



**Accent Reduction for Non-Native Speakers of English
Stanford Continuing Studies Winter 2022**

Instructor contact information

Instructor name: Neil G. Jacobs

Class meetings

Classes will meet virtually.

Grading options and requirements

There are three grading options for this course:

- (a) No grade requested [NGR]: If you are taking this course for NGR, no work is required, and there is no attendance requirement. No course credit is given for the NGR option.
- (b) Credit/non-credit [CR/NC]: If you are taking this course for CR/NC, you will need to attend at least 3 of the 5 class sessions and participate in class exercises, as well as complete and turn in the fill-in exercise. The fill-in exercise is found in this syllabus pdf.
- (c) Letter grade: If you are taking this course for a letter grade, the requirements are: attend at least 3 of the 5 class sessions and participate in class exercises; complete and turn in the fill-in exercise; and an end-of-class written assignment. Both assignments are found in this syllabus pdf.

PLEASE NOTE: THE "FIRST ASSIGNMENT"--WHICH SOME OF YOU TURNED IN BEFORE THE CLASS BEGAN--IS ENTIRELY VOLUNTARY, AND IS SEPARATE FROM BOTH THE FILL-IN EXERCISE AND THE END-OF-CLASS-WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT. THE "FIRST ASSIGNMENT" DOES NOT COUNT TOWARD CREDIT OR A LETTER GRADE.

According to the policy of Stanford Continuing Studies, you may change your grading option at any time before the end of the last class session. Please note: (1) If you are planning on seeking reimbursement for course tuition from your employer you will need to take this course for one of the graded options—either CR/NC or a letter grade. **It is your responsibility to find out which grading option you need to select for this.** (2) Participants taking this course NGR will not receive any documentation showing that they have attended/completed the course.

Course objective

The course objective is to help non-native speakers of English acquire new *practical* pronunciation skills, along with a better overall understanding of American English pronunciation issues. The course is presented in an interactive, workshop format. The course combines *theory* and *practice*. Key concepts are introduced, and then applied to language-specific pronunciation issues, followed by practical exercises and feedback.

Fill-in exercise [For participants registered for CR/NC or Letter Grade]

For this exercise, you will fill in the answers to questions about natively-spoken American English. The questions are based on material that will be covered in class. The assignment is due by the beginning of the fourth class meeting, but may be turned in earlier. You are free to use outside sources (books, articles, www) as well as consult with other people, including the instructor. If you have any questions concerning the assignment, even after you have begun working on it, please feel free to ask me for clarification. [This is an exercise—not a test.]

End-of-class written assignment [Only those participants registered for Letter Grade need to complete this assignment along with the fill-in exercise]

The end-of-class assignment gives you the opportunity to apply knowledge acquired in this class to a direct observation of your own spoken English. In this assignment, you will identify and describe 4 or 5 features in your spoken English which you feel are markers of a non-native accent—what these features are, and how they differ from natively-spoken American English. [It is okay to use features which you used to have but which you have since “nativized” during this course.] This assignment is due at the beginning of the final class meeting.

NEW!: I will make available an alternative to the end-of-class written assignment. In this option, you would send me via Canvas an MP3 file where you give your name, and talk freely for 1 minute, read a written passage for 1 minute, and then offer a short self-evaluation of your pronunciation issues.

Reading

There is no course reader assigned for this course. A booklet will be given to participants in class. The booklet includes basic terms, a schematic drawing of the vocal tract, table of American English consonants, table of American English vowels, exercises, and a sample list of supplementary readings and websites.

Outside readings, recordings, www, etc.

There are numerous books available on accent reduction/training/modification. Many of these are accompanied by CDs or tapes. There are also numerous resources to be found online. For example, a search under “accent reduction” often will get close to a half million hits. Many of these online resources include on-line video lectures touching on topics such as learning the phonetic alphabet, word stress, pronunciation of specific sounds, etc. Some of the resources are more helpful than others; almost all have their advantages and disadvantages. Much of this depends on your individual learning style and needs. Helpful hints on how to go about finding the best resources for your needs will be given in class.

For discussion of accent-based prejudice and discrimination, a valuable resource is: Lippi-Green, Rosina. (1997). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. (Routledge).

SCHEDULE

The following is a basic guideline for class meetings. This class is designed to be interactive; thus, the timing and topics covered are subject to change according to students' needs and interests.

Class Meeting Topics

1 Introduction: presentation of the goals and methods of the class; introduction of participants; production of speech sounds: a map of the articulators; types of sounds; phonemes and allophones in languages; identifying and isolating features (such as voicing, rounding, etc.); basic phonetic symbols; practical guide to "difficult" sounds; American English consonants and their difficulties—special attention paid to the languages of course participants, as these present problems in the pronunciation of American English; practical exercises and feedback.

2 Consonants (continued); American English vowels and their difficulties: monophthongs and diphthongs, with special attention paid to the languages of course participants; schwa and reduced vowels; practical exercises/feedback

3 Vowels (continued); American English sounds in combination: general overview; focus on special problems with emphasis on difficulties typically encountered by course participants; practical exercises/feedback

4 Sounds in combination (continued); problems across syllable and word boundaries; word stress: general rules; special problems; word stress and reduction in unstressed syllables; phrasal and sentence stress; slow speech and fast speech; when to enunciate and when to mumble, and how to do each of these—a basic guide to pronunciation differences in slow vs. fast speech; contractions and pronunciation; typically reduced words; British vs. American English; General/Standard American English; practical exercises/feedback

5 Intonation: basic overview of the intonation patterns and sentence types in American English; contrasts with British English; intonation and politeness in American English; speech register and social dialects: formal speech and casual speech: their roles at home, work, and leisure-time activities; pronunciation differences between speaking and reading aloud; hypercorrection; some finishing touches: avoiding overly-correct speech; eye-contact in American English; practical exercises/feedback; concluding remarks

FILL-IN EXERCISE

Please fill in the answers to the following questions. You are free to use outside sources (books, articles, www) as well as consult with other people, including the instructor. The assignment is due by the beginning of the fourth class meeting, but may be turned in earlier.

NAME [Please print] _____

CLASS MEETING DAY: _____

1. Which three sounds may be aspirated [get the “puff” of air] in American English? Give one example (a sample word) for each of the three sounds. Then give an example (for just one of the three sounds) where it is NOT aspirated.

2. The words *matter* and *madder*, and *waiting* and *wading*, are pronounced identically in American English. What is the name of the process which affects both *t* and *d* here. Also, please give in square brackets [] a phonetic symbol for the single sound which is used in these examples.

3. (a) What is a diphthong? Please give a short general definition. (b) What are the “true” diphthongs in English? Please give a sample word for each. (c) Which vowels are typically diphthongized in American English? Please give a sample word for each.

4. Draw the tongue for the place of articulation of *t*, *d*, and *n* in American English. (If you are submitting this assignment electronically, you may simply describe in words where the tongue is placed for these three sounds.)

5. When speakers of certain languages pronounce, in their English, *w* as [v]—as in, for example, “vonderful, Vednesday, Visconsin”, etc.—what are they doing? That is, describe the phonetic differences between [w] and [v]. Then, give the name for the phenomenon whereby some of these same speakers say “willage” for village, “wictory” for victory, etc.

End-of-class written assignment

The end-of-class assignment gives you the opportunity to apply knowledge acquired in this class to a direct observation of your own spoken English. The idea is that awareness will be helpful for accent reduction, serving as a guide for practical exercises.

Please identify and describe 4-5 features in your spoken English which you feel are (or were, if you have since eliminated the feature[s]) markers of a non-native accent—what these features are, and how they differ from natively-spoken American English. It is fairly open as to how you wish to approach the task. Here, you might be mentioning things like overall intonation, aspiration/non-aspiration of *p*, *t*, and *k*, the sounds *l* and *r*, issues concerning word boundaries, syllables, word stress, pronunciation of vowels, etc.—whatever you feel are/were your main concerns.

This assignment is due at the beginning of the final class meeting.

NEW ALTERNATIVE TO END-OF-CLASS WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT:

I will try to make available an alternative to the end-of-class written assignment. In this option, you would send me via Canvas an MP3 file where you give your name, and talk freely for 2 minutes, read a written passage for 1 minute, and then offer a short self-evaluation of your pronunciation issues.

RECORDING

Class sessions will be recorded and posted on Canvas. However, it is recommended that students attend the live class sessions, since this is the main opportunity to ask questions, and to practice and get feedback on their pronunciation. The recordings should be used mainly for reviewing the materials covered, or as a second chance for anyone who had to miss a live session.