

THIRD  
EDITION

*The*  
*Articulate*  
**VOICE**

AN INTRODUCTION  
TO VOICE AND  
DICTION

LYNN K. WELLS

**THIRD EDITION**

# **The Articulate Voice**

## **An Introduction to Voice and Diction**

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# P R E F A C E

Although the fields of linguistics, acoustics, and psychology can give us information about the perception of voice, it is the task of the textbook to give the student information about voice production and improvement. What we prefer to hear in another person's voice is (to some extent) subjective, but we do know that certain voices are thought to be more positively received than others. This text, then, serves to present as much information as possible in order to assist the reader in creating his or her best possible voice. In addition to all the information that we provide in this book, the student must also rely on the wise guidance of the instructor to assess and assist, and to serve as a role model.

This third edition of *The Articulate Voice: An Introduction to Voice and Diction* continues to stress the development of those skills necessary to creating a favorable impression in the following ways: (1) updated information in keeping with changes in the field; (2) the addition of application questions for the reader; (3) focus messages directed to specialized study areas; and (4) added exercises. The text continues to guide the reader in finding appropriate pitch and intonation, improving rhythm and rate of speech, supporting and placing the voice, and eliminating negative vocal qualities, such as breathiness or nasality. The text also takes the reader through a study of articulation and stresses exercises to improve lip, tongue, and jaw movement for crisper production of sounds. At a time when cultural identity issues and attendant identifying dialectal issues are in the headlines and because of the pervasiveness of radio and television, one may be required to be “bidialectal” in our society. The focus of this text is on the study of General American English as an “industry” standard.

- Changes brought about by the IPA conference of 1989 are reflected or indicated in the text by means of footnotes. These include the clarification of the inverted [ɫ] as representative of the General American and General English sound and the upright [ɹ] as representative of the trilled sound used in Spanish. This text will continue to use the upright “r” only for ease in reading and because of reader recommendations. The diphthongized vowels [eɪ] and [oʊ] supplant the pure vowel representations.
- General application questions at the end of each chapter should help the reader in making self-assessments and focusing on a more apt means of improvement.
- The new Focus Message segment at the end of each chapter is an attempt to target three specific audiences—the student of English as a Second Language, the actor, and the broadcaster. Each message seeks to provide a specific aspect of that chapter's material that the target audience might find useful. Included are tips that easily and readily can be employed.

Many instructors and students have found this text to be a flexible tool for an introductory voice and diction class. It is designed for use by students in broadcasting, communication, and drama, and by ESL students, but is useful for other students as well. As always, readers may begin with any chapter after Chapter One as a starting point. Individual chapters discuss the vocal mechanism; the vocal components of pitch, rate, loudness, and quality, including a discussion of paralinguistics for each; language; and vowels and consonants. A few new exercises have been added to the already extensive collection of exercise materials. For student interest and for practice purposes, the drill material includes a wide range of formats, such as simple words and sentences, news articles, essays, literature, and poetry. Chapters Nine and Ten present the the vowels and consonants and feature a simplified explication of each phoneme in a consistent format. Because mouth shape is important to vowels, we have continued to use photographs where possible. In addition, photographs are included for consonants for which mouth shape is important. These two chapters stress the individual phonemes of General American English and point out some common dialectal differences by indicating which speakers of other primary languages may have difficulty with a given sound. Drill words and sentences for each phoneme are designed to be particularly simple in order for students to concentrate on the sound under consideration. Advanced students, however, may find the pronunciation list in Appendix Two to be more challenging. Many students have commented positively on the opportunity to incorporate the list into their vocabularies. Because of the practical applicability of this material beyond the classroom, the entire book is perforated. Students can tear out lists and drill material for later use or reference. This is useful especially with the evaluation forms in Appendix Four, which can be used by the instructor and student to assess progress.

Several people deserve thanks for their contributions to this book in the form of assessment and suggestions. George Brown, Miami Dade University; Joe Chapa, University of Texas; Lynn Gamwell, SUNY at Binghamton; Elaine Klein, Westchester Community College; John Modaff, Morehead State University; Mary Elizabeth Moody, George Washington University; Wendy Overly, Clemson University; John Payne, Florida State University; Joan Regnell, George Washington University; E. James Ubbelohde, North Dakota State University; and Kristin B. Valentine, Arizona State University provided insightful observations and helpful suggestions. I sincerely appreciate the useful and kind assistance of these reviewers. Continuing thanks to Mark Nelson, my family, and friends for their support, and special thanks to my daughter, Laura Wells.

# CONTENTS

<b>Preface</b>	<b>xiii</b>
----------------	-------------

## **I An Introduction 1**

<b>Terms</b>	<b>1</b>
--------------	----------

### **Communication: A Discussion 1**

Speech As a Learned Process	6
-----------------------------	---

Communication Tenets	8
----------------------	---

### **Influences on Your Voice and Speech 9**

Friends	9
---------	---

Physicality	9
-------------	---

Psychology	10
------------	----

Environment	10
-------------	----

### **Improving Your Voice 10**

What Is a Good Voice?	11
-----------------------	----

### **Chapter One Review 12**

### **Application 13**

### **Focus Message 13**

## **2 Mechanisms for Speech 15**

<b>Terms</b>	<b>15</b>
--------------	-----------

### **Breathing 16**

### **Phonation 18**

### **Resonation 20**

### **Articulation 23**

Hearing	23
---------	----

Vocal and Auditory Health	24
---------------------------	----

### **Exercises 26**

Relaxation	26
------------	----

Breathing	27
-----------	----

<b>Chapter Two Review</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Application</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Focus Message</b>	<b>34</b>

### **3 Pitch 37**

<b>Terms</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Inflection: The Paralinguistics of Pitch</b>	<b>40</b>
Rising or Upward Inflection	40
Falling or Downward Inflection	41
Circumflex Inflection	41
Step Inflection	42
<b>Intonation</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Extralinguistic Features</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Pitch Variety</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Exercises</b>	<b>44</b>
Inflection	51
<b>Chapter Three Review</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Application</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Focus Message</b>	<b>58</b>

### **4 Volume 61**

<b>Terms</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>The Paralinguistic Factors of Loudness</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Syllabic Stress</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Projection</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Variation</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Exercises</b>	<b>67</b>
General Stress Rule	67
Equal Stress	68
Stress in Sentences	68
Projection and Support	69
Variety	73

<b>Chapter Four Review</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Application</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Focus Message</b>	<b>77</b>

## **5 Rate/Duration 79**

<b>Terms</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Speaking/Reading Rate</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Pause</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Speech Phrasing</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Variety</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Rate Assessments</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Exercises: Rate</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Chapter Five Review</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Application</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Focus Message</b>	<b>95</b>

## **6 Quality 97**

<b>Terms</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Paralinguistics</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Extralinguistics</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Exercises: Vocal Qualities</b>	<b>100</b>
Excessive Nasality	100
Denasality	102
Breathiness	104
Guttural Quality	106
Stridency	107
Thinness	108
Hoarseness, Harshness, Raspiness	109
<b>Chapter Six Review</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Application</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Focus Message</b>	<b>115</b>



## **7 Language 117**

**Terms 117**

**Language Defined 118**

Principle I 119

Principle II 119

**History of English 120**

England 121

United States 122

Media Influences 122

**Language Development in the Individual 123**

**Chapter Seven Review 126**

**Application 126**

**Focus Message 126**

## **8 Articulation 129**

**Terms 129**

**Definitions 129**

Articulation/Pronunciation 129

Phonemes 130

Vowels 130

Diphthongs 131

Consonants 131

International Phonetic Alphabet 131

**Coarticulation 132**

**Individual Differences/Dialects 132**

**Program for Improvement 134**

**Exercises: Flexibility 135**

Neck/Jaw 135

Lips 136

Tongue 137

Velum 138

Integration 139

**Chapter Eight Review 140**

**Application 141**

**Focus Message 141**

## **9 Vowels 143**

**Terms 143**

**Approach to Vowel Study 144**

**Front Vowels 146**

[i] 146

[ɪ] 147

[e] [eɪ] 150

[ɛ] 151

[æ] 153

Front Vowel Contrast Drill 155

**Back Vowels 156**

[ɑ] 156

[ɔ] 157

[o] [oʊ] 159

[ʊ] 160

[u] 161

Back Vowel Contrast Drill 163

**Mid Vowels 163**

[ə] 164

[ʌ] 165

[ə̃] 167

[ɜ̃] 168

**Diphthongs 170**

[aɪ] 170

[aʊ] 171

[ɔɪ] 173

**Special Diphthong 174**

[ɪu] 174

**Additional Drill 175**

**Chapter Nine Checklist: Vowels/Diphthongs 177**

**Chapter Nine Review 178**

<b>Application</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>Focus Message</b>	<b>179</b>

## **10 Consonants 181**

<b>Terms</b>	<b>181</b>
--------------	------------

<b>Approach to Consonant Study</b>	<b>182</b>
------------------------------------	------------

<b>Bilabial Consonants</b>	<b>185</b>
----------------------------	------------

[p]	185
[b]	187
[m]	189
[hw]	191
[w]	192

<b>Labio-Dental Consonants</b>	<b>194</b>
--------------------------------	------------

[f]	194
[v]	195

<b>Lingua-Dental Consonants</b>	<b>198</b>
---------------------------------	------------

[θ]	198
[ð]	200

<b>Lingua-Alveolar Consonants</b>	<b>202</b>
-----------------------------------	------------

[t]	202
[d]	206
[s]	210
[z]	214
[n]	217
[l]	218

<b>Lingua-Palatal Consonants</b>	<b>221</b>
----------------------------------	------------

[ʃ]	221
[ʒ]	223
[r]	224
[tʃ]	228
[dʒ]	230
[j]	232

<b>Velar Consonants</b>	<b>234</b>
-------------------------	------------

[k]	234
[g]	237
[ŋ]	239

Glottal Consonant	241
[h]	241
Additional Drill	243
Chapter Ten Checklist: Consonants	244
Chapter Ten Review	246
Application	246
Focus Message	247
 A Final Word	 249
 APPENDIX ONE IPA Pronunciation Guides	 251
APPENDIX TWO Pronunciation Guide	253
APPENDIX THREE Sound Recognition Practice	261
APPENDIX FOUR Evaluation Forms	265
Chapter One Vocal Profile	265
Chapter One Evaluation: Voice and Diction Overview	267
Chapter Three Evaluation: Pitch	271
Chapter Four Evaluation: Volume	273
Chapter Five Evaluation: Rate	277
Chapter Six Evaluation: Quality	281
Chapter Eight Evaluation: Articulation	285
Chapter Nine Checklist: Vowels/Diphthongs	289
Chapter Ten Checklist: Consonants	291
 Glossary	 293
 Index	 297

## CHAPTER

# 1

## An Introduction

*The articulate behavior I want everyone to master is an ability to put one's tongue on the most appropriate, effective, and beautiful way of saying what one means to a broad audience.*

—Tom Shachtman

### TERMS

**Voice** A good voice is clear, resonant, stable, well supported by adequate breath control. It is at a pitch level that is appropriate to the speaker and the message. Rate of speech is such that messages are clearly understood. A good voice has variety.

**Diction** Synonyms for diction are *articulation* or *enunciation*. Fine distinctions of these terms would be: *articulation*—producing individual sounds clearly; *enunciation*—

producing linked sounds clearly and distinctly as in words; *diction*—producing both sounds and ideas clearly. The use of the term *diction* in this and subsequent chapters refers to clear production of the sounds of a language.

**Paralinguistics** How we use certain factors such as pitch, loudness, rate, and quality to communicate messages beyond words.

### Communication: A Discussion

The human voice is a powerful tool for communicating emotions, manipulating messages, and entertaining others. Command of your voice and command of the language you speak begins in infancy. It is a skill that requires fine-tuning and practice throughout our lives. With aging we may experience some degree of short-term memory loss because we do not practice memory work as we did when we were younger and in school. Your speech may have a similar effect. It may become corrupted by disuse or misuse. Thus it behooves you to make speech improvement a lifelong goal.

Of the many news or magazine articles written to aid readers in improving their public speaking abilities, the majority of advice given is directed toward voice, for example, “listen for pitch, speed . . . clear or muddy . . . speak too quickly . . . use pauses . . . different pitches or tones.”<sup>1</sup>

Each year in the United States we spend billions of dollars and countless hours in order to improve our physical appearances. We exercise, diet, and go to health clubs. We buy clothing, cosmetics, and try new hair styles. We build muscle, engage in sports, and race cars. We spend this time and money because we hope that improving our appearance will make us happier and more successful and ultimately will get us good jobs, attractive partners, and interesting friends.

Our visual impact on others is one of the most important aspects of the impression we make on people. Experts agree that to a high degree visual features determine that impression. Yet, despite the predominance of our visual impact on others, we are all familiar with the cliché of the attractive man or woman who spoils that impression with a distracting voice. “Listen carefully. Words can lie, but the voice never does. . . . The voice can grab you like an arm, caress you like a hand, hypnotize you like eyes and walk all over you like feet. Its depth must match or heighten a man’s physique: Is there anything more ridiculous than a german shepherd with a poodle’s yap? Because even if a man can’t always look like a movie star, he can at least make an effort to sound like one,” notes one magazine advisor.<sup>2</sup> The auditory impression that we make can positively or negatively affect an impression we might have worked hard to achieve. In spite of this, many of us pay little attention to our voices. We fail to take care of our vocal mechanisms until something goes wrong. Many times we speak without thinking about or knowing how we sound.

Television, radio, and films provide our role models. Some educators view our media-saturated society as one that encourages replication of a certain style of speech, including both semantic constructs and manners of speaking. In other words, you may very well have grown up imitating those MTV veejays or those “cops and robbers” actors.

Learning to hear one’s own voice objectively is the single most important step in a program of voice development. Personal testimony reported in news articles reveals how people feel about other’s or their own voices: “After I heard myself in a radio interview sounding like a precocious 14-year-old, I began to look for a voice coach. . . .”<sup>3</sup> “Sometimes, I intentionally try to lose the accent totally, to assimilate . . . sometime, I’m like, what the heck, it’s too much of an effort.”<sup>4</sup> “When people have a very polished voice, I picture them as good-looking.”<sup>5</sup> “A language teacher told me that a . . . friend thought she lost out on a job because she couldn’t understand the interviewer’s accented English—and she felt too awkward to ask the interviewer to repeat the questions or explain them.”<sup>6</sup>

Our voices say a great deal about us. Some specialists consider communication to be a form of identity management or a way of telling others who we are. Vocal qualities indicate to others our moods, attitudes, states of health, self-image, and self-esteem.

Because of our voices, we may be ignored, penalized, or even characterized as unintelligent. It seems ironic that we spend so much time and money grooming

ourselves for the workplace or for our social lives and yet ignore our voices as an important tool for achieving success. Communication experts inform us that lasting first impressions are formed within minutes of an encounter. In direct encounters, we might have the advantage of an attractive face, firm handshake, or pleasant smile. On the telephone, we have only our voices to establish a positive impression. For example, one personnel director reports that in a matter of minutes she is able to reduce her list of potential candidates for management positions by interviewing them over the telephone.

Students learning English as a second language may find the sounds and music of English challenging. Often the pitch variations and stresses of the speaker's primary language are superimposed onto English. New English sounds may be approximated or substituted. For a non-native speaker, one's manner of speech may impress the listener as being too aggressive or even too shy.

### Try This

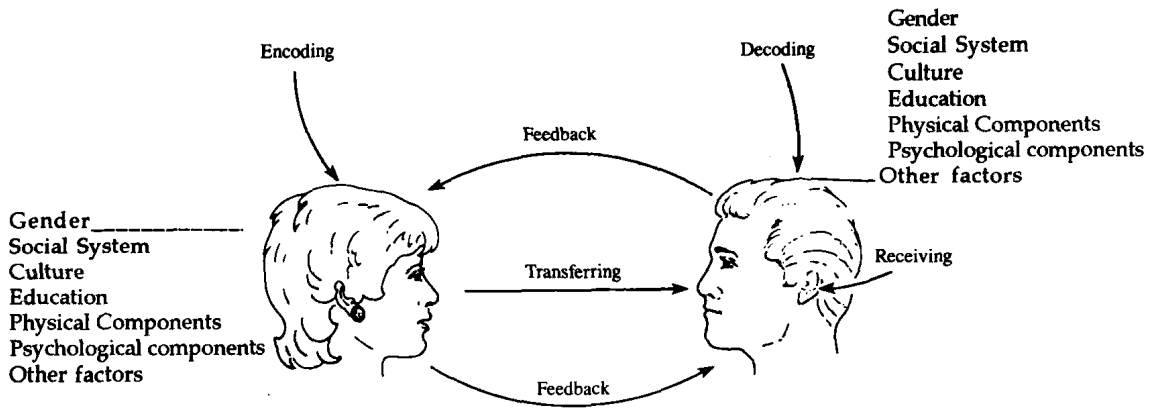


Try this exercise for yourself. Smile broadly as you read the next paragraph. Then read the same paragraph again while you frown and tighten your jaw. Note how the superimposed "attitude" and facial expressions changed the sound of the message.

Why do we pay so little attention to voice and to articulation? In most cases, we are engaged in casual, interpersonal communication. Because this may be our everyday speech, we are able to get by. Our friends seem to understand us easily and accept us for who we are and how we sound. Meeting new people and public speaking, however, require more attention to what we say and how we say it and therefore generate a great deal of apprehension for most people. James McCroskey, a professor of speech communication, proposes that individuals with high communication anxiety levels will try to avoid situations in which they are asked to speak. He suggests that some persons will avoid a job promotion if it means public speaking. Knowing that improving voice will better one's chances in the job market and social world is all the more reason to undertake a program for voice and articulation enhancement.

Communication is a complex process, and it involves some involuntary actions such as breathing. Because we learned to speak in our formative years, the act of producing connected, meaningful sounds probably no longer requires conscious effort. Let's examine the communication process. Communication involves five major steps: *encoding*, *transferring*, *receiving*, *decoding*, and *feedback* (see Figure 1.1).

Within this communication schema are multiple variables such as gender, culture, intellect, and so forth. Generally speaking, however, *encoding* involves generating a concept and formulating that idea into a code or language. You might decide to send this message in either a verbal or nonverbal manner. That is to say,



**FIGURE 1.1** The cycle of communication involves encoding, transferring, receiving, decoding, and feedback.

you may choose to gesture in some way in order to communicate an idea, or you may choose to sound out the words of a language. In encoding a verbal message, you must also decide what language and what words of that particular language you will use. We alter our manner of speech depending on our co-communicator, the situation, or the subject of our communication.

If you elect to send a verbal message, you will next *transfer* that message by means of an auditory channel. That is to say that you generate the specific sounds of the message by means of vocalization and articulation. Your listener or listeners will hear or *receive* your message and *decode* it. The decoding process itself is complex insofar as the listener needs to be able to translate or understand the message. He or she must have knowledge of the code used and be able to hear the message. Often a communication breakdown will occur at this point. *Feedback* takes place once a listener thinks he or she understands a message. This can be in the form of a nonverbal or a verbal response. In fact there are numerous ways we return information to one another; for instance, we can applaud, nod, frown, speak, or perform a variety of reactions. One aspect of feedback involves the regulation of interaction, sometimes called *back channeling*. This sort of communication behavior is learned regulatory behavior. Some examples are head nods while listening or the intentional use of a lower pitch to end a conversation.

This text is concerned with the vocal *transfer* step of the communication process. We engage in small cycles of communication on a daily basis. These points of verbal (and nonverbal) contact enable us to perform the simple and involved functions of our lives. Both the sounds of our voices and our manners of articulating messages affect the outcome of these daily encounters. Rarely do we receive complete, clearly articulated messages. Speech is temporal; that is, speech involves hearing and remembering just-vanished sound. For a brief moment we store in our minds what we have heard in order to sort out the message and respond properly. Though we may not hear complete words or sounds, we are still able to understand messages. Our minds fill in the missing pieces. As an example, you



might think of what you do when you “read” cleverly devised automobile license plates. “1ST LUV” can readily be interpreted as “First Love.” “FONECRU” could be construed as “Phone Crew.” In the first instance the visual picture is completed by what we know to be the missing vowels. In the second example our auditory perception untwists the visual puzzle. Spoken and written language works in much the same way. When we only hear a spoken message, we depend heavily upon context to help us translate it.

### Try This



For example, try to say the following:

diskalas kupa kafore gointa bedani r i won slipa win

Does it help to imagine saying it while sitting across from a friend in a coffee shop? Unless you are thinking about drinking coffee, you might not be able to decipher the message. Written language is easier to decipher because it is more concrete, with less distortion:

This is the last cup of coffee before going to bed tonight, or I won't sleep a wink.

You may have had the experience of having to slow down your reading when a writer writes in dialect. For instance, in his bestseller *Bonfire of the Vanities*, Tom Wolfe depicts a character as saying “Jeet foya came down heh?” The reader has to slow down in order to translate. Fortunately, Wolfe provides the translation, “Did you eat before you came down here?”<sup>7</sup> Another aspect of social interaction involves adapting to our co-communicator. As we subtly assess the other's level of intelligence, ability, or willingness to understand us, we modify our voices to accommodate the situation. For example, we might increase loudness to accommodate someone who may be hard of hearing, or slow our speech if we feel someone cannot understand the language. In essence, we make adjustments in order to optimize the possibility that others will understand us.

In the course of daily conversation, speakers do omit, transpose, add, or distort sounds. A sales girl, ringing up a customer's purchase, is heard to say, “Spit?” “Pardon me?” replies the startled customer. “Wan an thin else?” the girl adds. The translation is, “Will this be it?”

We become used to such translating. Perhaps we even no longer hear our own daily articulatory omissions, additions, transpositions, distortions, or substitutions. For example, the following is a list of common articulatory mistakes:

1. Omissions: *distrit* (for *district*), *library* (for *library*)
2. Additions: *athalete* (for *athlete*), *didnent* (for *didn't*)
3. Transpositions: *alunimum* (for *aluminum*), *relator* (for *realtor*)
4. Distortions: *shomething* (for *something*) [as with a lateral lisp]
5. Substitutions: *pitchure* or *pikshure* (for *picture*)