

THE MOST EFFICIENT WAYS TO LEARN AMERICAN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome!

This purpose of this E-book is to give non-native speakers of English tips on how to best practice and improve on their own, with self-study. While it is possible to improve your English pronunciation totally on your own, it is always best to have guidance from an expert. I am hoping that you decide to take one of my Self-Study courses, so that I can help you become a terrific American English speaker!

Important: While self-study can result in significant benefits and improvements in one's speech, it is always optimal to have feedback and direction from a trained accent coach in order to tackle wide-ranging improvements. If you are at the point of considering individual accent coaching, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at: dro@accent-american.com

The goals of the book are three-fold:

- 1) To give an introduction to the beginning accent client who is embarking on a self-study program on what an accent in a foreign language is;
- 2) To give advice on what types of goals are the best to work on for self-study and how learning takes place;
- 3) To give practical, helpful suggestions about how to most efficiently learn American English pronunciation, especially when practicing on one's own without the help of a trained accent coach.

Chapter 1: WHAT IS A FOREIGN ACCENT?

A foreign accent arises because an individual learns a foreign language and brings speaking habits over from his/her native language. There is no magic or mystery to a foreign accent, it is simply a collection of habits! This is good news, because if habits are learned, habits can be changed!

KEY POINT: A foreign accent is just a collection of learned *habits*.

When we are babies growing into children and then adults, our auditory system becomes attuned to the speech we hear around us. We then begin to speak what we hear. This is an important concept: we can never say anything that we cannot hear! For languages without the /r/ and /l/ sounds, for example, individuals can often not hear the difference between these two sounds. That is normal! These individuals have been brought up, their brains have developed in an environment without these sounds. As an adult, individuals from these countries may then have difficulty producing (saying) these two sounds, because their brains have not been trained to hear the difference!

KEY POINT: We cannot produce verbally what we cannot discriminate with our auditory system.

Can one learn to hear the difference between sounds not in one's original language? Of course! The auditory system of the brain is very modifiable, and learning can occur no matter what age we are. It just takes some practice with listening as well as with speaking.

Chapter 2: WHAT CAN ONE MODIFY ABOUT ONE'S SPEECH WITH SELF-STUDY?

Many aspects of one's speaking accent can be modified on one's own, although for some goals an individual will need to have the feedback and direction of an expert accent coach. These goals would be the ones that require auditory discrimination work or involve sounds that are more difficult to say.

That said, there are many goals that CAN be worked on successfully during self-study. Dr. Ojakangas has chosen practice materials for you, which, if practiced diligently, CAN make a substantial improvement in your pronunciation.

KEY POINT: The materials provided in the Speak Like An American Course can be used to substantially improve your American English pronunciation.

Chapter 3: WHAT ARE THE STAGES OF LEARNING IN MODIFYING AN ACCENT?

Learning is the process of bringing new information or skills into our long-term memory. In general, learning occurs in two stages: bringing information or a skill into short-term (or working) memory, and then transferring it to long-term memory. In addition, learning to speak differently, learning a new habit of speech is a type of sensorimotor skill learning. In other words, in learning a new speech habit, we use our senses (our hearing and our sense of how our mouth and its parts are moving) to produce a new movement, a new modulation of the air coming up from our lungs.

KEY POINT: Changing one's accent involves sensorimotor skill learning and bringing the new behavior from short-term to long-term memory.

Habits are automatic behaviors. What we do habitually, we do not have to think about. We just do it. In learning to modify one's accent, we want the new speech behavior to become a habit, so we do not have to think about *how* we are speaking. We want to think about *what* we are saying!

Our brains stores motor habits as automatic, habitual motor programs. These motor programs involve neural pathways, which are different from the neural pathways and activity used when one is learning a new motor skill.

KEY POINT: When a motor behavior becomes a habit, the brain generates a motor program, which involves brain activity which is different from that when we were learning the new behavior.

How long does it take to change an accent? This is an answer that cannot be answered specifically because each person is different. In general, for a motivated individual who practices daily in the advised way and follows all suggestions, significant changes in speech can be noted in approximately 3 months. Remember, that how we speak is simply a habit, and habits can be changed! But, it does require consistency in practice!

KEY POINT: If you are consistent and practice daily as suggested, you should see some significant progress towards your goals in approximately 3 months.

Chapter 4: WHAT ARE THE BEST WAYS FOR TO PRACTICE THE SPEECH GOALS IN THIS COURSE?

Practicing is not practicing is not practicing. What does this mean? There are tips for how to practice that really do make a difference in how fast one can learn a new speech habit. Here they are:

- **DISTRIBUTED LEARNING:** Space out your practice daily. Practice 1 hour per day in 15-minute segments throughout the day. Research tells us that practicing in short segments is significantly more effective than practicing in one solid stretch. Why is this? Because of several factors. First, you will not get bored as easily. When one is bored, one is not thinking about what one is learning, and the behavior is not being learned as efficiently. Secondly, when one practices, then sets down the material and does something else for awhile, the brain gets a chance to consolidate what has been learned. When practice begins again, it is a bit harder – one must remember and work up to the former proficiency level again. It is this putting work down and picking it up again that facilitates long-term learning. It is harder in the short run, but quicker in the long run!

KEY POINT: Practice four times per day for 15-minutes each! (Once right when you wake up, then around noon, then late afternoon, and lastly, before you go to bed!)

- **PRACTICE MATERIAL SEPARATELY FIRST (MASSED PRACTICE), AND LATER MIXED TOGETHER (INTERLEAVED PRACTICE):**

Initially, when one is learning a new behavior, it is best to practice one new behavior for a while and then turn to another. Focus on one goal of your self-study course for one of your study periods. Focus on another goal during your next 15-minute session. This is called ‘massed practice’. This helps you stay focused and master the goals you have set out to accomplish. Once the new behaviors are learned, it is good to mix up the practice materials, a few minutes with this material, then a few minutes with other material. It is a bigger challenge for the brain to have to concentrate on mixed goals, switching quickly between them. This helps learning and habit formation once the behaviors are accurate and is called ‘interleaved practice.’

KEY POINT: Initially, at the beginning of your 3-month practice, focus on one of your goals during each 15-minute practice session. Later in your course, when you know the behaviors and are just trying to commit to memory and make them automatic, mix the materials up within each practice session.

- **ROUTINE AND CONSISTENCY ARE KEY!**

Build a practice routine and keep yourself accountable. Choose times that you will practice day-to-day and stick with it. Use the Practice Worksheet to keep track of your practice periods. Daily practice over weeks will become boring so give yourself rewards for achieving one week, two weeks, a month of daily practice!

KEY POINT: Take daily practice seriously. Chart your practice and be routinized and accountable. It will pay off!

- **PRACTICE LISTENING AS WELL AS SPEAKING:**

Because speech is a sensorimotor skill, your auditory system and skills will improve as you practice your goals. Scheduling some specific listening activities, such as watching a nightly 30-minute situational comedy on TV can significantly help you speak! Listen to a few minutes of the show, pause it, and repeat what you have heard the characters say. The best shows for this type of work are NOT news shows, but shows or movies in which normal, every-day Americans speak to each other. Some shows Accent-American clients like to watch include: Modern Family, Friends, Everyone Loves Raymond, The Big Bang Theory.

Practice listening to Americans speak when you are in Starbuck's, on the street, at work. If you are not living in America, watch YouTube and American television shows on the internet. When listening to Americans speak you will hear them say words and concepts you are working on! Listen to their intonation, the way they ask questions, the way they say their sounds. As you practice and get more familiar with your goals and challenges, you will hear your goals in native English speakers.

KEY POINT: Listening to Americans speak, whether on television or in-person is a very important way to help you improve your American English pronunciation!

- **RECORD YOURSELF OCCASIONALLY AND LISTEN:**

Every week or every few weeks record yourself in your practice and listen to yourself. This can be uncomfortable, but doing this can provide insight into your progress. If you'd like you can even keep these weekly recordings which will provide a record of your progress throughout the course.

CHAPTER 5: WHEN TO SCHEDULE YOUR VIDEO SESSIONS WITH DR. OJAKANGAS (if you have purchased this option)

You may schedule your phone or video calls whenever you choose. However, it is recommended that you schedule the calls one month apart from one another in the middle of your practice. One suggestion is to schedule the first call after the Part I – Intonation section is completed, and the second either after Part II – Vowels and before Part III- Consonants, or after both Parts II and III are completed.

If you did not purchase the Instruction Session add-on, but have now decided you would like to after taking Parts I – III in the Speak American English Like An American course, please purchase it on my website, or write to me at dro@accent-american.com

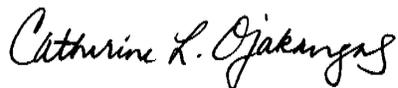
You may use these video instruction sessions any way that you would like. Dr. Ojakangas can work with you on specific issues (please specify before hand) or give you feedback regarding your progress or pronunciation as related to the goals you are working on.

CHAPTER 6: QUESTIONS

If you have any questions during your self-study program, please do not hesitate to write an email to Dr. Ojakangas. All emails are welcome!

I wish you all the best of luck developing your new speech habits!

Sincerely,



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