



5 Free Techniques for Better English Pronunciation



Enhancing Communication Skills...Enhancing Performance

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Accent is another word for pronunciation. And for free flowing communication, *in any language*, the speaker must master that language's pronunciation patterns. The following are five key pronunciation techniques that, when practiced for ten minutes a day for one month, can immediately and significantly improve your American accent.



Here are five essential techniques that will quickly make your American accent more effective:

Technique #1:

Learn the correct articulation technique for pronouncing an American 'r' and an American 'th'.

From our experience at the Accent Reduction Institute, these two consonants are two of the most challenging for non-native English speakers. They are also two of the sounds that, when pronounced correctly, make the most noticeable improvement toward clear communication.

- *How to pronounce an American 'r':*
 1. Do not let the tip of your tongue touch the roof of your mouth.
 2. The sides of your tongue, near the back, lightly touch your upper back teeth.
 3. Purse and protrude your lips.
 4. Your mouth and lips are in a slightly rounded position.
 5. This is the sound of an angry dog!



Practice saying the following words using the above technique:

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| a) red | R ed looks good on you. |
| b) right | He's always r ight! |
| c) really | I r eally like you. |
| c) bring | Please b ring me the phone. |
| d) great | That's a g reat idea! |
| e) drink | What would you like to d rink? |
| f) rock | This lesson r ocks! |

- *How to pronounce an American 'th':*

1. Place the tip of your tongue between your top and bottom teeth.
2. Your tongue must be visible.
3. Your lips are in a horizontal position.
4. Push air out.



Practice saying the following words using the technique above:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| a) th ank you | T hank you for your kindness. |
| b) th ink | I t hink you've got it! |
| c) som th ing | Can I help you with som th ing? |
| d) fa th ful | He's a fa th ful companion. |
| e) ma th | Her best subject is ma th. |
| f) bo th | I'd like bo th of them. |

Technique #2:

Make sure to pronounce the last sound of each word.

In many languages other than English, the last sound of a word is a vowel. That means that the speaker does not use his teeth, tongue, or lips to alter the steady flow of sound. Words in American English, however, often end with a consonant. The last consonant sound of a word is referred to as a 'final consonant'. Ending a word in a consonant can drastically change the meaning of the word. This is because, in English, grammar is often determined by the word-ending. This is particularly the case in terms of verb tense, subject/verb agreement, and plurality. Note the difference in meaning in the following words, and how the meaning changes depending on the word ending:

Verb tense:

Present tense
Past tense

I **play** the violin
I **played** the violin

Subject/verb agreement:

First person
Third person

I **go** to work by train.
She **goes** to work by train.

Plurality:

Single
Plural

The treasure is buried under the **tree**.
The treasure is buried under the **trees**.

It's also important to realize that, regardless of grammar, changing the last consonant of a word can drastically change its meaning. Compare the difference in word definition in the following pairs:

bad	vs.	bat
ice	vs.	eyes
back	vs.	bag
seat	vs.	seed

Practice pronouncing final consonants by reading out-loud, daily, one paragraph from a book, newspaper, or magazine. Make sure to pronounce the last sound of each word

Technique #3:

Slow down your rate of speech.

The five areas of American pronunciation proficiency are: vowels, consonants, rhythm, stress, and intonation. Rhythm, or rate of speech, is often overlooked in pronunciation programs. But from our years of experience, we've found that improper use of rate of speech can greatly effect a listener's ability to understand the speaker. Nearly always, this is because the person is speaking *too fast*. It's a common misconception that if we talk faster, people will think we're more fluent. That's simply not true. In fact, the slower we speak the clearer we are. This is true for even native English speakers, like me! When I speak slowly and clearly, people are less likely to ask me to repeat myself.

The best way to slow down your speech is to pause between ideas. This simple technique will help you speak with more clarity. Make sure to pause after commas and periods. This is essential. By doing so, your listener will know that a new thought or idea is on its way.

Practice pausing after commas and periods:

1. I need to work late tonight. However, I'll leave as soon as I can.
2. I like chocolate but, actually, I prefer vanilla.
3. I didn't mean to get off at this stop, but rather, at the next one.
4. Roger, our project manager, is out of the office this week. In fact, he won't return until the end of the month.
5. We need to get ink and cartridges. Also, while you're at it, pick up some paper too.
6. I like pizza with onions, mushrooms, olives, and pepperoni.
7. I don't like scary movies. On the contrary, I like comedies.
8. He's very athletic. He can golf, ski, and skate, even if he can't snowboard.
9. I'll send you the information when it arrives. Likewise, if you get it first, will you do the same for me?
10. I don't like math. Even so, it's necessary to know the basics.

Technique #4:

Use correct syllable stress.

Syllable stress refers to the part of the word that is pronounced longer, stronger, and with emphasis. Syllable stress is a very important part of English communication. If you put the stress on the wrong syllable, people might not understand what you're saying.

In some cases, a change in syllable stress can change the meaning of the word. Let's look at the word 'object'. When the stress is on the first syllable, the word refers to an inanimate item, concept, or entity. When the stress is on the second syllable, the word means to forbid or disallow.

The following pronunciation pattern will help you get your message across clearly and effectively:

- 1. Stress the first syllable when the word is a noun.*
- 2. Stress the second syllable when the word is a verb.*

Practice the following sentences with correct syllable stress. Make sure to emphasize the syllable written in bold letters.

Noun

1. What is the **object** of the game?
2. We'd like an **increase** in sales.
3. There's a **conflict** of interests.
4. He got an award for good **conduct**.
5. She keeps excellent **records**.

Verb

- I **object** to the plan.
Let's **increase** productivity.
Our schedules **conflict**.
He **conducts** himself well.
Record your expenses.

Technique #5:

Practice five minutes a day to rapidly improve your American pronunciation.

Practice is the key component of pronunciation mastery. We all have the same components of the speech apparatus (tongue, teeth, lips, and jaw) and, therefore, we are all able to produce the same sounds. If we don't have a particular sound in our native language, we have to teach our tongue, teeth, lips, and jaw what to do in order to make this new sound. With practice, we literally change the motor memory of the speech apparatus as we acquire this new sound on a permanent basis. This is where practice becomes fundamental in the speech and language acquisition process. By practicing ten minutes a day for one month, your mouth will begin to 'memorize' the new speech pattern. Soon this will feel natural and sound accurate.

There are two best ways to practice your newly acquired pronunciation skills are:

1. Read out-loud for ten minutes every day. To do this most effectively...
 - Take a paragraph or two from a magazine or newspaper and focus on one particular sound that you'd like to practice.
 - Circle that sound every time it appears in the reading passage.
 - Now read the passage out-loud while using correct pronunciation techniques.

For example, if you'd like to improve your pronunciation of the American 'r', circle every 'r' in your reading sample and then read the passage aloud while focusing on the pronunciation technique as described in **Technique #1**. Some people like to use a hand-held mirror to make sure they are using their tongue, teeth, lips, and jaw as indicated.

2. Watch the national news for a few minutes every day. To do this most effectively...
 - Make sure you're watching national news and not a regional broadcast. In the United States, national newscasters are required to speak with Standard American Pronunciation.
 - Watch the anchor's mouth while he/she speaks. Pay close attention to the position of his lips, tongue, teeth, and jaw.
 - When you hear a word that is difficult for you to pronounce, say the word out-loud as pronounced by the anchor.
 - Use the national news anchor as your pronunciation role model!

With consistent practice, your American pronunciation will improve. And your confidence in English speaking situations and your everyday life will soar!