

Pronunciation Improvement Tips

These 10 tips are designed to help you maximize your efforts to minimize your accent. Focus your energy where you can take control and see results.

1. Pick a sound of the week.

It's hard to change multiple habits at once, and each aspect of your pronunciation is a habit. Focus on one sound, stress, or intonation pattern for at least one week. Make progress with it—better yet, make it second nature—before moving on.

2. Listen to the sound or pattern in the world around you.

Take a “time out” once or twice a day to listen for your sound or pattern of the week. Listen to it pronounced by native speakers. Forget about the content of what you're watching on television...or the loud conversation at the next table...or the person sharing his personal life on his cell phone. Just listen.

3. Ask a native-speaker friend to be your pronunciation mentor.

Ask a native speaker you trust to give you feedback. Tell him/her your sound or pattern of the week. Ask your mentor to record your sound or pattern of the week or other troublesome words, so you can listen to them anytime. Ask him/her to give you feedback whenever appropriate.

4. Use a mirror.

The shape of your lips is critical to the proper pronunciation of vowels and some consonants. Use a mirror to compare the shape of your lips to a model, such as in a pronunciation book or your pronunciation mentor.

5. Record yourself and compare.

It's difficult to hear your own pronunciation while you're speaking. You need to “remove yourself” so you can listen to yourself as others do. Record yourself alongside audio of a native speaker, whether with a pronunciation audio CD or an excerpt from a TV or radio program. Then listen and compare your recorded pronunciation to that of the native speaker.

6. Focus on three troublesome words or phrases.

Write difficult words or phrases on the back of your business card or enter them into your PDA. Ask your pronunciation mentor to record them. Record yourself saying these words or phrases and compare them with your mentor's pronunciation. At breaks throughout the day, find a quiet place and practice repeating them.

7. Practice regularly.

Set aside a specific time to practice. Make an appointment with yourself to practice every day or every other day. As with any skill you want to improve, regular practice is key.



8. Trust what you hear.

Train yourself to separate spelling from pronunciation. English words like *says*, *been*, and many others don't sound the way they're spelled. Learn to trust the pronunciation of native speakers over spelling. You'll become more confident in your own pronunciation.

9. Conquer your fears of “looking funny”

People look at your eyes when you talk—not your lips. Don't be ashamed to manipulate your mouth differently than you're accustomed to doing. Non-native speakers are often embarrassed to stick their tongue between their teeth to pronounce the “th” sounds, concerned that they look funny. But if you don't, you'll *sound* funny!

10. Review for periodic maintenance.

Review sounds, stress, and intonation patterns you've already studied to avoid slipping back into familiar habits. Ask your mentor to help you review.

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