

LEARNING AN ACCENT

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There's only one way to learn an accent, and that's to learn the individual speech-sounds that it's made up of. Australian English has about 40 different speech-sounds, but since the consonants are virtually the same in Australian and Scottish English, we only have to worry about the 20 vowel-sounds.

People who study accents identify vowels by *keywords*, and so refer to "the FLEECE vowel" when they mean the vowel-sound in the middle of the word *fleece*. The same sound is found, with different spellings, in *breeze*, *Crete*, *freak*, *grieve* and *machine*, and native speakers know this automatically. What you also need to know is that sounds translate systematically from one accent to another, so that whilst the Scottish and Australian pronunciations of *fleece* may be very different, the same difference is found in *breeze*, *Crete*, *freak*... and all the other words that have that sound. The trick in learning an accent - and it's an easy trick, once you get hold of it - is to change all the occurrences of one sound - such as the FLEECE vowel - to its equivalent in the other accent. When you have your 20 Australian equivalent vowel-sounds, you're home and dry!

We use phonetic symbols to notate the specific sound of a vowel or consonant, using for example **i** for the sound of the FLEECE vowel in a Scottish accent, and **°i:** for its sound in an Australian accent: **flis** vs. **fl°i:s**. A given phonetic symbol is pronounced the same way wherever it's used, in whatever language or accent; so if I told you that the Greek word **mi** means *not*, *don't*, you'd know you had to pronounce it with the Scottish version of the FLEECE vowel, not the Australian version, **m°i:**, which wouldn't be a word in Greek. It follows from this that, to learn an accent, you have to follow the phonetic symbols, say them aloud, and see what result you get: that result is the word in the target accent! If you say to yourself, "I'm going to say this word in an Australian accent," you'll be stumbling about all over the place; but if you say, "I'm going to follow the symbols and see what comes out," you'll get straight there.

A couple of other points worth noting: Scottish English has a wide variety of accents and class distinctions (think Helena Kennedy and Frank McAveety); Australian English is much more uniform, but commentators distinguish two forms, General (more posh) and Broad (less posh). We're using Broad in this production. Australian English grew out of the English spoken by transported convicts, almost entirely from the south-east of England, and so resembles Cockney. And just like English English, it's *non-rhotic*, which means that an 'r' is pronounced before a vowel-sound (even if the vowel-sound is in the next word), but is not pronounced before a consonant-sound (even if the consonant is in the next word) or at the end of a phrase. So in the phrase, "Hear, hear!" neither 'r' is pronounced, because the first one is before the consonant *h* and the second one is at the end of the phrase; but in the phrase "hear a noise" the 'r' is pronounced, because it's followed by the vowel-sound of 'a'. This is something that speakers of Scottish English will need to constantly be aware of when learning this accent.