

# online letters



Technology is changing the way we do business, and we have witnessed this change in the *Forum* office. Through the years the mail would often bring us typed and handwritten letters from our readers asking a myriad of questions. Today, we may not receive any “letters” for weeks at a time; on the other hand, our e-mail has increased. Our mailbox is filled with an assortment of questions, manuscripts, and comments. We often get e-mail from readers who would like to get the magazine or who used to get the magazine and are not receiving it anymore. We also get e-mail asking how to submit an article to the *Forum* and whether the articles can be submitted via e-mail (yes, they can). And then we get e-mail from readers who have used the *Forum* in class, have suggestions, or just want to comment on the *Forum*. The *Forum* is interested in all queries, and we encourage our readers to e-mail. For those of you who are “technology challenged,” we look forward to seeing your letters by regular mail.

If you have a letter to the editor, suggestion, comment, or manuscript, you can reach us in the following ways:

**e-mail:** [etforum@usia.gov](mailto:etforum@usia.gov)

**mail:**

Editor,

*English Teaching Forum*

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USA

## Torquay or Turkey

Dear Editor,

I wish to share with you the following information on word stress and pronunciation. A recent newspaper reported that an English language student bought a ticket to **Torquay** in southern England when in fact he wanted to go to **Turkey**, several hundred miles away. Similarly, I recall a visit to the former West Germany when I requested a single ticket to a small town named **Balingen** near Stuttgart and was asked in return if I wanted East or West **Berlin**. In London an EFL student of mine asked at an Underground ticket office for a ticket to Tottenham Court Road. The native speaker knows **Road** in place names is the word that is stressed. My student did not, however, realise this at the time and as he asked for Tottenham **Court** Road, the ticket seller asked him “High Street **Kensington?**” The point of this anecdote shows that in the midst of a very noisy Underground station, it was the student’s word stress rather than his actual words that was understood by the listener. In all instances the problem was word stress, showing that correct word stress should not be overlooked.

As language teachers, the obvious question is, “What can we do to improve such miscommunication?” Requesting and giving directions is, after all, a particularly common feature of English classes, and if the student is ever to travel to an English-speaking country, he or she will undoubtedly have to do this activity for real. When learning new words, including names of places, towns, or countries, students also need to learn the correct word stress. Otherwise, such serious misunderstandings, as those recorded here, will continue.

One effective means of teaching vocabulary is to classify new words according to stress patterns as shown by these place names:

<b>Britain</b>	<b>Japan</b>	<b>America</b>
<b>China</b>	<b>Brazil</b>	<b>Colombia</b>
<b>Turkey</b>	<b>Taiwan</b>	<b>South Africa</b>
<b>Thailand</b>	<b>Hong Kong</b>	

I find that rhyme can also be effective in helping students imitate suitable stress patterns. Verse, like limericks, serves as an excellent means of encouraging correct stress and intonation in our students’ speech. Poetry, too, is an example of language that should be read aloud. So, the student can be introduced to such mnemonic devices as “**Torquay**/for me” and “It has never **snowed**/in Tottenham Court **Road**.” The teacher can easily see how pronunciation of all new vocabulary can be taught and practised in a similar way.

I have dwelt specifically on stress in place names, but I feel that problems such as those identified at the beginning of this article underline the importance of teaching correct stress and intonation patterns to our students. The subject could even be extended to include using appropriate speech patterns in asking questions or making suggestions.

Given the fact that a great many of our students are currently learning English to be successful in international business, I think we owe it to them to ensure that they reach their desired destinations.

Sincerely,  
MELVIN TYERS  
*Sultanate of Oman*

We appreciate your sharing your ideas and stories on word stress and pronunciation. Many times miscommunication occurs because of this problem.

## Money or flowers per word

Dear Editor,

I am a reader of the *Forum*, which has been a most helpful tool in improving my teaching methods. Now I feel obliged to return, at least a little bit, of what I have received during my own experience in the trilingual arts of teaching.

As teachers, we know very well that one of the main handicaps we have to face every day is that our students use their mother tongue in class. Recognizing this difficulty, I have wondered throughout the years how to overcome, at least partially, this problem. About four years ago I discovered a solution that I would like to share with your readers.

At the very beginning of my classes, I propose that my students decide on a fine for using their native language in class. Most often they agree on being fined for each word spoken in their mother tongue. The teacher pays double that amount if she/he uses the students' native language. After voting, students select the amount of money to be paid and decide who collects the fines and how those fines are spent.

Since students sometimes feel they need explanations in their own language, they can ask permission to use it

by using such phrases as "May I speak in my native language?" or "How do you say \_\_\_\_ in English?" If students use one of these expressions, they are automatically exempt from paying any fine.

One variation can be to replace the *money* fine with a *flower* fine which can be brought to the classroom.

The result of my experience has been that my students concentrate more on English, and I am increasingly proud to be able to tell my students that I not only teach them English, but I teach them to think in English.

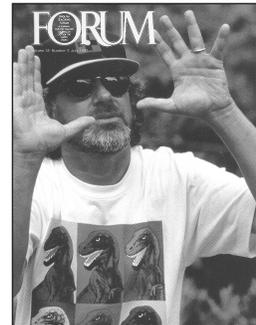
Yours truly,  
ERNESTO CARDENAS  
*Colombia*

Thank you for your practical tip. We hope that this technique will work for other teachers. We especially like the idea of being fined a flower.

## Ideas

Dear Editor,

I would like permission to quote directly from Susan L. Schwartz's article "At the Beginning and the End: Two Memorable Activities" in the July 1997 issue of the *Forum* and, perhaps, to make a copy of it for distribution. I am going to try her ideas in one of my classes here in Bulgaria and may want to promote them to the other TEFL Peace Corps teachers here. The ideas look promising, and I am especially excited about the yearbook idea. Of course all credit will go to Susan.



You've got a great magazine that is very helpful. Thanks.

Sincerely,  
JUDY KNOP

Thank you for writing. You have our permission to use and reproduce the article. Please let us know if the activities are successful. Good luck!