

Tidewater Southern American Dialect

February 2023

First and foremost, **intelligibility** is at the core of our work; followed closely by **authenticity**. If you cannot be understood by the audience, then all authenticity brought to the dialect is irrelevant. There will be moments when we make a choice that seems less authentic, but always for the purpose of clearer communication.

Rehearse and sing in dialect. Memorize your text in dialect. Revisit sound clips periodically to tap back into the sound/feeling of the dialect. ASK QUESTIONS if you are not sure about anything!

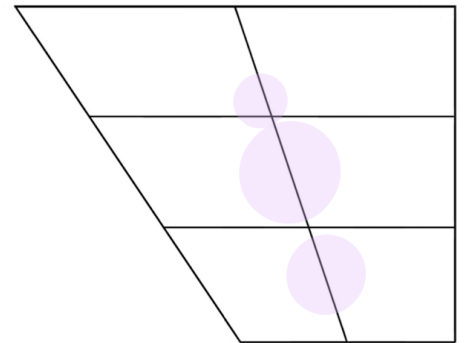
PEOPLE CONTENT

Tidewater Southern American dialect is most commonly recognized in the Tidewater region of Virginia, but does establish roots along the eastern coast. The Southern Midland dialect spans through a large portion of the Appalachia along the Blue Ridge (PA border down to Georgia - this is our home dialect for a lot of the WV folk!). For this production we will lean into our WV roots and apply the Tidewater Southern sounds in tandem.

The Indigenous population spoke primarily the three native languages of Iroquoian, Algonquian, and Siouan. Much of this language is lost as in the 1870s the US government made mandatory boarding schools for indigenous people where they forced them to cut their hair, replace their clothing and the use of their native tongue was severely punished. There is a strong movement for the language to be preserved and it, of course, as part of the history of this land is part of the history of the accent. There is also a great deal of Irish and Scottish influence in the Appalachian region. This variety of language offers a great diversity of sounds throughout the state of North Carolina.

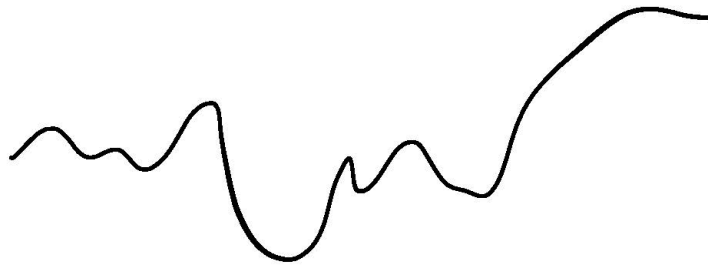
VOCAL POSTURE:

- **Jaw:** Held close, but loose - can easily open wide when needed
- **Tongue:**
 - **tip/blade** rests behind the bottom teeth and is reluctant to leave, shrinking the range of dexterity/vowel production
 - **body (front/middle)** sits rather middle [ə], but can easily cup or arch just above that equator of the mouth
 - **back** is wide and facile, sits arched but can open and cup for back vowel rounding
- **Lips:**
 - **corners** relaxed, allows for easy 'spreading' of the sound with the channeling of the tongue
 - **body** very relaxed
- **Velum:** a heavy 'neutral' - it can lower so that nasal quality can come into play
- **Thinking sound/home base:** [ə̃m], [ɛ̃m], [ə̃m]
- **Food Image/Taste/Texture:** ice cube from your sweet ice tea either cupped on the tongue or pressing against the roof almost as it melts

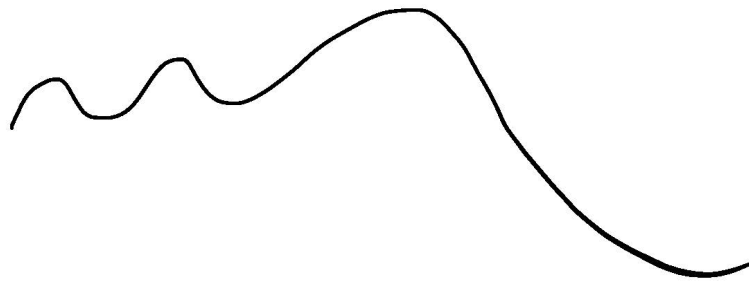


PROSODY: Rhythm, Stress, Intonation, Tone

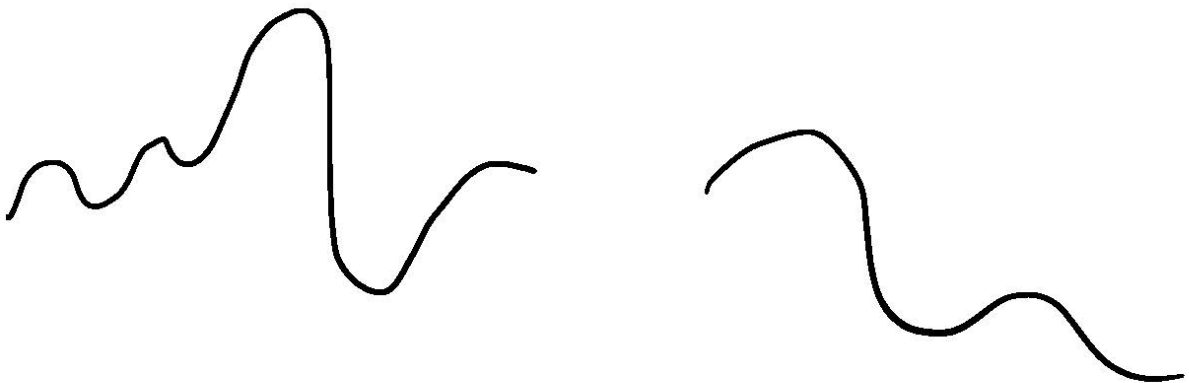
- We can find a great deal of manners tied into the application of prosodic structuring in this sound. i.e., rising inflection on statements
- There is a heavy use of timing (lengthening) in word emphasis, more so than volume.
- DRAWL - vowels are lengthened in a BIG way. Often times they will add a vowel sound (monophthongs become diphthongs and diphthongs become triphthongs) and a great deal of *glide* will help them sustain.
 - High Rising Drawl – a babbling brook along to a rising and lengthened scoop in the penultimate syllable or word



- Low Dragging Drawl – a languid flowing into a downward pitch/timing glide in finality -- Backing into gravel parking spot



- Bookend-ing – the phrase flows connected until the final word (or couple words), taking a pause before speaking them



PRONUNCIATION / SOUND CHANGES:

Consonants –

- **ɪ** → the /r/ sound primarily stays present in this region of the south. In lexical sets where /r/ coloration follows a vowel (NORTH/FORCE, START, SQUARE), it is common for the sound to include greater /r/ pronunciation: [ɔɜː], [ɑɜː], [ɛɪə]. *UNLESS* you are of an older generation. In this case you would *drop the /r/ when the sound occurs at the end of a syllable*.
 - *lettER* → *comma, NEAR, CURE, NURSE, SQUARE, START, NORTH, FORCE*
 - *Sarah, hurry // north square, work, millionaire,*
- **l** → [ɔ] — Dark /l/s, or when an /l/ follows a vowel and is terminal (final) sound of a word or syllable (meaning it's followed by silence or a consonant), it comes with significant rounding [ɔ]. (*Pull, milk, will you, school bus, failed, circle, hold*)
- **verbs with /-ing/ endings** → the velar nasal slides forward to an alveolar nasal (so, dropping the /g/), regardless of age, education, social status. (*running, happening, cooking, suffering*)
- **PRACTICE SENTENCE:** *Forever and ever, I'll be running over your prickly pears.*

Vowels –

Lexical Set(s)	SCGA	Tidewater	Description // Additional Words
KIT	ɪ	ɪə	This vowel becomes almost a diphthong as it migrates from the close front corner [i] (FLEECE) towards a middle schwa [ə]. (<i>inn, window, limb, kid, milk, sister, women</i>) <i>Come on in. Don't leave that window open or the bugs'll get in.</i>
DRESS → KIT	ɪ / ɛ	ɪ	The DRESS vowel moves higher (front of tongue arching rather than cupping) to a KIT placement. Also known as a pin/pen merger. (<i>men, lemonade, then, stressed, bed, second helping, Steve</i>) <i>Where have you been? Get on with it! Aspen's on his second helping already.</i>
STRUT	ʌ	ɜ:	This sound will move from the back of the mouth to a central cup in the dorsum. (<i>But, love, blood, button, truck</i>) <i>I love that baby - she's cute as a button playing with that truck!</i>
BATH/TRAP drawl	æ	æɪə	The Southern drawl elongates these vowels as they move from an open to a close position. This is most prevalent when the vowel is followed by a voiced continuant (fricative or nasal). (<i>half-past, grandad, laugh, trap</i>) <i>That apple-jacker will be trapped in the tree 'til Daddy's back.</i>

GOOSE	u	ʊ	<p>GOOSE fronting: the sound moves forward to be made under the hard palate with the middle dorsum.</p> <p>(<i>flute, tribute, twenty-two</i>) <i>Lizzo is a truly remarkable flute tooter.</i></p>
LOT/CLOTH	ɑ	ɑː / ɒː	<p>These open back vowels luxuriously take up more space first and foremost by lengthening/sustaining and a ‘sometimes second’ of greater rounding. On some occasions, the vowel sound can even move into a diphth- or triphthong: [ɑoʊ].</p> <p>(<i>dog, stop, solve // soft, frost, wrong, lofty</i>) <i>You can stop that nonsense and heat the pot while I put on my socks. I’m longing for some of that coffee to help me defrost. And some waffles.</i></p>
THOUGHT	ɔ	ɔʊ / ɒ	<p>This vowel can behave in a couple of ways. First, we might see it glide into a diphthong [ɔʊ]. A second option is to have it rise and stay within the one vowel sound [ɒ].</p> <p>Older folks might drop it to a more open back vowel as in ‘father’ [ɑ] or [ɒ]. This is an older sound typically associated with the plantation south and aristocracy.</p> <p>(<i>all, daughter, talk, applaud, water</i>) <i>That author had sought to be published, but he ain’t got no salt to his pen.</i></p>
PRICE	aɪ	aɪ̯ / æɪ̯ e / æ	<p>Tidewater Rising: The onset vowel sits higher in the mouth and can sometimes be lengthened into a monophthong.</p> <p>(<i>guy, I, time, nice, drive, climate, iced tea</i>) <i>Science will make a liar out of you. Christ almighty, he writes that sci-fi a mile a minute!</i></p>
GOAT	ɔʊ / oʊ	ə	<p>This diphthong will receive a modification only when it ends a polysyllabic word, shortening into a schwa [ə].</p> <p>(<i>pillow, pimento, tomorrow, window</i>) <i>He did not know his ‘tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow’ speech. He’ll need to be more thorough.</i></p>
MOUTH	aʊ / aʊ̯	eɪ̯ / eɪ̯ eː	<p>Tidewater Rising: The onset of this vowel sits higher in the mouth Sometimes: the drawl will carry this diphthong into a triphthong. It can also become a lengthened monophthong [eː].</p> <p>(<i>Out, home, lonely, grow</i>). <i>This sounds a lot like a loud vowel coming out of my mouth.</i></p>

CHOICE	oɪ	o / oə	<p>This diphthong will move into a singular sound or have the slightest off-glide into a medial sound.</p> <p>(<i>boy, toilet, oyster, employ</i>)</p> <p>You'll spoil your voice if you go on rejoicin' so boisterously.</p> <p>No ointment can keep it from spoil.</p>
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Additional Changes:

- **thing + compounds**, → the vowel sound before the nasal opens to DRESS [ɜɪ] or TRAP [æŋ].
Additionally, one syllable similar words will also make this shift. (*sing, bring, anything*)
- **'wash'** → some speakers will add an /r/ in this word: [wɔʃ]
- **'every' + compounds** → the final vowel sound [ɪ] is dropped: [evə]. (*everything, everyone, everybody*)

Practice Sentences/Phrases:

ɡɹæɪə.nɪ meɪd̩ wədə.miəlŋ piəkəʊs
Granny made watermelon pickles.

wɪ meɪd̩ ɪːskʁɪm ɑːn ðə frʌnt pɔːtʃ ɛvə.bɔːdi ɡɑː tə kɹæɪəŋk
We made ice cream on the front porch - everybody got to crank!

Listening Suggestions

Play with these sounds! The technical work is important, but don't let it dictate the sounds you are making. Test the boundaries and find the flow of the prosody.

- My YouTube playlist:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPZg3qYyXag6ZCeZuAHly_kNIIgSCKDTM
- IDEA - the International Dialects of English Archives: this is a highly valuable resource for any dialect sampling. You can find a wide range of gender/age/geographic location for Australian speakers here: <https://www.dialectsarchive.com/australia>
 - North Carolina 10: <https://www.dialectsarchive.com/north-carolina-10>
 - North Carolina 11: <https://www.dialectsarchive.com/north-carolina-11>
 - North Carolina 13: <https://www.dialectsarchive.com/north-carolina-13>
 - North Carolina 14: <https://www.dialectsarchive.com/north-carolina-14>
 - North Carolina 15: <https://www.dialectsarchive.com/north-carolina-15>
 - North Carolina 22: <https://www.dialectsarchive.com/north-carolina-22>

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