

BARRON'S

WITH MP3 CD



American Accent Training

A guide to speaking and pronouncing
American English for everyone who speaks
English as a second language



★ Take the “pure sound”
approach to speaking

★ Listen to the rhythms of
spoken language

★ Imitate the fluid ways
of American speech

★ Americans will
understand you better—
and you’ll understand
them better too!

★ “I took pronunciation classes for two years at
Princeton, and in my opinion, American Accent
Training is far superior.”
—Dr. Z. Kabala, Hydrologist

THIRD EDITION • ANN COOK

American Accent Training

A guide to speaking and pronouncing
American English for everyone who speaks
English as a second language



THIRD EDITION • ANN COOK

Illustrated by Holly Forsyth, Nathalie Jean-Barth, Randy Gossman,
Erik Scott, and Nelson Afian

Audio by Voice Trax Studios with Marcus Harwell

BARRON'S

Table of Contents

Introduction: Read This First	iv
Preliminary Diagnostic Analysis	x
Chapter 1 The American Sound	1
Voice Quality	1
Intonation and Attitude	5
Chapter 2 Psycholinguistics	7
Chapter 3 General Pronunciation	15
Chapter 4 American Intonation	23
Chapter 5 Syllable Stress	45
Chapter 6 Complex Intonation	49
Two-Word Phrases	50
Chapter 7 Phrasing	61
Chapter 8 The Miracle Technique	65
Chapter 9 Grammar in a Nutshell	67
Chapter 10 Reduced Sounds	75
Chapter 11 Word Connections	83
Chapter 12 Cat? Caught? Cut?	93
Chapter 13 Tee Aitch	99
Chapter 14 The American T	101
Chapter 15 The American R	109
Chapter 16 The El	115
Chapter 17 S or Z?	125
Mid-Point Diagnostic Analysis	129
Chapters 1–17 Review and Expansion	131
Chapter 18 More Reduced Sounds	149
Chapter 19 “V” as in Victory	157
Chapter 20 Tense and Lax Vowels	161
Chapter 21 The Ridge	165
Chapter 22 Grammar in a Bigger Nutshell	169
Chapter 23 Practical Application	175
Chapter 24 Nasal Consonants	179
Chapter 25 Throaty Consonants	181
Final Diagnostic Analysis	184
Nationality Guides	185
Chinese	186
Japanese	190
Spanish	193
Indian	196
Russian	199
French	201
German	202
Korean	204
Arabic	206
The American South	208
Answer Key	210
Teacher’s Guide	213
Index	225

When comparing your recording with our Aussie friend, see if you copied his nasality, used *plays* for the pronunciation of *please*, and included the distinctive phrasing as he finishes up the sentence. If your recording matches closely and you were comfortable with the process, go to Chapter 3 and get started. If it wasn't entirely satisfying for you, or your recording didn't sound like him, let's take a moment to think about who you are, and how you learn best.

Exercise 2-2: Are You Steadfast or Freewheeling?

Answer the following questions with a check mark in the appropriate box.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Would you rather answer...</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> An essay question</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A multiple-choice question</p> | <p>2. Do you...</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Start from yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Start from no</p> |
| <p>3. Do you prefer solutions that are...</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Open-ended, abstract, and subject to interpretation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Clear-cut, precise, and objective</p> | <p>4. Are you...</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Comfortable with a flexible time frame with constant updates</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More deadline oriented</p> |
| <p>5. Do you prefer to...</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Follow another person's lead <input type="checkbox"/> Do things your own way</p> | |

If you selected the second option two or more times, try this experiment. Just for today, when someone says something to you, practice temporarily suspending judgment. Respond with, "Hmm, that's interesting," "Tell me more," or "You could be right." Not only will this help you listen better, it will also make you a better conversationalist and open your mind to picking up and using this accent.

Exercise 2-3: Mimicry

Say the following sentence out loud:

There was a time when people really had a way with words.

Did you say it out loud (not to yourself, actually out loud)? If you did, go on to the next exercise. If not, let's talk about why you didn't. As we all know, *stubborn* is a negative word, and nobody wants to attribute a negative word to himself or herself. As the famous curmudgeon Bertrand Russell said, "I am firm. **You** are obstinate. **He** is a pig-headed fool." Interestingly, stubbornness has both *positive* (consistent, reliable, persistent) and *negative* (stubborn, inflexible, rigid) aspects.

Think back in your life to a time when persistence paid off. It may have been following through on an idea to successful fruition or overcoming apparently insurmountable odds on something important to you. Own that, it's yours. One of my favorite responses was when I asked a successful businessman if he'd had everything handed to him, if building his business had been easy or if he'd had to fight to succeed. "Fight?!" he barked, "I've had to kill!"

Now, however, we're going to look at how stubbornness can get in your way. Stubbornness isn't necessarily something that just happens later in life, but is often an innate trait. Many of us have a deep-seated feeling of what is *right*, and it's hard to go against this. If you're a visual learner, chances are you did well on spelling tests, and so you have a sense of the *rightness* of spelling. It can be checked and validated. Speech, however, may seem very fluid and free form to you. For this process, however, you need to embrace the *rightness* of phonetic spelling for speech as much as you embrace the *rightness* of spelling for written English and the *rightness* of mathematical notation for numbers.

Sometimes you're not being stubborn—you really *do* forget because you're focusing on **what** you're saying instead of **how** you're saying it. To illustrate this, a researcher had a problem with the door of the lab refrigeration unit, whose tall upright handle had come loose. Not having time to fix it, he decided to open it by pulling on the side. Not five minutes later, he went back to grab some more vials and opened the fridge with the handle. It came completely loose and clonked him on the head! This time, he knew he had to remember, so he put a note right on the handle to remind himself. And again, a few minutes later, when he went back to get another vial, he grabbed the handle and hit himself on the head again. Clearly he needed a more dramatic solution. He took a whole page of newspaper and covered the entire handle of the fridge, so that the next time he mindlessly grabbed the handle, the newspaper crackled, and he realized what he was about to do. It's not like he *wanted* to get hit in the head, he just kept forgetting because he was focused on the **goal** and not the **process**. Sometimes people speaking English are so focused on the end product of using words in conversation, like he was in the end product of getting vials out of the fridge, that they forget to include the accent and pronunciation.

Think, Then Act

CD 1 Track 30

When you have learned the techniques, but forget to apply them in speech, you are **acting** before **thinking**. In order to train yourself to think first, devise a strategy that works for you. For the researcher, it was putting a sheet of newspaper over the fridge handle. For you, it might be taking a deep breath before speaking, counting to three, pulling on a rubber band, or even the old school standby: a string around your finger. The point is, while you are internalizing these new sounds and rhythms, to create a stopgap measure to get you to focus on the process and not so much the goal.



The Four Stages of Learning

Let's look at the transition you will be going through.

1. Unconscious incompetence (you don't even know you're making mistakes).
2. Conscious incompetence (you're aware, but you don't know how to fix them).
3. Conscious competence (when you focus really hard, you're actually pretty good).
4. Unconscious competence (you've internalized the concepts, and it's second nature).

You're most likely edging from **2** to **3**. To get to **4**, the key is consistent practice—a minimum of 15 minutes per day, plus applying the techniques whenever you talk.

Exercise 2-4: Correlating Sounds & Phonetic Transcription

CD 1 Track 31

Listen to this sound and correlate it with this phonetic transcription:

CD 1 Track 32

gäddit

Repeat this sound and notice the open **ah** sound of **gä**, the **way** the tip of your tongue flicks on the bumps on the top of your mouth, and the fact that the air doesn't pop out at the end of the word. Listen to the audio and say this out loud ten times. (See also Chapter 8.)

Exercise 2-5: Correlating Phonetic Transcription & Regular Spelling

CD 1 Track 33

Listen to this sound and correlate it with this phonetic transcription:

gäddit

Got it!

Using the exact same sounds as before, observe how different the spelling is. Listen to the audio and say this out loud ten times.

Skidiz

CD 1 Track 34

Let me tell you a little story about how I came to "get" word connections in French, or as they like to call them, liaisons. I stumbled upon the word **skidiz** and was amazed that it could represent **ce qu'ils disent**. *Wow! That looks different!* I thought to myself. *They'll never understand me if I say it like that.* Fortunately, my empirical side prevailed and I thought, *Okay, fine, I'll try it, even if it's just to prove that it doesn't work.*

I was in Marseilles, so I combined it with the local pronunciation of **Je ne sais pas** and managed to work **Sheh pah skidiz** in as a conversational response. Whoa! To my huge surprise it worked, and the person started talking to me in real French and not baby language. That led me to part two of the epiphany: *Yikes, if I do this, it'll totally raise their expectations of how well I speak, and then, Ahh, I'm talking the way I want them to talk to me, so I can understand them more easily!*

Once I realized how I'd been sabotaging myself, I started trusting the phonetics and stopped basing my pronunciation on spelling. My confidence went up because thought follows behavior, and my new behavior resulted in more sophisticated, intelligent conversations. People didn't have to talk down to my language level but could actually talk with me at my conversational level. It's my goal that you have that same realization with **gäddit**. My job is to give the epiphany. Your job is to hold on and use it. (See also Chapter 10.)

Exercise 2-6: Gathering that Empirical Evidence

CD 1 Track 35

Trusting in this method is an important component of how successful you will be, so we're going to do a short trust exercise. Take this phrase out into the world, and use it exactly the way it's presented here. Try it out on coworkers and friends. Watch how they respond to you now that they can hear you playing with the language a little.

gäddit / Got it!



We tend to think of language primarily as a *tool*,



or as a *weapon*.

Instead, start playing around in the English *toy box*.



Play with the sounds, rhythms, and patterns. Have fun! You'll find that some of the inhibitions fall away, and your linguistic adaptability kicks in.

Phonetic Transcription = Mathematical Notation

CD 1 Track 36

If you accept that 2×2 can also be written 2^2 , you are comfortable with multiple labels for a single concept. This is the same principle as the word **cat** also being written as **kæt**.

Here is a simple two-part rule for the letter **o**:

1. In a *one-syllable* word, **o** sounds like **ä** (unless the word ends in **e**):

h**o**t, l**o**st, T**o**m, B**o**b, d**o**t c**o**m

2. In a *stressed* syllable, **o** also sounds like **ä**:

p**o**ssible, H**o**lland, phil**o**sophy

Here is a two-part rule for the letter **a**:

1. In a *one-syllable* word, **a** sounds like **æ** (unless the word ends in **e**):

c**a**t, S**a**m, dr**a**b

2. In a *stressed* syllable, **a** sounds like **æ**:

r**a**tional, m**a**nager, cat**a**strophe

(For more on these two vowels, see Chapter 12.)

Once you have internalized the basic rules of phonetics, you need to diligently, persistently, and *stubbornly* apply them universally. In computing terms, think of doing a global **Search All** and **Replace**.

Some people have an initial aversion to reading phonetics because it's new and confusing. *It doesn't even look like English!* This is where we're going to have you practice some of that open-mindedness and trust. Accept that if you read the phonetics, you *will* have an American accent.

An accountant kept making the same pronunciation errors in English over and over again. Asked why, her response was consistently, "I forgot!" When asked if she forgot arithmetic, the answer was, "Of course not, that would make my life miserable."

Well, not applying the phonetics was making her life miserable!