FROM THE KING’S SPEECH TO THE QUEEN’S ENGLISH –
TEN STEPS TO PERFECT SPOKEN ENGLISH

TEN STEP GUIDE TO PERFECT SPOKEN ENGLISH

FAST RESULTS IN TEN EASY LESSONS

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INTRODUCTION by Joanna Gray

Why improve speech?

Poor diction, otherwise known as lazy speech can hold us back in life in many different ways. First impressions are based not just on the way we look but the way we speak. Rightly or wrongly people judge us and our intelligence on how we present ourselves. We may look a million dollars but if, when we open our mouths we speak ungrammatically or have poor diction our credibility may immediately take a dive.

It universally accepted that being a powerful communicator is a good quality to cultivate if you want to get on in life and climb the ladder to success. If we do not put the same effort into our vocal presentation as we do into our physical presentation, then we are only enhancing part of our identity.

When we go to interviews for most fields of work, we tend to dress the part by donning a suit and looking business like and formal in our dress, according, of course, to what job we are aiming to get, but if we then open our mouth and say “I really want a noo job – instead of “New” for example or “I done a course in English.” We immediately lose credibility. If we add to poor grammar, poor diction, then our potential and value may plummet in the eyes of others. We may have all the qualifications on paper, but if we don’t speak powerfully or with authority, then we are limiting our means of expressing and imparting the knowledge we have.

Sadly poor speech is very common in society today. Less time is spent in schools in the promotion of good diction and unless people have private elocution, known now as voice training, they may end up with a good many certificates or degrees but very poor vocal skills and that may be the difference between excelling in your chosen career or being overlooked in
preference to someone who has the ability to express themselves powerfully, clearly and authority.

I realise this is not true in all walks of life. You may cite many TV stars who have actually traded on their accents as their unique identity and in the field of show business and the world of television having a pronounced accent can be an advantage but the majority of us are not going to work in TV – we are not the next Ant and Dec or Cheryl Cole, we are people doing ordinary jobs or following more routine paths and if we are senior management, running our own businesses or have following professions where intelligence and good presentation are key, then good diction goes hand in hand with good skills. We don’t tend to consider Ant and Dec or Cheryl Cole to be the imparters of great wisdom or knowledge, we rate them for their entertainment skills and their understanding of a particular brand of communication within the world of Television but if we are looking for a anything from a receptionist or office manager to a barrister, accountant or consultant, we do tend to want them to have powerful clear diction, certainly in the field of law, it is imperative in making points in court.

Strong accents can be very attractive and unique. They are what one may call a speech problem, but they can make diction hard to understand. Whether it be a foreign accent or a regional accent, it may be very appealing, but for those on the receiving end who are not used to that particular accent or dialect it may make what you are saying difficult to interpret for the listener. Therefore having good clear received pronunciation, (RP) or BBC English as it used to be termed, can give you a definite advantage.

But I like my accent, I hear you protest. Of course, and I stress there is nothing wrong with having it, but I suspect that if you have purchased this manual, you have an interest in reducing your accent or improving your diction. I will attempt to set out here some of the ways that you can do this. However, I stress that this manual is an introduction to voice training only and if
you are looking for a more comprehensive course, I would recommend that you use one of my other Voice Training Products –

Voice Training
Advanced Voice Training
Voice Training for Kids
Voice Training – The Power of Speech
Voice Training for European Foreign Speakers

And if you really want to get the edge – contact us at info@voice-training.org or 01234 926926 for individual tuition online via Skype or individual intensive tuition on a one-to-one basis. There is no substitute for direct teaching and it is the fastest way to overcome speech difficulties and make change to your accent or enunciation.

IT’S NOT WHAT WE SAY, IT’S THE WAY THAT WE SAY IT..........................

The following pages will attempt to show you some of the ways that you can overcome speech difficulties, lazy speech, lifelong accents – regional or foreign- and serve as a guide and introduction to elocution/voice training.
HINT 1

MODIFY AN ACCENT, IMPROVE POOR DICTION

If you speak with an accent that you wish to modify or just have poor diction that you wish to improve, the quickest way to purifying the sound of your voice is to speak on a whisper.

Start by choosing a passage from a book, magazine or newspaper and read it out loud on a stage whisper, gradually increasing the volume of your voice.

Once you have practised this for about ten minutes, try taping your voice and then playing it back to yourself to see your progress.

Keep repeating this exercise until your sound is purified. It DOES work but some people will need to practise more than others if their accent is well established or their diction is particularly poor.

The same principal can be applied to singing words. Take a passage and sing the words getting louder and softer.

Notice that there is no trace of an accent for most singers, regardless what their spoken accent usually is.
HINT 2

PROJECT YOUR VOICE (Good for modifying Northern accents or quiet voice)

If you have difficulty being heard, have a quiet voice or a nasal quality to the tone of your voice (particularly present in Northern accents such as Liverpudlian, Mancunian), you can bring your voice forward by speaking with a pencil in your mouth.

Place a pencil or straw between your lips and then read out loud holding the pencil between your lips. Keep practising this and then remove the pencil and attempt to read the same passage again without it. Keep repeating the exercise until your voice moves forward. It is impossible to speak in the back or throat or through your nose with the pencil in your mouth and you need to retrain your speech organs to project forward. Remember to tape and playback your progress.
HINT 3

CURE A STAMMER OR SPEECH DIFFICULTY

Stammers and speech impediments are often caused by lack of confidence. Therefore it is important to work on your self-esteem and remember that stammers and other speech impediments have often become habits. Just like giving up smoking or any other bad habit, stammers are some speech problems (not physical like cleft palate) are often just habits that we have established to cover shyness or lack of confidence.

First work on self-esteem techniques (more detail in New Improved Voice Training Manual and Secrets of Success, from Joanna Gray).

One boy was cured from a lifelong stammer in just one session using confidence techniques. Give yourself permission now to lose the stammer or difficulty – Sounds ridiculous, but does work. Say to yourself, ‘I don’t need this habit any more, I can speak without it and BELIEVE you can do it. Also practise speaking with the pencil.
in the mouth technique. It is much harder to speak badly when focusing your attention on keeping the pencil there.

A speech impediment can become so ingrained into our persona and sense of identity that we are almost afraid sub-consciously to lose it. It has become part of who we are and how we see ourselves. Positive affirmations that you speak with a strong, clear voice, can help for some people – visualizing that you no longer need the problem or speech defect and seeing yourself without it can also help. You need to make the picture in your mind clear and vibrant and see yourself speaking beautifully in different contexts and how that would feel.

HINT 4

SING YOUR WAY TO GREAT SPEECH

As mentioned earlier, singing your words can really help to purify an accent or speech problem. Think Gareth Gates. He has overcome his lifelong stammer since building a successful career and working with a speech therapist using some of the techniques in this guide. Singing, no matter how badly, can help you purify your speech and lose a difficulty. It is virtually impossible to stammer whilst singing and accents are hidden by singing. Even if you are a lousy singer, in the privacy of your home, sing your words and then go back to normal speech immediately afterwards and notice how much better your diction is. Again a tape recorder is helpful to practise this technique.
HINT 5

POSTURE - STAND TALL TO SPEAK WELL

The way that we stand and hold ourselves has a direct effect on our speech. Standing tall with your head held upright opens the throat and diaphragm for better quality speech. Never speak looking down, you will mumble, always look directly forwards and hold shoulders back and chest out. Give your passages and good open airway through which to operate.

If you suffer from bad posture, back problems or just habitually slouch, then try Yoga or Pilates or working on an exercise ball to strengthen and improve your posture.
HINT 6

IMITATION

Listening is one of the most useful things one can do to improve your speech. Remember you first learned to speak by imitating those around you. We tend to develop our accents and speech from our parents and family members and our peers at school. Whatever we are exposed to most is how we learn. Our ear is established before our voice and in order to change your diction you need to relearn by listening. If you want to speak like a BBC newsreader, then listen to the news, even tape it. Listen to how Trevor Macdonald or Moira Stuart sound when they are presenting. Take sentences, listen and copy. Actors use the IMITATION technique all the time to create characters who sometimes speak with entirely different accents. They do this by listening and imitating someone who speaks in the way they need to speak for the part they are playing.

BBC Radio 4 is a great place to hear good speech. Saturate yourself with the sound of good clear RP (Received Pronunciation). Go to sleep listening to it for even greater effect.

HINT 7

BREATHE YOUR WAY TO GOOD SPEECH

Our sound is very dependent on the way we breathe. To improve the quality of your speech you need to learn to breathe through your diaphragm. This is explained more fully in the complete Voice Training
Pack by Joanna Gray. However, a simple technique to discover where you are breathing from is to talk whilst placing your hands on your ribcage, if you feel a resonance/vibration in between your ribs, you are breathing correctly. If you don’t you are speaking higher up in your chest. To lower your speech to your diaphragm, say the sound O (o-her) as in the word COUGH – say this repeatedly whilst placing your hands on your diaphragm until you feel the vibration there. It takes practise so don’t give up. You will learn to feel where your breath is and then you will breathe naturally through your diaphragm.

HINT 8

TONGUE TWISTERS

Tongue twisters are a great way of strengthening your vocal ability. Use the exercise with the different techniques listed here – speaking on a whisper, singing, with a pencil in the mouth. This will strengthen your ability to have strong diction and to overcome lazy speech. Practise whenever you can.

A few examples

Around the rugged rock the ragged rascal ran.

(Use this if you have difficulty with the r sound – with the pencil in the mouth and on a whisper)
She sells seashells on the seashore.

(Use this for a sibilant s or for lazy speech with the pencil and whisper technique.)

Red lorry, yellow lorry, red lorry……etc

(Use this for lazy speech with the pencil or

Whisper technique)

HINT 9

WASH YOUR MOUTH OUT!

Not being rude, keep your mouth clean and fresh and look after your teeth. Poor dental care can affect our speech as gaps in the mouth change the whole structure of your sound and can lead to whistling sounds. Oral infections lead to throat infections which are fatal to good speech, so keep healthy – this is good advice anyway and diet and exercise help in all matter.

DO NOT SUCK SWEETS TO MOISTEN THE MOUTH…INSTEAD DRINK WATER. IT IS A MYTH THAT SUCKING HELPS THE THROAT AND MOUTH WHERE SPEECH IS CONCERNED. IF YOU MUST USE SOMETHING, A SMALL TEASPOON OF BUTTER AND SUGAR WILL INCREASE SALIVA OR HONEY, BUT FAR BETTER IS PLAIN WATER. TOO MANY THROAT SWEETS CAN ACTUALLY IRRITATE THE THROAT AND MOUTH.
HINT 10

LOVE YOUR VOICE

Love your own voice. Our voice is part of our own unique identity. It is not necessarily a good thing to change an accent for instance, unless it is holding you back in your line of work or daily life. In fact you can never lose an established accent entirely, it is part of your heritage and whilst you can learn a new way of speaking, you can go back to your old way any time you choose.

Learn to love your voice and nurture it. Don’t concentrate on what is wrong with it, improve what is good about it. Tell yourself your speech is part of your unique wonderful identity and just like polishing your car, you can make it more beautiful, but it is beautiful anyway!

VOICE TRAINING PROGRAMMES – CDS AND MANUALS
Other Publications by the author

Advanced Voice Training  
Voice Training for Kids  
Voice Training and Pronunciation Techniques when English is a Second Language  
Secrets of Success  
Voice Training Manual (Comprehensive guide to voice training and elocution)  
All Manuals, CDs and further information are available from:-

For direct teaching, either online or one-to-one, please contact us on info@voice-training.org or 01234 926926

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