SAY MY NAME

Saying Students' Names Right: 10 Top Tips

Here is what to do *(and what not to do!)*

A shareable resource developed by Dr Hannah Deakin-Smith and Dr Jane Pilcher of Nottingham Trent University, drawing on findings from the Say My Name research project funded by the British Academy

Please credit @sociologyblog & @hannahldeakin

NTU

1 Give students the opportunity to say their name first

It is often easier to pronounce names once you have heard them pronounced correctly. Don't be afraid to ask students to say their names and repeat them aloud to check your pronunciation.

Students appreciate the opportunity to avoid mispronunciation.

"I want to share the feelings I have with the name and even to correct it"

2 Give students the space & time to correct your pronunciation

Often students will feel uncomfortable correcting mispronunciation, particularly in a group setting and may be reluctant to 'interrupt' the flow of a class.

Allow for time at the end of session (when teaching both online and in person) as students may wait until they can address you in private. Make sure they have to opportunity to do so.

"He's a teacher and I'm a student and I would say that I was not so confident... going to the professor and telling him what you're doing is wrong"

3 Avoid public mispronunciation

Often the audience hearing the mispronunciation is the biggest issue for students.

If you plan to 'cold call' students during a session, check with them beforehand or use another resource to make sure you are publicly pronouncing their name correctly

"There are people there [group setting] who know how you are supposed to pronounce it, and I don't want them to suddenly think that that's how my name is supposed to be pronounced"

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4 Write it down or make an audio recording

When you hear the correct pronunciation of a name you find difficult, write it down phonetically or make an audio recording so you can use this when speaking to them in the future.

Students appreciate the effort and not having to repeatedly correct mispronunciation.

"It very much feels like I'm being disrespected and dishonoured when people don't get it right continually"

5 Don't avoid saying the names that you find difficult to pronounce

Using strategies to avoid having to pronounce students' names (such as calling students 'mate', pointing or tapping on the shoulder or not addressing students at all) are often deemed more offensive than mispronunciation. These strategies do not go unnoticed by students!

"And instead of saying like good job John, good job Anthony, he would say good job mate for me… I'm like oh right OK fair enough, I get it"

6 Don't ask "do you mind if I just call you…"

Don't ask to use a student's surname, shortened version, or alternative version of their name. Even if a student allows you to use a different version of their name, it does not mean they are comfortable with it. They may agree to this for your comfort, rather than their own. Always try to use their first/preferred name.

"I did not feel so happy being called by my surname rather than my first name… I love my first name"

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7 If a student corrects your pronunciation of their name, take this on board

"I told the lecturer that you need to spell my name [correctly]...But in the end he still when he gave me my feedback, he still got my name wrong. So I'm like this doesn't feel good and I didn't want to correct him the second time. I just like left it"

It often takes a lot of confidence and courage on the student's part to correct a member of staff. If they choose to do so, it is an important issue for them.

Repeated mispronunciation can be particularly offensive for students, so if corrected, make an effort to get it right in future.

8 Always check for autocorrect errors

Always check that autocorrect hasn't altered the spelling of student email addresses - or turn off autocorrect when sending emails to students.

Autocorrect can result in missed communications and opportunities for students. Equally, misspelling of names in emails can cause feelings of frustration.

"There isn't a backup account with the wrong spelling that comes to me... if you don't spell it right you will not get hold of me"

9 Talk to your colleagues

Share with colleagues when you know the correct pronunciation of a student's name that others find difficult and ask others if you need advice.

Some names may seem easy for you to pronounce but difficult for others, so always be on hand to supportively correct colleagues and use the language skills of those around you to inform your own best practice.

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10 Use technology

There are many websites which can guide you in the correct pronunciation of student names.

If you have time before meeting a student, these resources can help you get their name right, the first time – this is well received by students who regularly experience mispronunciation of their names.

Promote audio-name badges in email signatures. To create visit name-coach.com

namecoach

Here are just a few of the online tools available

Nameshouts   Howtopronouce.com

HearNames   Pronouncehippo.com

You can also find lots of pronunciation guides on YouTube

MOST importantly, just ask!

In most cases students are more than willing to help you get their name right. It is seen as a mark of respect and valued by students.

So, if in doubt, just ask!

Names are important and getting them right shows respect for students' identities and heritage. Students appreciate the opportunity to share their name and it's story.

"So I think I would say if you were to come across someone whose name you find really difficult or challenging, like have a conversation… if you don't have those conversations, you're never really going to learn off each other"

For more information about the Say My Name project please contact jane.pilcher@ntu.ac.uk

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