

10 tips to improve the way you speak English

How do you train yourself? By inculcating certain practices in your daily lifestyle. These will get you closer to sounding like a native English speaker and equip you with a global accent -- and you will speak not American or British English, but correct English.

This is the first step to learn any other accent, be it American or British or Australian.

Lisa Mojsin, head trainer, director and founder of the Accurate English Training Company in Los Angeles, offers these tips to help 'neutralise' your accent or rather do away with the local twang, as you speak.

i. Observe the mouth movements of those who speak English well and try to imitate them.

When you are watching television, observe the mouth movements of the speakers. Repeat what they are saying, while imitating the intonation and rhythm of their speech.

ii. Until you learn the correct intonation and rhythm of English, slow your speech down.

If you speak too quickly, and with the wrong intonation and rhythm, native speakers will have a hard time understanding you.

Don't worry about your listener getting impatient with your slow speech -- it is more important that everything you say be understood.

iii. Listen to the 'music' of English.

Do not use the 'music' of your native language when you speak English. Each language has its own way of 'singing'.

iv. Use the dictionary.

Try and familiarise yourself with the phonetic symbols of your dictionary. Look up the correct pronunciation of words that are hard for you to say.

v. Make a list of frequently used words that you find difficult to pronounce and ask someone who speaks the language well to pronounce them for you.

Record these words, listen to them and practice saying them. Listen and read at the same time.

vi. Buy books on tape.

Record yourself reading some sections of the book. Compare the sound of your English with that of the person reading the book on the tape.

vii. Pronounce the ending of each word.

Pay special attention to 'S' and 'ED' endings. This will help you strengthen the mouth muscles that you use when you speak English.

viii. Read aloud in English for 15-20 minutes every day.

Research has shown it takes about three months of daily practice to develop strong mouth muscles for speaking a new language.

ix. Record your own voice and listen for pronunciation mistakes.

Many people hate to hear the sound of their voice and avoid listening to themselves speak. However, this is a very important exercise because doing it will help you become conscious of the mistakes you are making.

x. Be patient.

You can change the way you speak but it won't happen overnight. People often expect instant results and give up too soon. You can change the way you sound if you are willing to put some effort into it.

Quick tips

Various versions of the English language exist. Begin by identifying the category you fall into and start by improving the clarity of your speech.

~ Focus on removing the mother tongue influence and the 'Indianisms' that creep into your English conversations.

~ Watch the English news on television channels like Star World, CNN, BBC and English movies on Star Movies and HBO.

~ Listen to and sing English songs. We'd recommend Westlife, Robbie Williams, Abba, Skeeter Davis and Connie Francis among others.

Books to help you improve your English

Essential English Grammar by Murphy (Cambridge)

Spoken English by R K Bansal and J B Harrison

Pronounce It Perfectly In English (book and three audio cassettes) by Jean Yates, Barrons Educational Series

English Pronunciation For International Students by Paulette Wainless Dale, Lillian Poms
