

5 TOOLS

**TO STOP YOUR
ACCENT GETTING
IN THE WAY
OF EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATION**



London Speech
Workshop

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INTRODUCTION

Many non-native English speakers living in the UK find themselves caught in an annoying paradox. On the one hand, they are fluent in English and, to a great extent, see England as their home. But having an accent means that often people's first response will be to ask them where they are from.

Speaking English fluently with an accent can lead to frustrating communications challenges on a daily basis. Have any of these ever happened to you:

- Misunderstanding or blank looks because of an incorrect pronunciation?
- Not getting a laugh on the punchline of a joke because the intonation is wrong?
- Feeling just slightly out of it at work socials?
- Prefer to write an email instead of picking up the phone?

The list goes on.

Accents are wonderful and important. They hold a major part of our identity. They contain our culture and our heritage, and it's important and totally fundamental to hold onto that. So what is the solution?

Well, the great news is that it is possible to work on one's accent; to take the edges off, avoid misunderstandings and improve clarity and confidence – and there is no need to get rid of this vital part of your identity in the process!

A lot of people feel since they have lived in the UK for so long and still have an accent maybe it is impossible to change. Not true! It is very possible. There are small and incremental changes you can make with individual sounds (which is a bit like going to the gym as you retrain your brain to adopt new neural networks) and bigger broader changes with an understanding of how the language actually works. These we call quick wins – things you can start doing TODAY that will instantly improve clarity when you speak and give you a sense of confidence about how to use the language to make it work for you.

So in this eBook, I have put five top tools to help you clear up those misunderstandings and feel more ownership over the language when you speak it, so that you can share your ideas without interference.

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TOOL 1: USE YOUR VOWELS

Vowels are all made with an open mouth. They are the feeling part of words. They provide an opportunity, literally a space in time, to share your feelings and portray very different meanings.



take the sound 'Ahh'. Now try saying it in five different ways; notice how easy it is to do and how each way can have a vastly different meaning.



If we keep our mouths closed when we speak, then the vowels become clipped and less expressive. Either our feelings are forced to come out through our body language, or they are suppressed altogether.

For non-native English speakers, it is quite common that they will use strong gestures, instead of channeling their energy through their vowels. This means they can be very engaging and passionate but can also mean that there are lots of misunderstandings – especially if they are talking quickly.

Try it for yourself:

- Say 'I am so excited right now' with all the energy you can muster, but with your teeth clenched firmly together.
- Now try saying again with your mouth open and moving freely.

Can you notice the difference? The first is like you are stuck, unable to release your emotions, while the second is like an outpouring of emotion?

So if this sounds like you – here are some tips for using your vowels to be clearer, and a more engaging communicator.

1. Try and put more energy into your vowels – think of tasting the word a bit more in your mouth, or simply just taking some time with it.
2. To emphasise you can go longer, louder, or higher around the vowel.
3. When thinking about which vowels to lengthen or energise, you want to focus on the important words. They are the words that everyone needs to hear to really get your meaning.
4. In every important word, there is only one syllable that really needs to be emphasised – and that is the stressed syllable. So this means you only need to lengthen one vowel sound. For example, it's the OR in im**port**ant.

So try to put your energy in your vowel sounds, lengthen them, lean into them. And you will find it slows you down in the right places, makes you easier to understand, and gets people to connect and engage with you even more. It also gives you more time to think and reduces the umms and ahhs. All good things!

TOOL 2: CRISP UP YOUR CONSONANTS

A lot of non-native speakers have a different relationship with consonants in their native language. Some consonants that we have in English don't exist in other languages, and some others are more fluid when it comes to consonants – they tend to get dropped off the end or switched quite a lot.

Now, in neutral English we have a particular relationship with consonants. They are like the structural framework of the word. It's a bit like having a building with no walls or steel frame – it won't be very sturdy! The consonants show a respect for the language, and they create boundaries for the more fluid emotional energy of the vowel. It's okay to drop some consonants, and indeed you can get away with dropping some without too much consequence.

However, there are two places where you really need to pronounce your consonants, because if you miss them out, it can either be difficult to understand or just really sound a bit off for the English ear.

1. Always pronounce the consonants at the end of a unit of thought, or before a pause – -
“I really do think this is **good**.”
2. Always pronounce the t's and d's in the middle of a word – “It really **mat**tters.”



T's and d's on the ends of words are hugely important. Apart from the fact that if they are dropped the word can mean something else, the word will sound kind of loose and flabby without the consonants clearly pronounced. And a listener will have to work really hard to work out what is being said.



By pronouncing the consonants, you can do the work for the listener, leaving them the opportunity to really engage and interact with you and the thoughts you are sharing.



TOOL 3: EMPHASISE YOUR KEY WORDS

In a sentence or a thought, there are always some words that are more important than others. These are words that contain vital information, or that are packed with meaning. They are different from the less important, often grammatical, words. An easy way to understand the distinction is that the important words hold the information that you need to understand the story or idea. Meanwhile the other words simply facilitate, put into context, time and place, but they don't tell you the actual story itself. For example, the difference between a word like 'while' and a word like 'palm tree'. One you can clearly feel has meaning in its own right, the other is dependent on context and other words to draw out its meaning.

After a bit of practice, you will be able to locate the important or meaningful words instinctively. Then you need to do the work for your listener by highlighting these words with your voice.

Essentially, when you speak you are creating the landscape of your thoughts in the listener's mind, and you want to do the work for them in painting this landscape well. You don't want to hand them over a blank canvas, and tell them to draw the picture for themselves.

TIPS on meaningful words:

1. If you are preparing a talk, underline the key words and phrases you want to emphasise – to help you to remember to make those pop for your listener.
2. If it is speaking off the cuff, you can train yourself to try and find those big ideas as you go, and lean into the words that matter.
3. If you feel the word is important, it probably is. If it's important to you – that also counts
4. Once you have the important words, connect with the vowels (see Tool 1)

The more energy you give to the important words, the easier it will be for your listener to get the gist of what you are saying. It will also slow you down, but without making you speak too slowly (which is just annoying). This is actually the best tip for all speakers, native and non native alike!



TOOL 4: KNOW, AND PREPARE FOR, YOUR WEAKNESSES

If there are words that you don't recognise, or words you know you are prone to mispronounce, then write them down and take ownership of them one by one.

There will be a handful of words that you commonly use that may be the biggest culprits in terms of getting in your way or leading to misunderstanding. If you can put in a bit of work to find out what those are, then you will start to feel that sense of confidence with your speech.

For example, I heard a very good communicator on the radio who said 'intertweened' instead of intertwined – it was fine because she spoke slowly and emphasised her words, and in doing so gave people time to figure out what she was saying. It would have been even better if she had a little notebook and was making a list or asking if there were any words at the end that she mispronounced.



The best way, though, is to get some support and work through a process with a professional, to make bigger, quicker strides.



TOOL 5: LET YOUR PASSION OUT

More important than correct pronunciation, by about a mile, is passion. If someone speaks and doesn't let any of their passion out into their words, then regardless of how correct the pronunciation is, or how perfect their accent is, people won't want to listen.



If someone speaks with passion, and injects their feelings and energy into the words then, even if some sounds or words are mispronounced, it will be compelling and engaging to listen to.



So don't get caught up thinking that your pronunciation may not be perfect therefore only half say it.

No, use the tips above, and go for it!

Engaging with the vowels, consonants and emphasising words and regardless of pronunciation, people will want to listen to you.



CONCLUSION FROM THE AUTHOR

Finally, remember: be kind to yourself on this journey. The way that you speak English is hardwired into your brain, and has been there for any number of years. But I hope this ebook shows that it's perfectly possible to do some rewiring and some of the ways are so simple and effective, you can start making changes straight away.

At London Speech Workshop our goal is to help you be the best communicator you can be. This is only partly about softening your accent. The other part is the psychology of how the language works.

We focus on:

- Intonation and recreating the melody of English speech.
- Practical work enabling you to create the neutral sounds and feel confident communicating.

We avoid:

- Technical terminology and overcomplicating things.
- Focusing too much on what your tongue and mouth are doing (your attention should be on your audience or listener as much as possible).

We find this not only makes for more engaging learning, but also puts you in the perfect mindset for the LSW techniques that make our method so effective.

If you would like to know more about our unique method and how we can help, the first step is to book a [one-hour Taster Session](#) with one of our expert coaches.

We look forward to hearing from you and I wish you well on your journey to more empowered communication in English.

Emma Serlin

Founder, London Speech Workshop



ABOUT US

London Speech Workshop is a leader in the field of communication training with a proven method for Accent Softening, Effective Communication and Elocution.

Since 2008, our unique methodology, our dedicated and passionate coaches and our commitment to excellence has led to hundreds of delighted clients from all over the globe. Our clients include politicians, CEO's, senior executives from many FTSE 100 companies and the 2018 Korean Olympic bid team.

"It's a very well-rounded course that tackles the problem from all angles. The accent softening course has helped me to find my own voice and to feel comfortable about using it."

Michelle

To find out more please visit our website at:
www.londonspeechworkshop.com

