

“DIVE INTO DIALECTS”

Created by Sara J. Griffin

Accents vs. Dialects: What’s the difference?

When someone speaks with an *accent*, it means they are speaking a language other than their first language, and their pronunciations, inflections, rhythms, and speech patterns are being affected by the characteristics of their first language.

When someone speaks with a *dialect*, it means they are speaking their first language, and their pronunciations, inflections, rhythms, and speech patterns are influenced by the region in which they live or have lived, and/or how they have been taught to speak.

A person from France whose first language is French speaks English with a French accent. A person from Wisconsin whose first language is English speaks English with a midwestern dialect.

Regional dialects are developed over time, imprinted on and taught from generation to generation.

I get to do a dialect! What now?

When you are cast in a show where you need to speak with a dialect, there’s a lot more that goes into doing a dialect well than just changing your pronunciations. You need to consider the rhythm and melody patterns, placement, pitch, vocal quality, and how speaking with this dialect impacts your physicality.

To answer these questions, you need to do your research. The best way to assimilate a dialect is to immerse yourself in it. Find audio clips and samples of people who speak with this dialect- watch local news, interviews, listen to podcasts, etc. One of the best resources available for English speakers, is the IDEA website, the International Dialects of English Archives website. There are hundreds of recordings of different dialects, with native speakers and non-native speakers, speakers of all different backgrounds, ages, and genders. When you are listening, pay attention to dialect characteristics noted above, then move into sound changes.

When breaking down a dialect, you should identify 5-8 vowel or diphthong changes, and 3-5 consonant changes. There may be more, there may be less, but this is a good range from which to start. When you are listening to audio examples, write down the words that sound different than how you typically pronounce them, then identify what the difference is. Hopefully, you will be given a list of sound changes and information about a dialect by a director or voice and text coach, so you aren’t responsible for finding all of the sound changes on your own. But that only happens once you have been cast. For the audition, you’re on your own.

RP

Received Pronunciation (typically called RP) is a standardizing British dialect, erasing regionalisms and speech patterns that historically have been deemed “lower class”. This dialect is still taught in British schools, which is why we hear people not from England but from countries colonized by England speaking with this dialect. This is most common British dialect used on stage across the globe, especially for English speaking actors.

Generalizations about the RP dialect compared to typical American speech:

- The vocal placement of the RP dialect is much more forward in the mouth, with the sounds being formed on the tip of the tongue, lips and teeth.
- RP speech is much clearer, crisper, and quicker than American speech.
- Higher pitches are used to emphasis a word or phrase instead of volume.
- RP is much more musical than American speech, meaning there are many more highs and lows as well as the highs being higher and the lows being lower than American highs and lows.
- Rather than attacking the beginning of a thought like Americans, RP speakers drive through to the end of the thought, with their strongest speaking happening closer to the end of their speaking.
- RP places more focus and emphasis on consonants rather than vowels.
- RP speakers tend to emphasize fewer words in a thought than in American phrasing, and “pounce on them with a higher pitch”.

Resources for listening to RP:

- IDEA (International Dialects of English Archives) website; Received Pronunciation examples 2 and 3, as well as England 7.
- Maggie Smith in *Harry Potter* movies, or *Downton Abbey*
- Imelda Staunton in *Harry Potter*, or as Queen Elizabeth in *The Crown*
- Judy Dench as herself, Queen Elizabeth in *Shakespeare in Love*
- Sir Patrick Stewart and Sir Ian McKellen as themselves
- Dev Patel in interviews

Sound Changes for RP

1. Elimination of “R” coloring in vowels and diphthongs of “r”. Replace with “uh” or schwa sound.

Examples:

Medial

Understand Standard Arbitrary Heart Artist

Final

Mother Father Sister Brother Car Star

Rule of thumb: If you can pronounce the word without the R-coloring and it still makes sense, remove the R.

2. "Linking R": When a word ends with an R sound (vowel, diphthong or consonant) and the following word begins with a vowel or diphthong sound, the R-coloring is moved the beginning of that following word.

Examples:

Mother is Ginger ale a pair of there is

3. "Ask" list words (see separate sheet). Specific instances of words where the vowel is replaced with an "ah" sound. **Only the words on the "Ask" List get this substitution.**

4. "Aw" sound, as in Paul, is more rounded, distinct, clear, and forward than American English.

Examples:

Initial

All Awe Alter

Medial

Wall Lawn Paul

Final

Paw Thaw Law Raw

5. "Honest" sound becomes much more prominent. It's often missing in American English.

Examples:

Initial

Often Of Odd Orange

Medial

Bob Soft Moth Bother Horrible Dotty

6. The "ou" sound, as in go or know, becomes "eo". A slight "eh" sound before a clear "o".

Examples:

Initial

Oh Over Only

Medial

Don't Won't Polar Show

Final

Ringo Woe Although Follow

7. "ary", "ery", "ory", "ony" endings lose the final vowel sound, and become truncated

Examples:

Imaginary Ordinary Matrimony Memory Machinery

8. Murmuring "R" sound replaces a hard "R"

Examples:

Initial

Earn Earl Urn
Medial
 Worm Murmur Girl World
Final
 Burr Were Stir Fur

9. "Liquid u's" are a necessity and much more common. A liquid u comes from adding a "y" sound before the "oo" sound, following the consonants of t, d, n, l, and s. Rule of thumb- use when an alternate pronunciation is possible. For example, you would never say "tyool" for tool.

Examples:

Duel During Lure News Nude Assume Student Tune Suit
 Intuition Supervise Lurid

10. Puffed "wh" combinations

Examples:

When Where Why Overwhelm

11. Long "ee" endings become a short "i"

Examples:

Money Family Any Lively

Anomalies

Been pronounced as "bin" or "bean"

Again pronounced as "uh-GAYN"

Immediately pronounced as "i-MEE-jit-li"

Aluminum pronounced "al-u-min-nee-um"

Tapped R's "very", "American"