

# Helping Learners with Common English Difficulties

---

اردو

Urdu

## Introduction & Background

This guide is designed to support ESOL tutors, volunteers, and staff working with **Urdu**-speaking learners. It outlines the most common challenges these learners face when learning English and offers practical examples, explanations, and exercises to support more effective communication. The aim is to build understanding, patience, and confidence in supporting **Urdu** speakers on their learning journey.

### Urdu

Urdu is primarily spoken in Pakistan, where it serves as the national language and a lingua franca across diverse ethnic groups. It is also one of the 22 scheduled languages of India, where it holds official status in several states.

It is widely used in:

- Pakistan – Especially in urban centers such as Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, and Rawalpindi.
- India – Particularly in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Telangana, Jammu & Kashmir, and Delhi.
- Diaspora communities – Found in the UK, USA, Canada, the Gulf states, and other countries with South Asian populations.

Urdu speakers face specific challenges when learning English due to **differences in pronunciation, grammar, writing system, and vocabulary**

## Pronunciation & Phonology

---

### 1. Sounds not in Urdu

- /θ/ (“think”) → often pronounced /t/ or /s/
  - “*think*” → “*tink*” or “*sink*”
- /ð/ (“this”) → often pronounced /d/
  - “*this*” → “*dis*”
- /v/ → sometimes pronounced as /w/
  - “*very*” → “*wery*”
- /z/ may be confused with /j/ or /s/ in some regions
- /ʒ/ (as in *measure*) is unfamiliar, sometimes replaced with /z/ or /j/

### 2. Consonant clusters

- Urdu words generally avoid complex clusters at the beginning; learners may insert vowels:
  - “*street*” → “*istreet*”, “*school*” → “*iskool*”

### 3. Final consonants

- English words ending in consonants can be tricky; extra vowel sounds may be added:
- “*cat*” → “*cata*”, “*desk*” → “*desku*”

### 4. Vowel differences

- English has more vowels than Urdu; distinctions like /ɪ/ vs /i:/ (“*ship*” vs “*sheep*”) or /ʌ/ vs /ɑ:/ (“*luck*” vs “*lock*”) are challenging.



## Grammar & Syntax

### 1. Articles (a/an/the)

- Urdu does not use definite or indefinite articles; learners often omit them:
  - *“I bought book”* → *“I bought a book.”*

### 2. Verb tenses

- Urdu verbs rely heavily on aspect; English perfect and continuous tenses are confusing:
  - *“I have eaten”* vs *“I am eating”*

### 3. Word order

- Urdu generally follows **SOV (Subject-Object-Verb)**; English uses **SVO**:
  - *“I the book read”* instead of *“I read the book.”*

### 4. Plural forms

- Irregular plurals (child → children, foot → feet) can be tricky.

### 5. Prepositions

- Urdu postpositions differ from English prepositions:
  - *“I am waiting you”* → *“I am waiting for you.”*

## Vocabulary & Expression

---

### 1. Literal translation

- Urdu speakers may translate idioms or expressions word-for-word, producing unnatural English:
  - *“I have cold”* → *“I have a cold”* vs *“I am cold”*

### 2. Politeness & register

- Urdu politeness forms may cause learners to overuse formal expressions in casual English.

## Writing System

---

### 1. Perso-Arabic script

- Urdu is written right-to-left; learners must adapt to English's left-to-right script.

### 2. Spelling irregularities

- English spelling often does not match pronunciation, confusing learners.

## Sociolinguistic Factors

---

- Exposure to English varies widely depending on schooling, region, and media.
- Regional accents may influence English pronunciation.

## Summary

---

Urdu speakers typically struggle with:

- **Pronunciation:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, /ʒ/, vowel distinctions, consonant clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, tenses, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary & Expression:** literal translations, idioms, over-formality
- **Writing:** left-to-right orientation, spelling irregularities

# Common mistakes Urdu speakers make in English

---

## Pronunciation Mistakes

---

1. /θ/ → /t/ or /s/

- “think” → “tink” or “sink”

2. /ð/ → /d/

- “this” → “dis”

3. /v/ → /w/

- “very” → “wery”

4. /z/ → /j/ or /s/

- “zoo” → “joo” or “soo”

5. /ʒ/ → /z/ or /j/

- “measure” → “mezure”

6. Consonant clusters

- “street” → “istreet”, “school” → “iskool”

7. Final consonant vowels added

- “cat” → “cata”, “desk” → “desku”

8. Vowel confusion

- “ship” vs “sheep”, “luck” vs “lock”



## **Grammar Mistakes**

---

### **1. Articles omitted**

- Incorrect: “*I bought book.*”
- Correct: “*I bought a book.*”

### **2. Verb tense errors**

- Incorrect: “*I go school yesterday.*”
- Correct: “*I went to school yesterday.*”
- Incorrect: “*I have eat lunch.*”
- Correct: “*I have eaten lunch.*”

### **3. Word order (SOV → SVO)**

- Incorrect: “*I the book read.*”
- Correct: “*I read the book.*”

### **4. Plural errors**

- Incorrect: “*Childs are playing.*”
- Correct: “*Children are playing.*”

### **5. Preposition mistakes**

- Incorrect: “*I am waiting you.*”
- Correct: “*I am waiting for you.*”
- Incorrect: “*I go to home.*”
- Correct: “*I go home.*”

## Vocabulary & Expression Mistakes

---

### 1. Literal translation from Urdu

- Incorrect: “*I have cold.*”
- Correct: “*I have a cold*” or “*I am cold*” depending on context

### 2. Over-formal expressions in casual conversation

- “*I request you to help me in this matter.*” → better: “*Can you help me?*”

### 3. Idioms / fixed phrases

- Literal translation issues: “*It rains heavily*” may be translated word-for-word and sound unnatural.

## Writing Mistakes

---

### 1. Spelling influenced by phonetics

- “*wery*” for “*very*”
- “*iskool*” for “*school*”

### 2. Word order issues

- Literal SOV structure from Urdu: “*I homework did yesterday*” → “*I did homework yesterday.*”

### 3. Confusing homophones

- “*their / there / they’re*”, “*to / too / two*”

## **Examples in Conversation**

---

- **Urdu speaker:** “*I go school yesterday.*”
  - → Correct: “*I went to school yesterday.*”
- **Urdu speaker:** “*This book very interesting.*”
  - → Correct: “*This book is very interesting.*”
- **Urdu speaker:** “*I am waiting you.*”
  - → Correct: “*I am waiting for you.*”

## **Summary**

---

Urdu speakers’ most common mistakes are:

- **Pronunciation:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, /ʒ/, vowels, consonant clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, tense, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary/Expression:** literal translations, idioms, over-formality
- **Writing:** spelling influenced by phonetics, homophones, SOV word order

# Teaching Strategies for Urdu Speakers Learning English

---

## Pronunciation Strategies

---

**Challenges:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, /ʒ/, vowel distinctions, consonant clusters, final consonants

### 1. Minimal Pairs Drills

- /θ/ vs /t/: *think – tink, three – tree*
- /ð/ vs /d/: *this – dis, that – dat*
- /v/ vs /w/: *very – wery, visit – wist*
- /z/ vs /s/: *zoo – soo, zero – sero*
- /ʒ/ vs /ʃ/: *measure – mezure, pleasure – pleshure*
- /ɪ/ vs /i:/: *ship – sheep, sit – seat*

### 2. Consonant Cluster Practice

- Start with added vowels: *iskool → skool → school*
- Gradually remove inserted vowels: *istreet → street*

### 3. Final Consonant Awareness

- Drill words ending in consonants: *cat, desk, lamp*
- Emphasize not adding extra vowels: *cat ≠ cata*

### 4. Recording & Playback

- Students record themselves reading sentences, then compare with native speakers



## Grammar Strategies

**Challenges:** Articles, tenses, word order, plurals, prepositions

### 1. Articles (a/an/the)

- Visual aids: *a cat* (any cat) vs. *the cat* (specific cat)
- Fill-in-the-blank exercises: *I saw \_\_\_ apple, \_\_\_ sun, \_\_\_ cat*

### 2. Verb Tense Awareness

- Use timelines for past, present, future
- Storytelling activities: “What did you do yesterday?”
- Practice perfect and continuous tenses using real-life examples

### 3. Word Order (SOV → SVO)

- Sentence rearrangement exercises: *I the book read → I read the book*
- Pair work to build correct sentence structures

### 4. Plural Forms

- Drill irregular plurals: *child → children, man → men*
- Classroom games: memory match, “plural hunt”

### 5. Preposition Practice

- Teach prepositions in chunks: *wait for someone, go to school, sit on the chair*
- Role-play exercises for reinforcement

## **Vocabulary & Expression Strategies**

---

**Challenges:** Literal translation, idioms, over-formality

### **1. Idioms & Fixed Expressions**

- Introduce gradually, with visuals or stories
- Encourage simplified equivalents initially:  
*“It’s raining heavily”*

### **2. Politeness & Register**

- Teach casual vs. formal English:
  - Casual: *“Can you help me?”*
  - Formal: *“I request your assistance”*
- Role-play everyday situations: asking directions, ordering food, shopping

### **3. Avoid Direct Translation**

- Encourage thinking in English structures rather than translating word-for-word from Urdu

## **Writing Strategies**

---

**Challenges:** Spelling irregularities, Latin alphabet, SOV → SVO transfer

### **1. Spelling Practice**

- Focus on tricky consonants and vowels: *very, school, desk*
- Dictation exercises using minimal pairs

### **2. Guided Writing**

- Start with sentence frames: *I went to \_\_\_ yesterday*
- Build up to paragraphs with word banks

### **3. Direction & Script Awareness**

- Urdu is right-to-left; practice switching to left-to-right for English
- Use lined paper and word maps to guide correct letter usage

## **Speaking & Listening Strategies**

---

### **1. Dialogues & Role Play**

- Everyday scenarios: shopping, traveling, asking questions
- Encourage peer correction and self-correction

### **2. Stress & Intonation**

- Clap or tap syllables to practice stress patterns
- Show meaning differences through stress: / *didn't say he stole the money*

### **3. Listening Exposure**

- Short videos, songs, or podcasts with repetition
- Shadowing exercises: repeat immediately after native speaker

## **Cultural & Confidence-Building**

---

### **1. Acknowledge Dialect Influence**

- Regional accents may affect pronunciation
- Use familiar vocabulary to ease learning

### **2. Safe Speaking Environment**

- Peer groups, pair work, and games reduce anxiety
- Correct gently, focusing on communication first

### **3. Celebrate Multilingual Skills**

- Urdu speakers often know multiple languages (e.g., Hindi, Punjabi, English), which is an advantage

## ✓ Summary

For Urdu speakers, focus on:

- **Pronunciation:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, /ʒ/, vowels, clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, tense, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary/Expression:** idioms, literal translations, register
- **Writing:** spelling, Latin alphabet, direction
- **Interactive practice** is key – role-play, drills, and listening exercises are essential

## Common Urdu phrases



### Greetings & Basics

- السلام علیکم (Assalām-o-Alaikum) → Hello / Peace be upon you
- وعلیکم السلام (Wa-Alaikum-Salaam) → Response to hello / Peace be upon you
- آپ کیسے ہیں؟ (Āp kaise hain?) → How are you? (formal)
- تم کیسے ہو؟ (Tum kaise ho?) → How are you? (informal)
- میں ٹھیک ہوں، شکریہ (Main theek hoon, shukriya) → I'm fine, thank you
- خدا حافظ (Khuda Hafiz) → Goodbye



### Introductions

- آپ کا نام کیا ہے؟ (Āp ka nām kyā hai?) → What is your name?
- میرا نام ... ہے (Mera nām ... hai) → My name is ...
- آپ سے مل کر خوشی ہوئی (Āp se mil kar khushi hui) → Nice to meet you



## Politeness

- شڪريه (Shukriya) → Thank you
- بهت شڪريه (Bohat shukriya) → Thank you very much
- براه مهربانى (Barā-e-meherbānī) → Please
- معاف كيڃيے (Maaf kijiye) → Excuse me / Sorry



## Food & Drink

- پانى (Pānī) → Water
- چائے (Chāy) → Tea
- كافى (Kāfī) → Coffee
- ميں بهوكا هون (Main bhooka hoon) → I'm hungry (male speaker)
- ميں بهوكى هون (Main bhooki hoon) → I'm hungry (female speaker)
- ميں پياسا هون (Main pyaasa hoon) → I'm thirsty (male speaker)
- ميں پياسى هون (Main pyaasi hoon) → I'm thirsty (female speaker)



## Getting Around

---

- ... کہاں ہے؟ (... kahaan hai?) → Where is ...?
- اس کی قیمت کتنی ہے؟ (Is ki qeemat kitni hai?) → How much does it cost?
- دایاں (Daayan) → Right
- بایاں (Baayan) → Left

## Polite Closings

---

- خدا حافظ (Khuda Hafiz) → Goodbye
- دن خوش گزرے (Din khush guzre) → Have a good day
- صبح بخیر (Subah bakhair) → Good morning
- شام بخیر (Shaam bakhair) → Good evening
- شب بخیر (Shab bakhair) → Good night



## **Notes:**

---

- Urdu is written in the **Perso-Arabic script** and is **read right-to-left**.
- Politeness words like “**Barā-e-meherbānī**” (**please**) and “**Maaf kijiye**” (**sorry/excuse me**) are frequently used in daily conversation.
- Pronunciation can vary slightly across regions in Pakistan and India.