

# Native-like Accent Pronunciation Course



## Lesson 15: Part 1: Intonation

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Intonation is sometimes called the “music” of English – it’s the way your voice expresses extra attitude and meaning through the way you speak. Studying intonation is a little difficult because it’s rather subjective, and it’s hard to identify definite rules – but this lesson will give you an introduction to the basics.

### Rising and Falling Tones

Listen to the difference between these two sentences:

**I’m sorry.**  
(apologizing)

**I’m sorry?**  
(asking for clarification)

When the phrase “I’m sorry” is used as a statement, to apologize, it has a **falling tone** – my voice starts high and goes down. When it is used as a question, to ask for clarification, it has a **rising tone** – my voice starts low and goes up.

Here’s another example – listen to the difference between the statement and the question.

“We’ll discuss this when the director arrives next week.”

“He’s coming tomorrow.”

“He’s coming tomorrow?”

“Yes, the visit was rescheduled.”



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Again, you can hear that the statement has a falling tone, and the question has a rising tone. We usually use rising tones for questions in which we have an idea about a fact, but we want to **confirm** the information.

Practice saying these sentences once with a **falling tone** (statement) and once with a **rising tone** (question to confirm the information).

The meeting was canceled.

The meeting was canceled?

He broke his arm.

He broke his arm?

She's married.

She's married?

### Tones in Question Tags

Another way to check information, or to see if someone agrees with you, is by making a statement and adding a question tag, for example:

She's married, **isn't she?**

"Isn't she" is the question tag – it makes the statement into a question, asking the other person to confirm the information. The intonation when you use this type of question tag is **high-low-high** – the tone falls during the statement, and rises again in the question. Practice with these examples:

The meeting was canceled, wasn't it?

You're from France, aren't you?

She hasn't quit her job, has she?



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You've been to China, haven't you?

They live in New York, right?

*(If you can't remember how to form the correct question tag, the simplest way is to add "...right?" )*

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## Lesson 15: Part 2: Intonation

### Asking vs. Checking Question Tags

When you have some doubt, and you need confirmation, we use a high-low-high intonation.

You're from France, aren't you?  
Yes – born and raised in Paris.

You're from France, aren't you?  
Actually, I'm from Canada. But I speak French.

In this case, you are really asking if the person is from France, because you are not sure about their answer.

But when you are making an observation, and you are pretty confident that the other person will agree, we change the intonation pattern from **high-low-high** to **low-high-low**. Listen to the difference:

You're from France, aren't you?  
It's a beautiful day, isn't it?

In this second question, you are pretty sure that the other person will agree. Here's another example – imagine you see your friend's kids eating salad, but they don't eat the tomatoes. You can say:

You don't like tomatoes, do you?



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## High Tones vs. Flat Tones

Exclamations in English are typically spoken with high tones, for example:

Great job!

Wow!

That's perfect!

The high tones express an attitude of **excitement** or **surprise**. However, if the exclamations are said in a different way – with a “flat” tone – they can express a negative attitude like **sarcasm** or **disapproval**.

It's a little hard to explain – but practice these examples with the same sentence spoken in different ways, showing a different attitude in each case.

I got a promotion!

**Wow!** Congratulations!

*(pleasant surprise)*

I was just fired.

**Wow** – I'm sorry to hear that.

*(unpleasant surprise, compassion)*

The boss said we can leave early today.

**Oh, great!**

*(happiness)*

The boss said we have to work late today.

**Oh, great.**

*(sarcasm, annoyance)*

Sheila won the lottery.

**No way!** How much did she win?

*(surprise)*



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Can I borrow \$100?

**No way!** You still haven't paid me the money I lent you last month.

*(disapproval, rejection)*

Intonation is also very individual – it varies from person to person – but it's good to remember that we don't speak English in a monotone way, like a robot. We use the tone of our voice to add emotion, attitude, and communicate extra meaning – so keep this in mind when you speak English.

No Homework 😊 just practice what you've learned today! 😊

**Thanks for participating in the course!**

## **References:**

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