

## Saying your name clearly: first impressions count

An international TA was puzzled by the fact that so many people had trouble with her name. Every time she gave her name (e.g., getting her ID photo, contacting the HUB, signing up for the ITA test, scheduling the installation of FIOS at her apartment), people asked her to spell her name. This did not happen in her own country and she wondered about the inability of Americans to spell names. Even when she spelled her name, people had trouble separating her first from last name and often misunderstood certain letters.

She had just as much trouble getting people to pronounce her name correctly. Neither her students nor her fellow graduate students could say her name (one office mate actually pronounced it in a way that sounded like an obscene word in her language). She finally decided that “Americans are just no good with foreign names” and asked people to call her by a popular English name, “Monica”.

If this sounds familiar, it is important to learn techniques to communicate your name clearly for both native English speakers and the many international students on campus who do not speak your native language. Saying your name clearly is a fundamental skill and is especially important for ITAs. The first day of class is crucial; the way you introduce yourself to your students can either build a bridge or create a barrier. The first impression should be that your English is clear and understandable – and introducing your name appropriately is an effective way to improve that impression.

### Here are some tips for saying your name:

1. Take responsibility for clarifying your name. If others cannot understand or say your name, the fault is *yours*.
2. Slow down. You cannot use the same speed you use with native speakers of your language. Speakers of other languages need time to hear each syllable and to understand unfamiliar stress patterns and phonemes. Say each syllable clearly (e.g., *Bar-ROCK / O-BAH-mah*).
3. Write both your name and, if needed, a phonetic transcription (especially if the spelling of your name in English is very different from the pronunciation). For example:
  - Xue (Chinese) = “Shoe-way” (and don’t expect the correct tones)
  - Koc (Turkish) = “Coach”
  - Juanita (Spanish) = “Wan-nee-tah”
4. Expect to spell your name frequently. In the US, there are multiple spellings for many names, and the variety of names is overwhelming. Most US speakers understand the need to spell names and do so routinely. When spelling your name:
  - Slow down, and pause between syllables (e.g., *An-drew Car-neg-ie*)
  - Clearly indicate the first name followed by the second name
  - Use well known words to clarify any letters that are difficult for you to pronounce clearly (e.g., “P” as in *Pittsburgh*, “B” as in *baseball*)
5. Do not expect people to be able to repeat your name with the exact phonemes, stress or tones that a native speaker would use. Be willing to accept pronunciation that is “good enough” (not: “*Oh, that’s okay (with a giggle)*”, but “*That’s right*”).