

- **Free Lesson from Course One- Accent Reduction: American Intonation**

American Intonation

The Key for Instant Speech Clarity and the Most Important Skill for Successful Accent Reduction

Why Speaking with Skilled Intonation Is the Most Important Skill for Clear and Confident-Sounding Communication

- **File 1, Track 3 Introduction to American Intonation 4:38**

Accents exist because every cultural group has its own style for talking and once someone learns a second language like English, it is spoken in the style of the first language because that is what the brain understands for the melody pattern. The melody pattern for talking is called intonation. American intonation is spoken with melody patterns that continuously change in pitch; learning American intonation will be the most important skill for reducing an accent. Intonation is a speaking style that has a lot of inflection, modulation, and vocal variety for sentences. In American speaking culture, people who speak using different pitch tones are considered to be more interesting, have energy and this speaking pattern is correlated with perceived leadership in the business community. It is the cultural style for how American English and business communication are spoken. If it is your goal to reduce your foreign accent, speaking with American intonation is essential. This chapter will teach you a simple technique, known as the speech stairs strategy, on how to speak with intonation.

Once again, *intonation* is a term describing how pitch, rhythm, and melody are used for phrases and sentences. It is a technique that will also enhance the interest of your listener because the brain likes moving pitch tones, and it naturally improves active listening. Skilled intonation is considered to be the model for international business communication because of its clarity and interesting melody pattern as well as being the American cultural style for speaking. People who speak monotone, too fast, or choppy; mumble; or have upspeak lack speech clarity. Learning how to speak with correct American intonation will significantly improve those issues and how you sound to others while enhancing your professional image because of your clear, smart, and interesting speech patterns.

To appreciate what it is you want to change about your communication style, think about your current speech pattern and answer the following questions:

- Does your speech lack clarity?
- Is your message hard to understand?
- Is your speech too fast?

- Do you delete or blend sounds together while speaking?
- Do you mumble or speak in a monotone style?
- Is it difficult for people to understand you on the phone?
- Do you feel your message or presentation style lacks effect?
- Do people talk over you in meetings?
- Are you not well heard by others?
- Do you feel respected by peers and colleagues when you communicate ideas?

Speaking with skilled intonation can eliminate those concerns. By changing your habits, you can fully control your communication style and produce speech that is clear and understandable while keeping your listener interested. It is important for you to have insight into your current speaking style so you can identify habits you want to change.

Take a moment to describe your current speaking style and specific habits:

An Introduction to the Speech Stairs Strategy

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Speaking while moving up and down in pitch is the speech melody pattern that international and American news broadcasters, political figures, and trained business professional's use. This speaking style can be described as speaking with a controlled rate to allow speech sounds to be clear and sharp while the vocal variety of patterns produce an interesting melody for listeners. The term *intonation* describes how melody patterns and moving pitch tones are used while talking.

The best strategy for changing your intonation pattern is to think of your speech moving up and then down a staircase. This is a very easy concept to understand, and I use it with all on my clients. The visual analogy of a staircase is a helpful technique for understanding how to move your speech melody patterns and therefore change your speaking style. Everyone understands the concept of moving speech up and then down a staircase.

Speaking with intonation is not a hard skill to learn, but it may feel funny, contrived, and slower than how you are currently speaking. On average, it typically takes three weeks for this new speaking pattern to become a habit. After some practice, this new skill that once felt funny will become more natural, and your speech melody will be more professional, interesting, and clear. As a result, you will be feeling more confident when you speak because the melody pattern sounds smart energizing and is easy to follow and understand.

This is how to speak using the speech staircase strategy. First, begin your statement in your "natural" tone. Then move up one step higher on the speech

As soon as there is a rise in pitch, there is a drop on *every syllable* for the rest of the statement.

- Notice the same pitch style in the other two examples. Notice the modulation and vocal variety. You may also start to notice that you are having more range of motion with your mouth.

Note: As a reminder, a syllable is an individual sound segment in a word, which is usually a consonant and vowel combination. For example, “cat” is a one-syllable word, “pizza” is a two-syllable word, and “computer” is a three-syllable word.

Examples of Longer Statements Using the Speech Stairs Strategy

cat
The is fat and should lose some weight.
ve- ry pret- ty and in- tel- li- gent.
go to the wed- ing and have some fun.

Be flat on the step: When you are coming down the stairs on every syllable, be sure your speech is *flat* on every step *to avoid an upward inflection in pitch on the vowel sound*. This is a common habit for accented or younger speakers. English does not have any significant pitch rises on individual vowel sounds. I like the analogy of a staircase because steps are flat and they do not curve up. Your pitch should not move up in inflection on vowel sounds.

If you are a fast or quiet talker: Hold the vowel sound segment a little longer with each syllable as you move up and then down the speech stairs. Create separation between each syllable. Otherwise, your speech will lack clarity because of fast speech or mumbling. Fast speech will cause you to omit final sounds in words or blend words together that should have some separation. Holding the vowel sound longer on each syllable will naturally slow your rate of speech and bring more volume to your voice. Your voice will become louder and more powerful because vowel sounds are voiced sounds and they, therefore, bring more volume and power to your voice for every syllable that you say. When you talk too fast or mumble, vowel sounds are held for too short a time, which makes your voice seem quiet and lacking power. If you notice that you do not project as well as others, hold the vowel sound longer as a strategy to reduce fast speech and increase the volume in your voice.