

General American vs General British – 5 Key Differences

It's a choice every learner has to make at some point – which model of English pronunciation should I learn? For most, that means a choice between General American or General British, so in this month's accent article, we look at 5 key differences between the two. The audio to accompany each point contains firstly a General American pronunciation of the words, followed by the same in General British.

1. 'r' – silent or pronounced?

In General American, every written 'r' is pronounced, whereas in General British, 'r' is only pronounced before a vowel sound – it is silent before consonant sounds. This is known as rhoticity – General American is 'rhotic' and General British is 'non-rhotic'.

work far pour
Audio Player

00:00
00:06

Use Up/Down Arrow keys to increase or decrease volume.

2. 't' – tap or plosive?

When 't' appears before a weak vowel, in General American it can be pronounced with a voiced tap /ɾ/ – this sounds a bit like a very fast /d/, whereas in General British it will be a voiceless plosive /t/ with some aspiration.

water party 'What are you doing?'
Audio Player

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Use Up/Down Arrow keys to increase or decrease volume.

3. 'got' – rounded or un-rounded?

In General British, we round the lips with the back open vowel in 'got' 'what' 'shop', whereas in General American this is an unrounded sound /ɑ/.

stop watch lot
Audio Player

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00:00

Use Up/Down Arrow keys to increase or decrease volume.

4. Upspeak – statement or question?

In General British, speakers tend to use a falling tone to indicate a new statement or utterance. In American, however, it is common to use a rising tone, which to British ears may sound more like a question. It is known as ‘upspeak’, which technically means a high rising tone. NOTE – this type of intonation is becoming more common in British English, although there are reports that some institutions actively discourage its use.

I'm going 'out later. I really want a new 'job.

Audio Player

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Use Up/Down Arrow keys to increase or decrease volume.

5. /j/ – included or not?

In General British, speakers would pronounce a /j/ before the vowel sound in ‘tune’ and ‘new’ – words where a /t/, /d/ or /n/ are followed by /u:/. In General American, this /j/ is dropped, a concept known as yod-dropping.

tuna news due

Audio Player

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