

Changing My Accent:

How, why, and where to start!

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**Congratulations on taking
the first steps toward
changing your accent!**

Why do I have an accent?

Part I: Introduction

Every language includes a unique set of speech sounds. Some languages include speech sounds and rhythm patterns that are not used in others. When we learn a new language, we retain markers of the speech sounds and rhythm patterns of our first language. These markers are referred to as your "accent."

While accents can be wonderful for showcasing where you're from, they can sometimes create communication barriers in personal and professional situations; native speakers may find you difficult to communicate with and frequently misunderstand what you are saying.

Similarly, different regions within a country have different ways of speaking the same language. Pronunciation, word choice, and inflection, all carry signs of what part of the country you're from.

In the United States, the dialect used in broadcasting the national news is considered "neutral" and has become a standard for clear and professional speech.

Essentially, we all have accents. Accents are merely a reflection of where we are from based on speaking styles. However, some accents are more common, and hence more easily understood and accepted, in certain areas or settings than others are.

**Signs your accent is interfering
with clear communication:**

Part II: Signs

Visual Signs:

- Listener squints
- Listener furrows eyebrows
- Listener raises an eyebrow
- Listener leans in
- Listener turns their ear toward you
- Listener just nods without saying much

Spoken Signs:

- Listener asks you to repeat yourself
- Listener repeats what you said back to you
- Listener asks you say it another way
- Listener asks you to write it down
- Listener says “uh-huh” or “mm-hmm” a lot
- Listener gives general, non-specific responses (e.g., “oh okay,” “that’s interesting,” etc.)

**Why it's so difficult to change your
accent on your own:**

Part III: Difficulties

Speech is a rote and automatic process. We do it on an unconscious level. However, each time you speak a sentence, a phrase, a word, or even a sound within a word, your brain sends a complex set of instructions to your mouth, lungs, and vocal folds (known as “articulators”) about how and when to move.

Changing your automatic speech patterns on your own would take an in-depth awareness of how to change the movements of your articulators to form and pronounce the many sounds of English. Additionally, making the new pattern automatic takes diligent practice, opportunity, and motivation.

In addition to pronunciation, spoken English has its own unique rhythm. There are “intonation” rules about when to raise or lower your voice. These rules apply to different types of phrases and sentences (e.g., statement, yes/no question, WH- question, etc.).

There are also “stress” rules about which part of individual words should be spoken louder or longer. These rules can change the meaning of similar sounding words (e.g., think of terms like “dye it” vs. “diet”) or change the tone and feeling of your message (e.g., angry, happy, unsure, etc.).

To follow these rules more like a native speaker would, you need to re-train both your ears as well as your articulators.

**Spelling only tells some of the
story some of the time:**

Part IV: Spelling

Spelling in English doesn't tell you exactly how to pronounce the sounds in every word.

There are numerous rules about which letters make which sounds, however many of these rules overlap or are used on rare occasions. The sound that /f/ makes for example can be spelled as "f," "ph," or even "gh." Vowel spellings can be even trickier!

Additionally, in English, a word's spelling doesn't always tell you the whole story.

In spoken English, there are variations of each sound. For example, the /t/ sound in "tab" is a stressed loud "t." The /t/ sound at the end of "bat" is an unreleased quiet "t." The /t/ sound in "water" is a flapped "d"-like "t." However, each of these variations is spelled with a regular old letter "t." Native speakers just know how each sound should be produced automatically because of years of exposure and experience with them. However, they are often not able to explain how or why we use these differences.

When you speak, native speakers can tell that something is different, but have a hard time pinpointing exactly where the differences lie. The rules for many subtle pronunciation changes are not often written or taught in standard training programs and can be quite difficult to learn on your own.

**How can accent modification
services help me?**

Part V: Benefits

Benefits of Accent Modification:

- Reduced frustration due to miscommunications
- Reduced anxiety about speaking
- Reduced awkwardness of listeners pretending to understand when they do not
- Increased efficiency in getting your message across
- Increased accuracy with voice-recognition software
- Improved self-confidence
- Improved clarity
- More positive professional and social opportunities!

Benefits of working with an Accent Specialist:

- Personalized coaching plans for your accent, your interests and your goals
- Specific knowledge and instruction on how to form the sounds of English
- Direction, models, and practice with the sounds, rhythm, and projection of spoken English
- The benefit of your coach's years of experience changing spoken pronunciation habits as a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist!

Can you give me an example of the type of information I might learn during accent training?

Part VI: Practice

The practice materials on the following few pages provide just a taste of some of the pronunciation instruction you could receive during accent reduction training.

They represent general pronunciation distinctions that many speakers of English as a second language might initially have difficulty perceiving.

However, your actual coaching sessions will be based on your personal language background and pronunciation assessment.

Your specific instruction, homework, and practice materials will be tailored not only to your personal pronunciation and speaking style, but to your interests, hobbies, profession, and goals as well.

Part VI: Practice (cont.)

Adding –ed

Is it a T, D, ID, or EED sound?

For written English, we add the letters “-d” or “-ed” to indicate past tense for many (but not all) verbs.

In spoken English, we pronounce the addition of the “-d” or “-ed” in 3 possible ways. We pronounce them as a /t/ sound, as a /d/ sound, or as the additional syllable /ɪd/.

Additionally, words that ended with “y” are changed to “-ied” in the past tense. This ending is pronounced as the syllable, “EED” (like in the word “studied”).

1. /t/

This pronunciation is used in words like “walked,” “hopped,” and “missed.”

Use this pronunciation after unvoiced (quiet) consonant sounds (except (/t/):

P, K, F, R, S, Z, CH, SH, TH

2. /d/

This pronunciation is used in words like “judged,” “hummed,” and “loved.”

Use this pronunciation after voiced (noisy) speech sounds (except /d/):

B, G, J, L, M, V, Z

Also, use this pronunciation is used in words like “played,” “sued,” and “mowed.”

Also, use this pronunciation after verbs that end with a vowel *sound* regardless of how they are spelled.

A, E, I, O, U, AH, AE, IH, OO, EH, UH

3. /ɪd/

This pronunciation is used in words like “lifted,” “tasted,” and “flooded.”

Use this pronunciation at the end of words that end with /t/ or /d/ sounds:

T, D

Part VI: Practice (cont.)

Let's Practice!

Circle the sound that should be made by the “-d,” “-ed,” or “-ied” at the end of each word.

1. Skipped	T	D	ID	EED
2. Played	T	D	ID	EED
3. Jumped	T	D	ID	EED
4. Parked	T	D	ID	EED
5. Weighed	T	D	ID	EED
6. Partied	T	D	ID	EED
7. Lived	T	D	ID	EED
8. Drifted	T	D	ID	EED
9. Checked	T	D	ID	EED
10. Waited	T	D	ID	EED

Answers:
1. T, 2. D, 3. T, 4. T, 5. D, 6. EED, 7. D, 8. ID, 9. T, 10. ID

Part VI: Practice (cont.)

Adding –s

Is it an /s/ sound or a /z/ sound?

In English, we add “s” to the ends of many words.

A final –s can represent

- **Plurals**
 - Meaning: more than one
 - Examples: bikes, cars, pencils, chips, teachers, etc.
- **Possessives**
 - Meaning: belongs to the given person
 - Examples: Tiffany’s, Bob’s, Marc’s, Pete’s, etc.
- **Third person actions**
 - Meaning: verbs done by someone else (not you or me)
 - Examples: he jumps, she skips, Paul sings, Mary throws, etc.

Since these all require adding an –s to the end of the word, how can we tell if that “s” will sound like /s/ or /z/?

Here’s how to tell ~

/s/ and /z/ are almost the same sound. They are made in the same place in our mouths, with the tip of the tongue on the alveolar ridge (bumpy spot). The difference between them is that /s/ is a voiceless (quiet) sound and /z/ is a voiced (noisy) sound. Therefore:

- After a **vowel** sound, adding –s to the end of the word = /z/ sound
 - This means that if a word ends with an “a,” “e,” “i,” “o,” “oo,” “ah,” “ih,” “eh,” “uh” sound, etc., an added –s will be pronounced as /z/ because vowels are voiced and so is /z/.
- After a **voiced consonant** sound, adding –s to the end of a word = /z/ sound
 - *This means that if the word ended with a /b/, /d/, /g/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /r/, or /v/ sound, the –s you added to the end of the word is likely to be pronounced as a /z/ sound because /z/ is voiced and so are those sounds.*
 - Examples: bibs, ads, tags, malls, fans, ears, leaves
- After a **voiceless consonant** sound, adding –s to the end of a word = /s/ sound
 - *This means if the word ended with /t/, /p/, /k/, /f/, when you add an –s to the end, you will still make an /s/ sound because /s/ is also voiceless.*
 - *If the word ended with any other sound before you added the –s, you will probably pronounce it as a /z/.*

Part VI: Practice (cont.)

Let's Practice!

Decide if the –s added to the end of each word makes an /s/ or a /z/ sound.
Circle your answers.

Plurals

1. Circ <u>l</u> s	S	Z
2. Websit <u>e</u> s	S	Z
3. Class <u>e</u> s	S	Z
4. Test <u>s</u>	S	Z
5. Exam <u>s</u>	S	Z

Possessives

6. Justin' <u>s</u>	S	Z
7. Lindsey' <u>s</u>	S	Z
8. Jessica' <u>s</u>	S	Z
9. Teacher' <u>s</u>	S	Z
10. Mike' <u>s</u>	S	Z

Third Person Verbs

11. Run <u>s</u>	S	Z
12. Play <u>s</u>	S	Z
13. Leap <u>s</u>	S	Z
14. Talk <u>s</u>	S	Z
15. Typ <u>e</u> s	S	Z

Answers

1. Z, 2. S, 3. Z, 4. S, 5. Z, 6. Z, 7. Z, 8. Z, 9. Z, 10. S, 11. Z, 12. Z, 13. S, 14. S, 15. S

Part VI: Practice (cont.)

Intonation Patterns

The rise and fall of your voice sets the tone. Intonation refers to the variation in pitch used in spoken language. In English, intonation can serve a variety of purposes. It can indicate the attitudes and emotions of the speaker; it can signal the difference between statements and questions; it can highlight the differences between different types of question; it can focus your listener's attention on important elements your message and it can also help to regulate conversational interaction.

In English, the following intonation patterns are distinguished:

- Rising Intonation - the pitch of the voice rises over time [\nearrow];
- Falling Intonation - that the pitch falls with time [\searrow];
- Dipping or Fall-rise Intonation - falls and then rises [$\searrow \nearrow$];
- Peaking or Rise-fall Intonation - rises and then falls [$\nearrow \searrow$].

Practice using intonation with these phrases:

How are you?



Good, how are you?



How was your weekend?



Nice to meet you.



Nice to meet you, too!



Have a nice day.



Source:

[[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intonation_\(linguistics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intonation_(linguistics))]

Part VI: Practice (cont.)

25 Common Reductions Shortcuts in Spoken English

While reductions are not appropriate for written English, they are frequently used in spoken English. Reductions make your speech sound more informal and friendly. Learning the reductions listed below will help you to better understand native speakers, as many Americans use at least some of these reductions when speaking.

1. **Woulda** = Would have (e.g., *He woulda taken the train if he missed the bus*).
2. **Coulda** = Could have (e.g., *I coulda bought two cars for that price*).
3. **Shoulda** = Should have (e.g., *You shoulda asked for his phone number*).
4. **Musta** = Must have (e.g., *He musta found the dollar under the table*).
5. **Gonna** = Going to (e.g., *He's gonna do really well at his new job*).
6. **Wanna** = Want to (e.g., *I wanna learn how to play the piano someday*).
7. **Wantsta** = Wants to (e.g., *He wantsta know where you bought that suit*).
8. **Wannid** = Wanted (e.g., *I wannid to go to the concert but it was sold out*).
9. **Hafta** = Have to (e.g., *I hafta stay after school to finish my work*).
10. **Hasta** = Has to (e.g., *She hasta learn every word in the song*).
11. **Needta** = Need to (e.g., *I needta find a good babysitter*).
12. **Tuh** = To (e.g., *I'd like tuh thank all of my friends for their support*).
13. **Kinda** = Kind of (e.g., *I kinda like it when I find extra fries at the bottom of the bag*).
14. **Lotta** = Lot of (e.g., *He has a lotta free time on the weekends*).
15. **Lemme** = Let me (e.g., *Lemme show you what I've been working on all day*).
16. **Gimme** = Give me (e.g., *If you could gimme a ride, I'll chip in for gas*).
17. **Betcha** = bet you (e.g., *I betcha find what you were looking for soon*).
18. **Dontcha** = Don't you (e.g., *Dontcha think that's a bad idea*)?
19. **Whatcha** = What are you (e.g., *Whatcha doing later this afternoon*)?
20. **Dunno** = Don't know (e.g., *I dunno what I'm going to eat for dinner*).
21. **-ing** = 'n (e.g., *If he's singin' again, I'm not listenin'*).
22. **'em** = them (e.g., *All of 'em saw the play*).
23. **'im** = him (e.g., *Tell 'im I'll call 'im back later*).
24. **'er** = her (e.g., *I know I've seen 'er before*).
25. **Fer** = For (e.g., *I need to finish the homework fer my math class*).

**Are there online resources that
I can use to learn more about
American English grammar
and pronunciation?**

Part VII: Resources

Griffin Speech, Chartered has identified several online resources:

Iowa Phonetics Interactive Pronunciation Site:

www.soundsofspeech.uiowa.edu/resources/english/english.html

Aloha English (Facebook Page)

www.facebook.com/KyotoEnglish

Grammar Girl

www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl

Online dictionary with sound clips

www.dictionary.com/

Phonetics: The Sounds of American English

www.soundsofspeech.uiowa.edu/resources/english/english.html

Phonemes: The Speech Sounds that our Letters Represent

www.griffinspeech.com/phonemes

**I want a trained professional to
guide me through this process.**

Part VII: Resources

Accent reduction services are an investment in time and money, both of which are valuable. Therefore, you want to make sure you choose the best accent reduction specialist for you. First consider that accent reduction specialists come from a wide array of education and career related backgrounds, including:

- Linguistics
- Theater/Acting
- English as a Second Language (ESL)/(ELL)
- Speech-Language Pathology

Individuals with backgrounds in linguistics have studied the sound system of English and other languages in depth. Theater and acting professionals often have had to use and study an accent other than their own to play a given character. ESL and ELL teachers are accustomed to working with individuals from other language backgrounds in group settings and know the grammatical structure of English well.

Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) have a mix of many of these experiences. SLPs, like linguists, have studied the phonetic sound system of English. They also have studied the anatomy and physiology of the mouth and upper body. SLPs have experience teaching native speakers how to pronounce speech sounds that are difficult for them and changing their pronunciation patterns; they are used to providing instruction in both individual and group settings. Like ESL/ELL teachers, SLPs also have experience teaching the grammatical structure and social expectations of American English in addition to pronunciation and enunciation.

**What are some tips for
finding a trained accent
modification specialist in my
area?**

Finding a Professional

To find an accent reduction specialist in your area, consider searching the Internet for your city's name and the following terms:

- Accent modification
- Accent reduction
- Accent training
- Accent coaching
- American English pronunciation
- Pronunciation coaching
- Pronunciation training

You may try search engines such as Google, Yahoo!, and Bing. You might also find it helpful to search Yelp.com or other phonebook type websites.

The following sites provide directories of accent coaches/trainers:

The Institute of Language and Phonology (ILP)

<https://800-language.com/business-directory/>

The Corporate Speech Pathology Network (CORSPAN)

<http://www.corspan.org/search.php>

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

<http://www.asha.org/proserv/>

Bio

Autumn Bryant, M.A., CCC-SLP/L

Speech-Language Pathologist & Accent Modification Specialist



Autumn Bryant, M.A., CCC-SLP/L is a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) from Chicago, Illinois. Autumn holds both a Bachelor's degree and a Master's Degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She also maintains a Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC) from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).

As an SLP, Autumn has extensive knowledge of the structure of the mouth, the sound system of English, and how each English phoneme is produced. Using the International Phonetic Alphabet, Autumn is able to accurately document specific pronunciations, down to the consonant and vowel sounds within each word, for both native and foreign speakers. Autumn has worked as an SLP for over a decade providing instruction on clear and precise speech sound production.

In 2013, Autumn obtained certification in the Compton Pronouncing English as a Second Language (**P-ESL**) method of **accent modification**. Using this method and other research-based techniques, Autumn trains both native English speakers and those for whom English is a second language. Autumn coaches clients in the dialect and pronunciation of American academic and business English, helping them to acquire a more mainstream and easily understood American speech pattern.

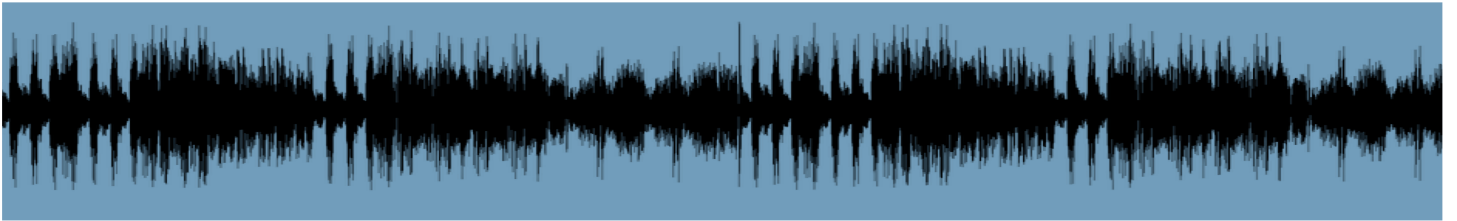
To advance her studies in voice production and function, Autumn participated in the 2015 Voice Conference at Johns Hopkins University with hands-on training in laryngeal stroboscopy - the practice of using cameras to visualize the structure and movement of the vocal folds in order to guide appropriate treatment for voices that are too rough, breathy, hoarse, quiet, tense, shaky, low-pitched, or high-pitched. This was followed by additional training and observation at the Bastian Voice Institute.

Dedicated to the study of **speech sound disorders**, Autumn received training in oral myofunctional disorders through a 28-hour certification-track course approved by the International Association of Orofacial Myology (IAOM) in 2017. Orofacial myology is the study and treatment of the muscles of the face throat and mouth and how they impact speech and swallowing.

In 2018, Autumn became an **LSVT LOUD** Certified clinician, a training specific to working with clients with voice disorders.

Autumn is also a 3-time ASHA ACE Award recipient, reflecting her commitment to remaining up to date on quality treatment techniques in the field of speech therapy.

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