

## Received Pronunciation / “Standard” British

Before working on any dialect, it is important to clarify 2 common goals and priorities of our work. First and foremost, **intelligibility** is the core of our work. A close second is **authenticity**. If you cannot be understood by the audience, then all authenticity you have brought to your dialect is pointless. 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/CULTURE

Received Pronunciation has a long history of prestige and class in Great Britain. It is not a geographically contained dialect, but one that came to populace among the higher class. This ‘standard’ or ‘default’ British was taught in institutions as prescribed sound, delineating those with money to afford education and those without. For many decades, the BBC required this sound from its broadcasters and it was used throughout the British Empire, gaining recognition globally. It was used for many years in actor and orator training in prestigious institutions, breeding a systematically prescriptive sound, but it is losing ground as a sound to strive to replicate as sociolinguistic studies are proving devalue in ‘standard’ speech practices. It is a sound heard more rarely these days, but still highly useful to build a variety of accents from the British Isles and in performance of historical populations.

### ORAL POSTURE:

- **Jaw:** less movement than in American dialects, held slightly narrower
- **Tongue:**
  - tip/blade has easy, fluid, darting access to back of teeth and gums
  - body (front/middle) is cupped (like holding a pool of water)
- **Lips:**
  - corners less retraction than American dialects
  - body has easy fluidity and tendency to pull forward
- **Velum:** sits at a tall resting place, letting sound flow
- **Food Image/Taste/Texture:** steaming cup of tea (tongue is the cup and vellum is tall for steam to gather), tea pot (mouth is the body full of tea and the lips are the spout)
- **THINK:** More work with the tip of the tongue, less work with the lips and the jaw.
- **TRY:** Alternate between saying, “Da-da-da” and “Do-do-do” - notice the posture of the lips and movement of the jaw. Also take note of the air flow behind the top teeth in the “Do-do-do”. This is the shape and focus you want to use when applying the RP dialect.
- **TRY:** Imagine spitting a jawbreaker out at something, but instead of using your cheeks to help blow it out, direct the air pressure with your tongue.

## PROSODY

- The sound moves along the roof of the mouth with momentum, resonating right behind the lips at a "thinking sound" [ɛ] (rather than the middle of the mouth American [ə])
- **TRY:** It can be helpful to imagine it resonating right outside of your mouth as well. Hold up a finger 3" in front of your lips and try to send the resonance to the finger. Be cautious not to move the lips into a pucker all the time or become too breathy.
- RP speakers play more with higher pitches while Americans rely on volume variance.
- Focus more on key words within a phrase to emphasize with a higher pitch. This will help with the quicker, more nimble rate the British speak at. These key parts of the text tend to be at the beginning of sentences in Americans, but the RP speakers find these articles at the end of their sentences/text.
- The rate of speech in RP tends to take place swiftly on a syllabic basis rather than gradually through a phrase.
- The musicality of a phrase is much stronger in RP. It tends to start with a downward glide in pitch and varies in melody depending on the needs of the text.
- Changes in rhythm, stress, tone can all happen in the middle of words - play with it!

## **PRONUNCIATION/SOUND CHANGES:**

- **Consonants** should be sharp and precise - especially on the plosive sounds. Use to the tip of the tongue to clear up consonants, not wider and more active lips. **THINK/SAY:** clipped & crisp!
  - **d -> t** — — release the t sound, aspirating the end of the sound rather than stopping the sound (*better, lot of, sit down, writer*)
  - **r** — — non-rhotic - this consonant should be lightened, almost graced over at times - think of the tip of the tongue moving towards the back of the top teeth rather than towards the soft palate (*bird, warm, colonel, letter, mother, her, choir*)
  - **Linking r** — — when a /r/ ends one word and a vowel begins the next word in a phrase, the sound blends together (*her eyes, here are, there are, fear of death*)
  - **Intrusive R's** - an /r/ can intrude sometimes when there is no /r/ in the spelling at all (*Shah of Persia, law and order, McKenna adores*)
  - **/wh-/ -> <sup>h</sup>w** — — words beginning with a /wh-/ can sometimes begin with a slight glottal exhalation of breath before making the [w] sound (*whisper, what, when, where, why, wheel, wheat, whale*)
- **Vowels & Diphthongs** should be free to take up space and time in your mouth - don't be tempted to cut them short! (think do-do-do, not da-da-da)

| Lexical Set<br>Keyword | “Gen Am” | RP        | Description // Additional Words   |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|---|
| TRAP                   | æ        | æ<br>ɚ    | With the cupping of the tongue in this oral posture, the TRAP sound sits lower as the front body of the tongue cups: <i>tap, back, badge, scalp, hand, cancel, blast, flap, matter</i>  |
| BATH                   | æ        | ɑ:        | The BATH sound rolls toward the back of the mouth, cupping acting happening in the back body of the tongue: <i>staff, brass, dance, ask, sample, chance, calf, after, half, laughter, last</i>  |
| STRUT                  | ʌ        | ɚ         | This heavily used sound in American english moves to a lower (cupped) middle tongue, pulling slightly backward: <i>cup, son, budge, pulse, trunk, blood, mother, some</i>   |
| LOT                    | ɑ        | ɒ         | This vowel lives in the the same place with considerable rounding of the oral posture: <i>stop, sock, dodge, romp, possible, quality, hop, knob</i>   |
| CLOTH                  | ɔ        | ɒ         | The CLOTH vowel moves into a more cupped back tongue, making more height in the back of the mouth: <i>cough, broth, cross, long, dog, toss, wrong, cost</i>   |
| THOUGHT                | ɔ        | ɔ:        | THOUGHT vowels gain some roundedness, get taller in the mouth, and is sustained extra long: <i>all, awful, taught, daughter, sauce, hawk, water, jaw, broad, caught, thaw, brought</i>  |
| GOOSE                  | u        | u:<br>ju: | The GOOSE vowel is sustained. When following a consonant, there is typically a slight /y/ slide into the sound: <i>loop, shoot, tomb, mute, huge, view, crew, flute, duel, lure, student, tune, duplicate</i>   |
| GOAT                   | oʊ       | əʊ<br>əɔʊ | The /oh/ diphthong has a more relaxed/neutral tongue at the onset of the sound, and a subtle flow into the second vowel. Sometimes, it can even be a triphthong: think of saying ‘uh-oh-oo’ very quickly: <i>so, slow, don’t, soap, joke, go, home, know, roll, most, crow, float</i> |
| Happy                  | i        | ɪ         | On ending /eee/ sounds, the sound lowers slightly and can often feel shorter in length: <i>city, party, money, coffee, taxi, calorie, twenty, silly, century</i>  |

- **More Changes**

- /ile/ endings— —all words with the final letters ‘ile’ should be pronounced like the word “file” (*mobile, fertile, futile, tactile*)
- —tory, —tary, —bury endings — —these ending sounds become one syllable (*secretary, dictionary, obligatory, monetary*)
- variations in stress patterns— — week-END, alu-MIN-ium, tele-VIS-ion, magaZINE

### Listening Suggestions

Play with these sounds! The technical work is important, but don’t let it dictate the sounds you are making. The RP sound is liquid and flexible. Test it out, push the boundaries, try to find its boundaries so you can see how expressive the range of play is. Try to capture the spirit of the sound (by focusing on rhythm/tempo/pitch play).

**\*\*\*Be playful but precise with sounds - particularly consonants. The relaxing lips can lead to a mumbling quality which, while may feel more natural or realistic, is not useful in the theatre. We must never sacrifice clarity of speech in the theatre.\*\*\***

- BBC radio
- IDEA - the International Dialects of English Archives: <http://dialectsarchive.com/received-pronunciation> —this is a great resource as they have 4-5 samples of different speakers saying the same text. It will highlight the variance the dialect can have and still be ‘right’.
- *Downton Abbey* (the wealthy family members: sisters, father, grandmothers - careful of Estuary sounds in lower class and American influenced characters)
- *The Crown*
- *Being Julia*
- *The King’s Speech*
- *The Queen*
- *The Imitation Game*
- *Saving Grace*
- *Gosford Park*
- *Enchanted April*
- *A Room with a View*
- Rowan Williams - former Archbishop of Canterbury
- Chris Huhne - former British Secretary of State for Energy & Climate Change
- The Royal Family (Christmas Broadcasts are an excellent resource)
- Maggie Smith
- Alan Rickman (notice his lip posture and the freedom he has here without sacrificing quality of articulation)
- In A Manner of Speaking podcast w/ Paul Meier and David Crystal: <https://www.paulmeier.com/2019/11/01/episode-22-received-pronunciation/>