

THE SPEAK CLEARLY METHOD

FREE STARTER GUIDE

Speak Clearly

5 sounds that cost you clarity

— and exactly how to fix each one

/θ/ TH

/r/ R

ship•sheep

-ED

stress

You don't have to lose your accent.

You have to be understood.

by Evangeline Smith & Miriam Smith · authors of Speak Clearly

Start here

Your grammar is solid. Your vocabulary is wide. So why do people still say, “Sorry — could you repeat that?”

The answer is almost never grammar. It's pronunciation — the one skill most English courses quietly skip. The good news: it isn't about talent, and it isn't about erasing who you are. It's a physical skill, and physical skills are learnable.

The one promise behind every page

You do not have to sound native to be understood. Only about one in four English speakers learned it as a first language — most English conversations happening right now are between two people who learned it later, just like you. Your accent is part of your story. This guide fixes only what gets in the way of being understood.

HOW TO PRACTISE — THE 4-STEP LOOP

1 Hear it

Train your ear first with minimal pairs — two words that differ by one sound (ship / sheep). Your ear must hear the difference before your mouth can make it.

2 Feel it

Use the physical check in each section — a hand on your throat, or a mirror. Feedback you can feel beats guessing.

3 Make it

Follow the mouth steps slowly. One correct slow repetition beats ten fast, sloppy ones.

4 Use it

Say the practice words in a real sentence. A sound only counts when it survives outside a drill.

Voiced or voiceless?

Before any single sound, learn this one idea — it explains dozens of English contrasts at once. Every consonant is either voiced (your vocal cords buzz) or voiceless (just air).

The throat test (do this now)

Put two fingers on the front of your throat. Say “ssss” — no buzz. Now say “zzzz” — you feel a buzz. That buzz is voicing. Same mouth, same tongue; the only difference is whether your voice is switched on. That single switch separates these everyday pairs:

SAME MOUTH POSITION — ONLY THE BUZZ CHANGES

Sue
VS
zoo

fine
VS
vine

price
VS
prize

think
VS
this

Why this matters

Three of the fixes in this guide — TH, the -ED ending, and W vs V — come down to voicing. Once your hand can feel the buzz, you can check yourself without a teacher. Keep two fingers on your throat as you work through the next pages.

TH

/θ/ · /ð/

The TH sound

The hardest sound in English for most learners — it doesn't exist in Spanish, French, German, Mandarin, Arabic or Japanese.

HOW TO MAKE IT

- 1 Put the tip of your tongue gently between your top and bottom front teeth — it must peek out a little.
- 2 Push air out over your tongue. If your tongue stays behind your teeth, you'll get S or T instead.
- 3 Decide which TH: voiceless (think, three) is just air; voiced (this, father) adds the throat buzz.

The mirror + throat check

In a mirror, you should SEE your tongue tip. With two fingers on your throat, "think" has no buzz and "this" does. Practise switching: ssss ... thhh (voiceless) ... zzz ... thhh (voiced).

EXAMPLE WORDS

think

three

thanks

mouth

this

the

father

breathe

MINIMAL PAIRS TO DRILL

think
vs
sink

three
vs
tree

they
vs
day

mouth
vs
mouse

R

/r/

The English R

Unusual: the tongue curls up and back but touches nothing. If it taps or vibrates, you get a different sound.

HOW TO MAKE IT

Round your lips slightly, as if about to whistle.

1 Curl the tongue tip up and back — and keep it floating. No contact anywhere in the mouth.

2 Switch the voice on. The English R always has a buzz.

3

The mirror test

Watch two things: your lips should round, and your tongue must never slap the roof of your mouth. If you can see or feel that contact, you're making a D, an L, or a rolled R — not English R.

EXAMPLE WORDS

red

right

car

very

around

great

road

real

MINIMAL PAIRS TO DRILL

right
vs
light

red
vs
led

rice
vs
lice

road
vs
load

ɪ-iː

/ɪ/ · /iː/

Ship vs sheep

If your first language has one “ee” sound, your brain filed both of these together years ago. It’s trainable.

HOW TO MAKE IT

Short /ɪ/ (ship): mouth relaxed, sound quick and short.

- 1 Long /iː/ (sheep): spread your lips like a smile, tense the tongue high, and HOLD it a beat longer.
- 2

- 3 The difference is tension and length — not just the tongue.

The mirror smile

Say “sheep” and check you can see your teeth (lips spread). Say “ship” and watch your face relax. If your face doesn’t change between the two words, the sounds aren’t changing either.

EXAMPLE WORDS

ship

sheep

live

leave

fill

feel

bin

bean

MINIMAL PAIRS TO DRILL

ship
vs
sheep

live
vs
leave

fill
vs
feel

bin
vs
bean

-ED

/t/ /d/ /ɪd/

The -ED ending

Almost never a separate “ed” syllable. It has three sounds, set by the sound before it.

/t/ after voiceless sounds (p, k, f, s, sh, ch): stopped, kissed, watched, laughed

/d/ after voiced sounds and vowels: loved, planned, rained, called, opened

/ɪd/ after T or D only — this one adds a syllable: wanted, needed, ended, waited

The Romeo & Juliet memory trick

Their parents HATED /ɪd/ each other (ends in T → add the syllable). The two of them

LOVED /d/ each other (voiced V → /d/). In the end they KISSED /t/ (voiceless S → /t/).

One story, all three rules. To choose: say the verb, hand on throat. Buzz → /d/. Air → /t/.

Ends in T or D → /ɪd/.

MINIMAL PAIRS TO DRILL**kissed**

VS

missed**loved**

VS

moved**ended**

VS

rented**called**

VS

crawled

Word stress & the “they’re so fast” illusion

Two rhythm skills that do more for clarity than any single consonant — and explain why native speech is so hard to catch.

1 • Stress: one strong beat per word

English hammers ONE syllable in each word and relaxes the rest. Put the beat in the wrong

place and even perfect sounds get misheard. Some pairs flip meaning entirely: a PREsent (a gift) vs to preSENT (to give); a REcord vs to reCORD.

Rule of thumb for two-syllable words: nouns tend to stress the first, verbs the second.

2 • Linking: natives aren’t fast, they’re joined

Words get glued together, which hides the boundaries. A final consonant jumps to the next

word: turn off → “tur-NOFF”; an apple → “a-NAP-ple”; pick it up → “pi-ki-TUP.”

If you couldn’t find “apple” inside “a-NAP-ple,” that’s not vocabulary — it’s linking.

You need to UNDERSTAND these to follow real speech. Using them yourself is optional.

Say it out loud

“I’d like to preSENT you with this PREsent.” “Turn it on” → “tur-ni-TON.”

Which sounds should YOU focus on?

Your accent isn't random — it's your first language showing through. Find your language below and start with those. (The full book has a dedicated chapter for each.)

IF YOUR FIRST LANGUAGE START WITH THESE	
Spanish	TH · ship/sheep vowel length · B/V · adding 'e' before s-clusters (eschool)
Portuguese	final NG · TH · dark L becoming 'w' · extra vowel after final consonants
French	TH · the H ('appy → happy) · word stress · the English R
German	W vs V (vell → well) · final consonant voicing (dog → dok) · J vs Y · TH
Mandarin	final consonants · R vs L · TH · dropped -ED / -S endings · vowel length
Arabic	P vs B · short vowels (bit/bet/bat) · CH vs SH · vowels inside clusters

Don't know the sound names yet?

That's fine — just work through the five sounds in this guide in order. They're the ones that cause the most trouble across every language. Master these and you've done the hardest part.

YOUR FIRST WEEK

The 7-day quick start

Ten focused minutes a day. Record yourself on day 1 and day 7 on your phone — hearing the difference is the most motivating thing you'll do.

DAY
1

Voicing

Do the throat test. Drill Sue/zoo, fine/vine, price/prize. Record yourself reading 3 sentences — keep it.

DAY
2

TH

Mirror + tongue tip. Drill think/sink, they/day. Say the tongue-lesson words slowly.

DAY
3

The R

Lips round, tongue floating. Drill right/light, red/led in the mirror.

DAY
4

Ship / sheep

The smile test. Drill ship/sheep, live/leave, fill/feel. Hold the long ones.

DAY
5

-ED endings

Romeo & Juliet trick. Sort 10 past-tense verbs into /t/, /d/, /ɪd/ out loud.

DAY
6

Stress & linking

Say PREsent/preSENT. Practise 'turn off' → tur-NOFF and 4 more links.

DAY
7

Put it together

Re-record the day-1 sentences. Compare. Pick your weakest sound to keep working on.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Ready for all 22 sounds?

This guide covers five. Speak Clearly — the full book — covers 22 sounds and speech patterns, with minimal pairs and tongue twisters for every one, six first-language guides, and a complete 30-day practice plan.

Speak Clearly

A Practical Guide to English Pronunciation

The complete method: all 22 sounds, first-language guides for six languages, self-assessment, and a 30-day plan. The natural next step after this guide.

Buy on Amazon → amazon.com/dp/B0H7NHTLKV

A Piece of Cake

Your Practical Guide to English Idioms

160 idioms across 26 chapters. Where Speak Clearly helps you be understood, this one helps you understand what native speakers really mean.

Buy on Amazon → amazon.com/dp/B0G3WNWMB1

Follow for free lessons — @SpeakClearlyMethod

YouTube · Instagram · TikTok · Facebook · X · Pinterest

Everything in one place → linktr.ee/SpeakClearlyMethod

You don't have to lose your accent. You have to be understood.

THE SPEAK CLEARLY METHOD

Speak clearly.
Speak confidently.
Speak as yourself.