



A Practical Course of  
American Pronunciation and Intonation  
for Chinese EFL Learners

实用美语语音训练教程

主编 姜虹



中央广播电视大学出版社



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## P R E F A C E

English is a dynamic language, and pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar are the three main factors of it.

This book is written for the students of higher vocational colleges in China to learn standardized American English. Pronunciation is one of the basic courses for English major students. There are variegated textbooks for them to utilize but most of them are theoretical ones for undergraduates which are sometimes not sufficient or not suitable enough for higher vocational college students. In addition, as per my observation, various types of examinations for students are based mainly on American English while in fact there's an obvious variation in pronunciation between American and British English. This is causing confusion among students and their losing of points in the listening tests.

Higher vocational colleges attach more importance to cultivating skilled workers rather than academic researchers. That is to say, teaching theoretical knowledge of phonetics in classrooms would be less emphasized and teachers are encouraged to highlight more on the application of the basic theories so that students may acquire more practical skills in real use. Students may not fully comprehend the difficult theoretical knowledge but if they are able to speak English language fluently and in right intonation, the learning objectives designed for the students in the higher vocational colleges can be regarded as being achieved.

This textbook is divided into four chapters: The first chapter gives introduction to the purpose of the book, the objectives of the exercises and the basic theoretical knowledge on intonation; the second chapter is divided into 6 units (from unit 1 to unit 6) talking about the vowel system of American English; the third chapter has 4 units (from unit 7 to unit 10) covering the consonant variations of American English; and the last chapter is mainly about the intonation patterns of American English, including 4 units (from unit 11 to unit 14). Each unit of the book is primarily composed of the following parts: a brief introduction to American English, auditory discrimination, pronunciation, oral English training, sound imitation and practical training. The main purpose and learning approaches of this book are described clearly in the first chapter of Introduction. Please read it carefully before you start to learn the following chapters.

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In order to help students further understand intonation patterns and rules of stress and rhythm in American English, improve their ability to identify stress and rhythm, and form a good habit of speaking American English, the author also designed series of exercises on stress, stress pattern and stress rhythm in addition to some key phonetic practice for each unit with recordings.

Similarly, Appendix 6 (Self-Taught Guidance) is added as supplementary learning materials of this textbook, which is in Chinese version, to meet the urgent requirements of English learners, especially the non-English majors in higher vocational colleges.

From the preparation to the final publication, it took three years to write this textbook. The first thirteen units of the book are written by Jiang Hong; the last unit and Appendix 7 by Lei Zhilian. Tang Lijuan is in charge of 70 percent of Appendix 6 (Self-Taught Guidance) and Ma Lijuan and Yang Wenyan take charge of the rest.

At the time of sending the book for printing, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Liu Kuohua of the College of Foreign Languages, Lanzhou University of Arts and Science, to Professor Lu Dewen, the dean of Foreign Language School, Gansu Agricultural University, and to Professor Shen Wen'an from Northwest University for Nationalities, for their useful and valuable views, comments and suggestions for the compilation of this book. Meanwhile, some passages and ideas from *Compton P-ESL Program* (written by Arthur J. Compton Ph.D) and *MEEC CD Series: The Vowel System, Consonants Variations & Intonation Patterns of American English* (written by Lorna D. Sikorsi, M.A) are also quoted and referred to in the book. The views of the above two books are also helpful guidance and provide reliable information for my writing.

In view of the limit of the authors' knowledge and ability, there must be errors and inadequacies in the book, for which comments and criticism are sincerely appreciated.

**Jiang Hong**

**July 2016**

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

The main purpose of this textbook is to help improve your spoken English. To achieve this goal, the main part of the textbook is divided into three sections: vowels, consonants and intonation.

The vowel and consonant sections are divided into three stages:

### ► Stage 1: listening

In this stage, you will learn to recognize English sounds, particularly the difficult ones for non-native English speakers. Once grasping the capacity of distinguishing what you have heard, you can more easily make accurate pronunciation.

### ► Stage 2: pronunciation

In the second stage, you will continue to listen, especially to spoken American English, and continue to read in order to understand phrasing, rhythm and intonation and practice with exercises. Most learners need to complete the first two stages to make correct pronunciation in a relatively short period of time provided they make a constant effort to do so.

### ► Stage 3: forming good conversational habits

At this critical stage, you are expected to achieve the goal of pronouncing sentences naturally. This is the stage where students demonstrate correct pronunciations in everyday conversation without their first language's interference. You will use what you have already learned in a real context.

## Single Word Exercises

These exercises contain several groups of words aimed at training the target syllables. With the training, you can concentrate more easily on the target pronunciation. Thus, the steps below should be followed:

Familiarize yourselves with the words and word groups. Close the book and listen to the



recording until you can easily distinguish the target pronunciation and have an initial impression of the pronunciation. Pronounce the words (during the pause time in the recording) and imitate the pronunciation as accurately as possible. In this way, a link between the words and their pronunciations will be formed in your head. The purpose of the exercises is to train your ears to guide your mouth. You should not read the script during the practice since this will only hinder the development of your listening and pronunciation skills. After reading these words repetitively and feeling you are pronouncing them accurately, you can open the textbook, read the words and record your own voice. At this time, make the pronunciations as what you have heard rather than those you imagined before. Finally, listen to your own recording to determine whether it is consistent with the original one. When you are satisfied with your pronunciations, then move on to the next exercise.

## Sentence Exercises

The purpose of these exercises is to train readers to correctly pronounce words in sentences after finishing the first stage of single words training. The aim is not only to read the target syllables correctly but also to grasp the phrasing, rhythm and intonation of the whole sentences. When you listen to the recording the first time, in order to better acquaint yourselves with the content, you need to take the entire set of sentences and text into consideration. Nevertheless, when listening to each sentence with the book closed, you should still focus on the target pronunciation of each word, and then the other parts such as phrasing, rhythm and intonation of the whole sentence during the second listening (after play back the recording). This is to help you form an auditory impression of a sentence just like a person could still see the picture in his mind when his eyes were closed after staring at a picture for a few seconds. However, when the person opens his eyes and looks at the picture again he can notice additional details that were not perceived before. Similarly, it is quite possible that you will get more details the second time you listen to the sentence and gradually remember the sound of the entire sentence.

Besides, when you listen to the recording and then speak out the sentence during the pauses, you can better copy the phrasing and intonation. The purpose is to correctly mimic the pronunciation of the entire sentence instead of the target keywords. In spoken language, words are not separate; by following certain rhythmical patterns they make up groups and phrases. Therefore, when you are doing reading practice, you must regard each word group or phrase as a whole. Only in this way will fluency be achieved.

In this kind of sentence exercises, you may find some compound words, collocations or word groups difficult to pronounce, which means you may forget their accurate pronunciations. When it

happens, you may find using a script as a “crutch” is very attractive as it can help you review the sentence. However, you should try not to do so. If you cannot remember the sound of the sentence, it possibly means that you did not form an auditory impression necessary for a correct pronunciation. You need to listen to the recording again and again before continuing with the sentence exercises.

It is advisable for you to speak out the complete set of sentences, along with its phrases and word groups, before looking at the script or moving on. Having satisfactorily completed two or three sentences in each exercise, you should open the book, look at the script and listen to the recording. What should be emphasized is that you must get an auditory impression before engaging in speaking and you should pronounce as accurately as you can. The last step is to listen to the original recording and compare this with your own recording so as to check your progress.

## The Basic Components of Intonation

Every non-native speakers may come across such situation: you can hear people talking, but do not understand what they were saying; nevertheless, you may have got some clues and understood a word here and there. If you were a sharp-eyed observer, you may have read their facial expressions and body movements. Likewise, it is also possible to get more information through a conscious source of information—the intonation.

Any kind of verbal communication contains several aspects. Words and grammar rules are the main body of communication. Body language reinforces the literal meaning and entitles the additional meaning. Pronunciation governs how your voice sounds, that is, the clarity of individual speech sounds. Intonation which includes the concepts of pitch, stress, duration and speech rate is a general term related to your musical aspects of speech.

Many researchers noted that 70% of the information is conveyed to the listener by the intonation we use. Correct intonation pattern can help the listener to focus on the focal point of your message. Listeners will understand what you mean faster, and respond you more quickly. The listener will need more time to interpret what you mean if you do not use the correct intonation patterns, then the communication barriers occur, and the two parties will feel depressed. Now, let's define and practice the critical components of intonation: pitch and stress.

► **Pitch:** no language is monotone. Voice quality and people's emotions polish our speech. When people speak, they use a variety of tones from low to high; these tones are called the different pitch levels. In American English there are four levels of pitch, we will use the following symbols to illustrate them:

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
 3 \_\_\_\_\_  
 2 \_\_\_\_\_  
 1 \_\_\_\_\_

American English flows along levels 2 and 3 for the most time. Level 1 is used to start or end the conversation, and it can also be used to reflect the physical discomfort or emotional depression. Level 4 can be used to represent the strong feelings, such as shock or surprise. When asking questions, we use this high pitch. American speech flows from pitch level to pitch level by steps and glides.

► **Step:** When one syllable in a word is said on a different tone from that used for the previous syllable, this is called a *step change*. Look at the following word graphed with intonation symbols:

4  
 3 wo  
 2 man  
 1

Two distinct tones are used in the pronunciation of the word; the pitch level used in each syllable is different. Step changes can go up or down the pitch range. Please look at the word “woman” with a rising pitch.

4  
 3 man  
 2 wo  
 1

► **Glide:** A glide refers to a pitch change within a syllable. Look at the word “quite” graphed below:

4  
 3 q —————  
 u  
 2 i  
 t  
 1 e

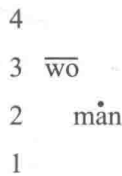
Imagine the pronunciation of the word is like a downward curve, prolonging the vowel in the word, to raise or lower the pitch through pitch bend. Using steps and glides in a longer messages can help us separate word groups into meaningful messages, the usage and rules of these changes will be discussed in later chapters.

► **Stress:** Stress is the second critical component of intonation. It means emphasizing a particular syllable or word to make it stand out from the rest of information, so how should you articulate the stress? Here are some ways:

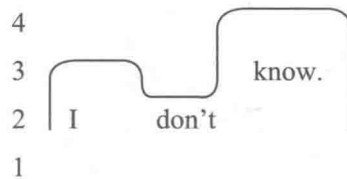
- use a louder voice;
- use a higher pitch;
- lengthen the vowel in a word.

There are 5-6 levels of stress in English according to the dictionary or professional language books, but in fact, only three stress levels with your voice (primary, secondary and weak ones) need to be clearly articulated. In the three levels of stress, the strongest pronunciation is primary stress and the slightly stronger one is secondary stress. You should read the syllable with weak stress tone or even slide over if it is not very important in a word.

Let's look at the two-syllable word "woman" again, the first syllable is the most critical syllable to meaning, therefore it receives primary stress, and the second syllable is not very important, so it receives weak stress. We can visually illustrate the stress and pitch of any word or sentence on the four-level pitch graph:



Because a stressed syllable or word is always said in a higher pitch, you can see that the position of the stressed syllable will be at the highest pitch point, as shown in the following illustration:



In later chapters, you will fully understand how stress rules change and work in the long messages.

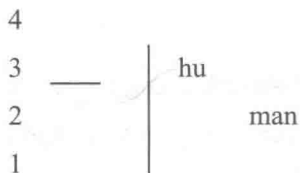
## Graphic Symbol System for Intonation

You will use the following symbols to show the changes of stress and pitch in the simple sentences. These symbols not only can help you identify what your practice pattern is, but also can help you solve the problem that you might meet in daily life. This kind of word or phrase's visual chart system can display three aspects of contents: stress, pitch and contrast.

► **Stress:** We define three basic degrees of stress in words and give them the following symbols:

primary \_\_\_\_\_ secondary \_\_\_\_\_ weak •

► **Pitch:** Step changes in pitch (where each syllable is on a separate tone) are indicated by placing the stress markers on distinct levels, either with or without the four-level pitch bar graph:



Glides in pitch are marked with a curve going up or down.

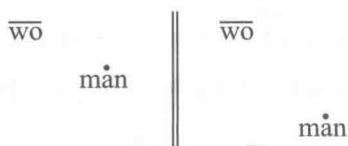
falling pitch      rising pitch      slightly rising pitch

we

him?

yes

► **Contrast:** The contrast of tone refers to how clearly and distinctly the speaker's voice indicates different pitch levels and degrees of stress. You can mark contrast by lengthening or shortening the stress marker lines and by placing these stress markers closer together or farther apart to indicate the differences in pitches:



For longer messages, this symbol system becomes too rigid and busy. An easier, more realistic graphic system for these instances will be described in Unit 13.

# CHAPTER TWO

## The Vowel System of American English

### » Unit 1 The Vowel Sounds

#### 1.1 Front Vowels

This first group of vowel sounds (/æ/, /ɛ/, /e/, /i/, /i:/) is called front vowels because they are produced with the highest part of the tongue arched towards the front of the mouth. Listen to the sample words for each of these vowels on your reference CD and observe the symbol used for each one. Please note that all possible spelling variations may not be listed for each vowel sound. Now, try making each vowel yourself. This will help you to associate the sound with the symbol.

##### 1.1.1 /æ/

##### Front Vowel

**Sound Features:** low, lips slightly retracted, lax, short

**Spelling Options:** a, au

##### Exercise 1. /æ/ Practice Words

**Directions:** Practice and add your personal words in the empty rows as well.

lack	rapid	cat	laugh
fact	man	nap	scab
anger	lamp	lasting	habit
hand	family	example	last
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

##### Exercise 2. /æ/ Phrase Variations and Sentences

**Directions:** Practice and add your personal phrases and sentences in the empty rows as well.

1. for the *masses* / for *mass* distribution / *Mass* was held
2. *and match* his price / *match* the *patterns* / made a *match*

3. *Sam's dad had the rank of captain* in the army.
4. A *diplomat* must be a *man* or woman of *tact*.
5. The *faculty* *clapped* their *hands* after the speech.
6. \_\_\_\_\_.
7. \_\_\_\_\_.
8. \_\_\_\_\_.

### 1.1.2 /ɛ/

### Front Vowel

**Sound Features:** mid, lips slightly retracted, lax, short

**Spelling Options:** e, ea, ue

#### Exercise 1. /ɛ/ Practice Words

**Directions:** Practice and add your personal words in the empty rows as well.

let	met	leg	set
deaf	lesson	empty	dead
trend	instead	tennis	question
bed	head	heavy	desk
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

#### Exercise 2. /ɛ/ Phrase Variations and Sentences

**Directions:** Practice and add your personal phrases and sentences in the empty rows as well.

1. *let* him go / *peck* the corn / *get* your gun
2. flew the *jet* / on the *ledge* / *get* my *breath*
3. I *never said* you were too *heavy*.
4. We played *ten sets* of *tennis* before lunch.
5. That *hotel* has a *guest* in *every bed*.
6. \_\_\_\_\_.
7. \_\_\_\_\_.
8. \_\_\_\_\_.

### 1.1.3 /e/

### Front Vowel

**Sound Features:** mid, lips very retracted, tense, long

**Spelling Options:** a, ai, ay, ei, ey, a-e (a-e stands for spelling combinations of “a” + any consonant + “e”)

### Exercise 1. /e/ Practice Words

**Directions:** Practice and add your personal words in the empty rows as well.

late	cape	tape	fail
play	eight	neighbor	lazy
fame	crate	rake	paid
nature	table	wait	way
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

### Exercise 2. /e/ Phrase Variations and Sentences

**Directions:** Practice and add your personal phrases and sentences in the empty rows as well.

1. *pray* for *rain* / *six lanes* / the *pain* is bad
2. find a *vein* / a good *table* / the *same name*
3. We *came late* for the *play*.
4. The *baker* isn't *able* to *bake today*.
5. *They played* that *game* until *eight*.
6. \_\_\_\_\_.
7. \_\_\_\_\_.
8. \_\_\_\_\_.

### 1.1.4 /ɪ/

### Front Vowel

**Sound Features:** mid-high, lips slightly retracted, lax, short

**Spelling Options:** i, e, y, u-y (u-y stands for spelling combinations of "u" + any consonant + "y")

### Exercise 1. /ɪ/ Practice Words

**Directions:** Practice and add your personal words in the empty rows as well.

tin	gin	shift	pretty
history	pity	liquid	busy
lyric	drift	twist	miss
hit	hill	it	limit
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

### Exercise 2. /ɪ/ Phrase Variations and Sentences

**Directions:** Practice and add your personal phrases and sentences in the empty rows as well.

1. the cotton *gin* / the speed *limit* / the *silver pin*



2. a small *kitchen* / a *big ship* / near the *river*

3. *It's pity* that *Rick is sick*.

4. *Will* you have a *drink* with *dinner*?

5. We have *pinpointed* his *position*.

6. \_\_\_\_\_.

7. \_\_\_\_\_.

8. \_\_\_\_\_.

## 1.1.5 /i/

## Front Vowel

**Sound Features:** high, lips very retracted, tense, long

**Spelling Options:** ea, ei, ee (e-e), ey, i-a (i-a stands for spelling combinations of “i” + any consonant + “a”)

### Exercise 1. /i/ Practice Words

**Directions:** Practice and add your personal words in the empty rows as well.

clean	sleeve	teeth	each
key	alley	ease	leaf
free	team	breathe	street
lead	sheet	feel	eat

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Exercise 2. /i/ Phrase Variations and Sentences

**Directions:** Practice and add your personal phrases and sentences in the empty rows as well.

1. in your *teeth* / on *each sleeve* / *leave* us now

2. it is *cheap* / on a *recent trip* / go *seize* it

3. You have a *tea leaf* stuck in your *teeth*.

4. *She screamed* when he painted the *ceiling green*.

5. Try to *breathe* with greater *ease*.

6. \_\_\_\_\_.

7. \_\_\_\_\_.

8. \_\_\_\_\_.

## 1.2 Central Vowels

The next group of vowels (/a/, /ʌ/, /ə/, /ɔ/, /ɜ/) is called *central vowels* because they are produced with the tongue arched in the central of the mouth, midway between the front and back.