

LESSON 6

IMPROVING DICTION

Introduction

Diction refers to the manner in which thoughts are expressed in words. It includes the choice of words to express ideas and the pronunciation and enunciation of those words. Words chosen for oral communication should be appropriate, clear, and effective.

The meanings of diction and style are similar. Both are concerned with the choice of words. Style, however, focuses on the arrangement of words to form phrases and sentences while diction has to do with the individual words. In this lesson, diction is limited to the proper pronunciation and selection of words. Lesson 7 will examine the proper arrangement of words into sentences and expressions of thought in oral communication.

Articulation was discussed briefly in the previous lesson on voice improvement. Mayer defines it as the process by which speech sounds are formed, separated, joined, and differentiated.¹ Articulation has to do with the sounds as uttered by the speaker, and enunciation has reference to the degree of clarity and distinctness of the sounds from the perspective of the hearer. The two terms are often used interchangeably and, in their broadest sense, they are synonymous with diction.

Articulation refers to the formation of sounds by use of the tongue, teeth, and lips. There are approximately forty-six different sounds in the English language. Combinations of these sounds are joined together to form approximately 550,000 words. Articulated sounds are combined to form words.

Pronunciation concerns the choosing of the correct sounds to make a word and placing the proper accent on the syllable or syllables to be stressed. The correct pronunciation of a word cannot be determined always by rules of phonetics (vocal sounds) because one letter can be pronounced different ways. It is

Diction includes the c _____ of words to express i _____ and the p _____ and e _____ of those words.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Match the following:

- ___ 1. articulation a. combination of sounds to form words and placement of proper accents on syllables of words
- ___ 2. pronunciation b. formation of sounds by the use of the tongue, teeth, and lips

(b-1, a-2)

¹Lyle V. Mayer, Fundamentals of Voice and Diction (Revised edition; Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1968), p. 29.

obvious that "a" has different sounds in the words "late" and "father." An effort should be made to learn and follow rules of pronunciation; however, the great number of exceptions to the rules requires that the pronunciation of unfamiliar words be looked up in a dictionary. Dictionaries record the pronunciation currently in use by the majority of educated people. Many words have more than one way of being pronounced.

The average person has a vocabulary of about 3,000 words. However, the educated, professional person may use up to 20,000 words. The average business man spends more than 70 per cent of his waking hours using words—speaking, listening, and reading. The goal of the minister should be to acquire an adequate vocabulary to understand what he reads; however, he should not conclude that the use of unfamiliar words makes him a better speaker. The success of his messages depends on the audience's understanding of them. He defeats his purpose in speaking if he uses words which are beyond the understanding of his listeners.

Either the Concise Oxford Dictionary or the Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary should be the close companion of every preacher. Books he reads will be understandable only if he takes time to look up the meanings of unfamiliar words. When an illustration or description in a sermon requires him to use an unfamiliar word, he should check the pronunciation of it in his dictionary before he uses it.

Improving Pronunciation

Using your dictionary

Since many words are not spelled phonetically, dictionaries employ a phonetic scheme to enhance proper pronunciation. This scheme is usually explained in the preliminary pages of the dictionary under the heading of pronunciation. The section is usually brief, and the speaker should give sufficient time to studying it in order to be able to use the signs effectively for proper pronunciation. The signs in most dictionaries are diacritical marks, which indicate the sounds of the vowels and where the stress or stresses should be placed on a word. Frequently, the word is respelt to assist in the pronunciation of the consonants.

Pronunciation varies among the countries using the English language. British pronunciation varies at many points from American, especially the accenting of words. Even within a given country, pronunciation may differ from one region to the next. Standard pronunciation is the usage that prevails among the

Underline the reason a minister should strive to develop his vocabulary.

- 1. In order to be a better speaker by using unfamiliar words*
- 2. In order to understand better what he reads*

(2)

Proper pronunciation of words is made easier by one's understanding diacritical and stress markings in a _____.

(dictionary)

educated and cultured people; however, the variations in different areas where English is spoken require that the standard of correct pronunciation remain flexible. The goal of the speaker is to use pronunciation which does not call attention to itself and which makes his thoughts and expressions clear and distinct.

The speaker needs to train his ear to hear the sounds in pronouncing a word. The sounds and accents of words are influenced by the environments of home, neighbourhood, and school. Speech patterns which are developed in homes where the parents have been exposed to more educational opportunities will likely have fewer faults than the speech habits of those from educationally deprived families.

Since the speaker becomes accustomed to hearing himself talk, he must exercise special discipline of concentration in order to discover faults in sounds and accents. His first step is to learn to recognize isolated sounds. He needs to give special attention when listening to persons who are likely to pronounce words correctly—his instructors, radio announcers, etc. Next, he should practise pronouncing correctly words which he habitually mispronounces, making certain that he gives the proper sounds to the letters which have been the sources of his errors. The use of a tape recorder, by which a person can hear his voice more objectively, is beneficial.

Pronouncing vowels

Letters of the alphabet are divided into vowels and consonants. The five vowels are sounds which require the resonance passages to be relatively open; therefore, the distinctive quality of the sound depends on the shape of the resonator. When the breath stream is stopped, narrowed, or diverted by the articulators, the sound is called a consonant. Vowel sounds are distinguished from one another by the way in which changes in the position of the tongue, lips, and jaw modify the shape of the resonator and its opening.

Since the tones of vowels flow relatively freely through the open mouth, their changes, duration, loudness, pitch, and quality are more apparent to the listener than the consonants are. Consonants appear to stop and start the vowels. The vowel sound must blend in to the preceding and following consonants. Since vowels are voiced with relatively little obstruction, their pronunciation determines the quality of the voice.

The movements of the articulators vary the oral cavity's size, shape, and opening for each vowel sound. Vowels may be classified according to the place or position of the articulators forming them. The front, central, or back part of the tongue may be most actively involved in producing each vowel. The

The pronunciation used by the educated and cultured people in a given area is called the _____ of that area.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

In order to overcome poor pronunciation, a speaker must:

- 1. Listen carefully to himself to _____ faults in sounds and accents;*
- 2. Learn to _____ isolated sounds;*
- 3. Pay special attention to the _____ of persons who are likely to pronounce correctly.*

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Identify the following statements as definitions of vowels or consonants.

- _____ 1. Sounds which require the resonance passages to be relatively open.*
- _____ 2. Sounds which require the breath stream to be stopped, narrowed or diverted by the articulators.*

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Three parts of the tongue which are most actively involved in producing vowels are the f _____, c _____, and b _____.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

front of the tongue may be positioned high in the mouth. In saying "meet," the front of the tongue is high in the mouth. In "mate" the front of the tongue is positioned between the roof and the bottom of the mouth, and the front of the tongue touches the floor of the mouth in saying "mat." Vowels also require various degrees of lip rounding.

The five vowels are considered generally to have sixteen sounds. Six of the sounds are formed by the front part of the tongue. The sounds of e in eat and i in it differ slightly, but both are formed in the front part of the mouth with the tongue in a raised position. The tongue drops slightly to form the a in ate and the e in egg. The a in at and the a in am are formed with the tongue on the floor of the mouth cavity.

No vowel sounds are made with the central part of the tongue against the roof of the mouth. Three central vowel sounds which are formed in the medial position of the tongue are er in wider, ir in bird, and a in about. A central vowel formed in the lower position is u in up.

The back vowels, those sounds formed on the back part of the tongue, with the tongue in a raised position, are oo (û) in moon and book. The o in obey is a back vowel made in the medial position of the tongue. While the back part of the tongue is in a lower position, the a in all, the o in nought and the a (ah) in calm are formed.

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) contains hundreds of symbols for representing various sounds. Sixteen of the vowel sounds are important to know. In the following chart, the first column lists the pertinent IPA vowel symbols. The second and third columns list the approximate Oxford and Webster dictionary signs. A key word, which illustrates the sound, is in the fourth column, and other examples are listed in the fifth column. It should be noted that the vowels in some of the words which illustrate the sounds are different. No attempt was made to organize the sounds according to the place of articulation. The student will find it beneficial to memorize the key word which illustrates each of the vowel symbols in the dictionary he uses.

Diphthongs have been included with the vowels in the following chart. A diphthong is a very short, stable vowel followed directly by a glide to or through another vowel position. The a, i, o, and u have initial short vowel sounds which are followed by gliding movements to other vowel positions without cessation of voice. The diphthong sounds are:

- (1) ai pronounced as a long i in aisle
and a long a in aid
- (2) oy or oi pronounced as the oi in oil

Positions of the tongue which may be used in forming vowels are:

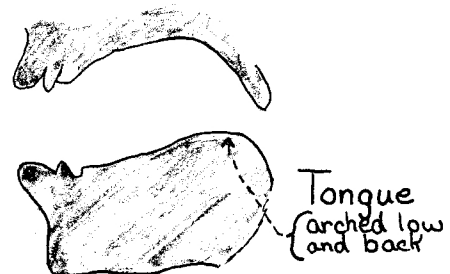
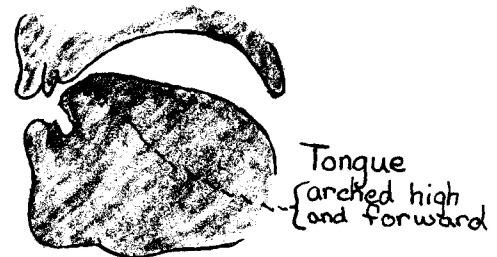
h _____, m _____, and l _____.

(high, medial, low)

Underline the correct number.

The five vowels are considered generally to have (20, 14, 16) sounds.

(16)



A very short, stable vowel followed directly by a glide to or through another vowel position is a _____.

(diphthong)

- (3) au pronounced as aw in bawl (cf. maul).
- (4) ou pronounced as ow in cow (cf. bound).
- (5) ei pronounced as the ay in day or the ei in veil.

Chart of Vowel Sounds

I. P. A.	OXFORD	MERRIAM WEBSTER	KEY WORD	PRACTICE WORDS
æ	ă	a	<u>at</u>	<u>plaid</u> , <u>sad</u> , <u>sat</u>
ɑ	ah	ă	<u>alms</u>	<u>ah</u> , <u>alms</u> , <u>father</u>
ɔ		ó	<u>jaw</u>	<u>all</u> , <u>ought</u> , <u>saw</u>
e	ā	ā	<u>ate</u>	<u>ape</u> , <u>day</u> , <u>gauge</u>
ɛ	ě	e	<u>set</u>	<u>ebb</u> , <u>many</u> , <u>steady</u>
i	ē	ē	<u>eat</u>	<u>be</u> , <u>meet</u> , <u>tea</u>
ɪ	ĭ	i	<u>it</u>	<u>pity</u> , <u>sieve</u> , <u>sit</u>
o	ō	ō	<u>obey</u>	<u>oasis</u> , <u>omit</u> , <u>remote</u>
ʌ	ŭ	ə	<u>cut</u>	<u>flood</u> , <u>sum</u> , <u>under</u>
ə		ə	<u>ahead</u>	<u>among</u> , <u>connect</u> , <u>kitten</u>
u	oo	ú	<u>cook</u>	<u>look</u> , <u>wolf</u> , <u>would</u>
u	oo	ü	<u>tool</u>	<u>fruit</u> , <u>ooze</u> , <u>who</u>
ɜ ɝ	īr, ūr	ər	<u>burn</u>	<u>deter</u> , <u>ermine</u> , <u>herd</u>
ɝ	ēr	ər	<u>ever</u>	<u>pert</u> , <u>motor</u> , <u>singer</u>
b	ō		<u>moss</u>	<u>of</u> , <u>stop</u> , <u>wander</u>
ai	ī	ī	<u>ride</u>	<u>die</u> , <u>isle</u> , <u>while</u>
au	ou	au	<u>owl</u>	<u>brow</u> , <u>out</u> , <u>now</u>
ɔɪ	oy	oi	<u>boy</u>	<u>joy</u> , <u>noise</u> , <u>oyster</u>
ju	ū	yū	<u>use</u>	<u>cute</u> , <u>few</u> , <u>you</u>

Write in a key word to illustrate the following vowel sounds. Refer to your dictionary if necessary.

- ā _____
- ă _____
- ah _____
- ē _____
- ě _____
- ī _____
- ĭ _____
- ō _____
- ŭ _____
- oo _____
- oo _____
- ū _____
- ū _____
- īr, ūr _____
- ou _____
- oy _____

Some of the vowel sounds which give difficulty are the i and the e in did and dead. The tongue positions for the two sounds are somewhat alike, but the tongue is higher and further forward for the i than for the e sound. Try pronouncing the following pairs of words with the tongue higher for the first word: did-dead, bit-bet, gym-gem, rid-red, lid-led, sill-cell, kin-ken, pit-pet, hid-head, pick-peck.

Sometimes no distinction is made between the short oo sound in cook, look, and wood and the long oo sound in cool and tool. Notice two o sounds in the following statement:

He would have wooded Cooky Cooper
if she hadn't pushed him into the pool.

In which word, did or dead, is the tongue position higher and further forward? _____

(did)

Pronouncing consonants

There are 21 consonants in the English language but 25 sounds. Most of the consonants have only one sound; therefore, they give little difficulty except in certain combinations. The g has three sounds. When g is followed by an e, i, or y, it is pronounced like j: gem, giant, gypsy. The same sound appears in soldier even though the letter g does not. Sometimes the g has a zh sound as in beige and rouge. The same sound appears in casual and vision. The most frequent sound for g is that in gong, ghost, plague, and dagger.

Consonants followed by an h add five additional sounds to the English language. Pronounce the following words and observe the different sounds of the consonant-h combination: think, them, shed, church, and while.

The ng adds another sound to the regular consonants. Notice this sound in such words as ring, king, bank, single.

Sometimes faulty pronunciation occurs in confusing the v and f, and trouble often occurs in distinguishing between the v and b. Practise distinguishing between the following pairs of words: vent-bent, feel-veal, fan-van-ban, vote-boat, vest-best, vein-bane.

Errors are often made in pronouncing the th and the d. One quite often hears "deze, dem, and tought" for "these, them, and thought." Practise saying the following pairs of words: thin-tin, thought-taught, thigh-tie, through-true, lather-ladder, oath-oat, worthy-wordy, three-free, thaw-thought, wreath-reef. The s sound after the th is often difficult to pronounce. Practise the following words: fifths, sevenths, faiths, deaths, depths, months, paths.

Sometimes the v and w are confused. Listen carefully as you say the words in the questions below and the pairs of words which follow:

Will Thelma Weems give Wilber West's vest to the wet vet? Veil-wail, veal-weal-feel, vein-wain-fain, felt-weld, vent-went, fine-wine, fee-we.

The sounds for wh and w often create confusion. Pronounce carefully the following pairs of words: wheel-weal, whine-wine, whale-wail, whet-wet.

The combination of two successive consonants is often difficult to pronounce. The l is especially difficult to sound when followed by certain other consonants, and it should not be pronounced in some words. Try pronouncing the following words and consult your dictionary if you are uncertain of some: calf, half, bold, told, elf, elm, milk, bulk, help, scalp, falls, halls.

The consonant "g" has _____ sounds. Words which illustrate the different sounds are:

_____, _____, _____.

(three, gym, beige, ghost)

Some consonant sounds which give difficulty in pronunciation are:

v and _____, _____

th and _____

s after _____

v and _____

(f, b, d, th, w)

Selecting Appropriate Words

The role of imagination

Sermons usually contain much descriptive material. Words are used to create mental pictures in the minds of hearers, and the vividness of those pictures will depend on the imagination of the speaker. Imagination is the ability of the speaker to visualize a scene or event which is separated from him by time or space. The more vivid his mental picture, the more animated will be his description of it. Speakers who are not imaginative are more likely to have dull voices and colourless descriptive words.

Two thousand years ago Quintilian acknowledged the value of mental imagery. He recognized the importance of imagination by which the descriptions of absent objects are presented so distinctly to the mind that they seem to be before us.

Whoever shall best conceive such images will have the greatest power in moving the feelings....If I am to make a complaint that a man has been murdered, shall I not bring before my eyes everything that is likely to have happened when the murder occurred? Shall not the assassin suddenly sally forth? Shall not the other tremble, cry out, supplicate, or flee? Shall I not behold the one striking, the other falling? Shall not the blood, the paleness, and last gasp of the expiring victim, present itself fully to my mental view? Hence, will result that power, ... which seems not so much to narrate as to exhibit; and our feelings will be moved not less strongly than if we were actually present at the affair of which we are speaking.²

The importance of concrete words

Imagination enables the speaker to see the event as if it were taking place in his presence. To convey the mental picture to the audience, the speaker must use concrete, specific, and vivid terms, rather than abstract and general terms. Concrete terminology describes objects which can be interpreted by the five senses. Philosophical terminology is abstract; that is, it is not addressed to the five senses but to the mind. Few audiences are geared to listening to discourses dealing with abstract subjects. Biographical illustrations gain the attention of audiences

²Quintilian's Institutes of Oratory, Vol. I of Bohn's Classical Library (London: George Bell and Sons, 1887), p. 427.

A speaker's ability to visualize a scene or event which is separated from him by time or space is called _____.

(imagination)

Concrete terminology describes objects which can be interpreted by the _____.

(five senses)

because they deal with objects which can be conceived through sense perception. Good speakers employ picture-painting words which stir the senses.

In the following description taken from Hamlin Garland's story, "Among the Corn Rows," notice that the author was not satisfied to stop with the first sentence which states that "a corn field in July is a sultry place." In his description, he aims at our sense imagery by appealing to our senses of sight, hearing, smell, temperature, and touch.

A corn field in July is a sultry place. The soil is hot and dry: the wind comes across the lazily-murmuring leaves laden with a warm, sickening smell drawn from the rapidly growing, broad-flung banners of the corn. The sun, nearly vertical, drops a flood of dazzling light upon the field over which the cool shadows run, only to make the heat seem more intense.

Julia Peterson, faint with hunger, was toiling back and forth between the corn-rows, holding the handles of the double-shovel corn-plough, while her little brother Otto rode the steaming horse. Her heart was full of bitterness, her face flushed with heat and her muscles aching with fatigue.... The dust rose under her feet, and as she was wet with perspiration it soiled her till, with a woman's instinctive cleanliness, she shuddered; her heart throbbed dangerously.³

The necessity of accurate words

Words are vehicles to communicate concepts. Words chosen in speech must describe accurately the speaker's mental picture so the hearers can formulate the same mental picture. Words denote certain meanings and connote other meanings. The word "tree" literally means or denotes "a woody perennial plant having a single main axis or stem." The connotation of a word refers to the reader's emotional response to it and the association the word carries with it. A tree denotes a woody stem but it connotes shade, coolness, beauty, endurance, and shelter. If the meaning of a word is understood by the audience, the denotative use of it is not endangered. However, connotative use may be

³Quoted by Harrison M. Karr, Your Speaking Voice (Glendale, Calif.: Griffin-Patterson Publishing Co., 1938), pp. 34-35.

Why do good speakers employ picture-painting words?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Match the following:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| ___ 1. Denotation
refers to | a. The emotional response
to a word and the
association which the
word carries. |
| ___ 2. Connotation
refers to | b. The literal meaning
of a word. |

(b, a)

misunderstood if the audience does not have a common emotional experience with the speaker with regard to the object referred to by the word. For example, "as good as ice cream" connotes something tasty and desirable to most people. To the person who may have eaten ice cream while sick and become nauseated, it connotes the opposite to something appetizing and brings the response of repulsion. The connotative use of words is excellent for illustrations, but the speaker must be certain that the audience understands the connotations he uses.

Of the half million words in the unabridged dictionary, many are almost synonyms but have slight differences in meaning. A good speaker is careful to use words which express accurately his thoughts. The following words are similar but not synonymous: ignorant, illiterate, unlettered, and uneducated. Is the audience which has become bored with the abstract and inaccurate language of the speaker described best as disinterested, indifferent, or unconcerned? If a wrong act is committed by a member of a church, should the preacher condone, excuse, forgive, or pardon the person's action? The speaker must have a clear understanding of the concept he desires to communicate before he will be able to select accurate words to convey it.

Some words sound almost alike but have different meanings. Care should be taken not to confuse the approximate homonyms. When a shower of rain comes on Sunday morning just preceding the worship service and only the children of the Sunday School hour are present, should the preacher adapt, adept, or adopt his sermon? If his sermon is on the Cross of Christ, will he likely refer to calvary or cavalry? Will the climatic or climactic conditions affect the attendance at the morning service? With only children present, should the preacher's sermon reach its climatic or climactic point quicker than usual? If one of the children became ill as a result of getting wet in going home from the worship service, would the doctor likely prescribe or proscribe medicine to accelerate his recovery?

Some words have more than one adjectival form. Distinguish between the differences in meaning in the following terms:

1. A changeable personality, a changing personality, a changed personality.
2. A hated person, a hateful person.
3. An intelligible writer, an intelligent writer.
4. An informed teacher, an informative teacher.

Underline the correct word.

The words "ignorant, illiterate, unlettered, uneducated" are (synonymous, similar).

(similar)

List four pairs of words that have the same root but different suffixes which give the words distinct meanings.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

(changing-changed; hated, hateful; intelligible-intelligent; informed-informative.)

Building Vocabulary

By this time, you may have concluded that your leisure hours should be spent in reading a dictionary. Actually, little progress can be made in building a vocabulary by selecting words arbitrarily from the dictionary. New words are remembered when they are related to an area of interest and knowledge. The easiest way of expanding your vocabulary is by acquiring groups of words from new experiences. In learning to drive a car, a number of new words will become necessary. Every book which is read in a new field of thought and study will add new words to one's vocabulary. A person who knows music will have words in his vocabulary which the non-musical person may not have. The study of biology or sociology will introduce numerous words.

Most people's recognizant and active vocabularies are not the same. The average person will recognize many more words in reading than he will use in conversation. It is important that he understand accurately the meaning of less familiar words when he reads. A good dictionary should be available at all times, and he should take time to look up the meanings of unfamiliar words. Using a dictionary requires time and discipline, but its use is essential for the person who desires to increase his education. By looking up words of which he is uncertain and by writing their definitions, the studious speaker's recognizant vocabulary can gradually become his active vocabulary.

Progress can be made in building a vocabulary by studying prefixes and suffixes. Space does not permit the listing and defining of either in this lesson; however, almost any available book on English grammar will have a section on vocabulary improvement, which will include prefixes and suffixes. Every speaker should devote some time each week to the improvement of diction.

There is no magical or easy way to improve one's word power. "A good vocabulary is the incidental product of years of serious reading, or listening to intelligent talk, and of seeking to speak and write forcefully and clearly."⁴

⁴Glenn Leggett, C. David Mead, and William Charvat, Handbook for Writers (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1951), p. 177.

After reading all of the text on this page, write four suggestions for improving your vocabulary.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

(Increase vocabulary through new experiences.
Learn the meanings of less familiar words.
Learn the meanings of prefixes and suffixes.
Be a serious reader and listen to intelligent talk.)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. What is diction? _____

2. Distinguish between articulation and pronunciation. _____

3. Why should a minister strive to develop his vocabulary? _____

4. Define standard pronunciation. _____
5. How can a speaker overcome poor pronunciation? _____

6. How do vowels differ from consonants? _____

7. Name three parts of the tongue which are most actively involved in producing vowels and give their three possible positions. _____

8. Explain how to distinguish between the pronunciation of did and dead. _____

9. Give three words which illustrate the three different sounds of g. _____
10. List the consonant sounds which give the greatest difficulty in pronunciation. _____

11. Define imagination. _____
12. What is meant by concrete terminology? _____
13. Distinguish between denotation and connotation. _____

14. By using a dictionary, distinguish between meanings of the following similar words:

Ignorant _____

Illiterate _____

Unlettered _____

Uneducated _____

15. Give four suggestions for improving one's vocabulary. _____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3):

1. From your personal dictionary, list the phonetic scheme for each long and short vowel and one word illustrating each sound. This list may be written by the learning activity on page 99 opposite the chart of vowel sounds. Find the phonetic scheme in your own dictionary for each of the vowel sounds.
2. Outline the rules for accenting words according to the dictionary you use.

Advanced activity (Level 3):

1. Review your book on English grammar and write an essay entitled "How to Improve One's Vocabulary."
2. Write a brief descriptive essay using concrete words, and write notes in the margin to indicate which sense is appealed to.

Seminar Discussion

1. Distinguish between articulation, enunciation, and pronunciation. Practise the pronunciation of the vowels on pages 98 and 99.
2. Practise the pronunciation of the following consonants (see page 100): g, five combinations of h, ng, v-f-b, wh-w, and the difficult combinations of l.
3. Ask level 3 students to read their brief essays on concrete words, and have the other students identify to which sense the concrete words appeal.
4. Give the denotative and connotative meanings of the words water, heat, green, and the name of your country.
5. What is meant by imagination in preaching and give illustrations if possible.
6. Ask level 3 students to share their suggestions for improving vocabulary.