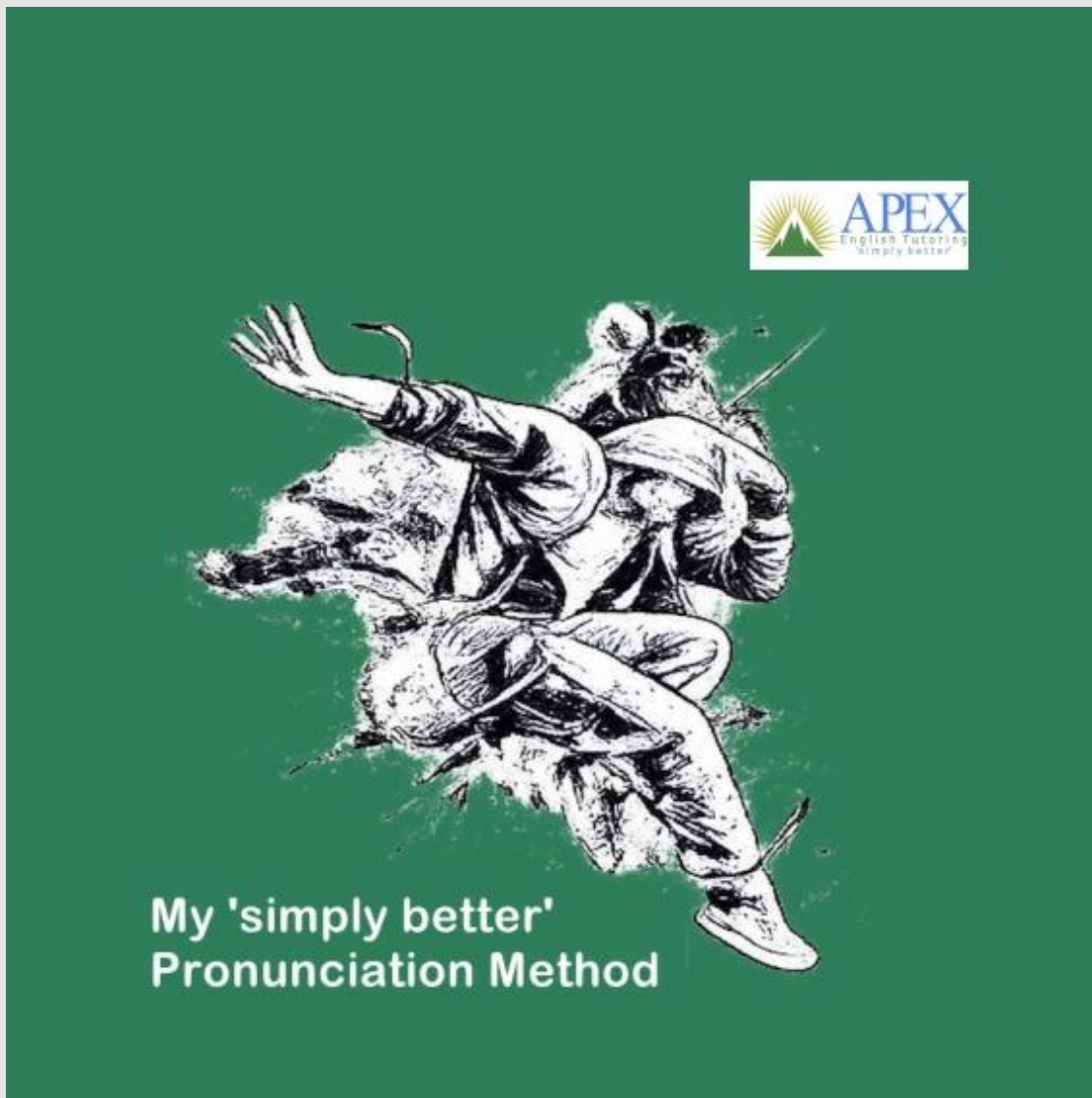


# My 'simply better' Pronunciation Method

## Stress and Rhythm—Intonation



# Introduction

In this lesson, I will continue explaining another important aspect of **Stress and Rhythm**. It's called **Intonation**.

As well, I will teach you about **Connected Speech**, and in particular, the forms of **Continuous Connected Speech**.

They are complicated.

But I encourage you to try to learn them because they will become useful when combined with the Method for practising pronunciation.

# Intonation

**In English, intonation carries emotions.**

But in some languages **like Chinese, Vietnamese, and Thai, intonation carries meaning** and often brings about a complete change of meaning.

Learning intonation, even teaching it, has been described as ‘challenging’.

Why? Because the way we teach it to make it comprehensible is as difficult for teachers as it is for their learners.

Nevertheless, it is an important (and interesting) part of pronunciation, so I shall try to make it as easy as I can.

Probably the easiest way to think of intonation is:

**“It’s not WHAT you say, it’s HOW you say it!”**

An activity will help making it clearer.

## **Task:**

Look at the following sentences and say them.

How does your voice change to say each one?

What's the context for each one?

How does the meaning vary?

(1) He's a judge.    (2) He's a judge?

The first thing to note is that one is a statement and the other is a question.

Did you notice a rise and fall in your voice?

**This rise and fall is what we call intonation.**

You might also have discovered a few different meanings for each.

Number 1 is a statement of fact: the man is a judge.

Number 2 is questioning the man's ability or character to be a judge.

Notice that **most intonation changes occur on stressed syllables.**

Hence, intonation and stress are very similar, and at times can be indistinguishable, that is they are similar.

They often work together aided by other factors—to change meaning.

## **Rise and Fall**

In these questions, the words ‘up’ or ‘down’ help you decide whether to cause your intonation to rise or fall.

When does it go up? (upward intonation on the word ‘up’)

When does it go down? (downward intonation on the word ‘down’)

## **What about these two?**

Are you happy?

Are you sad?

I am sure you can guess which way the intonation goes for each one.

Happy = positive—upward intonation

Sad—negative—downward intonation

So, generally, we can say that intonation is said to either rise or fall.

The next activity will help you further.

### **Task:**

Read the following questions and see if your voice rises or falls at the end.

#### **1 Wh-questions**

When are you leaving? Who are you?

#### **2 Declarative statement (affirmative and negative)**

He's a good boy. What a good boy! It's not true.

#### **3 Yes/no questions (inverted or not)**

Am I early? You're asking me?

#### **4 Imperative sentence:**

Give me that!

#### **5 Exclamation:**

I love it!

**6 Echo question:** A I'm going to the movies.  
B You're going to the movies?

## **Tag question (2 'flavours')**

### **- one seeking confirmation**

You have a driver's licence, don't you?

### **- one expressing uncertainty**

You're a certified English teacher, aren't you?

There are so very many ways for you to say these sentences. And it is impossible to stick to a rule that can be taught and used.

A general rule?

**Meaning + context -> choice of intonation used.**

So many different meanings, so many different contexts, and so many different combinations of intonation.

**Here are the ways that I would use intonation for each one:**

When are you leaving? ('when' and 'you' are rising; 'leaving' is falling, but 'leaving' could also be rising then falling)

He's a good boy. ('boy' is falling)

What a good boy! (an interesting one: the word 'boy', although short, is stretched out. It can start off rising, then end falling, said as praise—for the boy's good behaviour for example).

It's not true. ('true' is falling)

Am I early?

(‘early’ can be both—different meaning for each)

You’re asking me?

(‘me’ is rising; means ‘why’ me, of all people you might have asked, to answer your question)

Give me that!

(‘that’ is falling)

I love it!

(‘love’ is rising, ‘it’ is falling: expressing surprise and delight) also (‘love’ is falling or even ‘flat’, ‘it’ is falling or flat, just a positive statement of fact)

A I’m going to the movies.

(‘movies’ is falling)

B You’re going to the movies?

(‘movies’ is rising, meaning ‘why’ are you going to the movies?)

You have a driver’s licence, don’t you?

(‘licence’ is falling, ‘you’ is rising).

You're a certified English teacher, aren't you?

('teacher' is falling, 'you' is rising)

I hope that with these few examples, you have learned some of the possibilities for different forms of intonation used in different contexts to give different meanings.

**Let's look at a few more.**

**Task:**

Look at the sentences below.

Say them in as many ways as you can to show different attitudes and meanings.

Remember how important context is.

Focus on the changes your voice makes for each new meaning.

1 It's one o'clock!

2 What are we going to do?

3 Would you look at my car?

4 You did it, didn't you?

5 How much money do you need?

The variety of intonations possible seems to be endless.

But there was probably something else happening when you practiced the sentences, too.

### **What other factors play a role?**

How about gestures, body language, facial expression, eye movement, posture and breathing?

What about speed, pauses, volume, and voice quality.

You see, there is so much to pronunciation; much more than simply learning to pronounce difficult words.

### **Task:**

Revisit the sentences above, this time considering those other factors.

Be dramatic!

For example: “What are we going to do?”

1 Be upset. Cry. Wail. Put your palm to your forehead. Say ‘do’ as ‘doooooooooooo’, making the word slowly rise and fall.

2 Be calm but forceful, and clearly ask the question, without emotion. Say the word ‘do’ with a falling intonation.

Remember how I said that intonation and emotion are connected?

And different intonations are used for different emotions.

**Do this activity, and think about the emotions shown in the conversations. What’s the overall ‘feeling’ in each one?**

### **Task:**

Read the following conversations and decide what feelings are being shown.

Is the feeling happiness, anger, confusion, sarcasm, sadness etc.?

Remember to stress the focus words, rising or falling intonation.

## Conversation 1

Julie: I'm going to France for Christmas.

Sam: Oh, that's great!

Jenny: Wow! You are so lucky! (*Jenny is jealous?*)

Sam: Hey, who's picking up the tab? (paying for the trip)

Julie: My father, of course!

Jenny: That is so nice! (*Jenny is being sarcastic.*)

## Conversation 2

Bill: Hey, Mary! It's eight o'clock. The movie starts in ten minutes.

Mary: Oh, I just have to put some lipstick on. I'll be ready in a minute. (*Mary exits*)

Bill: Mary is just so beautiful. I don't mind missing the first part of the movie at all.

Tom: Neither do I! You know everyone in the theatre will be looking at her, so she has to look her best.

Mary: (*returning*) Oh, my gosh! It's 8.10. Sorry! (*Mary is apologetic*)

## Marking Intonation Patterns

One of the most common (and easiest) ways to mark intonation is to simply underline the focus words in a given sentence and draw a rising or falling arrow at the end of the sentence.

Drawing arrows on paper is easy, but I have found that on a computer it's easy to use forward and backward slashes (/ = rising; \ = falling)

### Here's an example:

The man is sitting on the bench.\ (falling at the end)

### Task:

#### Do the same for these sentences:

When are you planning to travel?

Do you like it?

TikTok is great, isn't it?

You like it, don't you?

I like cricket, football, hockey, and tennis.

Do you want chicken, beef, or pork?

## **Task:**

Look at the pairs of sentences below.

They are exactly the same, but different intonation patterns give different meanings.

Choose different patterns and notate them according to their rising or falling intonations at the end of sentences.

How do they differ?

Would you like coffee or tea?

Would you like coffee or tea?

What's his name?

What's his name?

**Some suggested answers are on the next page.**

When are you planning to travel? \

When / are you planning to travel? /

When are YOU / planning to travel? /

Do you like / it? \

Do you like it? \

TikTok is great /, isn't it? \

TikTok is great, isn't it? /

You / like it, \ don't you? /

You like \ it, don't you? /

I like cricket, football, hockey, and tennis. \

I like cricket, / football, / hockey, / and tennis. \

I like cricket, \ football, \ hockey, \ AND / tennis. \

Do you want \ chicken, / beef, / or pork? \

Would you like coffee / or tea? \

Would you like coffee \ or tea? \

What's his name? /

What's his / name? \

# Connected Speech

When we speak continuously and join words together to form sentences, a system of shortcuts arises that help us to maintain the natural flow, rhythm, and intonation of our language.

This is known as **natural connected speech**.

There are some definite differences between words in isolation and in natural connected speech.

In this section, I will briefly touch upon some of the more common areas of natural connected speech.

Natural connected speech happens in all languages.

**There are two kinds of pronunciation.**

So far we have focused on **dictionary pronunciation**.

**Think about the way you speak in your first language.**

Do you always speak in accordance with the dictionary pronunciation of words or do you roll them together with other words in a spoken sentence?

## **Speech is connected**

A language is much more than a series of individual sounds.

We do not simply 'stick' sounds together to form words, nor do we toss words together to make sentences.

Look at the following sentence, for example.

“You have to go now, don't you?”

### **Task:**

Say the above sentence.

Focus on saying it one word at a time.

Pretend to be a robot.

Then, say the sentence as you normally would, at natural pace.

What differences can you hear?

When you say it word by word by word, each word is clear, but 'unnatural'.

Did you make changes to ‘have to’ and ‘don’t you’, running sounds together or even modifying the phonemes?

Maybe you said it like this:

“You havta go now, doncha?” (or ‘hafta’ and ‘doanchew’)

When I taught English in China, I used to say this, then write what I said on the board and ask the students to say what they had heard—in normal English.

“owyergoinmateorright?”

It’s supposed to be an Australian asking:  
“How are you going, mate? All right?”

It demonstrates how difficult listening comprehension is.

For me, as an Australian, I can understand it.

But for anyone else, especially people with English as a second language, it would be impossible.

At least, writing it helps with deciphering the possible words.

**Continuous connected speech**, therefore, involves a flow of speech sounds which are connected, changed/modified, or grouped together.

There is a system however, for understanding the aspects of connected speech.

**That system involves the following:**

(Focus less on the term ; instead try and understand the meaning of each.)

**1 Assimilation** (the changing of sounds)

**2 Elision** (the omission/leaving out of sounds)

**3 Vowel reduction** (the shortening of vowel sounds)

**4 Liaison** (linking of vowels and consonants)

**5 Intrusive sounds** (introducing another phoneme between two words)

**6 Juncture** (the 'slicing' of utterances/sounds into understandable 'chunks')

**6 Contractions** (grammatical forms: would not -> wouldn't, do not -> don't)

**We'll look more closely at each one in turn.**

First though, let's mention:

## **Rate of Speech**

The speed at which someone speaks greatly impacts the way in which they speak.

What is said can also be influenced by the character and demeanor (attitude) of the speaker.

Some of us are naturally quick speakers, others speak more slowly.

We mustn't forget the influence of context either!

What if the person was drunk, causing them to slur their speech?

Or crying?

Or laughing uncontrollably?

Or excited!

A careful delivery of a speech or a presentation to a board of directors of a company often will consist of dictionary pronunciations of words.

Compare this with the wildly rambling informal dialogue between two close friends.

These two styles of speech can be categorised as:

**Careful colloquial speech** (the board meeting speaker or a newsreader).

**Rapid Colloquial Speech** (close friends)

### **Task:**

Consider the two types of speech discussed above.

Which is most appropriate for the classroom?

Which should you strive to become good at?

If I were to answer those questions, I would choose careful colloquial speech for the classroom but I would strive to become good at both types.

**We have to deal with both kinds of situations (context).**

Sometimes, I have to give a presentation or a speech using formal language.

Other times I might meet someone who has:

- a lower education and who speaks less clearly,

- has a poor vocabulary, imperfect pronunciation etc.

So I have to decide to use less formal English.

Lots of rapid fire colloquial speech.

I might even say “Owyergoinmateorright?”

**So, let’s go back to the various types of connected speech.**

## **1 Assimilation**

This happens when a phoneme changes its sound because of the presence of a neighbouring sound.

It changes to sound more like its neighbour, or may even become identical to it.

### **Task:**

Look at the following phrases. Say them as naturally as you can.

Have to go

How do you do

Don’t you know

Good day

Got to go

How are you doing

Got you!

Good night

Here are some suggestions—and I mixed them up to make you work a little harder:

gday,

howdyado,

haftago,

donchewknow/donchaknow,

gnite,

gottago,

howyadoin(g),

gotcha.

## 2 Elision

This term is best thought of as 'omission' (leaving out).

This occurs when a sound that is present in isolated speech is elided, or dropped out, becomes missing, omitted.

This most commonly happens with the phonemes /t/ and /d/.

Look at the following task.

### Task:

#### Say the following phrases:

Next please	I don't know
Send the letter	you and me
Old man	sandwich
Stand still	get well soon

#### Here are the omissions:

Nexplease	I donknow (I dunno)
Senthe letter	you n me
Ol man	san wich
Stan still	ge well soon

### 3 Vowel reduction

If a word is unstressed, it often shrinks/becomes shorter in length, becoming less distinct.

Single vowel sounds often reduce to the schwa sound /ə/.

#### Task:

**Say the following sentences rapidly, emphasizing the underlined words.**

**What happens to the vowels in 'you' and 'him'?**

This is for you, and this is for him.  
I want you to meet him.

Vowel reduction is most commonly associated with the '**grammar words**' of English.

These (usually) monosyllabic (one syllable) words are generally unstressed.

They're the words that can be dropped out without affecting the meaning.

But they're the words most learners have difficulty with!

These small words have two or more acceptable pronunciations:

- one when stressed or spoken in isolation—known as **the strong form**
- one when reduced in their more usual unstressed position. This is known as **the weak form**.

**Look at the following guidelines:**

- They have only **one syllable**.
- They act as **function words**. (prepositions, adverbs etc)
- They usually **occur in their weak form**, unless emphasised.
- They are **high frequency words**, though few in number.

**Here are some example sentences.**

**Say them quickly.**

Give in to my demands, or else.

Give in t my demands, r else.

Whatever will be, will be.

Whatever l be, l be. (l=L)

## 4 Liaison

Liaison is the smooth linking of words, generally seen as a fusion/joining of consonant sounds and vowel sounds.

Listen to yourself speak the following phrases naturally to see how sounds are fused in natural connected speech.

An orange    an apple

### Task:

Think of three more examples

.

## 5 Intrusive Sounds

These mean the introduction of a foreign sound between two vowels sounds.

Intrusive /r/ -> law and order (lor and order)

Intrusive /w/ -> you are (yew ware) go on (go won)

Intrusive /j/ -> he is, they are, Miami (he yiz, thay ya, Miyamee)

Take care here!

Not all, forms of English use these connectors.

Depending on where you come from, you may or may not be able to hear these connectors.

For example, I say 'Mi –ami not Mi-yami.

But I do say 'lor and order' and 'yew are'.

## 6 Juncture

These features allow us to distinguish the beginning and the end of each word in a phrase.

In the activity, look at the following examples:

### Task:

Read the following phrases. How can you tell the pairs apart?

**Send the maid** ('the' and 'them' are pronounced differently)

**Send them aid** (say them as single words: you will hear the difference)

**It's an aim** ('an' and 'a' are pronounced slightly differently)

**It's a name**

**A nice man** (the same as the previous pair)

**An ice man**

**Ice cream** (the stress is on Ice)

**I scream** (the stress is on I)

They ARE very similar sounding BUT there are very slight differences.

### Task:

Look at these and see if you can understand what is being said:

1 <i>cakes and</i> <del>cake some</del> biscuits	2 better the never	3 watch an aim?	4 neck store neighbour
5 grey tie dear	6 a way call night	7 grape Britain	8 ice beak French
9 thinking a view	10 walked a work	11 page or bill?	12 have an eye stay

Answers are on the next page.

1 <i>cakes and</i> <del>cake</del> some biscuits	2 better the never	3 watch an aim?	4 neck store neighbour
5 grey tie dear	6 a way call night	7 grape Britain	8 ice beak French
9 thinking a view	10 walked a work	11 page or bill?	12 have an eye stay

*1 cakes and biscuits; 2 better than ever; 3 what's your name?; 4 next door neighbour; 5 great idea; 6 awake all night; 7 Great Britain; 8 I speak French; 9 thinking of you; 10 walk to work; 11 paid your bill?; 12 have a nice day*

If you say each one quickly, they become easier to understand.

## 7 Contraction

This is a grammatical form that sometimes causes a change of sounds.

The contraction is marked by an apostrophe (').

### For example:

is not = isn't    would not = wouldn't    will not = won't

### Others:

I am = I'm    we will/shall = we'll    he is = he's  
she would = she'd    it would = it'd    they would = they'd  
it is = it's (know the difference between it's and its).

Also: goin' = going (missing 'g' in spoken English).

## Summary

These seven forms of connected speech are useful to know when it comes to pronunciation—either for speaking or listening and understanding what is said.

So, it's a good idea to become familiar with them.

## Conclusion

This long lesson has been designed to help you raise your understanding of the unconscious act of speaking.

Many of these activities have been difficult to explain simply.

However, I hope you agree that some concepts were made easier with the tasks.

**It is in the 'doing' that helps explain the somewhat complex ideas.**

## My recommendation

In terms of helping you improve your pronunciation, I recommend **revisiting the tasks here** to practice saying the words, phrases, and sentences, so that you become more familiar with them.

Not only will practicing them help your pronunciation but it will help you get better at **listening** as well.

This is the last lesson in this section.

Now, we move on to the last section: 11 fun and effective exercises.

**[When you are ready, click or tap here...](#)**

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**Preparing to Practise**

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