowel than in English and so they may assume all written letters are pronounced.

• 'l' is not allowed at the end of the syllable in Brazilian Portuguese, so it is pronounced as a 'w'. Brazilian Portuguese native speakers may, therefore, produce a 'w' at the end of words like 'small'.

Grammar

• Some grammatical structures might be directly translated from Portuguese, for example, 'I have 12 years'. A Portuguese native speaker may also say 'I am learning English since I was at primary school', using the present continuous tense instead of the present perfect.

• The Portuguese preposition para has multiple uses and so English prepositions can be confused with each other, such as 'I said for her' instead of 'I said to her'.

• In Portuguese, the pronoun can be omitted, and this may be transferred to English, saying 'I told' instead of 'I told him'.

• Portuguese speakers often use tag questions, such as 'It's raining, isn't it?'. However, it is common for Portuguese speakers to use 'isn't it?' as a set phrase. For example, 'He's eating, isn't it?'. It's good to introduce different ways of expressing questions, rather than just tag questions.

• 'More' is placed before the number in Portuguese, which is often transferred to English, for example, 'He bought more four shirts'.

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Writing

• 'w' is only used in Portuguese for loan words, such as 'webcam' and 'wombat'. English's irregular spelling is confusing for all learners, but the silent 'w' is particularly challenging for Portuguese speakers, who might spell 'wrong' as 'rong'.

• Homophones, such as 'its' and 'it's' and 'your' and you're' can also be confusing for Portuguese speakers.

Recommended FlashAcademy® lessons and resources

Beginner > A Few Basics > Personal Pronouns

Beginner > Phonics 1 > Set 2 and Additional Sounds

Beginner > Phonics 2 > 3-letter clusters and Magic 'e'

Beginner > School Essentials > Question words

Beginner > High Frequency Words 1 > Your vs. You're

Beginner > High Frequency Words 2 > Specifying and giving amounts

Beginner > High Frequency Words 3 > It's vs. Its

Beginner > English Language > Spelling