

AmeriSpeak Labs™
Speaking Fluency Experts



Speak Easy!
AI-Assisted American English
Accent Training Course

INTRODUCES



**Mastering the American
English Accent
with David Alexander**

WITH LITTLE-KNOWN SECRETS AND TIPS!



Table of Contents



By David Alexander Palahnuk - native California Boy
Get into the groove! Let the music and the rhythm move and carry you through...

Introduction.....	2
How This Course Will Help You to Sound More American.....	3
The Two Parts of Achieving the American Accent.....	4
Lesson 1 - Problems and Challenges.....	5
Lesson 2 - Why it's Easy.....	6
Pronunciation and Accent.....	7
Lesson 3 - Introduction to Vowels and Consonants.....	8
Lesson 4 - The “Music of English” (Stress, Rhythm and Intonation).....	9
Lesson 5 - Mastering Individual Sounds.....	11
Vowels in American English.....	12
Consonants in American English.....	14
Lesson 6 - Stress, UN-Stress, Rhythm and Intonation.....	16
Stress.....	16
Rhythm (or, UN-Stress in a Sentence).....	17
Intonation.....	19
Lesson 7 - Practice and Mastery.....	20

How to Master the American English Accent

INTRODUCTION

Why do most people born outside of the US have trouble copying the genuine American accent they wish to adopt? There are a few reasons, yet none of these reasons can keep you from learning how to sound just like a native speaker of North American English IF you desire it strongly enough. This is simply because, as with any skill or talent, those who possess them deeply **wanted** to master them more than they feared they would fail. They **aspire to have it more** than any other ambition. They **envision** what it would be like to master that particular skill or talent, and make a clear mental decision to develop it. This desire drives the commitment that breeds behavioral changes which develop into the necessary disciplines (actions) that result in mastery. Anyone with a talent has it simply because they want it enough to take the necessary steps to achieve it.

*You may not realize it fully, but your purchase of this course already **PROVES** your commitment and your desire to possess this talent (skill). You have decided, you have demonstrated (taken steps) - now, just keep believing, keep taking steps - don't give up - and you **WILL** reach your goal! The only way you can fail is if you give up.*

[CLICK HERE OR IMAGE BELOW TO WATCH INTRO VIDEO!](#)



How This Course Will Help You to Sound More American

Luckily, it's **not at all** difficult or overwhelming to learn what you need to learn to sound more like a native American English speaker, because this course will:

- 1) **Reveal everything you need to be made aware of and that you need to learn.** We help you by addressing the two most important areas that need to be strengthened in you:
 - a) Awareness and knowledge building: You don't know what you don't know when it comes to hearing the American accent, so you can't "listen out for" (identify) what to imitate, if you can't realize what you're hearing.
 - b) Listening and Imitation Accuracy strengthening: Going over the basic individual sounds and having you listen to yourself as you repeat them will help you to become more acute in your listening and more accurate in your imitating ability. This also happens, even more powerfully, once we move on to Part 2.

2) **Practice everything you've been made aware of and have learned.** In this part, through the use of specialized reading and shadowing exercises, your speaking accent will become transformed. Learning to "hear" (feel) the stress, rhythm and intonation of American English is similar to learning how to dance! You first learn to listen to the rhythm of the music, then you dance with your instructor, as he/she leads you in moving to the music, until you "get it;" until everything "gels," and it becomes "second nature" to you - at which point you no longer need an instructor. This, of course, doesn't mean you no longer need to practice, nor does it mean that you should get rid of your instructor...

But, at a certain point, you won't "require" an instructor, because you will have learned how to "hear" the music with greater acuity, and be able to ascertain with greater accuracy how well you have "followed" or copied the "dance" of the song. In the case of spoken language learning, that point is once you're skilled enough to use your listening ability and articulators (your mouth; tongue, jaw, vocal chords, etc.) to properly imitate sounds you hear when you're listening to native American English speakers speak.

The Two Parts of Achieving the American Accent

Developing a different accent requires the same simple steps as it does to learn any skill or to develop any talent. In the case of mastering the American English “sound,” what needs to be perfected are two fundamental things - achieving proper pronunciation of individual sounds and mastering its signature “rocking and rolling” rhythm. Attaining the choppy/punchy swaying rhythm of English, in its most authentic form, requires the proper execution of **stress** and **UN-stress** in words and sentences. Mastery of these two elements is, in fact, the “code” that most American ESL students can't seem to “break,” because they're stuck in thinking that mastering individual sounds is the only thing to “crack” (achieve).

Learning all that needs to be learned can **only** be achieved through an ample amount of desire, practice, guidance and trust. Because only with enough desire and trust will you be **willing** to practice enough to achieve mastery. But, where do you get the practice and how can you get the feedback you need to stay on track? This is where this course comes to save the day!

LESSON 1 - PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

Even before we talk about the difference between English and other languages, we must touch on some important problems that arise at the outset of learning English as an ESL student.

Problem Beliefs and Attitudes

- > Belief that it's easy to learn to sound like a native with little or no practice and focus and/or refusing to get help because of that belief.
- > Belief that it's nearly impossible to sound like a native and refusing to try because of that belief.
- > Not being willing to learn or refusing to be patient enough to sharpen focus and attention.
- > Not being willing to work and “sacrifice” - pay the price of time and attention - to strengthen our listening skill.

Problem of Resisting the Replacement of Old Speaking Habits and Methods with New Ones

English is not like most languages on earth. But, learning it is not much different than learning, for example, a new dance step. The problem is not everyone is willing to put in the effort to master new things. As with all skills and most talents, learning to speak like a native only happens when this skill is properly developed through focused listening to learn the new sound patterns, and practicing until they've been mastered and feel natural. There IS no other way, but the “hard” way to master any skill. It takes time and effort; there is no escaping this. There are no shortcuts. But, when you want something passionately, it's a small price to pay!

Learning the basics of pronunciation; getting the vowels and consonants sounding as close to how a native says them as possible, is, indeed, crucial, and can be a challenge in itself because so many of us have developed and maintained inaccurately pronounced sounds - in words and in the speaking-out of phrases and sentences. These imperfections have turned into often decades-long habits; we all know old habits are not-so-easy to change.

Some problems that ESL students face, often stem from the fundamental differences in language types. Many languages are syllable-timed, for instance. What this means is that at the very foundation of the language - the timing and rhythm - syllable-timed languages vary greatly from stress-timed languages in how the language is spoken out. English is one of many Germanic languages, all of which are **stress-timed**. Particularly in English, strong STRESS and UNSTRESS are at the core of its dynamic timing, which is responsible for its trademark rhythm.

LESSON 2 - WHY IT'S EASY

But the very most important aspect of mastering the American accent lies, as mentioned above, in the proper way we use stress, which leads to the signature rhythm of American English, where intonation also begins to develop. Hmm... If stress (and unstress...) is like a BEAT, and rhythm and intonation are both elements found in songs, wouldn't learning English be similar to learning music? It very much is.

Learning Proper Spoken English is Like Learning Music and Dance

Is it really difficult learning these seemingly abstract aspects, or might it take decades to master the North American English accent, as a non-native? No and No. Can this course really help? **Absolutely**. Why? Because, learning stress, rhythm and intonation is similar to the effortlessness of learning and remembering a new song you just heard on the radio, simply because you liked it so much. The only difference with English is that its accent has more facets than does a simple song, which has fewer elements to learn. Other than this, it's the same process, and requires the same relaxed, trusting attitude.

When we hear a song that we like, we don't **think** about it, we don't even **consider** being analytical about it; trying to **figure out** the intricacies of the song. When learning a song we hear for the first time, for instance, we exclude all conscious thinking. We don't delve, we **DIVE** - right into the music - forgetting everything else about how difficult it might have seemed it would be to remember each detail; each note, each rhythmic change; the chorus, the bridge, the harmonies, etc. Instead of **studying**, we just **ENJOY**. We don't think about it, we **just trust** in our innate ability to naturally learn a song - and almost **become one** - with it.

This is very much what it's like to learn American English, which has many of the elements of music - it has a **beat, rhythm and intonation**. And it's this aspect of English that evades most ESL learners. They tend to focus on pronunciation only, mastering individual sounds - many times being completely unaware of the existence and importance of stress, rhythm and intonation. They end up being left wondering why they still have a noticeable foreign accent when they speak! In this course, we'll address the two parts that must be practiced until mastery is achieved - Pronunciation of individual sounds AND stress, rhythm and intonation. Don't worry. It won't take forever, because this course will help you to learn it the easiest way possible.

PRONUNCIATION AND ACCENT

Pronunciation is actually two things - it's:

- a) the way we “pronounce” (say) individual sounds - the vowels and the consonants - and
- b) how we stress (which syllables and their intensity...) and UN-stress (reduce) syllables in words. Both affect the overall sound of words; the overall pronunciation of the language.

In American English, the **strength** (intensity) of **stressing**, in terms of how **punchy** these syllables are accentuated, as well as the intensity at which the un-stressed syllables are **reduced**, profoundly affects the way words sound when they are articulated.

Pronunciation Symbol Legend	
<p>In this course, I use my own sets of characters to represent individual sounds, <u>based on the American English Standard professional speakers use</u>. I have indicated words attributed to these particular individual sounds, to help you pronounce them like native speakers do:</p>	
VOWELS	CONSONANTS
<p><u>ae</u> = bad, sad, dad, answer, happy, after <u>eh</u> = bed, dead, said, envy, center, bender <u>ah</u> = father, policy, process, college, dollar <u>aw</u> = saw, dawn, cause, sought, awesome <u>uh</u> = fun, money, cousin, government <u>ih</u> = bit, lick, sit, dint, situated, individual <u>ee</u> = seed, deed, lead, bead, field, feeling <u>oo</u> = food, mule, fuel, rule, student, moon <u>'h</u> = foot, look, cook, pull, bull, shook <u>ou</u> = old, boat, home, most, both, notice <u>oi</u> = boil, foil, boy, toy, loiter, spoil, recoil <u>ei</u> = stay, away, mistake, fake, relate, sail <u>ai</u> = like, time, rhyme, fight, bike, smile <u>au</u> = town, clown, loud, about, gown, down <u>ai'r</u> = liar, tire, fire, wire, hire, retire <u>ahr</u> = scar, star, retard, regard, far, garden <u>ehr</u> = scare, tear, wear, fair, heir, despair <u>ihr</u> = beard, near, sneer, weird, volunteer <u>ohr</u> = four, more, tore, soar, door, bore <u>oor</u> = poor, you're, tour, lure, pure, cure <u>'R</u> = first, turn, herb, word, surge, earnest <u>'r</u> = better, actor, dollar, father, capture</p>	<p><u>s</u> = see, saw, bustle, kiss, sit, basket, sun <u>z</u> = zebra, zany, zealous, zoo, busy, muzzle <u>t</u> = tip, top, trap, stopped, helped, return <u>d</u> = drop, dead, dad, battle, saddle, better <u>th</u> = thanks, thought, south, mouth, think <u>dh</u> = this, that, those, these, them, smooth <u>sh</u> = should, sheet, shame, shout, share <u>ch</u> = chisel, chair, charming, challenge <u>zh</u> = measure, entourage, garage, massage <u>dg (j)</u> = age, message, magic, jaw, jeopardy <u>y</u> = yellow, yank, yam, yummy, yard, yolk <u>p</u> = stop, perfect, paternal, precious, apple <u>b</u> = bus, boy, bake, broil, membrane, dab <u>f</u> = fair, fare, fat, fabulous, feeble, ferocious <u>v</u> = vane, vulnerable, vivacious, variety, vie <u>k</u> = king, kill, kind, car, can, cap, cake, book <u>g</u> = great, goat, grasp, go, goal, give, gasp <u>w</u> = why, went, wild, winner, whiner, winter <u>l</u> = laugh, lotto, lanky, lemon, ludicrous, bell <u>r</u> = rain, rot, rope, radio, redeem, ridicule <u>h</u> = hat, hoe, hope, harbor, hospital, humor <u>m</u> = man, meat, mule, metaphor, mechanic <u>n</u> = no, nag, neat, notice, nomad, normal <u>ng</u> = ring, singing, dancing, playing, hanging</p>

LESSON 3 - INTRODUCTION TO VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

It takes becoming acutely aware of the proper pronunciation of **individual sounds** and practicing them, to fix them. Learning how individual vowels and consonants are **supposed to sound like**, and why you may be having trouble achieving accurate pronunciation, is extremely important. After all, **English has as many as 23 vowel sounds**, depending on who you ask, and non-English languages have been known to have as few as 2 to 7. With this many vowels, certain American English vowels can be quite difficult to distinguish from others and, for non-natives, are often confused with one another, leading to potentially devastating misunderstandings of what's being said. In some cases, especially with the “long e,” and “short e,” and the “eh” and “ae” vowels, we can end up saying embarrassing things!

Below are some examples of how easily it is to be confused with similar sounding vowels:

<u>EE (long e)</u>	<u>IH (short e)</u>	<u>EH</u>	<u>AE</u>
feet	fit	bed	bad
seek	sick	men	man
leak	lick	send	sand
beat	bit	bend	band
seat	sit	lend	land
deep	dip	end	and
sheet	shit	said	sad
beach	bitch	rent	rant

Actually, the list goes on and on and on and on! It should be obvious, then, that if these two sets of vowels get confused with each other, there can be a serious communication breakdown. We'll be working on getting you aware of the differences, so you can learn to separate the sounds further from each other and cease to confuse them or pronounce them too similarly to each other.

Consonants, too, can be confusing for a variety of similar reasons. In fact, there are some consonants in American English that often don't get learned properly and are substituted for similar sounding consonants. The two “th” sounds are often replaced with “s” and “z,” and the “zh” sound, often found in words with a French origin (i.e. garage, massage...) get replaced with the standard “dg/j/g” sound. And, finally, there's the “ng” sound, which sometimes gets pronounced just like the common “n” consonant.

Because American English is all about smoothness and efficiency, voiceless sounds like “s” are often pronounced like the voiced “z,” and the “t” to a “d,” for example. This is just some of what happens when we vocalize the language. [Americans tend to leave their vocal cords vibrating as they speak, which causes voiceless sounds to be pronounced as voiced counterparts.](#) Drastic reduction (and replacement) of sounds is common in spoken English.

LESSON 4 - THE “MUSIC” of ENGLISH: (STRESS, RHYTHM & INTONATION)

Understanding the “music” of English - the “secret sauce” of sounding more like a native speaker of North American English; a part that doesn't get addressed, taught or learned by the majority of ESL learners - is, arguably, the most important aspect of sounding like a native speaker. Most students learn grammar and vocabulary, but don't get “clued in” to advanced accent training by a native speaker who's an expert in teaching it.

Without advanced training, where timing, rhythm and tone is emphasized, an ESL student could, perhaps, “communicate” (somewhat) with English speakers, but would continue to sound non-native to them. Sometimes, these students, bereft of the full course of training, would struggle to be understood or to understand, because they haven't had their focus narrowed to these very crucial aspects of the North American English accent. What's not commonly known is that learning this is every bit as important as the correct pronunciation of individual vowels and consonants.

Even if you've mastered individual sounds, you will continue to sound like a foreigner, until you also master how we stress and UN-stress - how we use rhythm and intonation like an American. Not doing so results in the mispronunciation of the language. The specific way natives use stress, rhythm and intonation has a RADICAL effect on how words end up sounding overall when they are uttered (spoken). This is why it's **indefensible** to skip this crucial part of the training. We have no intention of skipping or minimizing it in this course. We, in fact, spend the bulk of our attention on stress, rhythm and intonation, because without it you can never sound like a native North American.

The Answer to the Question

How does one receive training for speaking with a certain set of stress/un-stress, rhythmic and tonal patterns without a “live” teacher in a real-time setting? This is actually a fantastic question; one that we have anticipated would be asked by most people. The good news is that we have a fantastic answer and a solution to this seeming conundrum...

We apply the same technique in this course as we've been applying in our live classes that've been taught to thousands of students since 2017 - **advanced reading and shadowing (imitation) practice** - to get students to learn how to improve their listening and imitation skill. Does this help? Oh, yes. Very much. In fact, it's exactly how we learned to speak our native languages, regardless of where in the world you were born and raised. We listen and we copy what we hear. At first, it doesn't come out sounding very much like what we heard, but through repetition, we automatically (via the unconscious innate ability to learn language) adjust how we repeat sounds until they sound exactly like what we'd heard!

This can ONLY happen via hours of listening and repeating with a laser-beam focus.

If you have the true desire to achieve the American sound, you need to pay the price of paying attention and applying an increasing amount of focus to the training, otherwise you won't reach your goal. But, if you DO pay this small price, you will achieve mastery. It's very much worth it.

No worries, it Won't Take Forever!

How long do you have to do this before you sound like a true native? Anywhere from 6 months to 2 years, depending on how much time you devote to it. The more time you spend shadowing (even just mentally...) every word of American English spoken by native speakers that you hear throughout the day (and in focused sessions with podcasts and ebooks, etc.) the faster you'll improve.

Listen, it's not a big price to pay. Just choose material that is interesting to you. That way, not only do you learn to sound more like a native, but you also expand your knowledge of subjects that you wish to become an expert in.

Let's get started!

LESSON 5 - MASTERING INDIVIDUAL SOUNDS

We'll do our best to keep "Mastering Individual Sounds" short and sweet, because we don't believe in hammering-in individual sounds through tedious repetition over and over again. We prefer actually practicing their correct pronunciation in real use - words spoken in sentences - because without the proper use of stress, rhythm and intonation, mastery of the vowels and consonants cannot be mastered. This is because, as mentioned above, stress, rhythm and intonation has a profound effect on how vowels and consonants ultimately sound when they're being actually spoken in sentences. You cannot sound like a native by focusing on individual sounds alone!

UN-Stressing (REDUCTION) in English - *the KEY to the American Accent*

*We don't hear much about it, but it's mostly the **UN-STRESSED** parts of words and sentences in which ESL learners are mispronouncing the language. Why? How? Because, in American English, the un-stressed parts are radically **reduced** - meaning that the way these vowels, consonants and un-stressed words ultimately sound when using proper stress, rhythm and intonation, leave the sounds not sounding at all like you'd have expected them to. Once properly reduced, what is left of these sounds are a fraction of what they "officially" sound like, and sometimes nearly or completely disappear altogether. This radical un-stressing can even cause syllables to completely disappear! Additionally, there's the way we natives blend, link, contract and say these parts more quickly - which is equally important, yet equally evasive without the proper training. The only way these can be taught is by listening and repeating. ([Click for audio](#))*

But, this is the section of VOWELS and CONSONANTS, so this course will teach you their official, proper, full, non-reduced sounds...

The Many Types and Forms of Vowels

First, it's important to know that vowels come in many types. There are LOOOONG and SHORT vowels. There are also **compound vowels** and **combined vowels** - these are two vowels permanently stuck together and considered ONE vowel, so they, too, are long. They must be said completely and blended together to sound correct. Then, there are what I call "**specialty vowels**," because they don't fall into either of the above categories. These are not found in most languages and must be properly understood and pronounced to sound like a native.

Mastering individual sounds is not so mysterious as it may seem, so let's go over them now!

VOWELS IN AMERICAN ENGLISH

SOUND	HOW IT'S WRITTEN	EXAMPLES
<u>ae</u> (shorter)	a	happy, fat, cat, ample, after
<u>ah</u> (shorter)	a, o,	octopus, wash, father, logic
<u>aw</u> (short)	a, aw, au, o,	saw, all, audio, cause, boss
<u>au</u> (longer) ah-ooo	ou, ow (<i>compound vowel</i>)	cow, house, about, mountain
<u>ai</u> (longer) ah-eee	i, ai, (<i>compound vowel</i>)	find, like, mile, sign, combine
<u>eh</u> (shorter)	e, ea	bed, dead, head, fell
<u>ei</u> (longer) eh-eee	a, ei, ai, ay, eigh (<i>compound vowel</i>)	ate, say, grain, fein, eight
<u>ee</u> (longest)	ee, ea, ie, y, e, ey	see, deal, field, fiend, shiny
<u>ih</u> (shortest)	i, ui, y	big, different, gym, build
<u>oi</u> (longer) oh-eee	oi, oy (<i>compound vowel</i>)	boy, soil, noise, destroy
<u>ou</u> (longer) oh-ooo	ou, ow, oa, ew, o (<i>compound vowel</i>)	soul, bowl, soap, bone, toll, sew
<u>oo</u> (longest)	oo, ue, ou, ew, u-e	moon, food, tune, hue, few
<u>'h</u> (shortest)	oo, u, ou	foot, could, put, full, brook
<u>uh</u> (shorter)	u, oo, o	flood, blood, dull, run, month
<u>ahr</u> (longer)	ar, air, are (<i>combined vowel</i>)	star, are, dart, smart, farther
<u>ihr</u> (longer)	ear, eir, eer (<i>combined vowel</i>)	beard, near, weird, volunteer
<u>ehr</u> (longer)	air, eir, ear, are (<i>combined vowel</i>)	chair, pear, heir, despair, care
<u>ohr</u> (longer)	or, ore, oar, oor, our (<i>combined vowel</i>)	four, more, tore, soar, door

SOUND	HOW IT'S WRITTEN	EXAMPLES
ae (shorter)	a	happy, fat, cat, ample, after
ah (shorter)	a, o,	octopus, wash, father, logic
aw (short)	a, aw, au, o,	saw, all, audio, cause, boss
oor (longer)	oor, our, ure (<i>combined vowel</i>)	poor, you're, tour, lure, pure
ai'r (longest)	ire (<i>combined vowel</i>)	liar, tire, fire, wire, hire, retire
'R (stressed) longer	ir, er, ur, or, ear	first, serve, herb, turn, word, earth, heard, search, learn
'r shortest (unstressed)	ar, er, or, ure	sugar, after, actor, future
SCHWA (ə) shorter than short	a, e, i, o, u, y... Schwa isn't a specific sound - it's a drastically reduced vowel in an unstressed syllable. Almost all unstressed syllables have their vowels reduced to Schwa.	a: ba <u>l</u> loon, a <u>t</u> tuned, a <u>g</u> o e: pro <u>b</u> lem, differe <u>n</u> t i: fam <u>i</u> ly, liqu <u>i</u> d, cap <u>i</u> tal, o: bott <u>o</u> m, to <u>d</u> ay, ag <u>o</u> ny u: su <u>pp</u> ort, su <u>rr</u> ender y: anal <u>y</u> sis, syn <u>o</u> psis

CONSONANTS IN AMERICAN ENGLISH

SOUND	HOW IT'S WRITTEN	EXAMPLES
<u>s</u> (voiceless) mouth wide	s, z, c	sit, basket, kiss, trace, face
<u>z</u> (voiced) mouth wide (often replaces the “s”)	z, s	zoo, busy, buzz, dazzle, diseases, reason, music
<u>t</u> (voiceless)	t	top, best, latent, talent
<u>d</u> (voiced) (often replaces the “t”)	d, t	dog, dribble, doubt, dentist better, positive, congeniality
<u>th</u> (voiceless)	th	thanks, think, mouth, bath
<u>dh</u> (voiced)	th	the, then, this, father, smooth
<u>sh</u> (voiceless) mouth narrow	sh, ch, tio	share, machine, nation
<u>ch</u> (voiceless)	ch, tch	which, chair, witch
<u>zh</u> (voiced)	s, g,	garage, vision, espionage
<u>j</u> (voiced)	j, g, d	jar, giraffe, gentle, individual
<u>y</u> (voiced)	y	yellow, yawn, yank, yes, you
<u>p</u> (voiceless)	p	post, pebble, prince, party
<u>b</u> (voiced)	b	boy, brittle, beast, kabob, be
<u>f</u> (voiceless)	f, ph,	fun, factory, phone, physics
<u>v</u> (voiced)	v	vivacious, vary, very, voice
<u>k</u> (voiceless)	k, c, ch	king, car, mechanic, kite
<u>g</u> (voiced)	g	great, green, gregarious, go
<u>w</u> (voiced) starts with “oo”	wh, w	why, while, wick, winch, wet
<u>l</u> (voiced) smiling	l, ll	lamp, lament, bell, fill, allow
<u>r</u> (voiced) not rolling	r, rr	rest, roar, rare, mirror, oracle

SOUND	HOW IT'S WRITTEN	EXAMPLES
<u>h</u> (voiceless) often silent	h	happy, hell, horror, perhaps
<u>m</u> (voiced)	m, mm	<u>m</u> emory, <u>m</u> ix, su <u>mm</u> er, <u>m</u> eme
<u>n</u> (voiced) tongue tip up	n, nn, gn	<u>n</u> o, <u>n</u> one, <u>n</u> ice, si <u>gn</u> , di <u>nn</u> er
<u>ng</u> (voiced) tongue tip down	ng	be <u>ng</u> , si <u>ng</u> ing, ha <u>ng</u> ing, thi <u>ng</u>

LESSON 6 - STRESS, UN-STRESS, RHYTHM & INTONATION

STRESS

First thing to realize is that there's **no such thing** as a word in English with two syllables or more that **doesn't have** a syllable that's **stressed much stronger** than any other syllable in the word - none. This consistent “up and down” beat is not common in most other languages, to this extent. Yes, there can be several UN-STRESSED syllables in a row in words, and if there are enough un-stressed syllables in a row, usually two or more, without a STRESSED syllable in between, we usually will add a “secondary” or even sometimes a “tertiary” (third) stress, especially in words with five or more syllables.

- Words with a **primary stress** on the 3rd syllable often have a **secondary stress** on the 1st syllable, such as **gasoline** or **absolute**.
- Words with a **primary stress** on the 4th syllable often have a **secondary stress** on the 1st or 2nd syllable, such as **characteristics** or **encyclopedia**
- Rarely, certain words have three levels of stress, thereby including a **secondary stress** AND a **tertiary stress**, such as **indivisibility** and **unconstitutionality**.

Stress and un-stress isn't just common and found in all words with two syllables or more, but to sound like a native speaker of American English, you must apply PUNCHY - hard, fast - stress. When you think of a PUNCH, what comes to mind? A very hard and fast **increase** in energy that directs great STRESS to its target. When you pull the fist back, there is an equal but reversed speed as it retreats, AND the energy **decreases** as quickly as it increased, in preparation for the next PUNCH. If we don't apply our stresses with enough POWER and SPEED, the un-stressed syllables won't become compressed enough to cause the trademark reduced sounds of un-stressed syllables inherent in the American accent.

“Improper stressing and un-stressing of syllables in words results in improper pronunciation and an accent that doesn't sound native. To speak rhythmically, there must be a “beat.” Native speakers of English STRESS very hard and fast - like a punch - and UN-stress very hard and fast - like the pullback of the fist in a punch - causing words to sound more compressed and “choppier,” causing a very noticeable beat to each word. Non-native speakers, who haven't yet picked-up this extremely important-to-learn speech pattern, often fail to hear the beat, so they don't hear the rhythm, either. Honing and strengthening listening, through intense focus, helps listeners to notice the beat and the rhythm, resulting in more natural sounding speech as they begin to adopt what they heard. Learning to speak with proper stress and un-stress in words and in sentences cannot be avoided, if you wish to speak smoothly and rhythmically, as do the natives.”

RHYTHM - or, UN-Stress in a sentence

We talk so much about STRESSING in this course, because it's so important, but let's not think this is the complete equation. Every stress has an equally consequential UN-stress, as does every "punch" have a pull-back of the fist. The faster and harder you punch, the faster is the pull-back and the more extreme is the decrease in energy. This is very similar to how we un-stress in words.

There is no such thing as rhythm without a beat, and that beat comes from the very hard and quick stress and equally fast un-stressing, which causes compressed sounding syllables and words, as mentioned earlier. But, how do we achieve that effect? It's actually quite easy, because instead of having to concern ourselves with how we stress and how we un-stress, we only have to focus on proper "punchy" stress, and the un-stress will follow automatically.

But, you say, I've tried that and it hasn't seemed to work. This is probably because of two reasons:

- 1) You may not realize that, unlike in most languages, English cannot be properly spoken without major reduction of how the un-stressed parts of sentences are vocalized. Most ESL students read words with gaps in between the words. By fully pronouncing every letter in every word, they OVER pronounce the language, not realizing that most of their pronunciation errors are occurring in parts of sentences where we natives are barely pronouncing at all!
- 2) Because this doesn't occur in most languages, most ESL speakers fail to reduce the sounds of unstressed syllables and words sufficiently; not causing the necessary compression of sounds. Natives attain rhythm by shortening unstressed parts of the language, resulting in reduced definition and completeness.

Natives also **link** and **blend** sounds in unstressed parts of the language together; contract many, and say these reduced sounds and words very quickly and more quietly. If this is not done, you cannot speak rhythmically. **Linking** is the connecting of the first sound of a word to the final sound in the previous word. We have many ways of doing this, and will do it as much as possible, for smoothness purposes. Gaps between words usually happen only in between phrases and at ends of sentences. If you hear a gap between words in American English, it was most placed there for emphasis, or before a comma.

Blending is similar to linking. In conversational English, the words in phrases and short sentences are blended together as if they were one word. This manner of speaking, where contractions, blending and word reductions are used regularly, is perfectly acceptable speech, and makes the language sound the way it does. But, take note - this is normal in how American English is spoken by natives, but it is **never** written this way.

Be sure to relax and let loose enough to allow this blending style to occur. If you don't relax and allow sounds to become severely reduced or even to totally drop away, as they will and as they must, you can never sound totally like a native.

I am often asked what it is that I do to sound so “American.” And, my response is always that it's not really what I DO as much as what I DON'T DO. I simply don't pronounce as many of the sounds as do non-natives.

How do we learn to do this? It may sound complicated, but in truth, it's not. No native speaker of English fails to do this, if they speak English regularly. Yet, no native speaker of English learns to speak English in school or with the help of a coach, either. These ways of smoothing out the language and speaking rhythmically happens automatically, as the language is spoken daily. It will happen with you, as well, if you stop consciously directing your speaking efforts and relax, as we natives do. You must “fall” into the music and rhythm of the language and allow it to “sweep you away,” to speak like a native! The rhythm of the language is like an engine. Once you begin to speak with rhythm - using proper stressing and unstressing - the engine will engage and power you through! You don't need to “do” anything.

Keep your conscious thinking out of it; relax and have fun, and you'll reach your goal. What if you're a brainiac and can't stop your mind from getting involved at every stage of learning? Easy! Use the included AI-powered American English pronunciation practice app! With it, you'll be able to paste the text of any paragraph (as many as you want...) into the field, then have the AI generated American voice vocalize what you'd typed into the field, wherein you'll then repeat what you'd listened to, then receive AI-generated feedback. Keep practicing until you can raise the rating and feel like you've improved. It's not as amazing as a live accent coach, but it comes close, and it's included in this paid course. To receive American English accent training from a live coach, email david@materingamericanenglishaccent.com.

INTONATION

Intonation is the final vocal feature we'll learn about. Intonation is the “music” of the language. Not all languages have as much tonal variance as does English, especially American English, and although not all native speakers vary their tone as much as do others, it's virtually impossible for a native speaker to intone in a monotonal way. Some speakers will begin a sentence or paragraph with the tone of each syllable stepping **up** a tone or half-tone - aka as a step or half-step in music. Conversely, at the end of the sentence or paragraph, most natives step a syllable or word **down** a tone or half-tone, just for “color.” Other times, we natives will “punch” a stressed word or syllable **harder** than others and/or apply “staccato” (a choppy, fast rhythm) or **soften** and/or apply legato (an elongated, slower rhythm) to certain parts of sentences to exaggerate or to understate.

This “all-over-the-place” sound - the up and down and slowness and fastness of American English can only occur in stress-timed languages and although unpredictable sounding, is truly colorful and amazing to listen to! After speaking English long enough to use stress, rhythm and intonation as natives do, you'll consider the way syllable-timed languages sound to be a bit monotonous.

Intonation works, much of the time, along with stressing and unstressing. To sound like a native, understand that when we stress a syllable or word, we don't just add more force, we also usually go up a note or half-tone (aka as a half-step in music) on the tonal scale, while, conversely, most of the time we'll drop a whole or half-tone in the tonal scale as we unstress. The idea is to avoid speaking as if no part of what we're saying is important and to add some “life” and “excitement” to what we're saying or narrating to others.

Other times, intonation will change depending on what type of question we ask. If we ask a question where we're asking for a “yes” or “no” response, we'll raise the pitch at the end. If we want or expect a more detailed answer, we'll either keep the tone straight or even drop it at the end. If there's uncertainty to what we're saying, or if there's surprise, we'll often raise the pitch at the end, which can dramatically change the way the last word in a sentence is pronounced!

An example is, if we say: “I supposed that's possible.” We wouldn't stress the word “possible” the way we would normally stress the word “possible,” which is to stress the first syllable. We would, or should, stress the final syllable. This is how the listener knows that what we're saying is uncertain. The words “suppose” and “possible” definitely don't imply any level of certainty, do they? If someone were to compliment you and say that you're the nicest person they've ever met, you may exclaim “Really?” (rih-LEE). You wouldn't say “RIH-lee,” as would be the normal way to stress the word. Remember, when we stress, we also raise the tone a whole or half-tone. How can you learn this? LISTEN and notice when natives are doing this.

LESSON 7 - PRACTICE & MASTERY

So, that's the theory behind what makes a native speaker of American English sound like a native. Now, let's practice by using the included AI-assisted pronunciation practice app! It's **fun and easy**... All you have to do is to LISTEN without THINKING. Just intake the sounds - the stresses, the unstresses, the intonational changes - *and listen carefully for the rhythm!* Hold it all in your mind by repeating it to yourself - usually silently - then simply REPEAT what you heard OUT LOUD, **exactly** the way you heard it. Receive the AI-generated feedback and rating and try to improve your score. You may practice as much as you want for as long as you want with the app with no limit and no additional charges!

To further improve how accurately you imitated, please shadow other professional speakers, in podcasts and newscasts, for example, and **record yourself** with your smartphone, so you can play it back and LEARN to distinguish the differences between how what was intoned in comparison to how accurately you imitated it. By listening to the voice you heard next to yours, you will sharpen and hone your listening skill, resulting in more acute listening and better imitation.

By shadowing as many broadcasted or recorded native speakers of English that you wish to sound like, you will continue to improve. Newscasters and podcasters are a great source. You need to copy the masters of English to become like them. Everyone who masters a skill has a mentor to emulate. They copy them until they have become sufficiently skilled to develop their own expression or “voice.” The more you shadow (either silently to yourself or actually vocalize) accomplished speakers of American English, the more you will sound like one when YOU speak. Eventually, you'll be a master speaker and you can help your friends to do the same!

It's this “helping” that makes me EXCITED about helping YOU! I get a lot out of it. I have been working on my “voice” for decades. I never knew why I was doing it. I just wanted to sound as good as I could. I didn't criticize myself. I just kept my goal in my heart and in my mind and that was all there was to it. I was hired to do voiceovers and to record radio commercials and to narrate throughout the decades. I also worked as a proofreader and editor. These are the things that have helped to make me qualified to teach you the correct way to speak.

I now understand, after having taught several thousand students how to sound more like a native speaker, why I had done all that preparation in the past. **All I do now is to help learners increase their knowledge and understanding of the theory behind spoken (vs. written) American English, and to strengthen their awareness of how they, themselves, sound, by sharpening their listening skill through focused listening and by improving their native sound when they speak by practicing repeating accurately via shadowing.** It's not rocket science, but it's just as amazing!

THANK YOU!

I thank you for purchasing this course and wish you much success and happiness in speaking in a much smoother and more fluid way. English will no longer be a burden to speak and you'll be much more easily understood by natives. By improving your vowel pronunciation and applying proper stress (and UN-stress aka REDUCTION), rhythm and intonation, English will no longer be a burden, and as effortless and as much fun to speak, as it is to listen to a song you love.

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law

Produced by AmeriSpeak Labs, LLC
amerispeaklabs.com
david@masteringamericanenglishaccent.com