



# What Do You Say?

## American Accents and Dialects

### Week 2: *Accents*

How sounds, pronunciation, emphasis, and tempo combine to form the “accent” part of your dialect.

- Goals of Week 2’s study of accents
  - Tune your ear to hear dialect differences.
  - Be inquisitive about sources of dialect differences. These could be:
    - Gender (of speaker, of listener)
    - Age (of speaker, of listener)
    - Casual/polite speech
    - Speaking at work or play
    - Rank (of speaker, of listener)
    - Geographic or dialect region
    - Other dialect influences (parents, jobs, hobbies)
  - Do not judge dialect differences.
  - Identify unwritten rules of pronunciation.
- Review the homework: pronouncing the “Accent Challenge” word list or listening to different singers who covered the same song. What did you hear? (Go to the [tinyurl.com/OLLI-WhatDoYouSay](https://tinyurl.com/OLLI-WhatDoYouSay) website for how people across the country pronounce the words.)

- Examples of dialects: listen for pronunciation, word choice, grammar and syntax. How are these dialects different from your own?
  - “I speak Jive” from *Airplane* <https://youtu.be/3GDiOBA7Yyg>
  - “Midwest Voice Translator” <https://youtu.be/7OR7yPK4wEw>
  - Appalachian English: <https://youtu.be/03iwAY4KIIU>
- Attitudes about dialects, including your own attitudes and your own dialect
  - Linguistic discrimination PSA <https://youtu.be/YXxCYkquRYs?t=7>
- Pronunciations: “You say eether, I say eyether.” Watch Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers tap-dance on roller skates while singing this classic song about dialect differences...  
[https://youtu.be/LOILZ\\_D3aRg?t=39](https://youtu.be/LOILZ_D3aRg?t=39)
- Pronunciation shifts: Anne Curzan, Lecture 7, “‘Often’ versus ‘Offen’—Pronunciation” from *The Secret Life of Words: English Words and Their Origins* on Wondrium.  
[https://www.wondrium.com/pdf/index/index/docName/DG2140\\_AC4DC.PDF/](https://www.wondrium.com/pdf/index/index/docName/DG2140_AC4DC.PDF/)
  - Judgements of different pronunciations of a word are socially constructed. “When people are judging language, they are almost always judging more than language—that is, speakers and groups of speakers.”
  - Metathesis: two sounds switch places (asterisk/asterix)
  - Syncope: sound simplification (family/fam’ly)
  - Consonants are pronounced by impeding the flow of air through the vocal tract, either by stopping it (the /b/ or /t/ sound) or by creating friction (the /f/ or /v/ sound).
    - The position of the tongue, lips, and other articulators determine the consonant: /b/ and /p/ are bilabial sounds because both lips are closed when they are formed.
    - Another element distinguishing consonants is voicing, or whether the vocal cords are moving when you make the sound. The /b/ sound is voiced, and /p/ is voiceless.
  - Pronouncing vowels involves unimpeded airflow and the alteration of the shape of the mouth as well as the height and “frontness” of the tongue.
    - Because each vowel is a “target” in the vowel space of the mouth, they are rarely said the same way: the tongue forms the vowel as the mouth moves from one consonant to another. The pronunciation of vowels can shift from one target position to another.
    - Vowel mergers: pin/pen and cot/caught. Some people pronounce the vowels the same, and some differently.
  - Pronunciations can change through insertion of sounds, deletion of sounds, assimilation of sounds, and analogy.
    - Insertion: adding an extra sound to an existing word. For example, pronouncing *hamster* as if it had a /p/ in the middle: “hampster.” (The word *empty* now has a *p* in its spelling and pronunciation but was spelled *emty* until the 1600s.)

- **Deletion:** omitting a sound in a word. For example, the second syllable in *laboratory* is often deleted in American English.
    - Is the pronunciation “offen” for *often* a deletion? Historically, yes, just as the /t/ was lost in *soften*. But now, the pronunciation “often” is an insertion based on the word’s spelling; it’s referred to as a spelling pronunciation.
  - **Assimilation:** sounds become like other sounds near them. For example, many people delete the /d/ in *sandwich*, and for some, the /n/ then becomes /m/. Because the /w/ is bilabial, the /n/ shifts to the bilabial /m/.
    - The prefix “in-“ (from Latin ‘not’) becomes “im-“ before bilabial sounds: *improbable, immobile* versus *inarticulate* or *indecisive*.
  - **Analogy:** changing the pronunciation of a word to be more like other words. For example, *height* often becomes “heighth” by analogy with *depth, width, and length*.
- Pronunciation: Gender: vocal fry, uptalk, pitch
  - Pronunciation unwritten rules: Ding-dong, tick-tock and zig-zag
  - **Homework:** Made up words
    - Words that you or your child invented.
    - Words that are “missing” (for example, “hot spicy” vs “hot temperature”)
    - How to Invent a New English Word: <https://youtu.be/WdrZkl8WYIg> (5:54)
  - **Optional homework:** Can you determine some rules governing the pronunciation of “often” and “offen”?

Next class is in 4 weeks on July 13!!

### Words

The words you choose are part of your dialect: for example, do you say *garbage* or *trash*? Have you ever made up a word?



Note: links to the videos used in this presentation can be found at [tinyurl.com/OLLI-WhatDoYouSay](https://tinyurl.com/OLLI-WhatDoYouSay) .