

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT

AUSTRALIAN

by

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAVID ALAN STERN is the founder and president of DIALECT ACCENT SPECIALISTS publishing, and has worked in Hollywood since 1980 as an accent and dialect coach for the motion picture and television industries. After receiving a Ph.D. in speech from Temple University, he served on the theatre faculties of both Penn State University and the University of Connecticut. He has taught thousands of actors and broadcasters to put on (or take off) foreign accents and regional dialects. Among the students he has coached are:

**Mike Farrell, Jack Klugman, Edward James Olmos,
Bronson Pinchot, Lynn Redgrave, Forest Whitaker,
and Michael York, as well as OSCAR WINNERS
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SOME PRELIMINARY CONCERNS

When should I use dialects & accents?

Here are a few guidelines I've put together after years of performing and coaching dialects.

(1) If there are characters in the script who come from a different speech group than the rest of the cast, consider differentiating them with appropriate dialect(s). (2) If the entire script is set in a country or region where a specific dialect of English is spoken, determine whether the whole cast can use that pattern while still creating complete, believable characters. (3) Avoid using foreign accents for translations of foreign scripts. For example, don't play Chekhov with a Russian accent or Moliere with a French accent. For such "classics," try using ELEVATED AMERICAN DICTION (see the final tape in the SPEAKING WITHOUT AN ACCENT series). (4) "Elevated diction" is also appropriate when American casts are doing Shakespeare, especially those of his plays which are not set in England. (5) Finally, **DON'T USE ACCENTS UNLESS THEY ARE GOING TO BE PERFORMED WELL!**

What techniques lead to good dialects?

Perhaps as few as twenty per cent of actors have the "good ear" that leads to skillful imitation of speech patterns. Other actors must use a systematic approach in order to create authentic-sounding accents and dialects. Here is a brief discussion of the most important factors.

PRONUNCIATION: Creating correct pronunciation changes is a "necessary, but not sufficient" condition for generating dialect authenticity. Most teachers, texts, and recorded programs drill their students almost exclusively with the appropriate vowel and consonant substitutions needed for the target pattern. Although I believe that correct pronunciation is absolutely necessary, these changes will not sound authentic unless you combine them with several other important vocal features that I'll discuss in the next few paragraphs.

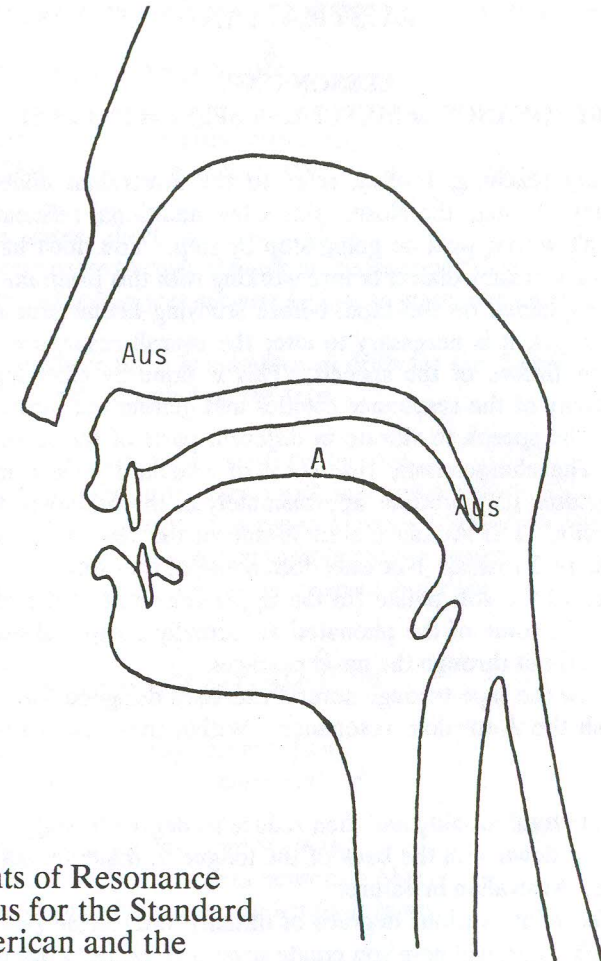
PITCH CHARACTERISTICS: "Pitch" can refer to any of several vocal traits--from how high or low a voice is to how much intonation or pitch variety is used. But for many of the dialects which actors must study, the most important of these traits is a unique lilt or pitch change that takes place inside vowels, especially (but not exclusively) during the sounding of stressed syllables. In many accent patterns, this trait (which I call INNER-VOWEL LILT) helps to generate an authentic-sounding dialect.

STRESS PATTERNS: American English has a complex pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Some other dialects and accents have few, if any unstressed syllables. Still others have rather intricate staccato rhythms which must be mastered before the dialects can possibly sound authentic.

RESONANCE or MUSCULAR SPEECH IMPULSE: Much of my research, teaching, and performing experience has taught me that the most important part of a dialect's authentic essence comes from a characteristic shaping of the throat, nose, mouth, tongue and soft palate. The many available configurations, in turn, give many different resonances or "timbres" to the overall sound. Such a specific "tone focus" is very noticeable throughout a dialect, regardless of whether actual pronunciation changes are occurring on certain words. In fact, once an actor has mastered the new muscularity and tone focus for a given dialect, many of the important pronunciation changes can be made much more easily and convincingly. Most of the tapes in this series begin with a detailed lesson on resonance. Subsequent pronunciation drills then grow from the new muscularity. So now your new pronunciations have an "organic core." They need no longer be isolated memory exercises.

What is the best way to practice?

Begin by drilling the mechanics of the new dialect--the resonance, lilt, rhythm, and pronunciations. Go on to integrate the changes into phrases, sentences, and passages. Then try improvising and actually generating your own speech while using the new dialect. Don't limit your new accent to the target script. If you do, you are apt to be very mechanical and never create the sense that you are a real person who actually talks this way.



Points of Resonance
Focus for the Standard
American and the
Australian Dialects

A -- Standard American

AUS -- The two points of resonance
focus for Australian dialect

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT AUSTRALIAN

LESSON ONE: RESONANCE or MUSCULAR SPEECH IMPULSE

In my teaching, I often refer to the Australian dialect as "Cockney Through the Nose," plus a few additional refinements. But don't worry; we'll be going step by step. You don't have to know the Cockney dialect before working with this program.

As explained on the tape, before studying actual pronunciation changes, it is necessary to alter the overall resonance, tone focus, or timbre of the speech. This is done by changing the muscularity of the resonance cavities and getting the overall energy of the speech to vibrate in different parts of the resonance tube. The characteristic resonance of Standard American Dialect focuses its vibrations approximately at the midpoint of the oral cavity. The Aussie dialect is one of the few in the world which is really nasal. Not only does some of the sound focus on the back of the soft palate (in the upper-rear part of the mouth cavity), but some of the phonated air actually escapes above the velum and out through the nasal passages.

Follow the tape through several exercises designed for you to establish the Australian resonance. Within these exercises you will:

1. create total nasality and then reduce its degree by stages.
2. pump down with the back of the tongue to make the nasality more Australian in nature.
3. differentiate various degrees of nasality and tongue pumping which, later, will help you create several types, or, styles of the Australian speech pattern.

LESSON TWO: VOWEL CHANGES RELATED TO MUSCULARITY AND RESONANCE

The following vowel substitutions are extensions of the resonance shift you just learned. Repeat the words and sentences after hearing them on the tape. Don't just imitate the new pro-

nunciations. Create the new muscularity, and let the Australian vowels grow naturally out of that change in speech impulse.

1. THE "LONG E" as in SEE

IPA: [i] becomes [əi].
LESSAC: y becomes N⁴ + y.

each, agree, sheet, achieve, slightly
- *Please cease to creep through the Garden of Eden.*
- *Steve went to pieces because he was so green with envy.*

Now here are a few additional drills for the "LONG E" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * *The speedy car careened off the freeway.*
- * *He teased the eager marine with sneezing powder.*
- * *He achieves intrigue by agreeing to speak Japanese in two scenes.*
- * *We can't seem to agree on what to eat this evening.*
- * *For tea, meat and cheese were served under the tree.*

2. THE "LONG OO" as in SMOOTH

IPA: [u] becomes [əu].
LESSAC: #1 becomes N⁴ + #1.

moon, truth, gloomy, prove, flute
- *I always knew that prunes never turn blue.*
- *The gloomy June moon makes fools loony.*

Now here are a few additional drills for the "Long OO" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * *Give the duke a boost with your boot.*
- * *Rumor has it that raccoons buy fruit with coupons.*
- * *At two past noon, we heard hooves on the roof of the room.*
- * *It's true that Sue proves school is gloomy.*
- * *After his review, the pupil developed a loose screw.*

3. THE "LONG A" as in ^{ei}DAY

IPA: [ei] becomes [ɑi].
 LESSAC: +y becomes #6y.

able, greatest, played, Australia, famous
 - The fateful delay in rainfall created a great weight.
 - The ailing aviator chased the victory for its own sake.

Now here are a few additional drills for the "Long A" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * They paid the price for delaying the instant replay.
- * A great April shower came our way today.
- * The flaky neighbor made a face at the baby.
- * They blamed the dame with the famous face.
- * The able often stray in this fateful age.

4. THE "LONG I" as in ^{oi}CRIME

IPA: [oi] becomes [ɔi].
 LESSAC: #6y becomes a half-rounded #3y.

NOTE: This sound does not round as much in Australian dialect as it does in Cockney.

bright, time, Eliza, writer, whitest
 - It's the right time to find a gold mine in the sky.
 - A life of violent crime is a sign of the times.

Now here are a few additional drills for the "Long I" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * The actor recited ironic rhymes of an ionic kind.
- * Blind justice presided over the indictment.
- * This time of night is for the shining of lights.
- * Nine firemen tried to fight the flames.
- * The sight of dry land made for an exciting ending to the flight.

5. THE "LONG O" as in ^{ou}ALONE

IPA: [ou] becomes [æou].
 LESSAC: #21 becomes #6 + #21.

oaken, loan, stone, soldier
 - Slowly the ocean rolled home.
 - The oboe and cello sat alone, woefully echoing tone for tone.

Now here are a few additional drills for the "LONG O" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * The rowboat slowly floated over the ocean.
- * He was bloated from eating a roasted tomato.
- * Of all the folks I know, he is the most hopeful.
- * I told Joan that the snow is flown in from Ohio.
- * Smoke rolled out the open end of the hotel window.

6. THE "SHORT O" as in ^ɒHONEST and ^ɒWHAT

IPA: [ɒ] becomes [ɒ].
 LESSAC: A sharp #4 is used for "Short O."

NOTE: In many American regions, this vowel is already rounded. Lessac, in fact, calls for the slightly rounded #4 vowel in these words. **ALSO:** In Australia, the "short o" becomes a sharp [ɒ] even before the letters "s" "th" "f" and "ng."

rock, obstinate, on, hot, confiscate, common
 - The rocket shot toward the opposite air lock.
 - The frog got groggy and hopped away anonymously.
 often, song, toss, sloth
 - We often sing songs while tossing cloth down from the loft.

And, some "SHORT O" words are spelled with the letter "A."

- * what, want, wash, watch, calm, palm
- * What do you want to watch while doing the washing up?

Now here are a few additional drills for the "SHORT O" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * He occupied the gondola of the golf cart.
- * Oxygen is commonly found in air pockets.
- * Becket was positive about the honor of God.
- * Move the fox from the rocks to the bog.
- * Mr. Roberts threw the potted palm into the balmy deep.
- * Tommy is a rock opera.
- * He calmly fled from the swampy bog.

7. THE "BROAD AW" as in BROUGHT

IPA: [ɔ] intensifies to [ɔ:]
 LESSAC: #3 rounds very tightly

NOTE: Since this vowel varies greatly in different regions of the U.S., be aware that it is usually spelled with the letters "au" "ou" "aw" or "al."

- taught, vault, cause, cough, awful, almost, walk
- You taught me to vault flawlessly without falling.
 - The awful sauce made Paul pause and walk away.

And now here are a few more drills for the "Broad AW" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape. Note that when an "R" follows the "Broad AW" vowel, the R-shading will drop, leaving the same vowel we've just practiced (see Pages 12 and 13).

- * The awkward, awful, tall man walked home.
- * He stalked the ball and then vaulted down the hall.
- * He thought he saw the autumn leaves falling.
- * The cat crawled across the lawn.
- * The quarterback stalked the ball.
- * The tall author stormed toward the North Pole.

8. THE "SHORT E" as in GET READY

IPA: [ɛ] tends toward [ɪ]
 LESSAC: N³ tends toward N²

NOTE: In New Zealand, this sound almost becomes [i] in IPA or y in Lessac.

twelve, twenty, bend, mention, head, respect, special

- Ten and ten eventually get you twenty.
- September seventh was a red letter day.
- Ben was renting several sections of federal land.

And now here are a few more drills for the "Short E" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * Ed rented the penthouse at an exorbitant price.
- * I meant every word I said in the elementary section.
- * Don't lose your temper when I enter the room.
- * The song was rendered by men who netted twenty cents.
- * I was in an exceptional mental dilemma.

9. The "SHORT A" SHIFT as in GLASS

IPA: [æ] occasionally becomes [ɑ].
 LESSAC: #6 occasionally becomes #4.

NOTE: If you've studied Standard British or Cockney dialect, you know that this switch usually happens before the consonants "f" "s" "th" "ns" "nt" and a few incidentals. In Australia, the rule holds for all of these consonants except the "ns," which usually does not trigger the change. This "ns," however, still can trigger the change in the most upper-class versions of Aussie speech.

fast, last, grass, asked
 but not in: gastric, hassle, tassel (although "castle" does change)
 bath, pathway, rather
 but not in: catholic, mathematics, catheter, cathode
 staff, after, laugh, laughter
 but not in: caffeine, saffron, sapphire
 can't, advantage, plant, enchant
 but not in: banter, fantasy, fantastic, tantalize, rant

And remember, in Aussie, "ns" does not trigger the change, as in:
 chance, France, transfer, dance, answer, fancy, romance

ALSO NOTE: When the [æ] doesn't change to [ɑ], it will likely change to the nasal diphthong [ɛ̃ə].

that, hat, happen, snack, carry
 - My batting hand soaks in a vat of apple cider.

- My batting hand soaks in a vat of apple cider.
- The handsome man actually went to see his parents in San Francisco.

In the next set of drills, which are not recorded on the tape, the "Short A" vowels which do broaden to [ɑ] are underlined:

- * That man is dancing divinely.
- * Last night the cat transferred the kittens to the back room.
- * He comes from a class of radical rascals.
- * Asask any bashful man to dance and accept his answer.

10. THE "AH-OO DIPHTHONG" as in OUT OF TOWN

IPA: [ɑu] occasionally becomes [ɛ̃ɑu].
 LESSAC: #51 becomes N³ + #51.

- around, down, about, hound, south, found, now
- The crowd loundly prowled the streets of the town.
 - He counted the hours and vouned to get ount of the house.

Now here are a few additional drills for this vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * The loundest hound in town bow-wouned at the mounse.
- * The counard found a tounel and plouned into the mound.
- * I dount that the lounse will pound doun the flouners.
- * The coun was dounsed by a shouner ount of the clound.
- * I found that I had gained abount a pound.

11. "AH" and "AR" as in FATHER'S CAR

IPA: [ɑ] and [ɑr] become [a].
 LESSAC: #5 and #5+R become a frontal #5.

- father, calm, aqua, marshal, scarf, charming, harsh
- He disembarked from the sparkling new golf cart.
 - The two sergeants are college archery partners.

Now here are a few additional drills for this vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * Carl and Marni formed an artful partnership.
- * It's hard to part when it snows in March.
- * Arthur charged out of the arbor unharmed.
- * They calmly parked the car in Harvard Yard.

LESSON THREE: OTHER AUSTRALIAN R-DROPS

The R also drops from other R-shaded vowels as in OTHER. BUT, the R-sound remains when it is situated between two vowel sounds within a word, as in VERY, and between words as in THE OTHER ISSUE.

- player, helper, brother, mother
- The runner staggered over the hill and became a climber.
 - My mother, father, sister, and brother have all gotten fatter.

- first, thirsty, earnest, hurdle, word
- Herman was the first to win thirty games.
 - Herb first learned twenty new words.

- short, more, before, explore, records
- Fourteen boring sportsmen adorned the shore.
 - Forty creatures poured through the French doors.

- sincere, here, appear, cheer
- Don't jeer at me; I'm not weird.
 - The wheel to steer was located near the gear box.

- air, hair, pear, barely, fair
- Where did the polar bear go?
 - Clear air is very rare over there these days.

- endure, tour, sure, allure
- Are you sure you can endure the long tour?
 - Poor hunters offer no allure to pacifists.

- very, sorry, miracle, adore it, more and more
- I'm sore at you, because you prefer everybody else's cooking.
 - Trevor Adams had to be carried out of the convention hall year after year.

Now try these additional R-drills.

- * *Summer went faster and further than winter.*
- * *We searched the world for a perfect curve.*
- * *Father Charles argues about the guard's identity card.*
- * *More and more support came forth for the orphans' party.*
- * *Pay your fare, then tell the driver where to stop.*
- * *Be sincere my dear; it's a queer world.*
- * *I'm secure that velour will endure.*

LESSON FOUR: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AUSSIE & COCKNEY

Even though most of the characteristics of Australian pronunciation we've studied so far have been related to Cockney speech traits, there are several Cockney elements which do not carry over into this dialect.

1. "INITIAL H" as in HOLDING HANDS

Except in certain parts of western Queensland and western New South Wales, "H" does not drop before vowels.

- *I hasten to add my hearty and humble congratulations.*
- * *Do not hesitate to help the homeless.*
- * *Don't hog the hash; we're hungry, too.*
- * *I have never had such happiness.*

2. "NON-VOWEL L" as in BATTLE FIELD

The Cockney "L" to "W" switch does not take place.

cruel, hill, build

- * *Steel workers always feel the need for real friends.*
- * *He was still able to conceal the state of his health.*
- * *The snail crawled over the garden wall.*

3. "MEDIAL T" as in BETTER BUTTER

"Medial T" does not change to a glottal stop in Australian. Instead, it becomes "Almost D" as it does in American dialects.

- *The beautiful British writer carried a little water.*
- * *A glottal stop happens in a lot of unlikely dialects.*
- * *Get out of the battle with a better position.*
- * *The beautiful British writer scattered the letters.*

4. "-ING ENDINGS" as in READING & WRITING

In hard Australian, "-ing" endings will drop. In softer or more educated versions, these endings may well be retained.

- *I'm singing and dancing in the rain.*
- * *Don't be telling tales while waiting for the next sailing.*
- * *I was hoping you'd be feeling better and be wanting to go walking.*
- * *I'm finding myself slipping into a new way of thinking.*

5. THE "TH SOUNDS" as in THIS THING

The Cockney tendency for "TH" to become "F" or "V" usually will not carry over into Aussie speech. Keep the TH sounds.

- *What do you think?*
- * *They played around with this, that and the other thing.*
- * *The other snake thlithered through the grass.*
- * *They received three thousand thank-you notes.*

6. SPECIALIZED PRONUNCIATIONS

In Australian dialect, the following words are very close to their specialized pronunciations in British and Cockney dialects.

<i>been</i> (with a "Long E")	<i>again</i> (with a "Long I")
<i>clerk</i> (with an "AH")	<i>garage</i> (1st syllable stress)
<i>either</i> (with "Long I")	<i>neither</i> (with "Long I")
<i>process</i> (with "Long O")	<i>missile</i> (with "Long I")
<i>hostile</i> (with "Long I")	<i>tomato</i> (with an "AH")

7. "ERY / ARY / ORY" as in SATISFACTORY SECRETARY

As in British and Cockney, words ending in [ɛri] [æri] and [ɔri] will almost lose the first vowel of these word endings.

necessary, satisfactory, secretary, commissary, laboratory

- * *She was a very satisfactory apothecary.*
- * *Ordinary pay is not satisfactory for good secretaries.*
- * *The revolutionary leader said some extraordinary things.*

LESSON FIVE: COACHED DRILL

The transcript below uses the same pronunciation markings I demonstrated earlier in the manual. Follow the tape closely, as it guides you through the pronunciation changes and demonstrates several levels and intensities of the Australian dialect--including the modifications to turn it into a New Zealand pattern.

I AM GOING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS FINAL
 DRILL PASSAGE TO NOT ONLY POINT OUT HOW THE
 RESONANCE AND PRONUNCIATION CHANGES TAKE
 PLACE WHEN MOVING TOWARD AN AUSTRALIAN AC-
 CENT. I ALSO WANT TO POINT OUT TO YOU HOW YOU
 MUST PRACTICE THESE SPEECH CHARACTERISTICS SO
 THAT THEY BECOME SECOND NATURE. WHEN THAT
 HAPPENS, YOU WON'T HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION TO
 THE MECHANICS OF THE SPEECH CHANGES AND YOU
 CAN GO BACK TO YOUR MAIN TASK OF CONCENTRAT-
 ING ON THE ACTIONS AND INTENTIONS OF YOUR
 CHARACTER. A CHARACTER WHO SPEAKS WITH AN AC-
 CENT. THE THOUGHTS MUST FLOW. WE MUST NOT BE
 CONSCIOUS THAT YOUR CHARACTER IS THINKING
 ABOUT THE WAY THAT HE OR SHE IS SPEAKING.

HAVE AT IT WITH YOUR AUSTRALIAN DIALECT!