

Native-like Accent Pronunciation Course



Lesson 4

Part 1: STEER / STIR / STORE

Today we'll finish our study of vowels with R by practicing the sounds in **Steer** /iə/, **stir** /ɜ:/, /ə:/, and /ɔ:/ **store**.

All of these sounds end in R, and the difference is in the starting mouth position:



STEER

STIR

STORE

oooo. For **steer**, your mouth starts in an open horizontal position, like the sound in the word **seat** from Lesson 1.

ππππ. In the word **store**, your mouth starts in an “O” shape.

θθθθ. In the word **stir**, your mouth is in a “middle” position between the **steer** sound and the **store** sound.

Watch me and you'll see the difference – and also try to repeat it.

EER –

STEER

OR –



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STORE

IR –

STIR

Let's practice the sound in **steer**:

pppp. **here**
ssss. sincere
tttt. atmosphere
ssss. appear
tttt. earrings
tttt. near
ssss. career
tttt. beer
ssss. volunteer

As you can see, this sound is usually spelled ERE, EAR, or EER. There are also a few words with IER, like **fierce**, **pierce**, and **cashier**.

Now let's practice the sound in **stir**:

ttttt. were
ttttt. perfect
ttttt. turn
ttttt. bird
ttttt. learn
ttttt. work
ttttt. courage
ttttt. sugar
ttttt. doctor

Notice the many different spellings. All of these words have the same sound – the ER sound – so don't be fooled by the written form of the word! I'll talk more about this later in the lesson.

Listen to and repeat these words with the OR sound in **store**:



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φφφφφ. more
κκκκκ. before
λλλλλ. explore
μμμμμ. order
ννννν. orange
οοοοο. organize
πππππ. forest
θθθθθ. story
ρρρρρ. corner
σσσσσ. tour
τττττ. four
υυυυυ. course
ωωωωω. door
ωωωωω. poor
ξξξξξ. floor

This sound can be spelled ORE, OR, OUR, and OOR.

Let's go back to the EER sound for a moment. Some students have difficulty making the difference between a word with the EE sound and a word with the EER sound – so try practicing with these pairs:

ψψψψψ. be / beer
ζζζζζ. fee / fear
ααααα. ease / ears
βββββ. knee / near
χχχχχ. piece / pierce
δδδδδ. she / sheer
εεεεε. tea / tear
φφφφφ. weed / weird

And let's do a few exercises of "Which word do I say?" You'll have three seconds to identify the correct word before the answer appears.

γγγγγ. bead / beard
ηηηηη. cheese / cheers



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uuuu. he / hear
pppppp. pea / peer
kkkkkk. tease / tears

It can also be difficult to distinguish the EER sound and the ER sound – so let's practice a few pairs:

llllll. bird / beard
mmmm. her / hear
vvvvvv. purse / pierce
oooo. fur / fear
pppppp. word / weird

Let's focus on this ER sound for a moment. There are a few common pronunciation errors that many students make due to the irregular spelling in English.

Common Error #1

Pronouncing **urgent** as "OOR – gent," with a strong "U" sound. But this word is actually pronounced "ER – gent," as if it began with the letter E. The words **hurry**, **purple**, **return**, and **occur** also have the ER sound, even though they are spelled with the letter U.

Common Error #2

A similar error also happens with words ending in –URE, such as **picture**. Sometimes students say "PIC – toor," which is incorrect. The word is really pronounced more like "PIC – cher" with the ER sound. (We'll talk about the "t" and the "ch" sound in a later lesson).

Here are more words with the ER sound: **nature**, **pressure**, **measure** – remember that the end of these words is pronounced ER and not UR.

Common Error #3

I frequently hear students mispronounce the word "work." – They pronounce the "O" like an "O" – but in reality, it sounds like "werk" – it's that same ER sound, even though it's spelled with an "O."



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This is the case with many words beginning with WOR, like **word**, **worse**, **worry**, and **world**. (Pronounced “werd, werse, worry, and world”).

Common Error #4

In general, the letters OR or AR, when they are in an unstressed syllable, are pronounced with the ER sound. You can see this in the word **forget**. It is not pronounced like a combination of the words “for” and “get” – instead, the first part sounds like “fer” – “ferget.”

A few more examples are **effort**, **comfort**, and **grammar** (“effert, comfort, grammer”) – in fact, many native English speakers misspell the word “grammer” because of this pronunciation difference at the end of the word.

Now let’s practice a bit with the OR sound in **store**. Some students get this mixed up with the AW sound in **saw** – so let’s do some practice.

- saw / sore
- paw / poor
- law / lore
- fought / fort
- flaw / floor
- raw / roar
- cause / cores
- sauce / source
- often / orphan
- draw / drawer

That last one is difficult. The first word is pronounced “draw” and the second word is pronounced “dror.”

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Homework:

4: Part 1- Record yourself reading these sentences:

Here are some sentences focusing on the sound in **steer**:

- My volunteering interferes with my career as an engineer.
- It's clear that beer brings cheer to my peers.
- The cashier had severe hearing problems for years.
-

Sentences focusing on the sound in **stir**:

- The third picture of the bird is worse than the first.
- The teacherer prefers to hurry and return to work early.
- The girl in the shirt and skirt searched for a purple purse.
-

Note that the word “for” in this sentence sounds like “fer” – this is because of the rhythm of natural spoken English. We’ll study more about this later in the course.

Sentences focusing on the sound in **store**:

- I bought four more oranges at the corner store.
- Let’s explore the forest in the morning, before the tour.
- George told a short, boring story about a sports award.

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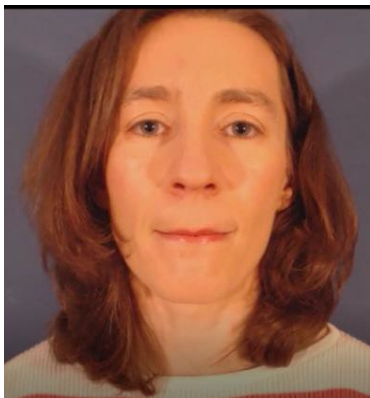
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Part 2 : SUM / SUN / SUNG

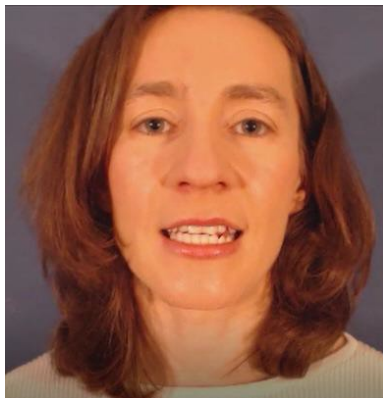
You're going to practice the M /m/ and N /n/ sounds in **sum** and **sun** – as well as the NG /ŋ/ sound in **sung**.

The M sound is very easy – just put your lips together and hum. In the N sound, your lips are slightly apart and your tongue touches the roof of your mouth behind your front teeth.

Most students have difficulty with these sounds at the end of a word. Watch how my mouth is completely closed at the end of **sum**, but it is slightly open at the end of **sun**.



M – SUM



N – SUN



NG – SUNG

Now, the contrast between **sun** and **sung** is very small. There are two common errors – either eliminating the G sound entirely so that the two words are the same – or pronouncing the G too much, like this: / ŋ /sunG

The NG sound has just a very small, very subtle G at the end of it.

Practice these words with N:

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γγγ. **neat**
ηηη. **nine**
ιιι. **noon**
φφφ. **nut**
κκκ. **knee**
λλλ. **knot**
μμμ. **knife**
ννν. man**nner**
ooo. fi**nish**
πππ. a**nnoy**
θθθ. mai**n**
ρρρ. **known**
σσσ. bo**n**

This sound is spelled N or NN. In words beginning with KN, the K is silent – so

knot is pronounced the same as

not. Practice these words with

M:

τττ. **me**
υυυ. **main**
ϖϖϖ. **must**
ωωω. su**mmer**
ξξξ. **memory**
ψψψ. s**mile**
ζζζ. s**mart**
αααα. from**m**
ββββ. see**m**
χχχχ. fir**m**
δδδδ. la**mb**



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εεεε. autumn

This sound is spelled with M or MM. As you can see, with words ending in MB and MN, the B and N are silent:

φφφφ. climb, comb, tomb, limb, crumb, bomb

γγγγ. column, condemn, hymn, damn,

solemn

Practice these words with NG:

ηηηη. sing

ιιιι. ring

φφφφ. hang

κκκκ. bang

λλλλ. song

μμμμ. strong

νννν. lungs

οοοο. young

ππππ. going

θθθθ. hang

ρρρρ. coming

This sound is very common in English, because it exists in all the -ING forms of the verbs. Again, be careful not to over-pronounce or under-pronounce the final G.

Note that the pronunciation of words ending in -NGE is different. In this case,

we pronounce the G like a “soft G” (or J sound):

σσσσ. arrange, revenge,

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sponge, lunge **Practice the**

difference: M and N

ттт. beam / bean

υυυυ. game / gain

тттт. mail / nail

ωωωω. map / nap

ξξξξ. scream / screen

ψψψψ. them / then

ζζζζ. warm / warn

Practice the difference: N and NG

ααααα. fan / fang

βββββ. run / rung

χχχχχ. gone / gong

δδδδδ. robin / robbing

εεεεε. sin / sing

φφφφφ. win / wing

Practice Sentences

Let's try some practice sentences!

Focus on M:

γγγγ. **M**ary **remem**bers **m**any **mem**orable **m**oments from **m**the
sum**mm**er.

Focus on N:

ηηηηη. **N**ancy **n**ever **n**oticed the **n**ine **n**ew **n**eon **n**signs.

Focus on NG:

The young **ng** woman with long **ng** hair sang **ng** the wrong **ng** song.

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Homework:

4: Part 2- Record yourself reading these sentences:

Focus on M:

- α. **M**ary rem**em**bers **m**any **mem**orable **m**oments from **m** the sum**mm**er.
- β. I'**mm**ad that Sam's **mom** made **me** **m**ee**tt** him**m**.
- χ. It's ti**mm**e for the tea**mm** to co**mm**e into the roo**mm**.

Focus on N:

- δ. **N**ancy **n**ever **n**oticed the **n**ine **n**ew **ne**on **n**signs.
- ε. **N**one of the **n**apkins are made of **n**ylon.
- φ. The **n**orthern **n**nations often **n**need tons of grain.

Focus on NG:

- γ. The you**ng** woman with lo**ng** hair sa**ng** the wro**ng** so**ng**.
- η. The swi**ngs** hu**ng** from ri**ngs** in the ceili**ng**.
- ι. Please bri**ng** the thi**ngs** to the weddi**ng**.

References:

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